

Ephesians 2:1-10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ 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. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do

Gospel reading: John 1:14-18

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, 'This is the one I spoke about when I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."') ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Oxford martyrs memorial to Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer and Thomas Cranmer – all burnt at the stake in the reign of Mary Tudor "Bloody Mary". People willing to die for the great truths rediscovered in the Reformation including the wonderful truth that we are saved by *grace alone*. So what is so amazing about grace? What makes *Grace alone* a truth worth dying for? For many grace is little more than a prayer said before meals. But of course grace is far more than that - it refers to God's love unearned and undeserved, unmerited. Now at the time of the Reformation it wasn't that the church didn't believe in God's grace but it didn't believe in *grace alone*.

You were saved by God's grace **plus**

I must have shown in some way that I deserve God's grace – I've tried my best, gone faithfully to mass, regularly confessed my sins, had the last rites, given to charity.

Today we might not express it quite so crudely, but nevertheless it's hard to shake off that idea that somehow, some way, we must have done something to deserve God's love, forgiveness and grace: Sound of Music song: "Nothing comes from nothing"

Maria & Captain von Trapp: "Perhaps I had a wicked childhood, perhaps I had a miserable youth,
But somewhere in my wicked, miserable past there must have been a moment of truth
For here you are, standing there, loving me, whether or not you should;
So somewhere in my youth or childhood I must have done something good

Our every instinct rebels against the idea of *grace alone* because it is so hard to accept that we have done absolutely nothing to deserve our salvation. The trouble is if we go down that road, how can we ever be sure that we've done enough?

But look at what Paul says when he describes how we were without Christ. *Ephesians 2 v.1*
You were dead in your sins. Not just disappointing, you were **dead**. Spiritually lifeless. We like to think of ourselves as being better than the godless masses, but God sees all of us as dead. This means we were all in the same boat – there are no comparative degrees of deadness: *Yes I was dead, but he was dead and she was the deadest !*

Dead people can't hear – and we were deaf to the voice of God

Dead people can't see – we were blind to the glory of God or even his presence

Dead people can't feel – we were incapable of responding to the touch of God's Spirit or his love.

If I was spiritually dead, that means I was completely incapable of doing anything to save myself.

Dead in another way – *a ship dead in the water – no power, or rudder – tossed by the waves and currents*

Similarly we were utterly at the mercy of ungodly influences

- *followed the ways of the world*: conditioned by what those around us think – TV, radio, newspapers, our friends, colleagues at work, our families – the current fads in thinking not necessarily what is politically correct, but what is *culturally* correct
- *subject to the ruler of the kingdom the air* – WHO? the one Jesus calls *the prince of this world – the devil*: *kingdom the air*: invisible but all around us, v real and powerful effects (*germs in the office air-conditioning system*)
- *gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature* – not just gluttony or lust, but anger, laziness, pride, selfishness

C S Lewis: *"For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion."*

And Paul makes it clear that he was not just talking about the Ephesians who had come from a pagan and ungodly background but about himself and his fellow Jews who thought of themselves as being God's own people: v.3 ³ ***All of us also... Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.***

As he says elsewhere in **Romans 3** ²² *There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile,* ²³ ***for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,***

So we're not just dead but doomed – *objects of God's wrath* v.3

not a popular idea – but God's wrath is not *"God losing His rag"*

John Stott wrote: *God's personal, righteous, constant, hostility to evil; His settled refusal to compromise with it and His resolve to condemn it.*

– *Even in our modern society where tolerance is exalted, we recognize the great need for wrong to be punished. If someone who does wrong, gets off scot-free there is a great sense of injustice c.f. our reaction to child abuse, or acts of terrorism. If the offender is caught and found guilty and then not punished – there would quite rightly be a huge public outcry at such injustice. This is why God's righteous and just nature requires that sin must be punished. Anything less than wrath in God against sin would actually be deeply disturbing. But that leaves us in a very precarious position for sin runs through us like a highly contagious cancer.*

So we were ***dead, defeated and doomed*** – and now you will probably say: ***deeply depressed !***

What hope can we have?

Two wonderful 3-letter words **BUT GOD - But** – all the initiative lies with God

Yes, we were dead but now *God has made us alive with Christ,* v.5

Yes, we were enslaved – *trapped in the bog of our culture and our sinful nature, - but now God has raised us up with Christ* v.6

Yes, we were doomed – *but now God has seated next to Him, in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.* v.6

Why did God do this?

not because of anything in us) Because He loves us so much

viz: because of his great love for us, v.4 *God, who is rich in mercy ...* v.4

the incomparable riches of his grace, v.7

*expressed in his **kindness** to us in Christ Jesus.v.7*

This grace, this salvation, this faith is all the gift of God v.8 *this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God –⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast* – no one can say God has shown me his grace and mercy because of something I have done.

As soon as we try and add to grace we take away from it, because we are saying what Jesus did for me on the cross is not enough.

To say *I hope I'll get to heaven* is more arrogant than to say: *I know I'll get there.*

First is saying *I'd like to think I'm good enough, that I've done enough*

2nd is saying *"I know I am a sinner, dead in my sin, but by grace God has saved me"*

If this is true then no one is beyond help, for by God's grace anyone can be saved.

God has saved us because of his great love for us but he also had a further purpose: v. 7 *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.*

Incomparable Nothing else in the whole universe like the riches of God's grace

v.10¹⁰ *For we are God's handiwork – His work of art, his masterpiece*

Think about the artist who is a potter or sculptor: He takes mud and water and turns it into something quite beautiful. When we see it, we don't say what incredible mud! but what an incredible artist

It is God's purpose and His delight to take ordinary fallible human beings, creatures of mud and water and form us into His works of art, His masterpieces, so that the whole universe could see and understand the amazing grace of God which in turn might lead to more and more responding to his grace.

Now some might be thinking why having just said *you have been saved*

not by works in the very next verse he says *you have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works.* ?

Well the answer to this question is also the answer to those who might ask *If we're saved by grace alone does that mean it doesn't matter how we live?*

The answer is that God has saved us from being spiritually dead in order that we might not only be fully alive, but fully the people he created us to be. The award winning film producer Jane Campion recently cast her own daughter in the recent TV series *Top of the Lake*. *Because she knew what the role involved and she knew her daughter so well, she realised she would be perfect in that role.* And when a film director gets that right, how wonderful and fulfilling it is for the actor to discover their metier and their potential.

So God has a particular role for each one of you *good works, which He has prepared in advance for us to do.* And if we have any sense at all we will seek to discover that role, to do those good works for in doing that we discover and become the people that we have been created to be. For this too is all part of God's grace to us alone.