A life changed

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Date: 05 August 2018

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Well, I've been reading a little bit about the early church, and it's a fascinating history. The first Christians in the first few centuries of the church's history after Jesus died and rose again.

And as I've been reading it and learning about that world, generally the Romans were in charge at that time. And you learn a lot about how that world worked. I was struck just by how different that world 2,000 years ago was from the world today.
And I'm not just talking about, you know, we have smartphones and antibiotics and airplanes. There was something else that struck me, that marked out a real difference between that world and the world today.
And I noticed what it was. I noticed the real difference was that back then, everyone knew who the Christians were. Everyone knew who the Christians were. They stood out. They couldn't help but be noticed.
If your neighbor was a Christian, you would know it. And the reason was because the early Christians knew how different they were to the world around them.
[1:11] It was part of their identity. They knew that they were different. They were called to be different and that they were different. Foundationally, fundamentally. And their message, the gospel, spread in the early church largely because they were different.

And people wanted to know why they were different, what made them tick. And it was because of that that their message spread so rapidly, as it did in the early church. And so maybe, I was thinking, one of the reasons the Christian message is often so muted in the world today and doesn't spread nearly as fast as it did back then, is that Christians don't tend to stand out anymore.
As much as we used to. And the reason for that, I think, is because we've forgotten how different we really are. And that's why we need to read Ephesians.
Because Ephesians is a book that highlights, amongst other things, but primarily highlights, how different Christians really are from the world around them. Especially the passage we're looking at this morning, Ephesians 2.
Because here, Paul explains just what it is that should make us stand out from the rest of the world. What it is that should make us so different.
[2:30] And you know what he says it is? He says it's the simple fact that Christians are actually the only people on earth who are really alive. That's the point he's trying to make in this passage.

Christians are the only people on earth who are really alive. Now that is quite a shocking statement to make. And quite an offensive statement to non-Christians. But that's really his whole argument here.
See what he's doing in this passage. And I want you to have it in front of you so you can see how his argument is built. He's comparing the life of a non-Christian in the first verse 1 to 3 with the life of a Christian.
From verse 4 onwards. And he does that by telling the Ephesian Christians what their lives were before they believed. And he says this. He says, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.
In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world. And then in verse 3 he says, the same is true for the rest of mankind. And so, you see what he's saying here? He's saying, before people become Christians, they are actually dead.
[3:38] Even though they might look alive. And he's not even talking figuratively here. He doesn't say, well, it was as if you were dead. He says, you were dead.

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In a very real sense. You were dead. So, what he's saying, what this passage teaches us, is that people who have not trusted in Jesus are actually dead already, according to the Bible.
But what does that mean? What does it mean to say that non-Christians are dead? Because they look alive, right? I mean, your non-Christian neighbor seems very much alive, don't they?
In fact, I bet there are times that you wish they were a little less alive when they're practicing karaoke at 6 in the morning. We actually had a karaoke neighbor once. That's a true story. And they really should put a warning on the rental ad about those kind of things.
Anyway, the point is that people, non-Christians, that we share this world with seem very much alive, don't they? Reality doesn't seem to match what Paul is describing here.
[4:44] Non-Christians seem to be just as alive as Christians. Living, breathing, laughing, singing songs. And so, how can he say that they're actually dead? What does he mean?

Well, we see that in the next verse. Look in your Bibles. Where Paul explains just what he means by being dead. Verse 2. Here he's describing what being dead actually is.
He says, Okay, so this is Paul's definition of what it means to be dead.
That's the way that Paul says those without Christ are actually dead. In that they're just blindly following the agenda of outside forces that they have no control over. The world, the flesh, and the devil.
And so, basically, he's saying that non-Christians are like zombies. You know what I mean? Zombies? I don't know if you've ever seen a zombie movie. Probably better if you haven't.
[5:52] But if you have the idea of a zombie movie is that there's, I don't know, some kind of virus that's come and infected the whole planet and killed off most of the world's population.

But the virus that killed off most of the world's population is a very unique virus in that it still animates these dead people, these dead bodies. And so, they're actually walking around.
But they don't have any control over what they're doing. They're just aimlessly wandering around in the street by instinct looking for people to bite. That's basically what a zombie story is about.
But funny as that may seem, that's actually what Paul is saying about the state of humanity right now. People might be walking around in this world and look alive and have jobs and play sports and watch movies.
But the truth is they don't really have any control over what they're doing. They're just following the instincts and directions of the virus inside them called sin and they can't resist that.
[6:54] And so, Paul writes this section to the Ephesians because he wants the Ephesians to realize that is the state of our world. And he wants them to realize that is what they once were, zombies. And that's what God wants you to realize if you're a Christian this morning from this passage.

That you were once a zombie, an animated corpse, irresistibly following the direction of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And you had no control over it.
And so, do you see, this passage is actually meant to teach you the enormity of what God has done for you in Jesus. If you're a Christian, which he says in verse 4. Because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ.
Even when we were dead in transgressions, it is by grace you have been saved. So, when we read that, God made us alive in Christ, with Christ.
It makes so much more sense and it's so much more powerful when we understand what Paul's just said about the rest of the world. And the state of death that the world is in. And that we were once in.
[8:02] It helps us to realize the enormity of what's happened in the gospel. Basically, when Jesus came into this world, he came into a world full of animated corpses.

Just walking around. People infected with the virus of sin. And you were once one of them. You were once one of those animated corpses just walking around.
Having no control over what voices you were following. But Jesus came to this world to cure that virus. And he did it in the most unexpected way.
He did it by letting himself get killed by that virus of sin. Now, why would he do that? Why would he come and why would his plan be to cure the virus and its effects?
By letting himself be killed by it. That doesn't make any sense, does it? Well, the Bible teaches he did that for us. The Bible teaches that Jesus was uniquely qualified to stand in our place on our behalf.

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[9:02] And take God's judgment for our sin as our representative. But here's the thing. Which I think we often miss. Jesus wasn't only representing us in his death on the cross.

He was also representing us, his people, in his resurrection. So that when God raised Jesus from the dead, that same power that God injected into Jesus to raise him from the dead.
That same power that gives him life would then overflow to give life to the people he came to represent. That was always his plan. His plan to rescue us from our state of zombiness, walking around this world as walking corpses.
Jesus' plan was not only to come and die for us, to remove, eradicate the virus of sin. But also then to rise again so that that life could be flowed into us.
And that we could be made alive from the dead. That's what Paul means here by he made you alive with Christ. He doesn't just say he made you alive, but he made you alive with Christ.
[10:12] So when Jesus rose, you did too. It's like one of those champagne fountains. I don't know if you've ever been to a fancy party and seen a champagne fountain.

I may have even used this in a sermon before. But I think it's a really great picture. Have you ever seen a champagne fountain? Do you know what I'm talking about? It's basically all these champagne glasses into a big pyramid. And at the top is just one glass.
And then you pour the champagne into that top glass. And then it overflows eventually into the glasses underneath it until every glass is full. Well, Jesus, you see, came to be that first champagne glass.
So that when God poured new life into him, who was the only person who ever deserved life to be given to him. It would then overflow to all those who stand under him.
To all those who come to Jesus in faith and repentance. And so you've got to ask yourself this morning, do you stand under him? Have you received that new resurrection life that was poured into Jesus?
[11:12] Have you experienced new resurrection life that breaks you free from the tyranny of the world, the flesh, and the devil? Have you experienced that yet? Have you received new life?

Are you alive? Well, you can tell by asking yourself which one of these two categories that Paul describes in this passage. Which one of them better describe your life?
Now you've got to be honest. You've got to do some soul searching. Because remember, he describes, he characterizes the life of the dead. And then he characterizes the life of the living at the end of this passage.
And I want you to evaluate your life by these two criteria. So look how the dead are described. They're described as following the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. Gratifying the craving of the flesh and following its desires and thoughts. And so that's someone who instinctively, without questioning, takes on the values and the ways of this world.
[12:12] And who instinctively, without question, satisfies what their body feels like. Whether that's through sex or alcohol or whatever.

And someone who instinctively is not only tempted by sin, but falls for that temptation without resisting it. That's how the dead are described here.
But look how the living are described. The living are described completely differently. They're described as God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
That is the characteristic of those who have life. So which of those two descriptions better describes your way of living?
Be honest with yourself. If you had to look in the way you spend your time on earth, do you lean more towards the world and its priorities? Do you lean more towards self-gratification, what your flesh wants?
[13:10] Or do you live for Christ and what he wants, over and above what your flesh wants and what the world wants? Do you live a holy life, striving to do good works?

Do you live, in other words, as a citizen of heaven, representing and characterizing heaven?
Or do you live as a citizen of this world, not really standing out from the non-Christians around you? And that's another way you can tell whether you're a citizen of heaven or a citizen of the earth. Do people know that you're a Christian?
Do you stand out? Because that's what citizens of heaven do. Well, if you're not, if you're not standing out, if you know, if you evaluate yourself by these criteria and you realize you actually lean

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more towards the dead, well then, you've got to realize, you've got to come to terms with that and realize you are still dead.
That despite you coming to church and calling yourself a Christian, you're still dead. Sin is still in charge of your life. And if that is the case, then there's one thing you need to do.
[14:20] You need to come to Jesus properly. Properly. Not just come to Jesus to maybe help you live a better life and take his advice kind of once a week.

But you need to come to Jesus so you can live at all. You need to actually give what you call your life currently completely over to him.
Not just a bit of it, but completely so that he can take it and exchange it for what is real life in him. Real relationship with God day to day living for his kingdom and his glory.
Because he is willing to do that for you. If only you would admit how much you need him to. But we're proud, aren't we? We don't like to admit that we are dead. And that we are slaves.
And that we need Jesus to rescue us. But you will never be saved unless you admit that of yourself. And so if you've realized that this morning. That that is true of you.
[15:17] It's so urgent for you to do something about that. That I'm going to let you do something right now. About that. Before I go on. I'm going to pause my sermon so that you can ask Jesus to come in and take over.

If you've realized this morning. That that is you. Because you never know how much longer you're going to live. And so I'm going to pause now and give you an opportunity right now.
To give your life to Jesus so he can exchange that for what is real life. Do you want that? Do you realize you still need that? And then let's bow our heads. Let's all bow our heads.
And if you are sitting here this morning. Or you're listening to this recording. And you know. That you are still under the control of the world, the flesh and the devil.
And you realize this morning that you are still dead in your sins. Then I want you to know Jesus came to this earth specifically to give you life. And if you want that life now he offers it to you as a free gift.
[16:16] And so pray this prayer in your heart after me and mean it. Lord Jesus. Jesus. I know that you rose from the dead. I know that you are alive today.

And I know that you are hearing this prayer. I realize that I am still dead in my sins. And I am a slave to sin. And so I pray.
Come into my life now and set me free. Give me new life in you. And cause me from this moment on. To live the new life you have called me to live.
Amen. Well if you prayed that prayer in your heart. Then what I would really like to do for you as your pastor. Is I would like to set you up with someone else who will read the Bible with you.
Just to. You need help. For the first steps of a new life. And that is what God has given the church and other Christians for. So please do. Come speak to me afterwards.
[17:21] Or email me or something. Saying just. I prayed that prayer. And I would like to meet with someone. On a regular basis to read the Bible with. And I will happily set you up. So please do that. But now before I finish.

As we go on. There is one more thing I want us to see in this passage. That I think is vital to see.
And that is the reason. That God does all this. Paul also tells us. What the reason is that God.
Has given us new life. And it is this. It is in verse 7. He gives us new life. In order that. In the coming ages. He might show the incomparable riches of his grace.
Okay. So according to that. If God has made you alive. He did that to demonstrate his grace. To all creation for the rest of eternity.
You are forever meant to be now. An exhibit of God's grace. Like when you go see an exhibit in an art museum. You know what I mean by exhibit. It is a work of art.
[18:25] From a famous artist. They are showing some of who that artist is. Showing some of his greatest work. Well you. If you have been given new life through the gospel. Are meant to be an exhibit.

Of God's greatest work of grace. To the rest of creation. Think about that. You are meant to be a demonstration. Of the awesomeness of God.
In his grace. An exhibit. Of God's grace. Okay. But now before we understand what that means. We need to understand what grace itself means. It is a word we often come across.

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And you never know. Maybe to you. The only thing grace means to you. Is the prayer you say before supper. But what does that word grace actually mean?
Well Paul goes on to explain. As he so well does. He says something. And then he explains it. And he does that as well. When he mentions grace. And he explains it in verse 8 and 9.
[19:21] He explains what he means. He says. For it is by grace you have been saved. Through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not by works. So that no one can boast.

So there he defines what grace is. It's completely undeserved favor. It's a gift. That you don't work for. That you can't boast about. Because it's got nothing to do with you.
It's salvation that comes from God alone. And that is something. Grace. That is something you won't find anywhere. In this world. And in all of creation.
Except in the gospel of Jesus. Jesus Christ. Because every single other religion. Is about working for God's favor. And the people in those religions.
Are all about what they've done. How worthy they are. Of God. But Christians are different. This is another way that we stand out. From the rest of the world. Christians are all about.
[20:18] What God's done for them. And because Christians are the only ones. Who really have experienced. Experienced God's grace. Which can only be found in the gospel of Jesus.

Because they're the only ones. Who have really experienced that grace. We are the only ones. Who can properly display God's grace. To the rest of the world. And that is quite a responsibility. And that is according to this passage. What we have been saved for. To be exhibits. Of God's grace. To the rest of creation. But here's the thing.
We don't have to wait. For the new creation. To be exhibits of God's grace. We can start doing that now. In this world. In our daily lives. We can start being exhibits of God's grace.
To the people around us. In how we speak. And in how we act. We can exhibit God's grace. In how we speak. Primarily. By speaking about Jesus.
[21:15] Who is the only place. You can find God's grace. We get to be signposts. To others. We as Christians. Who have experienced God's grace. We have the privilege.

Of being signposts. To other people. To direct them. To the only place. That they can find. This amazing grace. For themselves. And find life in it. And so that's one way.
We exhibit God's grace. Now as Christians. We are to be salt and light. In our speech. We are to deliver. Liberately. Look for opportunities.
To talk about Jesus. Because that is. Even if people. Might think you're a weirdo. Or people might. Not like you. For talking about Jesus. All the fears.
That you might have. Which most of them. Never come true. Actually. People appreciate you. Sharing what you believe. Especially if you stand out. They're interested to know. What it is about you. And so they're interested.
[22:09] To hear about Jesus. Most of the time. But even if they're not. They might. Realize. That. Whether they know it or not. Jesus. Is their only hope.

Of having life. Jesus. Is their only way. That they can experience grace. And so they need to hear about him. Even if they don't think they do. Don't fall for that. Realize they do.
And do it out of love for them. And so that's one way. We can exhibit God's grace. In this world. We can talk about Jesus. And not be ashamed to. But also.
We exhibit God's grace. In how we live. In giving grace. To other people. In other words. Doing good works. For other people. That they don't deserve.
When was the last time. You did. A good work. For someone. That they didn't deserve. Okay. Well parents are saying. This morning. With my kids. But.
[23:02] But it's that kind of grace. Which God the Father. Does for us. His children. Undeserved. Favor. Which he. Then is calling us. To be exhibits of. To the rest of the world.

The people around us. And that's why this passage. Ends like it does. Verse 10. For we are God's handiwork. Created in Christ Jesus. To do good works. Which God prepared.
In advance. For us to do. And the good works. He's talking about here. Are the kind of good works. That only people. Saved by grace. Can do. And we do those good works.
Not to be saved. But to show off. The grace. That's already saved us. We have the privilege. Of showing the world. Just what God is like.
Which means. That a Christian. Doesn't have. To do good works. Rather. A Christian. Gets to do good works. Christians. Empowered by the spirit.

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[23:56] And empowered. By the experience of grace. Are really the only people. Who are able. To do. Truly. Good works. That aren't. For selfish means. Or for trying to.

Earn briny points. With God. We can do good works. We can do good. For the joy of that. And for the joy. That it brings in. Us glorifying God. And what a great privilege. That is. In fact.
It reminds me. Of a line. In this book. That you're going to go by. After the service. But listen to. To how Keller puts it. He says. You see. The verdict is in.
And now. Now I perform. On the basis. Of the verdict. Because he loves me. And he accepts me. I do not have to do things. Just to build up my resume. I do not have to.
Do things. To make me look good. I can do things. For the joy of doing them. I can help people. To help people. Not so I can feel better. About myself. Not so I can fill up.
[24:51] The emptiness. And I would add. Not so I can. Earn points with God. Because by his grace. We already. Have everything. All the. Heavenly blessings. In Christ. That's why in chapter 1.

Of Ephesians. Paul doesn't need to pray. Any more blessings. For the Ephesians. He just wants them. To realize. What they've already got. And when you realize that. Then. You want other people. To realize that. And you will do good works.
To please God. Out of joy. And not duty. And that. Really. Is what should mark. Out Christians. As different. To the rest of the world. There are people. Who are able.
To exhibit a grace. That you can find. Nowhere else. Through both our words. And our works. And so. To close. I challenge you. To think about this.
Challenge you. How are you. In the week to come. Going to exhibit. The grace of God. To the world around you. Think about that. If you've experienced. God's grace.
[25:45] And you know. From today. That he saved you. In order to be. An exhibit. Of his grace. To the world. How are you going to do that? Now of course. In growth groups.

Where we study this passage. In detail. We'll talk more. About practically. How we can do that. But I want to challenge you now. Think about. What are you going to be doing. This week. To exhibit. God's grace.
To the people around you. How are you. In your words. In your works. Going to be. A signpost. To heaven. Because remember. That is what you've been saved.
And placed. In this world to do. For we are God's handiwork. Created in Christ Jesus. To do good works. Which God prepared. In advance. For us to do. Let's pray.
Yes Lord. We thank you for this reminder. Of why you saved us. And why you have given us. New life. Thank you for creating us. In Christ Jesus. Even before we were born.
[26:41] In that you would. Help us. To do the good works. That you've. Prepared in advance. For us to do. Thank you Lord. That before we were born. You. You rescued us.

You decided to save us. As new creatures. As citizens of heaven. Help us Lord. In this coming week. To live out. That identity. And that calling. In Jesus name we pray.
Amen.

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