

9.27 New Creation

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Father, I thank you for who you are and, and what you've done, the promises you give to us and the way that you reveal yourself to us through your word. Spirit, I ask that in these moments that you would open our hearts and open our minds to hear the things, the ways that you want us to be encouraged and challenged and instructed by your word. In your name, Jesus, I pray, amen.

Well, I love in the service so far how Travis named this theme of we're thinking about what it is to be brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. What is it to be made alive with Christ? And, you know, we sang some things like, I ran out of the grave, death was arrested and my life began. And there's this, an extent to which this concept of trying to understand, trying to wrap our minds around what it is to be, to go from spiritual death to spiritual life, to be made alive with Christ. It's kind of like, understanding that concept is kind of like, if we were trying to describe a smartphone to someone who lived in the 13th century, and it's before electronics, and we say, well, it's this rectangle, and it's made of plastic.

You don't know what plastic is. Well, it has a screen on it. You don't know what a screen is. Well, you can imagine a button. If you push a button, then And then it, you can hear music, and they would say, well, you can't fit an instrument inside that little rectangle.

And you say, nah, you don't have to fit an instrument in it, but it plays any music. Well, you get the point. Trying to describe this smartphone to someone at that time, it's challenging. So, as we go into this passage, we're going to have Paul trying to describe to us, inspired by the Spirit, in the words of the letter in Ephesians, describing to us something that is hard to wrap our minds around, this idea of being made alive with Christ. So, I say all of that to be honest with you and to encourage you to take on this challenge of leaning in and trying to wrap your mind around this beautiful concept of being made alive with Christ.

So the passage that we're looking at is Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 10, and I encourage you to open that up and even to, to keep it open throughout the message and to keep going back to it and following along with me. Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 10. Paul writes this, he says, 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 the ruler of the kingdom of the air. The spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us 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. 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 our 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 Jesus Christ. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this 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. Father, we thank you for the gift of your word. So this passage articulates and celebrates what is perhaps the most incredible miracle that ever takes place, and that is the miracle of a human being brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. So we

want to explore what is that miracle of being made alive with Christ. Paul describes in the beginning of this passage, he says, we were dead in our transgressions and sins.

So, we were spiritually dead. Spiritual death is, at its core, it's separation from God. It's living outside of the perfect loving community of the Trinity. So, since the fall of Adam and Eve, all humanity are born into this which is a tragedy because we were actually created to be in relationship with God, but now we're born into a state of being spiritually dead, being separated from God.

So Paul goes on to describe those in this state of being spiritually dead, being separated from God. What is true of their life is they are following the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. And they're gratifying the cravings of their flesh. So all of the— all of these are different ways of saying basically the same thing. It's running after something or someone other than God.

One scholar characterized it this way. He said it's, it's living in accordance to a non-Christian value system that is created and energized Satan. So, that sounds a bit harsh to me at first because I think many of us, we don't set out to follow Satan, evil himself. We don't set out to follow Satan, but Satan, in his craftiness and his deception, he twists things such that if we go back and to see what happened in the garden in Genesis 3, as it's recorded, where Satan came to Eve and Adam was around and he didn't say to Eve, why don't you follow me rather than God? But he came around in this crafty and deceptive way and he pointed to God and he asked this question.

He called God's goodness into question. He said, did God really tell you not to eat of any tree in the garden? And then he continues to call God into question, but to focus Eve's eyes on herself. And he says, do you know that your eyes will be opened if you eat this? And do you know that you'll have knowledge like God when you eat this?

And the temptation is to do something for self. So, that's the craftiness of the tempter, that he doesn't say, "Follow me, follow evil", but he puts on this charade like he's tempting us to follow ourselves. So much of our temptation is a temptation to follow ourselves, which doesn't seem so bad, but really at its core, it's following after the father of lies. So, Paul writes about this, this state of being dead in sin, following after the kingdom of the ruler, the ruler of the kingdom of the air, This state, being in this state, is deserving of wrath. So, God's response to sin is wrath.

So, what we know about God's wrath in this particular context is that God's wrath results in spiritual death, in our separation from God. The NIV Study Bible says this, it describes it this way, that the wrath of God is an expression of his love and his deep attachment to his people. So, somehow, the wrath of God and the love of God is somehow connected and related, to the extent that one theologian would say, would reason, that one who does not get angry does not care. So, to summarize this very complex concept, God's wrath shows us that God takes sin seriously. And, and if we're honest, that's what we want as we look across this world and see brokenness and pain and hurt.

We, we want an all-powerful God to take sin seriously.

So to sum up these first 3 verses, Paul is making it clear to his audience that all of them all the Jewish Christians and all the Gentile Christians, all of them were at some point spiritually dead, deserving of wrath. And it stands to reason then that this is true for us as well, that at some point we were spiritually dead and deserving of wrath. So then comes perhaps the

greatest or the most exciting 2 verses in all of Scripture, in verses 4 and 5 when Paul writes, but because of his great love, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions. So the question then I want to spend the rest of our time exploring, the 3 questions, is what does it mean to be made alive with Christ? How does that happen, and, and why does it happen?

So what does it mean to be alive with Christ? First of all, we, we know that, remember, spiritual death is separation from God, so spiritual life is connection with God. It's relationship with God. This isn't just knowing some things about God, but it's a personal relationship with God.

I can remember 26 and a half years ago, I was a senior in college and I was interviewing for a staff position here at Covenant, and the search committee encouraged me to read a book that was written by David Henderson called Culture Shift. And they reasoned that if I read his book, I would get to know a lot of things about the leaders of this church family. So I read the book and, and I got to know a lot of things about David. A few years later, I was here on staff at Covenant. I was in between housing situations, and the Hendersons invited me to live with them for a month in between.

So I, I lived with David and his family. I got to experience them on a daily basis and eat with them and play games with them and talk with them. And, and have a relationship with them. So knowing about David from reading his book was a completely different thing than having a relationship with David after living with him and his family. So when we talk about relationship with God, it's completely different than simply knowing about God from reading his book about him, but it's about having a relationship with God.

So when we have a relationship with God, we have the Holy Spirit inside us, dwelling inside of us, going everywhere with us. We can hear the words of the Spirit at any time. We can speak to the Spirit at any time. We have the Spirit with us. That is relationship with God.

So, first, to be made spiritually alive is to be in relationship with God, in fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, the second thing I want you to notice about this made alive with Christ idea is the with Christ and in Christ language that saturates these verses. We're made alive with Christ. We're raised, he raised us up with Christ. We're seated in the heavenly realms in Christ. We're created in Christ, with Christ, in Christ. That language saturates these verses.

I think about a time when I was 10 years old and I was growing up in a small college town, and I absolutely loved sports, playing sports, watching sports. I loved and idolized in many ways the college athletes that I would go and watch at the college in town. My dad was a professor at that college, and he had a friendship with the head coach of the football team.

So I had the occasion on one time during a home game as a 10-year-old to go down and be on the field, on the sidelines with these massive, amazing college athletes. A little 10-year-old got to be down there with all these super important, super talented people. As a 10-year-old, what I did is I held the cord connected to the head coach's headset, because back then they didn't have a wireless headset yet. So there was a cord, and I would follow the coach around, and I would give slack in the cord and then tighten the cord up and then give slack and tighten it up as he walked around everywhere weaving in between the players, encouraging them, yelling at them, yelling at the people on the field, and I'm following him everywhere. And I think, well, what business did this 10-year-old have to be on the field, on the sidelines with all these amazing people?

And the answer was simply that, well, I was with The coach. So, we think about this movement of how in the world does a mere human get access to this miraculous movement of death being moved from death to life? And the answer is, we're with Christ. How does a mere human get to be able to be raised up and seated in the heavenly realms? With angels and these heavenly beings and in the throne room with God.

How does a mere human get access to that? Well, we're with Christ. To be made alive is to be one with Christ. It's to be with him, to be in Christ. So, the third thing that I want to point out as we think about what this, what it is to be made alive, in Christ is this idea that Paul refers to this new creation as God's handiwork, God's workmanship.

We see in Genesis that, you know, in the first few days of creation as it's described in Genesis 1, after day 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 5, God says, it is good. It is good. And then after day 6, when God creates man and woman, he says, it is very good. So, men and women are the crown of God's creation. And then when we think about this reality of those who were brought from spiritual death to spiritual life, not only are we the crown of his creation, but I would say we are his masterpiece.

So, we are his handiwork, his workmanship, his masterpiece. Philippians 1:6 says, he who began a good work in us will carry it out to completion. We are his work, his masterpiece. Consider the work of an artist. What is going on when an artist is, is creating his art?

I think first of the long patience and the careful attention that artist gives his work.

Think about the long patience and attention that God, our maker, is giving as he is working on us, his pieces of art. I remember last year my daughter Ashley was taking an art class at Harrison high school. And this art class, the assignments had her drawing these very detailed, impressive pictures. So she is drawing these pictures and drawing these pictures, and, and it would often happen that before I went to bed, I would go and look at her work that she was doing, and I would say, Ashley, that is amazing. She'd say, "Thanks."

And then I'd say, "It, looks like you're almost done. Hopefully you can go to bed soon. And she'd say, I'm not even close to done. This is going to take me hours still. She had this long patience to just keep working and to keep working on this piece of art.

You know, even more so, we could read and learn that Michelangelo took 2.5 to 3 years to sculpt the Statue of David. 2 and a half years of brushing and chiseling and carefully sculpting that piece of art. So we think about not only the long patience of the artist, but the intentional design of the artist. Each brushstroke, each tap on the chisel. And then to carry the metaphor further, I wonder if blessings in life are like a brush in the artist's hands, making things more clear and more beautiful gradually, bit by bit.

And then I wonder if, if the difficulties— if, if what God does is he takes the difficulties in our life and he uses them like the chisel And the hammer in the artist's hands.

And then I keep carrying the metaphor and I realize, well, we're not like a static piece of art, we're actually living pieces of art. So what happens when the living piece of art begins to get a little impatient and squirm a little bit and move around in the hands of the artist? And then I picture how, well, you know, when I'm squirming, squirming and moving around in the hands of the artist, the brushstrokes get messy and honestly the chisel gets a little bit dangerous. So then I ask myself, am I doing a good job of being still in the hands of the artist?

Paul says we are God's workmanship. We're his masterpiece, we're his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. So then I wonder, what are those good works that we're called to do? And I wonder if the first and perhaps the most important good work that we're called to do is to be still in the hands of the artist.

When we're still in the hands of the artist, I can think of those, those, the right moments in my life, some of these right moments in my life when I'm still before the artist, I begin to see him more clearly. When I see him more clearly, I begin to see the blessings in my life. More clearly as his gifts to me. I see his kindness and I see his abundance of provision.

When I continue to be still in his presence, still in his hands, then I also begin to see my difficulties differently.

They're still painful, but I see how he's using them to shape me into ways to become the person that he wants me to become, to become the work of art that he's fashioned me to become.

And then this interesting thing happens as I continue to be still before the Lord and I see him and his blessings and the difficulties in life differently. Then what happens before I know it is I'm enlivened by the Spirit and I start to do the kinds of good works that I see Jesus doing.

So this idea of to be made alive with Christ, it's to be in relationship with God, it's to be in Christ and with Christ, and it's to be God's workmanship.

So that's what it is. So the, the 2 questions that we just want to spend a few moments on now is, well, how does that happen and why does that happen? How is it that we're made alive with Christ? And verse 8 makes that clear, that it is by grace through faith that we're saved. So grace enables this miracle to happen.

Jesus died a substitutionary death, and by grace he offers to cover our debt of spiritual death with his death. So spiritual death, separation from God, was the consequence of my rebellion. And if separation from God is removed by grace, then what I have is connection with God, communion with the Father, peace and fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. Grace enables that. There's nothing I can do to make that happen.

It is a gift. We don't earn it. We don't deserve it. Grace enables us to be made alive with Christ. That's a humbling thing to hear because we who are capable people, we want to think about, well, how can I achieve that?

What can I contribute? But it's grace, it's grace that enables that. And then faith is the path through which that happens. To place faith in Jesus is to put trust in him, to give our allegiance to him, to follow him. So grace enables this movement and faith is the path, it's the process through which it happens.

So then the last question is, why? Why does this happen? Why does God do this, that he brings us from spiritual death to spiritual life? And the answer in verses 4 and 5 is because of his great love and his rich mercy. Notice it's not because of you, something you did. It's because of his love and his mercy.

I think back, Amanda and I had a very scary moment a little over 18 years ago when Amanda was pregnant with Ashley and we were at the hospital and labor was long, as it's always long, and difficult, as it's always difficult, and Ashley is about to be delivered but she's in the wrong position in the womb and the nurses were worried and everything was getting super

stressful and they called for the doctor and they didn't know what was taking the doctor so long. Finally, the doctor gets there and the doctor, he does what he's good at doing and he figures out how to get Ashley in the right position and he delivers Ashley and he, and he saves her life and he saves Amanda and I from the tragedy that we were worried about. And in that moment, I remember this incredible affection that I had and gratitude I had for this doctor and the way that he had saved our daughter and in many ways saved us.

And then you think about why did the doctor do that? Did he do that because Amanda and I were just pretty kind people? Did he do it because he thought, well, one day I think Amanda and Brently are probably going to do something nice for me. No, the doctor did that because it's what a good doctor does. When God brought us from spiritual death to spiritual life and made us alive with Christ, did he do it because of something good about us, because he thought we might do one day?

No, he did it because of his great love and his rich mercy.

In our pride, sometimes we insist that, you know, I have something to offer. I deserve this at least a little bit, or I achieved or earned it at least a little bit. Or on the flip side, in our self-focus, we can begin to wallow in this place of saying, well, actually, I know I don't deserve it. And, and that— and, and it feels terrible that I don't deserve it. And, and in either of those cases, what we're focused on is ourselves and thinking it's about us rather than realizing that this is really all about him.

It's about his work in us. It's not about the art, it's about the artist. It's about his love and his great mercy and his workmanship.

I want to close our time by just inviting you into having a conversation with the Lord and reflecting for a moment in quiet. There'll be some music that'll play to help move us into this conversation with the Lord, but to be thinking about what is it when I think about his love and his workmanship.

Be still before the Lord for a moment and ask him to talk to you about his love and his workmanship.