

A Made-Alive People

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[0:00] Let me pray. Heavenly Father, as we hear your word this morning, may it speak to our hearts that we may grasp the richness of your grace for us in Jesus.

! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Let me begin with a simple question. Have you understood the magnitude of God's grace towards you in Jesus?

Have you understood the magnitude of God's grace towards you in Jesus? Suppose I give you a RM10 gift. You might say, thank you.

But suppose you are drowning in the debt of RM10 million and someone pays the entire debt.

Suddenly, the gift means something very different. The greatness of the gift is understood against the greatness of the debt.

Or imagine someone falling into the sea. If they are a strong swimmer and someone throws them a life ring, that is helpful. But imagine someone is unconscious at the bottom of the ocean.

[1:10] They cannot reach for the rope. They cannot swim. They cannot call for help. They are completely helpless. The rescue must dive down, find them, bring them up, and give them life.

Now, that is the picture of our passage today. It is a story of salvation. It is about understanding how terrible our condition was and the magnitude of God's love for us.

That he came to us and make us who we are in Jesus. Now, the letter was written, originally written to the Christian Church, and yet it is for everyone this morning.

Our outline is simple. In the first part, we look at human condition in verses 1 to 3. And then we look at what God has done to rescue us from our human condition in verses 4 to 6.

And the purpose in verses 7 to 10. And as we go through this passage, I want us to see that Christianity is not primarily about becoming a better version of yourself.

[2:16] It is about moving from death to life. Let's begin with verse 1. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.

Paul begins with a shocking dynasties. He does not say you were confused. He does not say you were spiritually weak. He does not say you needed some guidance.

He says you were dead. And Paul is not talking about our physical death, but our spiritual death. But there is a lot of things in common between spiritual death and physical death.

A physically dead person is basically unresponsive. And being spiritually dead means we were unresponsive in our relationship with God. We were not capable of responding to Him, of listening to His voice, of regarding Him as a creator of the universe, and of worshipping Him as He deserves. Friends, do you understand how helpless we were before Christ came to us? Think about the difference between sickness and death.

[3:22] If someone is sick, they may need medicine. If someone is weak, they may need strength. If someone is lost, they may need directions. But if someone is dead, they need something far more radical.

They need life. And Paul says we were dead in transgressions and sins. Transgressions refer to crossing a boundary. God says, this is the way.

We say, I will go my own way. Sin means falling short of God's standard. So sometimes we deliberately rebel against God. And sometimes we fail to become what God created us to be.

We sin by the things we do. We also sin by the good things we fail to do. But sometimes we may think, I'm not a bad person.

But that is not Paul's point. The question is not whether we can find someone worse than ourselves. There will always be someone worse. The question is, have we loved God with all our hearts?

[4:30] Have we loved our neighbor as ourselves? Have we lived completely according to God's purpose? And the answer is no. This is why we need to understand what spiritual death means.

We don't need encouragement to try harder. We were dead. And this is humbling. Because naturally, we want to believe that if God gives us enough information, enough motivation, enough discipline, then we can fix ourselves and be right with him.

But the gospel says our deepest problem cannot be solved merely by self-improvement. We do not simply need better habits. We need new life.

And that is why Jesus did not come merely to make bad people good. He came to make dead people alive. We need to be spiritually resurrected. And we know only God is powerful enough to do that.

Paul said it in chapter 1, verse 9 to 10. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead. Paul continues in verses 2 and 3.

[5:43] He says, we once followed the ways of this world. Now, what does it mean? It means that before Christ, we were not as independent as we thought.

We were enslaved. Friends, we like to think about ourselves as free. We say, I make my own decisions. I live my own life.

I don't follow anybody. But Paul says that apart from Christ, we are often simply following patterns around us. We absorb the values of the world.

We begin to believe what everyone else believes. We begin to desire what everyone else desires. We define successes the way the world defines successes.

And so, though we think we are free, we are really enslaved to the ways of the world. Now, many of the things that control us are not obviously bad things.

[6:41] Sometimes, there are good things that become ultimate things. A good thing becomes an ultimate thing. That is one of the most dangerous forms of idolatry. Now, work is good.

But when your identity depends on your career, work becomes your master. Family is good. But when your entire identity depends on your family, you may become controlled by fear and approval. Money can be useful. But when money becomes your security, you become controlled by the feeling that you never have enough. The world says, prove yourself.

Make yourself important. But if your identity depends on your performance, your life will always be unstable. When you succeed, you become proud.

When you fail, you are crushed. When others succeed, you become jealous. When others criticize you, you become defensive. We thought we were free.

[7:44] But we were just simply following the ways of this world. Paul says we were also following the ruler of the kingdom of the air. Paul is speaking about Satan.

The Bible tells us there is also a spiritual dimension to our broken world. There is a spiritual enemy who opposes God and deceives humanity. But notice something important.

Satan's strategy is often not simply to make people obviously evil. Sometimes, his strategy is to make us believe that we do not need God, just like he deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

If he can convince you that you are basically fine without God, then you will never see your need for grace. Now that is how Satan is now at work in those who are disobedient, as Paul says in verse 2. He makes them believe you can save yourself. But the gospel says, No, you cannot. That is why grace is necessary. Now Paul continues, All of us also live among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.

[9:04] Notice the three directions of our problem. We followed the world, the evil, the devil, and now the desires of our flesh. This is important because we often blame only one thing.

We say society made me do it. Or, the devil made me do it. Or, I couldn't help myself. Now Paul says the problem is deeper.

Sin involves the world around us. It involves spiritual opposition. But it also involves something within us. Our desires are disordered. We often want good things in the wrong way.

Or we want the right things too much. Or we want them more than we want God. And when that happens, our desires begin to control us.

And Paul is describing all of us. Did you notice how he says in verse 3 that all of us live among them at one time?

[10:06] In other words, we all fall into the same category. No one can say, this applies to others, but not me. No.

Whoever we are, we all follow the desires and the thoughts of the flesh in one way or another. Even our thinking and one thing is twisted. And so we get proud, we get envious, we get bitter, just like the world.

Even though we might look respectable on the outside, on the inside, we are still ruled by the simple desires of the mind. No wonder Paul says at the end of verse 3 that by nature we were deserving of wrath.

The wrath of God is not a popular subject. We cannot understand the greatness of grace unless we understand what grace has saved us from. Here we are talking about God's wrath.

God's wrath is not like human anger. Human anger is often selfish, uncontrolled, and sinful. God's wrath is his holy and righteous opposition to sin and evil.

[11 : 18] If God saw cruelty oppression, abuse, murder, lies, and injustice, and simply said, it doesn't matter, he will not be true to his character.

God must be opposed to sin and evil. So let me sum up what we have seen so far. In verses 1 to 3, we see the magnitude of our problem.

We are so deeply dead in our sin. So what hope do we have? On our own, none. But then we come to verse 4.

After all the darkness of verses 1 to 3, Paul writes, but God. Now brothers and sisters, these may be two of the most hope-filled words in the Bible.

We were dead, but God. We were enslaved, but God. We were following the world, Satan, and our sinful desires, but God.

[12 : 18] We deserve wrath, but God. The gospel begins with what we cannot do, but it does not end there. It tells us what God has done.

Verse 4 says, Notice why God acts.

Not because we were lovable, not because we had improved, not because we had finally shown enough potential, not because we first reached out to him. He acted because he is rich in mercy, and because of his great love.

This is grace. Grace means receiving what you do not deserve, and mercy means not receiving the judgment you deserve, and in the gospel, we see both.

God withholds the judgment that we deserve, and he gives us the life and blessings that we could never earn. Verse 5 says, Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.

[13 : 28] By grace, you have been saved. Notice those words again, Even when. Now, God did not wait until we became alive and then save us.

He made us alive when we were dead. Let me repeat again. He made us alive when we were dead. And this destroys every form of spiritual pride.

We have no part in our salvation. Romans 5, verse 6 to 8 says, You see, at the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Friends, Christianity is therefore not primarily advice. Advice tells you what you must do.

[14 : 32] Advice says, here is the ladder, climb. The gospel is first an announcement of what God has done. The gospel says, you could not climb to God, so God came down to you.

And notice the phrase, with Christ. Paul keeps repeating this idea, we are made alive with Christ, raised with Christ, seated with Christ.

Brothers and sisters, our salvation is connected to Jesus himself. Why can we be made alive? Because Jesus died. Why can we receive grace?

Because Jesus took the judgment we deserve. At the cross, something extraordinary happened. The one who deserved life took our death, so that those who deserved death could receive his life. The one who knew no sin bore the consequence of sin, so that sinners could be welcomed as God's people. The cross shows us both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of grace.

[15 : 42] If sin were not serious, Jesus would not need to die. If God's love were not great, Jesus would not have willingly gone to the cross. At the cross, God's justice and mercy meet.

But that's not all. Verse 6 says, God raises us up with Christ. This means salvation is not merely for the past.

It is also new life in the present. When Christ rose from the dead, death did not have the final word. And when we are united with Christ, his resurrection power begins to define our new identity. But being made alive with Christ does not mean Christians never struggle. Because we still live in this broken world, we still fight against sin.

We still experience weakness. We still live in a broken world. But sin is no longer your ultimate master. The Holy Spirit works in you so we can say no to sin.

[16 : 50] Your past is no longer your ultimate identity. Your failures are no longer your final verdict. Because your sins are already forgiven, Christ has spoken the final word and his word is grace.

And Paul goes even further. God seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. What does that mean? Remember where Christ is seated from chapter 1?

He is at the Father's right hand, far above all rule and authority and power. Then remember chapter 2, verse 2. We used to follow the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

But now, because we are with Christ, we are seated above this ruler of the air. He is no longer our master. So we don't have to fear Satan any longer.

Because we are with Christ where he is. And here is another implication. If we are seated with Jesus in the heavenly places today, our citizenship is already in heaven.

[17 : 58] Although we live in this world today, we belong under his jurisdiction. And that very much affects the way we live our life here on earth, isn't it? We know that our life here on earth is not all there is.

Therefore, we do not store up treasures for ourselves in this world. We look forward to the life that we will live with God in heaven and store up the treasures that matter to God and will last to eternity.

That is our relationship with him. And then you wonder, why did God do all this? Why did God come to us even while we were dead, while we were still sinners, while we were in rebellious state?

Verse 7 gives us the answer. 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.

Now, brothers and sisters, your salvation is a demonstration of God's kindness. And notice when God demonstrates this, in the coming ages.

[19 : 11] God didn't save you just to improve your life for a few decades. He saved you so that for all eternity, before angels and every power in the heavenly realms, he can point to you and say, look what my grace has done.

You are a permanent exhibit of the kindness of God. Think about that. Sometimes we believe our failures disqualify us from being useful to God.

We say, my past is too messy. I have made too many mistakes. I am not talented enough. My brothers and sisters, God is not looking for impressive people to use.

He is displaying what his grace can do. That is the point. So that means, instead of your past disqualifying you, it becomes the very backdrop against which his grace shines.

no one looks at a man raised from the dead and says, look what he achieved. They say, look what God has done.

[20 : 18] And so your life becomes a testimony, not to your greatness, but to his kindness. Not, look how good I have become, but look what grace has done for a sinner like me.

Paul repeats the word grace three times in verse 5, 7, and 8.

Why? Because our hearts are naturally inclined to works, we naturally want something to boast about. We want to say, I earn it.

I deserve it. But salvation leaves no room for boasting. Imagine someone gives you an expensive gift. You cannot boast about how much you paid for it if you paid nothing.

You simply receive it with gratitude. Now that is salvation. Even the faith that we have is not from ourselves. Faith is a gift from God.

[21 : 29] Remember Paul said earlier that we were dead? Therefore faith does not come from us. We were absolutely incapable of responding to God, nor even go to Him on our own.

And this means the Christian life is built on gratitude rather than anxiety. You do not wake up every morning asking, how much faith do I have today so that God will love me and do something for me? instead, you wake up knowing in Christ, I have been loved with a love I could never earn. And then you ask, how can I live today in response to that love?

Verse 10 now provides us the answer. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This is a beautiful ending. Paul has just said, not by works, and then immediately created for good works. Do you see the difference?

[22 : 37] We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. Works are not the roots of salvation, they are the fruits of salvation.

You do not work your way into God's family. good works are rather the results or evidence of God's grace towards us in Jesus. Imagine an apple tree.

You do not tie apples onto branches to make the tree alive. A healthy apple tree naturally produces fruit. In the same way, grace produces a changed life.

That's why Paul says we are God's handiwork. The word gives the idea of something intentionally designed by a craftsman. This means that if you are in Christ, you are not an accident.

You are God's handiwork. And God is still at work in you. Sometimes we look at ourselves and only see what is unfinished. But God sees the work he is doing.

[23 : 43] A masterpiece is not judged while the artist is still painting every detail. And perhaps today you feel unfinished. You may say, I still struggle.

I still fail. I still have weaknesses. Yes. But if you are in Christ, the story is not finished. The same God who made you alive is continuing his work in you as he has prepared good works for you to do. That means there is a purpose in your ordinary life, serving your family, doing your work with integrity, forgiving someone, helping someone in need, encouraging a discouraged person, serving in the church, standing for truth, showing compassion, doing your job faithfully, sharing the gospel. These are not insignificant things. God has given his people a new life for a purpose. Now, let's return to where we began.

Ephesians 2 begins with us as being dead in our transgressions, following the world and deserving of wrath. That is the bad news. And unless we understand the bad news, we will never understand how amazing the good news really is.

[25 : 10] But then comes the good news. But God, being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loves us, has made us alive with Christ, raised us with Christ, seated us with Christ, to display us as his handiwork, all by grace.

And so perhaps there are people here today who have never come to Christ. You may have been trying to fix yourself, trying harder, promising to do better, trying to become more religious, but hear the message today.

You do not save yourself. Jesus saves. Come to him. Trust him. Receive his grace. And for those of us who are Christians, perhaps we need to remember again where we came from.

When you are tempted to be proud, remember. for it is by grace you have been saved. Through faith, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

So, let's live not to earn God's grace. Let's live because we have received it. Let's not boast in ourselves. Let's boast in Christ.

[26 : 34] And may our lives become a testimony to the world. look what the grace of God can do. Now, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We confess that apart from your grace for us in Jesus, we were dead in our transgressions and sins. We could not save ourselves. We could not earn our way back to you.

but God, you are rich in mercy. Thank you for your great love. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for our sins and rise again so that we might have new life.

Thank you that salvation is not something we earn, but the gifts of your grace. Forgive us when we become proud and forget where we came from. Forgive us when we try to earn what you have freely given.

Forgive us when we trust in our own goodness rather than in Christ. Help us to live in the freedom of your grace. Remind us that we are your handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

[27 : 46] We are saved not by good works, but for good works. Use our lives to show the incomparable riches of your grace to our families, our church, our workplaces, and our community.

May people see not our greatness, but your mercy, not our strength, but your grace. Not what we have done for you, but what you have done for us through Jesus Christ.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.