

Alive in Christ

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Date: 26 April 2026

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Lomian. Great, thank you Dee. Thank you Dan for your input on the laughing and I think I appreciate! Guys it's great to see you. My name is Luke if you don't know me and I'm going to be sharing from the Bible this afternoon.

If you've got a Bible with you we are in Ephesians chapter 2 but it will be on the screen as well. So let's have a look. Right, great. Has anyone been following what we've been preaching on the last couple of weeks?

If you've been here hopefully you've noticed that we have started our new series on Ephesians and Mike and Gordon have shared from chapter 1. So I get to share from chapter 2 today which is wonderful. It's an amazing part of the Bible to read and it's just later on I'll talk about it being a bit like a banquet.

You know, I don't know if you've ever been to a banquet. Imagine like Harry Potter in the Great Hall and you just get food galore and it's all wonderful. You don't know what to eat first and the book of Ephesians is a bit like that. It's just so full of good stuff.

It's almost too much, you know. So hopefully as we go through it bit by bit we'll get a sense of what God is speaking over us. And today's topic is from Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 to 10 and the topic is being made alive in Christ.

[1 : 24] But I just want us to try and think back a little bit. If you know Paul's letter to Ephesians or if you've been coming the last couple of weeks, you'll know just at the end of chapter 1 Paul talks about Jesus being resurrected and ascended.

And it's some of the most wonderful verses in the Bible, I think. He talks about Jesus being risen from the dead, seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, being above any other rule, any other authority, any other power or dominion. Paul talks about Jesus being the head of the church. And I love this, the one who fills everything in every way. I don't think I really understand what that means, but it's pretty amazing. Jesus is the one who fills everything in every way. It's awesome. It's inspiring.

But what happens next is a bit different. We turn from the heights of Jesus in glory and Paul changes tack completely to talk now about the depths of human experience, human darkness and sin.

And it's quite a gear change. So we're ready for that. In my imagination, it's a bit like if you imagine like a lift or an elevator going up to the top of a skyscraper, you get this beautiful view and vista and then imagine the lift being a free fall down to the dark basement. It's a bit like that in what's happening in Ephesians chapter 2. So we're going to read from verse 1 to 3, first of all, and then we'll read the rest later on. Thank you, Dan. So verse 1 of chapter 2, Paul says this, 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 of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who's now at work and those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. So we're going to pause and have a look at these three verses, first of all, before we carry on later on. So here, Paul is describing the human state without Jesus Christ. And I don't know if you've heard of this old preacher, Martin Lloyd-Jones. He spoke these words about 70 years ago,

[3 : 50] I think he was preaching, and he talked about these verses. I was listening to it this week. He said this, So we can't really understand the heights to which Christ has raised us, all that he has done without, first of all, understanding the depth of where we were before. The depth is an essential part of the story of who we are as humans and the story of God's amazing grace. So we're going to look at those first three verses in detail, first of all. So back to verse one. It'd be great if we had that on. Thank you, Dan. Paul says, So when Paul says that each of us was dead, he's saying

that we were spiritually unresponsive.

It reminds me of like CPR, or the doctors will know, like if they're unresponsive, what do you do? But we were spiritually unresponsive, lifeless, cold towards God. The Old Testament uses a phrase that that we have a heart of stone. It's a bit like that. It's a helpful description, isn't it?

Of just being dead towards God, spiritually dead. And why is that? Paul says it was because of our transgressions and our sins. And transgressions are violations of a divine command.

Reminds me of, you know, if you're going for a walk and it says, do not trespass on this land, or some angry farmer or something, has put up a sign. But God has rules. He has things that he set out for our good, but we've chosen to cross them. And sin is all about our thoughts and words and deeds and how they can offend God. Paul's saying because of our transgressions and our sins, that we are dead.

And each person has lived this way. Paul says in verse two that we have followed the ways of this world, which is quite interesting, isn't it? What the ways of this world, I wonder what you imagine when you hear the ways of this world. One thing I thought about was perhaps the ways of this world at the moment in our culture is all about self. You know, it's all about promoting oneself, protecting oneself.

[6 : 25] We live in a very individualistic age, don't we, where we live for ourselves rather than thinking about other people. That is the way of the world in which we live. And there's other things too we could add into that mix. I was reading N.T. Wright, who's a Bible scholar. He wrote about this. He said that God revealed himself fully in Jesus and he revealed fully what genuine human life should be like, that actually it should be deeply self-sacrificial. So simply following the desires of your body and the desires of your mind will actually just lead you to ruin.

Paul is saying if you follow the way of the world, or if we do what he says in verse three, if we live to please our desires of our body, the desires of our mind, actually that'll just lead to ruin and it'll lead to spiritual death. Jesus has shown us that that's not what life is about.

And he's actually the only one who has successfully navigated this life. The pull of the ways of the world, the temptations that has, that temptation to live for yourself. I was reminded of one of the most vivid moments when Jesus managed to live this out. You'll probably know it. Gordon was speaking about it a few weeks ago, actually. Jesus's temptation in the desert, in the wilderness.

And it's really striking because the devil is there tempting Jesus in three different ways. But each one really is about pulling Jesus towards living for himself rather than trusting his heavenly father. And that's what the devil does. And Paul makes it clear that the devil will try and lead people away from trusting in God. In verse two, we saw that it uses some interesting phrases like the kingdom of the air and all that kind of stuff. We're not going to get too deep into who the devil is and what the devil does, because later on in the series, we're going to have a big chunk thinking about the armor of God. And in Ephesians, it talks about the schemes of the devil and how the devil is at work and how he tries to tempt us and lead us in different ways, but how we can stand firm in God.

But just to say today that actually the devil is real and the devil is scheming and the devil is leading people towards evil. And Paul makes that clear in the verses that we have said today.

[8 : 55] We'll look at that more another week. But really what we see in Ephesians chapter one and chapter two at the beginning, it really just expresses actually the hopelessness and the helplessness of the human race. Apart from the grace and power of God, the human race is hopeless, but we can trust in the grace and power of God. So we're going to look at verse four onwards just now. So let's read that together. Verse four, Paul says this, but 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. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages, he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 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. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

I said earlier that the book of Ephesians is a bit like a feast, isn't it? A bit like a banquet. And even in those words there, you don't really know what, which bit to focus on. There's just so much goodness. Last night we had a party for our daughter Flora, who's turning 11, and we had just ate and ate.

There's just so much food. By the end, the girls who were there with her for her sleepover had to choose between milkshake or chocolate brownies. It's like, you can't have both. You can't have both.

Choose. You've got to choose. And in these verses, it's a bit like, wow, there's this abundance of truth. But the good news is that you can, we can enjoy all of it. We can enjoy all of it. But what I find when I read things like this, I have to sort of take my time to digest it almost, like a meal. Digest it and meditate on each part. So verse four and verse five, let's look at that bit again.

Because of his great love for us, God, who's rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved. Now in these verses, we see the truth that God's mercy flows from his loving heart, rather than anything that we have done to deserve it.

[11:38] So it's from him. It's not because of who we are. It's not because of what we've done. Because of his great love for us, God has acted in mercy. It is from him. And we also see that for those who trust in Jesus as their saviour, they have been resurrected from a spiritual death, just as God raised Christ from the dead. And in other places in the New Testament, you might see words like regeneration or being born again. The Old Testament, we talked about having a heart of stone. And there's this great promise that actually God would remove that heart of stone and give us a new heart, a heart of flesh. And that is the experience of being made alive in Christ. Even that phrase made alive in Christ, it tells us something, doesn't it? It tells us it's not about what we do, you know, being made alive.

I can't do that. Only God can do that. Only God can do that for each one of us. He can make us alive in Christ. And at this point, I think Paul, I don't know, maybe he gets a bit excited when he's writing this letter, because he jumps in with this phrase, it is by grace you've been saved. And he says it now, and then he says it later. It's almost like he was waiting to say it, but he just couldn't hold back by saying it is by grace that you have been saved. And this is like a major theme, isn't it, of these verses, a major theme of the book of Ephesians. It is by grace you have been saved. It's not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. That's what he says in verse eight. It's not by your works so that no one can boast. You see, if it was all about what we did, or our character, or, you know, the things that we can do for God, there would be people that would be boasting, wouldn't there? That's the point. You know, if you could earn it, that gives rise to people actually being better than others and being able to boast about their good works, a good character.

But the point is that salvation, which is being saved by God, it is a gift, a free gift. It is not earned. It's not deserved. Do you know, you can't pay it back. There's nothing you can do to pay back the gift of God. And our kids this weekend, because it's been sunny, they've been outside, they've been playing on our trampoline, and that's not actually our trampoline. We got given it.

And it's far more expensive than we could ever have afforded, you know. And we are, and the wonderful thing is, the people gave it to us, they don't expect us to pay us back. It is a gift. It's a gift.

[14:32] And if, you know, maybe in life we don't often get gifts that are that good, but when I was looking at my kids playing, I was like, wow, that is a gift. I can't pay that back. Do you know, it's wonderful.

And it's the same with our salvation. There's nothing that you or I could do to pay God back for what he's done for us. There's nothing. We can do nothing to accomplish it ourselves.

It's only through Jesus's death and resurrection that it is achieved. But there is one thing, one thing that God looks for. There's only one thing we can bring to the table, so to speak, and that is faith. So the word faith comes up in these verses. Where is that? But it's in verse 8.

And faith is a confident trust and a reliance upon Christ Jesus. And you know, faith is the only way to receive the grace of God in our lives. It's only through faith. Like we said, it cannot be earned through anything else. It's just through faith. It's just through knowing Jesus, having trust in him.

The last bit of the scripture today is interesting because Paul has hammered home that it's nothing about what we've done, but all about Christ. It's not about our good works. But then it does say in verse 10 that we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. So it could be confusing, couldn't it? I guess if you're reading it, you're going, so it's not about good works. No one can boast. But then Paul's saying, but there are good works for us to do.

[16:18] Well, here Paul uses the word handiwork. I think in some Bible translations uses the word workmanship. So for each one of us today, you can go home thinking, I'm God's handiwork. Okay,

I'm God's workmanship. It sort of sounds like artistic, doesn't it? Like a sculptor or an artist. What God has done to us in Jesus is like a bit like a work of art or maybe a piece of music. And the new music that's playing is the genuine way of being human or what life now looks like in God's design. And actually, as we go on through Ephesians, we'll see that God kind of, he lays out, but through Paul's writings, he lays out what that looks like, what it looks like now to live as someone who has received the free gift of grace in their life, what those good works look like. But it's really important we get the things in the right order. It's not good works first, and then we receive God's gift. It's that God lavishes his gift of love and mercy and salvation on our lives. And that gives us a new heart and a new desire to live a life for him. Out of the heart that God puts in us, there flows new things. And maybe as you go home, you'll be thinking, right, God, you've made me your workmanship, your handiwork. My new heart is keen to live for you. Show me what that looks like. And so most of that is in God's word. It's not a mystery of what that looks like. We can read that for ourselves. But also God has a call on each person's life, doesn't he, for specific times and places and people that we are with and the things that we're doing, which is wonderful. So in these words of scripture, this sort of banquet, this amazing meal, we can see the depths from which God has rescued us and the heights to which he's raised us. We can see the depths of of who we were without Christ and how he has made us alive in him, the heights of his love and his mercy and his power. And I just want us to sort of dwell just as we come to a close on a few things about how how does this fit into my life or how should I go from here? How can I respond to these words? And the first thing made me think about one of my favourite worship songs is a song called Mercy by Matt Redman. I really like this song. It starts with this line, I will kneel in the dust at the foot of the cross. I love that line. For me, that dust is like a reminder of the dirt and the mess and the mess and the sin and the darkness, the stuff I get myself into.

[19 : 21] And you know, the only place to get that dealt with is at the foot of the cross. And so for some of us, the first thing is maybe that is our place of response today.

Maybe it's recognising the depth of our sin, the depth of that darkness that Jesus is rescuing us from. Maybe it's coming to him with a sense of repentance, a sense of owning that sin and giving it over to Jesus.

Perhaps that's the place you're in today. The second thing I was thinking about is that there is, even as we're singing and worshipping today, there is this freedom of a life of grace, isn't there? There's this freedom and liberation of living in the grace of God. It's about tasting and experiencing what that freedom is like.

Do you know, God is not stingy. Many, many people think of God as stingy. God is not mean. He is open-handed and open-hearted. And he is extravagant in his grace to us. He wants you to know that he loves you with so great a love. And he wants you to know freedom. He wants each of us to know a freedom of living in the grace of God.

[20 : 42] So it might be today that you just want to taste and see that the Lord is good. Taste that grace again, that free gift of God. And finally, for some of us, we get into this thing sometimes where we question, what purpose does my life have? You know, what's the point? What is my life all about?

And I love that bit at the end of these verses we read that actually the truth is that you are God's handiwork. You know, he has put a purpose upon your life. You are God's handiwork. Who decides that purpose? It's not us, is it? We don't decide the purpose of our life. We are God's handiwork, so he decides. But he has wonderful things for each one of us. He has a wonderful purpose for your life. And he loves to help us live out that purpose. And maybe today we just want to go away with that in the renewed sense of, this is my purpose, to live for you, Lord Jesus, and to explore what that means. So as Luke's going to come and help us, as we respond, as we worship, maybe we come in repentance, or maybe we come in a sense of freedom, or maybe we come just thanking God that we have a purpose, that he is our God and that we are his children. Can I just pray for us as we come to worship him? Lord, we thank you for this wonderful part of the book of Ephesians that we've been reading together. Lord, we thank you for your incredible, amazing grace.

Lord, there is nothing like you and your grace at work in our lives. God, the depths of our sin, the depths of our sin, even that is hard to comprehend. But even more so, the heights of your love and mercy to us, that you would show such kindness to us. Thank you, Jesus, that you died for us and you rose again and that we can be made alive in you. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.