

Alive Through Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Please do have a seat. It's great to be here this morning. I hope you've had a great weekend. But let's just, before we turn to God's Word, let's just have a moment of silence. Let's just still our hearts and let's pray together.

Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you this morning, Lord, like we've sung. You're an awesome God. That your mercies are new to us each and every morning.

And that your grace is truly sufficient for us. Lord, we come to your Word this morning desperate to hear from you. So, Father, we ask that you would send your Spirit, that he would lead us into all truth.

He would be our teacher. He would be our guide. And, Father, as we look at this wonderful picture of grace, that it wouldn't just be a word that we sing. But, Father, it would be a reality and a truth that we experience.

So, Father, I pray that we would leave here this morning with a bigger picture of who you are. And this is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen. One of the television programs that Alex and I have got into recently is The Voice.

[1 : 1 6] I don't know if anyone else watches The Voice. Have we got any other voice freaks here? It's basically a music talent show on the BBC. Now, I don't normally go for stuff like that.

It's not really my thing. But, see, when you're up with a child at five in the morning changing nappies, honestly, anything on the iPlayer will do. So, loving watching The Voice at the minute. And the way it works, for those of you who don't know, it's a singing competition.

Contestant comes on the stage and really belts it out for two minutes, any song that they want to sing. And there's four judges. And as you've seen the picture there, they've got the backs to the contestant.

And the whole aim of the game is for the contestant to convince the judges that they're good enough, that their voice is worth it. And then they hit the buzzer if they're good enough.

And they turn around, they face the contestant, and they point at them, and they say, I want you in my team. It's a great show. It's a great idea. I was watching this the other morning, and it struck me.

[2 : 1 7] You know, I wonder for how many of us, actually that is what we think it is to be a Christian. You know, maybe that you're here this morning, you wouldn't describe yourself as a Christian, and you feel like you're performing for God.

You're trying to live a good life, a moral life, but deep down you know, you think, you're never going to be good enough for it. Or perhaps that the problem isn't with you, actually the problem is with the judge, it's with God.

To you, he seems like he's got his back to you. You think he doesn't care, you think he doesn't know you. And he comes across as harsh and faceless.

Or maybe you're here and, actually you would describe yourself as a Christian, but if somebody asked you to articulate how you became a Christian, it would be along the lines of, actually I was good enough for God.

And maybe you wouldn't articulate it like that, you know that you're saved by grace, but actually you're living your Christian life as if that's true. And you need to keep performing to earn God's favor.

[3 : 24] Now I think every single one of us in this room is in one of those four categories. And this is why it's so exciting to preach this this morning, because this passage speaks massively into each of them.

So this is the great chapter in the Bible about Christian salvation. Effectively, it's going to tell us three things. Firstly, it's going to give us a reality check on where mankind stands before God in his own right.

It's going to tell us what God has done about it. And in light of that, it's going to tell us how we should respond. So turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 2. We're in at the first 10 verses this morning.

It's imperative that we have God's word open to us there. If you've got a Bible in front of you, can I encourage you to open it? Just, if anything else, you can check this. It's not something I'm making up.

This is actually what it says. And as you're turning there, let me give you a quick 101 on what we've seen in Ephesians so far. Remember, this isn't a theology pamphlet. This is a real letter, written by a real person, written to real Christians, who've got real struggles.

[4 : 28] And Paul's rocked up in Ephesus, and he's declared, in this city where the goddess Artemis is worshipped, that a God that you can make with your own hands is no God at all.

Now this is effectively like someone turning up to Paris, walking right underneath the Eiffel Tower and declaring that the Eiffel Tower is a fraud. It's not going to go well for that guy. But this is what Paul's done, and he's been aggressively forced out of this city.

But here's the thing. These Christians remain. These Christians remain living in this hostile, pluralistic, dangerous, spiritualistic, occultic, paganistic world.

A world that's not too dissimilar from ours. And he's writing to give them confidence in the incomparable power of God. And that's what we saw last week.

Paul's been saying this, that there is no greater power than God against all the odds, raising Jesus from the dead and seating him above all powers and rulers and authorities.

[5 : 37] And this is what he's going to say this week. That same power, the resurrection power that God worked in Jesus, if you're a Christian, you've experienced it in your own life as well. Big idea this morning, to be a Christian is to be a living miracle.

And grace, as we've been singing, as we've been looking at so far, grace is the banner that flies right across this section. Now, I love a sporting cliché.

If you were watching rugby yesterday, incredible by the way, watching rugby yesterday, full of sporting clichés. My favourite, game of two halves. This section, is a game of two lives.

And he's going to contrast the walk of death, and he's going to contrast the walk of life. So let's read about this, the walk of death. This is verses 1 to 3, Ephesians chapter 2.

Paul writes 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 is now at work in those who are disobedient.

[6 : 54] 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.

Now, Paul uses that word once, two times in these verses. So this is what he's saying to these Ephesian Christians. This is what your life was like before God got involved.

You were dead. That's really strong language. Certainly comes across at that to us, doesn't it? Especially, since these guys are physically alive and kicking.

So what's Paul on about? Well, he's saying that out with Jesus Christ, you're separated from God, you're spiritually dead. This is how the Bible says it is.

If you want a life of fulfillment, of purpose, of meaning, and of lasting joy, then you're only really going to get that in a relationship with the God who created you. And to be outside of that relationship, to be separated from him, is to be spiritually dead.

[8 : 08] That's the diagnosis here from Dr. Paul. And he's going to write, this death shows itself in two ways. Firstly, you were enslaved.

Verse 2. I was driving our car on the M8 a few weeks ago going to Glasgow. And I noticed that our car massively started veering to the left.

So much so that I had to oversteer to the right just to make it go in a straight line. So I got back to Edinburgh, phoned up the garage, said I've got a problem with the car. They took a look at it. They phoned me the next afternoon and they said, Sir, your wheel alignment massively out.

Now we live in that area of the city where there's lots of cobbled streets and the cobbled streets had knocked the car's alignment completely out. So instead of going in a straight line like it was designed to, actually this thing was veering all over the place.

And unless we did something about it, if we left it to its own devices, it's going to veer. And it's going to crash. And that's what Paul is saying is true of these Christians outside of Christ.

[9 : 17] He uses a shipping metaphor. Remember, he's writing to Ephesus. It's a port city. They understand what it means to have a course. That's what he's saying as a result of sin messing up the alignment in your hearts.

You're just following the default nature of your sick, human heart and you're just following the course of the world. He uses that word following three times in this section, doesn't he?

You're following three things. He says you're following the flesh, you're following the world, you're following the devil. You're just behaving like everyone else. That's how he used to behave.

You lived with the same priorities, you lived with the same dreams and hopes and ambitions. That's how he used to live. You know, John Stott says it so beautifully.

He says that it's only dead fish that go over the stream. That's what you once were, says Paul. You were enslaved. And secondly, as well as being enslaved, you were condemned.

[10 : 20] Look at what he says in verse three. You stood guilty before a holy God. So this is because of their willful disobedience against him. They stood at odds with God.

And they are in the firing line for his holy anger, his wrath. That implies, doesn't it, that there is, regardless of what our world tells us, there is an absolute standard of truth by which we will all be judged.

And it's God's standard, his perfect standard, which we have fallen well short of. Our world would tell us that we're inherently good. Paul would say, you're being far too optimistic.

You were enslaved and you were condemned. Outside of Christ, you were dead. And another program that I watched on the iPlayer, it's getting a lot of air time at the minute, J.K. Rowling's The Casual Vacancy.

I don't know if anyone watched it. The only reason I watched it is because I read something that told me it was a bit controversial. And the reason it was controversial is because the BBC make of the book, the BBC changed the ending.

[11 : 29] I don't know if anyone noticed that, if anyone actually stomached it to the end, I made it to halfway through episode one. But the BBC changed the ending from the book. So in the book, it ends on a really desperate note.

Whereas the BBC drama ended on a really positive note. In the book, the villain at the end is exposed. In the BBC drama, actually the villain ends up being the good guy.

Now why did they change it? That's the question. Well the reason they changed it was because of when it was being shown. On a Sunday evening.

Now I well remember that feeling on the Sunday evening before working the Monday. And that's why they changed it. Nobody wants to see tragic TV. People want to see feel good TV. People want to feel great as they go to bed on a Sunday night.

And that's why they changed it. And I think the temptation for all of us as we read these first three verses here is to give it a rewrite.

[12 : 29] Is it not? Surely we weren't that bad. Surely we, that is just Paul's opinion. That's not really what's happening. But actually it's true.

And what Paul outlines here is the staggering reality of what a life lived outside of Jesus Christ looks like. Now if that's you this morning then can I just point out to you where your life is heading?

What's going on? You know Sinclair Ferguson would write that the gospel sobers us before it satisfies us. I have a good friend of mine who I met up with this week.

He's a pastor down in Leith. And he was telling me, and the church plant there has been going for two, three years, and he was telling me that there's a woman who's been going for that whole time. Not interested in any of this God stuff.

And actually she was converted a few weeks ago through these verses. That actually it made sense to her because she couldn't figure out why she kept going back to church week on week.

[13 : 36] She couldn't fathom why she suddenly took a notion to read the Bible. She couldn't understand why she liked hanging out with Christian people because this detested her. And then it clicked.

She realized that God was pursuing her by his spirit. That God is into making dead people alive. If you don't believe that, come back a few weeks time for Easter.

We go big on it. It's kind of what it's all about. And she realized that God was pursuing her. And she gave her life to Jesus. I wonder if that's something that's true for some people in here this morning.

Actually, you don't really know why you come to church. You don't really know why you like singing these songs. You don't really know why you kind of read the Bible. Well, guys, can I say, could it be that God is pursuing you by his spirit?

Could this stuff be beginning to make sense because God is at work in your life transforming you? Have a think about that. But you were dead, writes Paul.

[14 : 42] Here is mankind shown to be totally inadequate to save themselves apart from God's intervening grace. Dead. You know the thing about dead people?

They can't make themselves alive. This isn't like Sherlock where he puts the squash ball under his arm, he stops the pulse, he's declared dead, but he's not actually dead. Okay, this isn't like your first aid certificate.

I don't care what qualification you have, you cannot revive a dead person. Okay, no kind of Heinleck maneuver in one, two, three is going to resuscitate a dead person. A dead person's only hope, resurrection.

Only hope. Now that is pretty bleak reading as we move on to our next section. The walk of darkness. And it leads us to ask the question, is that it?

What's going to happen next? Well, this is where I want you to think of the first school disco that you ever went to. Okay, do you remember that?

[15 : 50] Boys, you maybe put on a bit of your dad's Paco Rabanne, a bit of bro cream in the hair. Girls, you maybe borrowed your sister's lipstick for the evening, and you went to the village hall, and you went into the village hall, only to be greeted with the great divide.

Yeah? Boys on this side of the hall, playing keepy-ups with balloons, if you were me, and girls on this side of the hall. And there was a massive separation. And the tension, you could feel it, it was palpable in the room.

The tension was, the question was, who's going to make the first move? Who is going to make the first move? And as we leave verse 3, that is the question that's there.

Who is going to make the first move? Our sin has separated us from God. There's a massive chasm there. So who's going to make the first move towards reconciliation?

Well, we've just seen, haven't we, quite categorically, it wasn't us. It couldn't have been us. We were dead. It's not like we were crying out in God's direction for forgiveness.

[16 : 57] We weren't trying to make ourselves look pretty before God. In fact, the opposite is true. that we were shoving God's kindness back in his face. We wanted nothing to do with him. We preferred the darkness.

So who's going to make this first move towards reconciliation? Who's going to make the first move to bring people back to God? Well, this is where Paul pens two of the most beautiful words that you'll find anywhere in Scripture.

If you've got an ESV, it just reads, but God. But God. The two words on which the whole future of the human race rests.

And it hits you, doesn't it, given everything that's gone on before? We were dead in our transgressions and sins, but God. We were enslaved, but God.

We were condemned, but God. Do you see how that works? That God is the one who makes the first move towards reconciliation.

[18 : 07] Praise God that it's him who steps forward in grace and it's him that comes down to us. You know, when we weren't looking for him, he came looking for us.

This is what it's telling us. That God is the loving pursuer. That God is the gracious initiator. And God is the one who changes absolutely everything but God.

You know, let's read verses 4 to 10 and we'll see how this works. Paul writes this, God. 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.

[19 : 41] So what has God done? See verse 6. God has done in our lives exactly what he did to Jesus back in chapter 1 and verse 18.

Have a little look at it there. God made Jesus alive, he makes us alive. He seated Jesus in the heavenly realms and he seats us with Jesus in the heavenly realms.

God's power raises Jesus from the grave and the same power raises us from the spiritual grave. We were dead, God has made us alive.

We were condemned, now God has saved us. We were enslaved to the flesh, now God has freed us from its grip and he's seated us, us with Christ above every rule and authority and power.

What's the point, caller? We share in Christ's victory. If we are in Christ, we share in his victory. And this is something I noticed this week.

[20 : 43] Notice that it's in the plural all the way there. It's us. So Paul's including himself in this. It's us. And I think something that hit me this week, this has implications for the way that we deal with one another.

You know, I caught myself this week, every time that I was tempted to gossip about something, every time I was tempted to speak badly of someone, every time I was tempted to belittle someone.

And guys, listen, I still struggle with that. Don't think that just because I'm standing up here makes me immune from those struggles. But I'd reminded myself that that person that I was thinking about, actually somebody that God's raised from the world.

God has put his spirit in that person. So who on earth am I to belittle them? To gossip about them. To try and put them down. Do you see how that has implications for us in this room? Have a think about that.

The next time you're tempted to do something about that, actually that's the reality of what you're doing. He has seated us with Christ.

[21 : 44] You know, there's that famous quote from C.S. Lewis. An inquirer came up to him and he asked him to summarize the difference between Christianity and every other religion in the world. Maybe it's a question that you've got this morning.

And Lewis said it's simple really. It's the difference between do and done. All the other religions in the world, it's about making your way up to God by your good works.

But somehow we can make our way up the ladder to God. I hope, if anything, you've seen the futility of that in these verses this morning. But Christianity is not about us going up the ladder to God.

Actually, it's about God coming down the ladder to us. Our salvation is based on what Jesus has done for us. His atoning work on the cross is he takes our filth, the death that we deserve to die, and he gives us his righteousness.

It is not in what we can do for ourselves. What has God done? He's saved us by his grace. Friends, this should humble us.

[22 : 52] Do you see how we can take absolutely no credit for our salvation? That we absolutely have no boast about the fact that we're Christians.

It wasn't like we performed well enough for God to be impressed by us, and he chose us. Do you see how God gets all the credit here? It should humble us, and it should also cause to dwell up within us a deep, deep gratitude, a heart of thankfulness.

It's a wow factor that Paul's going for here, that God saved us, us. Wow. And do you see as well how this massively takes the pressure off?

We're free to take off our masks and stop pretending that we're perfect people. Two reasons for that. First of all, because we're not. And second of all, if you think about it, doesn't it rob Jesus of his glory?

You know, actually, if we've added something to our salvation, if we added 5% and God was 95%, then actually we can take some credit for the fact that we're Christians. But if we take off the mask and we say, actually, amazing grace saved the rich like me.

[24 : 06] Do you see how God gets all the glory of that? That Jesus has glorified, not me. There's something practical I've tried to do this week every time I've come to pray, is I've just simply gone, but God.

But God. You can do it, but God. I don't know how you pray, but you can do that. Just reminding ourselves of what God has accomplished for us, all by grace. Why has God done this?

Because he's a loving, heavenly father. Do you see how that works? Verse 4, the adjectives that Paul uses. What's driving this whole salvation venture is the great love that God has for us.

You know, I used to think of God a bit like the, I'm quite into football, you may have guessed that. I used to think of God like the football referee. Actually, he's there just to spoil my fun and he's just there to keep the score.

He is somebody to be begrudgingly obeyed, certainly not enjoyed. Maybe that's your opinion of God this morning. Well, can I ask you, is this the God that you see Paul describing here?

[25 : 15] God's rich in mercy. God's rich in grace. Why does he love us? He loves us because he loves us because he loves us. Actually, do you see how he's not the referee?

He's the one who steps in off the sidelines and gets involved in my mess, gets his hands dirty to save me. You know, Rico Tice in the Christianity Explored course, he puts it like this.

You are more sinful than you ever realized, but you are more loved than you ever dreamed. But you see, there's another reason that God saves us.

And I wonder if you remember doing show and tell at school. I certainly do. Maybe you brought in your pet budgie. Maybe it was your ninja turtle figurine. Show and tell at school.

Something that you were proud of that you wanted to show the rest of the class and tell them the story behind it. Well, these verses tell us that God's doing a show and tell with his church of the world.

[26 : 14] Every single person that God has saved is a trophy of his amazing grace. I don't know if you've ever thought about that, that God's intention for Brunsfield Evangelical Church is that he can showcase his incredible grace to the world.

As he does a resurrection job on dead people. As he forgives and transforms outrageous sinners like us. As people see that, his grace shines forth.

Maybe you're here this morning and like Paul alluded to earlier. We didn't even talk about this beforehand so it must be something in it. If you have a hard time believing that God loves you.

If you have a hard time believing that grace really is sufficient for you. Well, can I ask you from this passage to look around. You can do it.

Move your neck. Look around. This is a community of grace. None of us have earned our right in God's kingdom.

[27 : 17] This is all grace. And this is a place where it's okay not to be okay. Grace. If you don't believe me, listen to Mumford and Sons.

They put it like this. It seems that all my bridges have been burnt. But you say that's exactly how this grace thing works. It's not the long walk home that will change this heart.

But the welcome I receive with the restart. Amazing grace. What should be our response? We'll see that God saves every Christian in order that they might do good works.

Saves them so that they can do good works. So important we get that order right. I hope you've enjoyed the Exodus series that we've been going through the last few mornings. Taking a little break from it for a while.

We'll go back to it in a few weeks. And we'll see them being given the law by God. So this is what is happening here. God saved them and he's saying because you're my holy people this is how I want you to live.

[28 : 22] And notice that it's not the other way around. It's not that you obeyed me. You lived up to my standards. Therefore I think you're worthy enough to be saved. No, no, no. It's grace.

And it's the same for us. God saved us and he says live for me. This is how I want you to live. And do you see how it's a worshipful response?

We are God's workmanship at verse 10 created in Jesus for good works. Good works that you'll notice that God has prepared beforehand for us to do. So these works that we're doing we can't even take the credit for them because it's God that's prepared them for us to do.

You know, I know a lot of you here are in that transition stage of life. You know, maybe you're a graduate. Maybe you're leaving uni this summer. You're going somewhere else. Maybe your job's finishing up and you're about to move on from this city.

Well, can I encourage you to see the wonderful promise here at verse 10? That whatever you go on to do you can walk sure knowing that God has gone before you and that no matter what you encounter there he has got good works for you to do in that new situation.

[29 : 39] He knows what you're going to face. He's prepared works for you to do and you can trust him. So sovereign and gracious is God's that he's prepared good works for us to do.

I find that incredible and I find that amazingly humbling. So do you see the contrast in walk as we bring this thing to a close? Verse 2 we're walking in darkness without a hope.

Verse 9 and 10 we're walking in grace. We're walking in good works. What an amazing God we serve. What an amazing God that we know.

Now let's finish by going back to the voice. Is the voice theologically sound? That's our question. Well what picture is Paul painted in Ephesians here?

Can we do anything to earn our way onto God's team? Is God the harsh judge who's got his back to us? Did we earn our way onto his team by performing well enough?

[30 : 44] And are we outwith God's love and grace? No, no, no, no. Do you see this picture in Ephesians 2?

Do you see how we're the contestant that's dead on the floor? Do you see how God is the one who turns towards us in grace? Do you see how God is the one who breathes new life into us?

And do you see how God is the one who tells us for the rest of our days to sing a song of worship to him telling the world how incredible his grace is? This is our great God.

You know, one of the songs I've been listening to in preparation for this, I don't know if that's too small to read. If it's not, I'm going to read it out. It's called Grace Unmeasured. It's a sovereign grace song that we used to sing, Alex and I, at our church back in Bristol.

And I've been listening to it this week and I just think it's so poignant. Let me read it to you as we close. Grace Unmeasured, vast and free, that knew me from eternity, that called me out before my birth to bring you glory on this earth.

[31 : 54] Grace amazing, pure and deep, that saw me in my misery, that took my curse and owned my blame so I could bear your righteous name.

Grace abounding, strong and true, that makes me long to be like you, that turns me from my selfish pride to love the cross on which you died. Grace unending all my days, you'll give me strength to run this race.

And when my years on earth are through, the praise will all belong to you. Let's pray together as we close. Amen. Amen. Father God, we worship you, Lord, for your outrageous grace.

Thank you that you are the God of all grace. You have shown us favor, Father, sinful and disobedient people like us. Lord, I pray for us this week that you would help us grasp grace more.

I pray that you would help us love grace more. And I pray that you would transform our lives by grace more and more into the image of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

[33 : 14] Amen. Amen.