

Ephesians 2:1-10
Resurrection Power Salvation
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Call to Worship

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:1-3

Invocation

O Lord, we praise You today that You have given us a salvation that has the power of a resurrection from the dead, the power of a new creation, the power of a new birth. For we are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is Your gift to us, O God, and not of our works lest anyone should boast. We praise you, O God, for the undeserved gift of our salvation.

We confess, O Lord, that we still at times are overcome by temptation and fall into sin. We do not always live as those who have been raised to new spiritual life, as those who are a new creation in Christ Jesus, as those who have been born from above.

Forgive our sins, O Lord, with Your fatherly forgiveness, for we know that we are born of You, and are no longer of this world, which lies under the sway of the wicked one.

1 John 5:19

And now, O Lord, prepare our hearts for worship. Give us a new heart, O Lord, and put a new spirit within us. Take the heart of stone out of our flesh and give us a heart of flesh. Put Your Spirit within us and cause us to walk in Your statutes that we may keep Your judgments and do them. And enable us to worship You today in spirit and in truth
Ezekiel 36:26-27

Sermon

Humanity first demonstrated the destructive power of uncontrolled atomic energy in a spectacular explosion on July 16, 1945. On that day, scientists tested the first atomic bomb on a empty desert near Alamogordo, New Mexico. At 5:30 A.M., a sun like flash of light shattered the predawn darkness. A great roar rumbled through the flat land, and a crater was scooped out of the desert floor, as though by a giant hand. The bomb exploded with the force of 20,000 tons of TNT.

I'm sure that those who witnessed this first atomic explosion were at a loss for words to describe this awesome new power. Paul seems to be struggling with the same human limitation when he tries to describe the awesome power of salvation that is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. All he can do is to pile adjective upon adjective in his divinely inspired effort to describe this supernatural event in terms which humans can understand. And that brings us to a question: Why was such awesome power needed? Why couldn't we be saved from our sins by the more conventional methods of other religions? Some enlightening teaching, a good example, a little motivation and encouragement, a few spiritual exercises and disciplines. Why

weren't these adequate for are salvation? Why weren't these sufficient?

The reason these conventional religious techniques and methods were not adequate for our salvation is that they all radically underestimate the sin problem. Awesome problems require awesome solutions. Radical problems require radical solutions. Extreme problems require extreme solutions.

Too many people envision the lost as analogous to someone on an ocean liner who has fallen overboard into the ocean. This person can't swim. He is desperately trying to keep afloat. He is crying out for someone to throw him a lifesaver or to come to his rescue in a lifeboat. That is not the Biblical picture of a lost person, of a person in need of salvation. The lost person described in the Bible drowned long ago, and his coral encrusted skeleton is lying on the ocean floor. That is what Paul tells us here in Ephesians 2:1:

1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ...

What does it mean to be spiritually dead? Spiritual death means total spiritual inability. The dead cannot walk or talk or think. They are incapable of all activity in the physical realm. And that is also the situation of the lost in the spiritual realm.

Romans 3:10-12

10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;
11 There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.

12 They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one."

Romans 8:7-8

7 ... the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Total spiritual inability. Unable to do anything that pleases God. Unable to do anything that does not offend God. Why? Because every thought, every word, every action, even a person's best and noblest, is tainted with the stench of rebellion.

Our first parents, Adam and Eve, followed Satan's lead and example in rebelling against God's rule. And now that rebellious spirit is inbred in the human race. It is a part of the very nature we inherit, the very nature we are born with. We can no more rid ourselves of this rebellious spirit in our own power than could a tiger through sheer will power turn himself into a vegetarian.

Because of this sinful nature which we were born with, we are, in our fallen condition, enslaved to Satan, the one whom our passage calls "the prince of the power of the air." Paul is saying that the lower atmosphere of this earth is teeming with demons, and that Satan is their lord. This powerful demonic lord has enslaved us. People in their fallen condition have been taken captive by Satan to do his will, and yet they are unaware of their slavish condition. They are not aware of the seriousness of their sin and the depth of their misery. Yet even if fallen humanity

were aware of their slavish condition and wanted to be delivered from it, they are no match for Satan. The enslaving master is a strong man who keeps his captives in bondage and who views them as his treasure. Those enslaved by Satan are not strong enough to break these bonds and free themselves, even if they wanted to.

Fallen humanity is also enslaved by the world system. In our fallen condition, "we walked according to the course of this world." This is referring to the world as a system in rebellion against God. The world as a social system exerts a tremendous peer pressure. The individual living in the world is like an individual in the middle of a mob that is intoxicated by mass hysteria. It is so difficult in such a situation to be an isolated, lone voice of opposition. The individual in the world is like a soldier marching in the middle of a massive army. It is so difficult in such a situation to break ranks, to be out of step, to go a different direction. In our fallen condition, we are swept along by the social forces of this world like a dead fish floating on the surface of a rushing stream. In our fallen condition, we do not have the discipline and resolve of Shadrach, Meshech and Abed-Nego. In our fallen condition, we do not have the discipline and resolve to remain standing while the masses surrounding us bow low to the ground before Nebuchadnezzar's idol towering over us on a pedestal.

Fallen humanity is also enslaved by fallen humanity's own sinful nature, which is a dominating propensity toward sinning, an overpowering inclination toward rebelling against God and breaking God's moral laws. In our fallen condition, we were "by

nature children of wrath." We deserved the wrath of God not only because of what we did but also because of what we were. Our ingrained nature was one of rebellion against God. In our fallen condition, we were hardened sinners even before we committed our first sin. Through the fall, this inclination toward sinning had become our very nature, our defining characteristic.

Humanity was originally created in the image of God. This means that humanity was made to be like God in every way it is possible for a creature to be like the eternal Creator. When Adam rebelled against God and fell into sin, he retained the image of God in the broad sense of possessing gifts and abilities analogous to God's communicable attributes. If the image of God in this broad sense had been totally eradicated in the fall, then humanity would have no longer been human. Creation in the image of God is the defining characteristic of humanity, that which separates humanity from the animals. Humanity retained the image of God in the broad sense of gifts and abilities, but lost the image of God in the narrow sense, which is also called the functional image or the moral image. This is the ability to use the gifts and abilities of the broad image for the glory of God. With the loss of the moral image, humanity retained rationality but used it to devise vain philosophies. With the loss of the moral image, humanity retained emotions but exercised them as lusts. With the loss of the moral image, humanity retained a sense of religion but practiced idolatry, the worship of the creation instead of the Creator.

Fallen humanity is like a piano that is totally out of tune. All the keys and strings are still there. A pianist can still play it, but

instead of producing a harmonious tune, it can only produce a discordant cacophony of sounds.

Fallen humanity is like a car with a bent frame which is totally out of alignment. A driver can still drive it, but it requires great effort to keep it on the road. The car has an overpowering tendency to go off the side of the road and into the ditch.

Fallen humanity is like a skill saw whose blade has been set at the wrong angle. No matter how sharp the blade and how powerful the motor, the saw is useless because it cannot cut a proper cut.

Fallen humanity is like a baby born with a heroin addiction obtained in the womb from his mother. The fallen human is created in the image of God, but he is born screaming for a fix. He is born with an inner craving for sinful living. He is born with a destructive appetite which can never be satisfied.

We have looked at the problem as our first point. We will now look at the solution as our second point. The solution is merciful love, unconditional love, undeserved love. In eternity past, God chose to save us. Why did God choose to save us when He passed others by? We don't know why. All we know is that it wasn't because we deserved to be saved. We were not better or wiser than others. God did not look at us and see anything that set us apart as deserving of His mercy. His mercy and love were unconditional. His salvation is all of grace. There is no trace of merit in the water of salvation. We do not sew a single stitch in the garment of salvation. God took us out of the common lump

of sinful humanity and chose to mold us into a vessel of mercy. We were not better clay. Again, God took us out of the common lump of sinful humanity. We did nothing to deserve this.

The solution is merciful love combined with supernatural power that is able to overcome Satan, the world and sin. Merciful love is the motivation, and supernatural power is the ability. Combined they spell salvation. Jesus is the one who is able to bind Satan and to plunder Satan's human treasure. Jesus is the one who is able to translate us from the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light and love. Jesus is the one who is able to free us from the pervasive influence of a world system that is in rebellion against God. Jesus is the one who is able to overcome the dominion of sin within our hearts. Jesus is able to do this because of the power of His life of perfect obedience and because of the power of His death as a finished sacrifice and because of the power of His resurrection as a victory over sin and death.

Our passage says that "even when we were dead in trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ." Back in chapter one, we read that God saved us "according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." The power with which God saves us is a resurrection power which brings the dead to life.

Think about the coming day of physical resurrection at the end of the age when Christ returns. He will call and command the dead to come forth from their graves and assemble before Him

for judgment. When the dead come forth, will they make any contribution to their coming to life? Or will their resurrection ability to answer Christ's summons be totally the result of Christ's power working in them? Their resurrection will be totally the result of Christ's power working in them. When Christ calls the dead to come forth on that last day, will the dead have any choice in obeying? Will any be able to turn off Christ's call as if His call were an alarm clock and go back to sleeping the sleep of death? They will have no choice in the matter. They will come forth, and none will be able to resist Christ's call summoning them from the grave.

The same is true when Christ calls the spiritually dead to come forth from spiritual death unto spiritual life. The spiritually dead make no contribution to their spiritual resurrection, and they have no ability to resist Christ's powerful summons.

Their experience is like that of Lazarus when he had been dead and in the tomb for four days. Jesus cried out, "Lazarus, come forth." The sovereign command went forth with the power of its own fulfillment. Dead Lazarus heard and dead Lazarus came forth. He made no contribution to his coming to life; He passively experienced the life giving power of Jesus. He could do no other than come to life. The life giving power of Christ was irresistibly powerful.

Something similar happened at the moment of our conversion. Here is the logical order of events which occurred in an instant. We were dead in sin, spiritually dead, morally unable to respond to the gospel in faith because we loved our sin too much to want

to be delivered from it. Then Jesus as an act of unconditional mercy poured out His Holy Spirit upon us. The Holy Spirit put us into covenant union with Jesus, a union so real and powerful that we are already in a sense seated with Christ in heaven. As a result of this mystical union with Jesus, we experienced the sin defeating power of His death and the life giving power of His resurrection. We died to spiritual death and we came alive to spiritual life. We consciously experienced this as the Holy Spirit's convincing us of our sin and misery and enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills. We consciously experienced this as the Holy Spirit's persuading and enabling us to embrace Jesus Christ as He is freely offered in the gospel. This new faith relationship with Jesus immediately and necessarily bore the fruit of repentance and new obedience. We turned from our sin unto God with new purpose of and endeavor after new obedience. Jesus freed us from the dominating power of indwelling sin and replaced our overwhelming tendency to rebel against God with an overwhelming desire to please God. He replaced our characteristic inclination toward sinning with a characteristic inclination toward obeying God's moral law. He took out our heart of stone, replaced it with a heart of flesh, and wrote God's law upon it.

The piano has been tuned. The car has been aligned. The skill saw blade has been set properly. The addiction has been cured. There is still a struggle in this life with indwelling sin, but the new way of life dominates us and characterizes us as the people of God. We are like a swampy marsh which has been drained and transformed into a grassy field. There may be the occasional

downpour and flood, but the transformed field will never again be a swampy marsh.

That brings us to our last point, the result. We are saved with a salvation which is all of grace. It is totally a gift to us from God. We did nothing to earn it or to deserve it.

Our salvation is through faith. Faith is the instrument God uses to bring the saving power of Christ into our conscious experience. Faith is our conscious experience of the union with Christ which God has sovereignly established in our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit. Faith is not something Jesus or the Holy Spirit does for us. We do the believing, the trusting. Yet God is the one who gives us the spiritually alive heart which is not only able to believe but which can do no other than believe. God is the one who gives us the heart disposition to believe, the overwhelming heart inclination to believe. In that sense, even our faith is a gift from God.

Our salvation is not a result of works we do. Our salvation is based totally of the work which Jesus has done in our place and on our behalf. He lived a life of perfect obedience to God. He died the death of a finished sacrifice. That is the work our salvation is based upon, not anything we have done.

Our faith comes to Jesus with the empty hands of the beggar. Faith is a hand reaching out to God. It is not the working hand demanding wages nor the full hand offering something in payment. It is the empty hand pleading for mercy. Faith is our emptiness looking to the fullness of Christ. Faith is our

weakness looking to the strength of Christ. Faith is our poverty looking to the riches of Christ's grace. This is the sense in which faith is an alone instrument. Faith does not bring its fruits, which are repentance and new obedience, as partial payments for salvation or as reasons for acceptance. The hand of faith is the empty pleading hand asking for nothing but undeserved mercy.

Finally we are saved unto good works. Faith is our conscious experience of our covenant union with Jesus. We can't be in a saving union with Jesus without its affecting us. We can't be made right with God without its affecting us. In this sense, faith necessarily bears fruit, the fruit of repentance and new obedience. When we turn to Christ, we turn from our sins to a new way of life. Christ both forgives our sins and delivers us from a life dominated by sin.

Do you see a need for forgiveness? Do you have a desire to be delivered from sinful habits? Respond to these stirrings within your heart while there is still opportunity, before they grow cold. Reach out to Christ with the empty hand of faith. Cry out to Him for salvation, for forgiveness, for deliverance. Receive Him into your life. Rest upon Him alone for salvation. Do not focus on your effort to believe. Focus on Jesus as the object of Your faith. Look to Him as your only possible help. Then act on that faith by confessing Christ to others and by becoming a part of His church. Do this, even as Lazarus came out of his tomb with his graveclothes on in obedience to Jesus' command. Then after you have done this, fall down at Jesus' feet and thank Him for giving you the life, the power, the heart to come to Him in faith for salvation. Never forget that when you were dead in

trespasses, God made you alive together with Christ; by grace you have been saved. Never cease to be humbled by this fact. Never cease to be filled with gratitude.