

*Sermon on Ephesians 2:1-7 prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

## **Ephesians 2:1-7(-10)**

### **The mercy and great love of God pulls us out of the tomb.**

All of this rain lately, and I have been thinking about mold.

When we lived in eastern Washington, at our home (tri-level), we converted a spot under the house into what we called the “pillow room.” Great for Iona to play in and was inviting, hospitable to everyone who came to the house.

One weekend though Stacy decided to power wash the siding of the house. And spend a bit of extra sprays on a corner of the house behind the chimney... she didn't know that that extra water was getting in under the house, to the crawl space of the house... where the pillow room was.

It took time. It started as a faint smell. (maybe Iona spilled something). But eventually mold made the room inhospitable and we had to remove it and repair a couple of walls.

Mold is everywhere, but given the right situation it can be dangerous. And while it affects everyone a little differently, in the end it overwhelms.

The announcement of our rescue in Ephesians 2 paint the reality of our existence to match the way of mold.

There is something in the air, and the spiritual realm, as well as inside of us, that leads to death. But there is also an antidote - grace - fresh air to breathe. Protection from biological, environmental, and spiritual harm.

Two movements in the first seven verses, life without Christ, and with Christ.

### **The mercy and great love of God pulls us out of the tomb.**

This is a letter to the churches in Asia, for the one in Ephesus Paul has a special relationship as planter. His letter started off singing of the goodness of our union with Christ.

Being made one with him by faith. All that is his, ours for his glory. The backbone of Ephesians.

Here we have an unfortunate chapter break. The text actually flows directly out of the power of Christ toward the church. This is a second whole Greek sentence.

“In Ephesians 2 Paul takes us down to the Death Valley of the Soul (vv. 1-3) and then up to “the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (vv. 4-7). His method is contrast: from death to life, from Hell to Heaven, from bondage to freedom, from pessimism to optimism. The journey’s contrast will enhance our appreciation for what we have in Christ and will influence the way we live.” Hughes

Begins with bad news.

### **Without Christ**

**Ephesians 2:1–3** “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (ESV)

Resurrection power comes to this reality. Humanity dead in sin.

Paul is personal here. He wants us, as the church, to own this story. We were dead in our rejection of God. This is the normative state of humanity without Christ.

That which made us sick has three sources. Enemies of the soul.

The world, the devil, and the flesh. Each of these tell lies that lead us to reject God and his way, and each produces only death.

“Our war against the three enemies of the soul is not a war of guns and bombs. It’s not against other people at all. It’s a war on lies. And the problem is less that we tell lies and more that we live them; we let false narratives about reality into our bodies, and they wreak havoc in our souls.”

– John Mark Comer,

The world - “following the course of this world...” This is the drift of the sea, this is what we swim or exist in.

This is the humanistic system that is at odds with God. Voices of influence that say to follow “your truth,” your preference, self above all.

**Matthew 18:7** “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!” (ESV)

“We sin because we believe a lie about what will make us happy.” The world produces an endless supply of lies of finally having enough, being enough, or not caring enough to be free.

Exhausting and never satisfying. Keeping up with the Jones’ in a toxic, unfulfilling way.

Prevailing idols the world desires we worship; money, success, power.

**1 John 2:15–17** “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. [17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (ESV)

The world is here just the first in the unholy trinity or tempters.

The devil - “the prince of the power of the air. The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...”

A spirit with some dominion in the world... this is the cosmic accuser. We see it in the old stories of Scripture, lying accusing the brethren before God (The serpent that deceived in the garden or think of Job and his faithfulness).

He is the tempter in the wilderness for Jesus. A spirit with control over “demons” attempting to ruin humanity, to rob God of glory.

The images of the red guy on your shoulder making bad suggestions, not far off! Whispers, the power of suggestion in the spiritual spaces of life. “Reject God, get yours, take a hold of what you deserve...”

Prevailing idols the devil desires you to worship - any but God! All of them lead to death, which is all the Father of lies can provide.

Jesus, condemning religious Jews that rejected him...

**John 8:44–47** “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. [45] But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. [46] Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? [47] Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” (ESV)

The devil is active, but not wholly responsible. There is another.

Little girl who kicked and pulled the hair of her brother. Her mother caught her and said “Sally, why did you let the devil entice you to kick and pull your brother’s hair?” To which the girl responded, “The devil only told me to kick him, I came up with pulling his hair myself!”

The flesh - We once lived “in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...”

This is the sarx, the corrupted inclinations, attitudes, character within us without Christ.

It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person but what comes out of it...

**Matthew 15:18–20** “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. [19] For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. [20] These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.” (ESV)

Flesh, we are responsible here even for the temptation. Our inherited sinfulness. Not as bad as we could be necessarily but depravity remains the normal state for humanity.

Prevailing idols of the flesh; pleasure, hunger, image. Pursuing things to make you feel, or numbing yourself to avoid feeling.

This is the corrupting of good things, even to excess. Never satisfied. Never able to deliver what our hearts long for. All it produces is shame and anger.

Succumbing to these three enemies, humanity is by nature children of wrath. All of us.

Pursuit of “self” always leads to death - spiritually, eternally.

“Death is understood in two ways. The first is the familiar definition—when the soul is separated from the body at the end of life. The second is that, while abiding in that same body, the soul pursues the desires of the flesh and lives in sin.” Marius Victorinus

The dead, those without Christ, are dominated by the world, the devil, and the flesh. The world dominates from without, the flesh from within, and the devil from beyond. These are the terrible dynamics of spiritual death!

John Stott says, “We should not hesitate to reaffirm that a life without God (however physically fit and mentally alert the person may be) is a living death, and that those who live it are dead even while they are living.”

Because of this, apart from Christ we are totally lost. So profound is human depravity that near the end of his argument in Romans 3 Paul says that both Jews and Greeks are under sin...

**Romans 3:10–18** “as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

[11] no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

[12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,  
not even one.”  
[13] “Their throat is an open grave;  
they use their tongues to deceive.”  
“The venom of asps is under their lips.”  
[14] “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”  
[15] “Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
[16] in their paths are ruin and misery,  
[17] and the way of peace they have not known.”  
[18] “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (ESV)

This is life without Christ. Us in need of rescue.

Image of the swamp of sadness in *The Neverending Story*, overwhelmed. Or the slough of despond in the *Pilgrim’s Progress* where Christians sinks under the weight of guilt...

When things seem to be darkest, without hope. Something happens that leads to life with Christ.

### **With Christ**

But God...

“We were not strugglers in need of a helping hand or sinking swimmers in need of a raft; we were stone-cold dead—spiritually lifeless, without a religious pulse, without anything to please God. But he loves the loveless, gives life to the lifeless, and is merciful to those deserving no mercy.”

**Ephesians 2:4–5** “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—” (ESV)

Paul’s description of the salvation of believers is thoroughly God-centered. God initiates our salvation, his love and mercy motivate it, and his grace grounds it. Ultimately, the display of God’s grace is the purpose of our salvation.

This is the good news that beats out the bad. Course-altering, life-giving, grace.

What we bring in - sin, burden, the weight of or sin and shame.

What are we given? We are made alive together with Christ, raised up with him, and seated with him in the heavenly places.

Due to our union “with Christ,” God has accomplished three events spiritually for believers that he did for Christ: (1) made us alive.

New Testament scholar Marcus Barth says that “in the majority of occurrences in the New Testament, the verb ‘to make alive’ is a synonym of ‘to raise’ from the dead.” Man is radically dead, and he can be saved only by the radicalness of resurrection!

We possess a living relationship with God (Rom 6:1–11).

**Romans 6:5–11** “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [6] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin. [8] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [9] We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. [10] For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. [11] So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (ESV)

(2) raised us up. We presently experience spiritual resurrection life. The resurrection of our physical bodies will occur when Christ returns.

Taken positionally out of the world, out of slavery to sin, transformed.

This means that, because of Christ’s resurrection, those who believe in him are given new life spiritually in this age (regeneration). They will also be given renewed physical bodies when Christ returns (future resurrection).

(3) seated us. Being seated with Christ, we share in his victory over the demonic powers (1:20–21) and are no longer obligated to follow the world, the devil, and the flesh (vv. 1–3). with him.

God has allowed his people even now to share in a measure of the authority that Christ has, seated at the right hand of God.

Ascension. With spiritual resurrection comes ascension to the heights of Heaven: Though not yet there physically, we Christians are already in the heavenlies by virtue of our union with Christ. Spiritually we are seated on the throne along with other believers. The powers of the spiritual realm have been brought to bear on our present life.

Jesus shares his victory over the enemies of our soul with us.

This is true of us with Christ. We were dead, but God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us... made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

It is then essential that followers of Jesus stay rooted in this rescue.

To fight lures.

To love each other.

To love and serve others.

Clinging to Christ, united with him, experiencing the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Jesus.

Wave upon wave of grace, new mercies every day. No longer of the world, no longer a slave to the lies of the devil, a flesh being made new.

Grace that is sufficient for us. That satisfies.

There are still battles... more to come in Ephesians - we still renounce the world, devil, and the flesh. But we battle from the reality preached here - we were dead in sin, but God...

Shane and Shane: *You've Already Won*

“There's peace that outlasts darkness



Hope that's in the blood  
There's future grace that's mine today  
That Jesus Christ has won  
So I can face tomorrow  
For tomorrow's in Your hands  
All I need You will provide  
Just like You always have  
I'm fighting a battle  
That you've already won  
No matter what comes my way  
I will overcome  
I don't know what You're doing  
But I know what You've done  
I'm fighting a battle that  
You've already won”

**The mercy and great love of God pulls us out of the tomb.**

Things around us may still be moldy, but a day is coming when the air will be clear once for all.

Choose Jesus - His way is life, purpose, eternity. Renounce the ways of the world, devil, and the flesh and commit to the way of Jesus. To his forgiveness and new life.

Experience grace - It is the air we breathe in Jesus. Unmerited favor. What we could never deserve. Security, identity. Kindness of the merciful and loving God toward us in Jesus.

Where there was no pulse, God intervened and brought life.

May we see it, savor it, and showcase it for his glory and our good.