

Those of you who have raised children know the sense of dread you feel that those children – your very own offspring that you fed and clothed and taught to walk and talk, that you sacrificed for and invested in – might do something to embarrass you in front of people. The sense of terror at the prospect that those children could, at any moment, drop to the floor and begin kicking and screaming, drawing the attention of everyone in the store, because they didn't get to flush the potty themselves. The sheer panic you feel at the possibility that they might spend the night at a friend's house and say things they know better than to say and do things they know better than to do and generally ignore everything you've taught them since birth. The paralyzing fear that their behavior will reflect on you as a parent, and that people will look at you with that judgy look and shake their heads and roll

their eyes. You know that feeling. It's awful. And it's universal. And the truth is, we don't ask that much of our dear, sweet children. We don't demand that they make straight A's. We don't require them to be the smartest or the fastest or the best. We don't ask them to be perfect. We only have one request. We say it every time we leave them somewhere: at school, at a friend's house, at the grandparents'. Just one thing: **be good. Please.** Be good. We feel like everything would be fine, life would be enjoyable, we would be successful as parents, if our kids would just be good. Make good decisions. Make wise choices. Don't do anything colossally foolish. Don't throw temper tantrums. Don't smear peanut butter on the dog. Don't throw rocks in the house. Just be good. And it's not just the children. The world would be a better place if people would just be good. Politicians. Athletes.

Entertainers. The media. Our neighbors. Our coworkers. Our classmates. Our teammates. All we need is for everyone to be good, and all our problems would go away. Don't steal things. Don't hurt anyone. Don't be selfish. Don't say terrible things. Don't kill people. Be kind. Be courteous. Be thoughtful. Be responsible. Be good. That's simple enough, right?

And that would be a great solution...if being bad was our main problem. If our primary issue, kids and adults alike, was poor choices and bad decisions and wrong behavior, then being good would be an easy fix. But the way the Bible tells it, our biggest obstacle isn't that we're bad. Our greatest dilemma isn't that we make bad choices and do bad things. Our predicament runs much deeper than that. It goes way beyond just behavior and speech and

attitudes. It goes all the way to our hearts. And fixing that problem – that deep, profound heart problem – is why Jesus came to earth. It's why He was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger. It's why He lived a perfect, sinless life. It's why He died on the cross on Good Friday. It's why He came out of the tomb on Easter Sunday morning. He came to fix our problem. And being bad isn't our main problem. So what is? What is it that Jesus came to fix? What is the problem Jesus came to solve? What did His life, His death, and His resurrection accomplish? In **Ephesians 2**, the Apostle Paul is recounting for the Christian church in Ephesus what Jesus had done for them, how He had fixed their problem. And here's what he says to them beginning in v.1 [READ EPHESIANS 2:1-3].

So Paul starts the passage by defining their problem, their main issue, the single greatest obstacle they faced. It wasn't that they were bad. It's that **they were dead**.

There's a big difference between bad and dead. Bad can be solved gradually, by degrees. Bad can exist on a pretty wide spectrum. You can be bad, you can be worse, and you can be the worst. Dead is dead. There aren't degrees of dead: barely dead, kind of dead, mostly dead, way dead, super dead. If you're dead, you're dead. And the Bible says that we were dead. All of us. From birth. Male, female, black, white, rich, poor, all dead. That's our condition. Dead in relation to God. Unresponsive.

Unmoved. Blind to His word. Deaf to His voice. Unable to fix ourselves. Unable to even take the first step. Unable to even know we're dead without someone showing us.

Dead, Paul says, in our trespasses and sins, in our failings

and rebellions, in our defiance and missteps, in our lusts and desires and cravings and selfishness and greed and anger and hatred and dishonesty and deception and self-reliance and self-centeredness and self-absorption. These were the things that first introduced death into the world way back at the beginning when the first two people chose to go their way instead of God's way and rebelled against His goodness and His provision. In that moment, they suffered the consequence of their sin, which was spiritual death, separation from the good gifts of God. And when they died, we died with them. All of humanity did. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." When Adam and Eve sinned, we sinned. When they died, we died. And so all of us are born in a state of spiritual death. And dead

people do dead people things. They follow the pattern set by the world around us, by the other dead people we live with and walk among. All of them, all of us, follow the pattern set by the devil himself, the embodiment of evil, the prince of the power of the air, Paul calls him. Satan is the author of death and he's got the world in his grip. And as long as we're dead, he's got us in his grip as well. So that's pretty terrifying, right? Usually we think of the minions of Satan like people who dress in all black and listen to 80's hair metal and sacrifice cats or something. But the Bible here says that anyone who is spiritually dead, anyone who lives and walks according to the pattern of this world, anyone who conducts their life in opposition to God's rule is following the devil. There's an eye-opener.

And so it kind of makes sense that that condition – spiritual death – is marked and characterized by disobedience to God, complete hatred of His will and His ways and His commands. A refusal to submit to Him and live under His rule. But we all serve something, we all obey something. And spiritually dead people simply trade out the one true God for a false god. Instead of submitting to Him, dead people serve their own appetites, the passions of their flesh, the desires of their bodies and minds. They are slaves to their lusts, doing whatever it is they've determined they want to do, deciding for themselves what is right and wrong, obeying their own wills, following their own hearts. And I know Disney says that's what you're supposed to do – follow your heart – but that's the problem, not the solution. That's evidence of spiritual death. You've made your heart your god. That



becomes who you listen to, who you obey, who you worship. It's the gospel of Oprah. Believe in yourself. The truth is inside of you. Follow your heart. That's what dead people do.

But the worst part of all isn't just that, without Jesus, we are all dead. The worst part isn't just that we are slaves to our own desires and our own hearts. The worst part of all is the consequence. The worst part is that, apart from Jesus' solution, we are, by our very nature, children of wrath. That's a huge, important statement. We are children of wrath, objects of God's judgment and anger toward sin. God is the Creator and King of the universe. And sin is treason against the King of the universe. It's betrayal. It's rebellion. And that kind of crime doesn't go unpunished. It deserves the harshest penalty: death. So

every sinner is deserving of that sentence. Every sinner deserves to die. Every sinner deserves God's wrath against sin. That's all of us. We all deserve God's wrath. And you might think that the solution is easy: just don't sin, right? Just be good. The problem, though, is that sin is more than just what we do. It's who we are. It's hardwired into us. It's our default setting. That's why the "be good" strategy fails. We are children of wrath, not just by conduct, but by nature. We're not only sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners. It's our nature. All of us. So you see our problem, right? Our condition. We're spiritually dead. And spiritually dead people do spiritually dead things and are subject to the rightly deserved judgment and condemnation of a holy God who we've sinned against. That's a big deal. And it seems pretty hopeless, right?

Well it would be hopeless were it not for the next two words [READ EPHESIANS 2:4-10]. First two words. But God. Maybe the greatest phrase in the Bible. You were dead...but God. You were slaves to your passions and desires...but God. You were, by nature, children of wrath...but God. But God, who is rich in mercy, having pity on hopeless sinners. But God, who loves us with a love beyond measure. But God, who is gracious and generous in His kindness towards us. But God took dead people and **made them alive**. He took dead people and gave them what they needed most. What does a dead person need? Not help? Not instructions? Not education? Not encouragement? They need life. Bad people need to be made good. Dead people need to be made alive. And that's what Jesus came to do. He didn't come to make you

good. He came to make you alive. He came to give you spiritual life. If you are a follower of Christ, through His death He took away your sin – the thing that had caused your death in the first place – and then, through His resurrection, He infused you with supernatural, spiritual life that made you a brand new person, new beginning, new hope, new destiny, new identity, new purpose, new King, new desires, new loves. Even when we were dead, for those who believe, He made us alive with Christ. By grace, He saved us. There's a new word, right? What is grace? Grace is giving an immeasurably valuable gift to someone who has done everything not to deserve it. It's making your greatest enemy the beneficiary of your will, leaving everything you own to the person who hates you the most. That's what Jesus came to do. He came to give

transforming life to people who hated Him and whose sins put Him on the cross. He came to make them alive.

But that's not all. Not only did Jesus come to give life to dead people. Once He brings those dead people to life, He raises them up. Just like He raised Jesus up from the grave, He does the same for those who belong to Jesus. He brings us to life and pulls us up out of the grave, out of the tomb, out of the place of death and decay and gloom and despair. He raises us up. And then He gives us a place to sit, with Him. The King brings us home with Him and lets us sit at His table and live in His house. Man, that's a long way from dead in the ground, disobedient, objects of wrath. Now, we're loved, we're alive, we're raised up, and we are seated with God, enjoying the kind of intimate communion we were intended to have with Him

from the time He made us. That's what Jesus came to do. He didn't come just to make you good. He came to take His goodness and put it on your record, so you could be judged by His life, not yours. He didn't come to modify your behavior. He came to transform your heart and your life. He didn't come to dress you up and make you presentable. He came to make you His.

But why? Why would He do that? Why would He do that for rebel sinners who hated Him and refused to recognize Him as their King? V.7 tells us. He made us alive and raised us up and seated us with Him SO THAT, beginning the moment we receive life and extending forever into eternity, He might put His grace and kindness on display. He did it so that, for all time, we would marvel at a grace that can't be measured and a kindness that can't be

fathomed. So that, for the rest of our existence, we would see what He's done and who He is and just go, "Wow. Incredible. You've got to be kidding me. Unbelievable." So that we would honor Him and worship Him for how amazing He is. So that we could spend eternity basking in His greatness. He did it for the same reason He does anything: to receive glory that He alone deserves.

So Jesus came, not to make bad people good, but to make dead people alive, to raise them up, and to seat them with Him. And He did it to show off His grace and kindness. But how do we get in on that? How do we become recipients of that new life? VV. 8-9 tell us. He saves us **by grace, through faith**. He offers the gift, we respond by trusting in the one who offers. He gives, we receive. He extends life and forgiveness and rescue to

those who don't deserve it, and all we have to do is believe it. We don't DO anything. We can't DO anything. None of it is ours to do. It's God's gift. If we had something to do with it, we could claim credit. Look what I did. Look what I contributed to. Look what I accomplished. But no. Our works, our good deeds, our accomplishments, our religious observances, our obedience, our keeping of the 10 Commandments have NOTHING to do with our salvation. They have ZERO ability to make us right before God. All of it – grace, faith, salvation – it's all His work, His provision. He is the author and creator of life, the source and giver of life, the sustainer and upholder of life. And all we have to do for that life to be ours is look to Him for it.

And then, once we have received that life, once we've been made alive by grace, through faith, we begin to walk



in the good works that God made us for, that He prepared ahead of time. In other words, we start acting like we're alive. Dead people do dead things. Living people do living things. Dead people lie there and rot. Living people move and speak and go and do. What Paul is talking about here is NOT just being good. It's doing the things that accompany life. We do the things that begin to come naturally to us as living creatures. We love people. We meet needs. We show compassion. We sacrifice. We pray. We encourage. We speak truth. We share the gospel. We worship. That's what living people do. God's already prepared you for it. Now walk in it. Live it.

So what do we do with this? What am I asking you to consider this Easter morning? Well the first question to consider is this: are you alive? Have you been made alive

by Jesus? Have you trusted in Jesus and been changed? Notice I didn't ask if you're good. Or if you're moral. Or if you're patriotic. Or if you're decent and respectable. Or if you're nice. You can be all those things and still be dead on the inside. I asked if you're spiritually alive. Have you come to the place where you've seen your own sin for what it is: rebellion against God? Have you come to understand that you deserve God's wrath to be poured out against your sin? Have you seen the futility of your own efforts to make yourself acceptable to God, to make yourself good? Are you willing to come to a point this morning where you turn your back on everything else you've ever trusted in to make you whole, and instead place your faith and trust and confidence in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? Do you want to live? If so, come to Jesus today and find life.

And for those who would say that you have been made alive, you have trusted Jesus to give you life and raise you up and seat you with Him, you have been saved by grace through faith, here's my question for you: do you act like you're alive or do you still act like you're dead, like you did before you met Jesus? Are you still hanging around the cemetery, spending time in your old coffin, hanging around with dead people, doing dead person things, even though you're alive? The truth is, it's a pretty drastic change to go from death to life. It's noticeable. It's observable. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, everyone knew it. When He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, everyone could tell. When HE walked out of the tomb on Easter, there was no mistaking it. Have you been changed like that? Have you been utterly transformed, as different from

what you used to be as life is different from death? And are you living like it? If not, repent of your hypocrisy today and be what you were made to be. Be alive.

2,000 years ago a dead man walked out of a tomb, alive. The Son of God, Jesus the Christ, was put to death in order to forgive our sin, and was raised in order to give us life. He didn't come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people alive. And He offers this life to us by grace, through faith. Let's worship Him and honor Him today by receiving His gift and living as those who have been raised to life. He is risen! He is risen indeed!