7-29-18

Ephesians 2:4-7

Our last three Sundays, we have looked deeply at the first three verses of chapter 2. Paul goes to lengths to remind us of where we were in sin and where the rest of the world still is.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

We were spiritually dead, separated from our creator God, facing an eternity without Him. The true free will that was given to Adam and Eve had been taken away and we became slaves. We were slaves to our flesh, constantly seeking our own pleasures. We were slaves to the world; constantly looking to it to see how we should think and act. We were slaves to satan; we followed his designs to be rebellious to God and try to detract from His glory. Perhaps worst of all, we faced God’s wrath. His holy and just punishment of evil; His righteous action against sin.

Our reading today begins with some of the most wonderful and most powerful words in the Bible: *But* *God*. All of these things were true of us; *but God*. We were doomed; there is absolutely no hope for any of us to have salvation by something we do. *But God*. Our salvation is impossible, but Yahweh is the God of the impossible.

Matthew 19:23-26

And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard *this*, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” And looking at *them* Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

We were dead, but God made us alive. We were slaves to the flesh, but He condemned sin in the flesh. We were slaves to the world, but Jesus said, “take courage; I have overcome the world.” We were slaves to satan, but God intervened through Jesus Christ. “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

It is only right to praise God for all these things He has done for us. Especially when we consider that we are no longer “children of wrath”, we are now “children of God”. Through Jesus Christ, God has adopted us as His own children. Although we may sometimes be chastised by Him, it is for our good; and His discipline is nothing compared to His wrath. We are alive, we are free from sin and death, we have forever been exempted from God’s wrath. And all of it is God’s doing. There is no place for us to boast; God took the initiative, He did all that was necessary, He has accomplished it all through Christ.

In verse 4, Paul gives us a couple reasons why God would bring us to salvation. First, He is rich in mercy. We find this all through the Bible; it is one of the primary attributes of God Himself. Because of His justice, He cannot let sin go unpunished. But because of His mercy, He desired to have Jesus take the punishment for us on the cross.

Isaiah 53:10

But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief.

That is how wonderful, how rich His mercy is: God accepted our punishment in the person of Jesus Christ, so that we could spend eternity with Him in fellowship.

Along with that mercy, Paul brings out the love God has for us. Because of His great love with which He loved us. Not only does Yahweh love us, He loves us with a great love. He loves us tenderly as children and He wants to be with us; so much does He want to be with us, that He made a way where there was none. He has died for us, He has suffered for us, He has saved us from the wrath that we deserve; and He still gives.

Remember back in 1:3, Paul tells us that we have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. Two verses later, we are reminded that through Jesus, God has actually adopted us as His sons and daughters. This makes us heirs with His only begotten Son, Jesus. God loves us so much, that He is happy to include us in His inheritance. And Jesus loves us so much, that He is happy to share with us; there is nothing that comes from God grudgingly. Don’t forget about 1:13; in Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Notice that word “with”. We are not sealed “by” the Holy Spirit, as in the Holy Spirit is the one who puts some kind of seal on us. We are sealed “with” the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself is the seal. He is the seal of God and no one will break Him.

Verse 7 speaks of God’s kindness. It is sometimes hard for us to picture kindness and wrath coming from the same source. But there is no paradox here. Both of these are part of God’s nature. His wrath is only poured out on those who choose to reject His offer of salvation. For those who accept Christ, God is kind. That is for eternity; and there is never any concern that at some point, something could happen, that would cause God to unleash His wrath upon us. He is unchanging and once we are His, it will stay that way.

Paul talks about God doing these things “even when we were dead in our transgressions”. This is such an important point. When you’re dead, you can’t do anything. Because of our being dead, we were not able to follow the law perfectly; we could not seek God; we could not believe in Jesus as the Christ; we certainly didn’t have any faith with which to believe in Him. Here is the point: God did it all. He brought us to the place where we would hear the Gospel, the Holy Spirit stirred our hearts to believe in Jesus, and He gave us the faith we needed. We, in some way, made a decision for Christ; but there is no way we could have done that without God. We have nothing to do with our salvation, it is all God.

We have been saved by grace. Grace is unmerited favor. It is getting something we don’t deserve. Thinking back to the first three verses of this chapter, it is obvious that we don’t deserve salvation. We deserve God’s wrath. It always makes me cringe when someone says, “I want what I deserve!” No, they don’t; no, you don’t. We deserve hell. We have rebelled against our creator and we have caused Him grief. Think about that; God loves us and when we sin, it causes Him grief. But God! He has poured out His grace upon us and we are saved! All the more reason to praise Him and give Him glory.

Now, in our reading today, Paul tells us three things that God has done to us, together with Jesus. Again, everything is done by God through Jesus and in each of these things, we are together with Him.

By way of review, think back to our study of 1 John. One of the main ideas was being “in Christ”. All Christians are in Christ. To be in Christ, means to be connected to Jesus in a very real way, in the spiritual realm. We are actually a part of Him and He is a part of us. One of the common metaphors is the vine and the branches. Jesus refers to Himself as the vine and Christians as the branches. The branches are physically part of the vine, in the same way we are spiritually part of Christ. All three of these wonderful things God does for us is because we are in Christ.

The first thing is that He made us alive. Our spirits were dead, but God resurrected them, gave them new life. This spiritual death was a separation from God, but by this resurrection our spirits will live with God forever. Notice from the wording that Paul uses that this has already happened. Our spirits are alive. Certainly, we also look forward to a bodily resurrection that will take place in the future, but now we are speaking of our spirits.

Something happens when our spirits come back to life. We are changed. The flesh, the world, and satan no longer have the same hold on us they did before. We think differently, we view life differently, we consider things more from an eternal perspective. The rate of change for these things is different for different people. Some have an immediate, drastic change in their lives. Others may not notice much change at first but will eventually. This is the work of the Holy Spirit and it is according to the way He wants it. It is best for us to cooperate by prayer, Bible study, fellowship with other Christians; but we must allow Him to direct our lives.

If you look back to the time when you first accepted Jesus and you don’t see any of these changes, then there is a problem. One possibility is that you are resisting the Holy Spirit. You haven’t been able to give up the things of the world and they are choking your growth in Christ. If this is the case, a conscious effort must be made, through prayer, to release the ways of the world and submit to the Holy Spirit. Remember Lot’s wife.

The other possibility is that you didn’t really accept Christ as Saviour and that is scary. Perhaps you simply repeated a prayer of some kind with no real meaning and went about your business. If this is the case, cry out to Jesus for true salvation. If you knock, He will open.

Secondly, Paul tells us that we were raised up with Him. Jesus was dead and in the grave. His body was in the grave and His spirit was in the realm of the dead. But God brought Him to life and raised Him from the dead. His spirit came back from that realm and His body came out of the grave. In the same way, our spirits were in a spiritual grave. It belonged to the realm of the dead, but God raised our spirits up with Christ and now they live. Our spirits being alive is why we look at things differently now. The Holy Spirit works with our spirits to consider the things of God.

Because of this new life, we can consider ourselves dead to sin. Our spirits do desire to seek God and to please Him. There is still a fight as long as we live on this earth. The victory has been won, but evil keeps doing damage where it can. This is a fight we will be in as long as we live, but we have already won. Sometimes we fall, but Christ has already taken care of that; so, we confess and ask for reconciliation, and then continue the process of sanctification. This is all because we have risen with Christ; already happened. It will happen again physically, but it has already happened spiritually. We are in Christ.

Lastly Paul says that God “seated us with Him in the heavenlies”. Admittedly, a lot of this is hard to comprehend because we live in a physical world and here Paul is talking about very spiritual things. In some ways, we are incapable of understanding. What we do catch on to is revelation from the Holy Spirit. Here is where faith comes in. Faith is not a blind acceptance of what we are told, but an acceptance based on reason, based on how much Scripture has proven itself, and based on the spiritual understanding that is given by the Holy Spirit.

Given all that, we are now faced with being seated with Jesus in the heavenlies. That means right now, in actual fact, being with Jesus in heaven. Again, this is spiritual and, in the future, we will be given new resurrection bodies and live with Jesus. For now, because we are in Christ, we are with Him where He is. Notice how much this follows 1:20 regarding the power of God working in Christ. He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*. Here we see even more of the power of God in that He raises us with Christ and brings us along with Him. We are with Christ, because we are a part of Him. There is one big difference and that is in the seating arrangement. We are seated with Christ, Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father.

What does this mean for us? It means that although we live in this world, our citizenship is in heaven. It means we are no longer controlled by satan, we are controlled by the Holy Spirit. It shows that we are no longer under the wrath of God, but we are under His love and kindness. That’s quite a difference; it’s a wonderful difference. It’s worth whatever it costs us here in this life. Take hold of these things and believe them, God is for us; let us live for Him.

In the last verse of our reading, Paul reveals that the ultimate reason for our salvation is to bring God glory. But that is the subject, LORD willing, for next week.

Prayer

LORD God, You are all powerful, creator, gracious, kind, and merciful. You are slow to anger and You wish that none would perish. You have made a way of salvation where there was no way; at great cost to Yourself. But You did it because of Your great love. You have opened a narrow pathway; You have provided a narrow, but open gate; though the way is narrow, it is safe.

Your ways are too great for us to understand. We have been irrevocably joined to our Saviour, Jesus Christ. By Him, our spirits have been raised to eternal life and are with Him, even now. Though we may not understand, we believe; these things are written in Your word and so they are true. We look forward to the day when our bodies join our spirits, but we know that You have work for us now.

Please accept our humble offering of praise; may Your Holy Spirit guide us that we always bring You glory. Because of all You have done for us, it is our prayer that You would use us; to further Your Kingdom, to bring You honor, and to win souls for You. By Your strength we can do these things.

We pray them in Jesus’ name

Amen