**Ephesians 2:1-10 Are You Alive or Dead?**

I want to start this morning with a question that you might find somewhat simple to answer. But I want you to answer anyway. What is “grace”?

I’m pretty confident that all of us could answer pretty easily – “Grace is God’s undeserved love.” As Christians, we know what grace is. We love to hear about grace, talk about grace, and sing about God’s amazing grace. Some of us can define grace in under 5 seconds. We are so familiar with it. And yet, sometimes, the way we live, act, think, makes it seem as though grace is a foreign concept to us.

Last week, the apostle Paul brought us so much comfort didn’t he?  In that opening paragraph of his letter to the Ephesians, he drilled home the point that we are chosen from all eternity in Christ.  God intended that truth for our comfort and for our confidence.  But a week goes by, a day goes by, for Paul a paragraph goes by and he knows how quickly that truth of being chosen can quickly go from comfort to overconfidence.

And that’s why Paul starts chapter two the way he does. ***“As for you, you were dead in your sins… you followed the ways of the world… you followed Satan.”*** If you one of those people hasn’t missed a Sunday of services this year, if you’re one of those people who gives so much to charity and offerings that it raises red flags on your taxes, if you’re one of those people who wears your faith on your chest so everyone can see who you are, OR, if you’re one of those people who is right now is cheering on, “that’s right preacher go after those goody – two shoes people.” In other words, if you’re human, you need to mentally circle this Word in today’s text: **All.** ***All of us lived among the disobedient, gratifying the cravings of our flesh. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.***

This is how God once looked at us. Can you see the picture of all these descriptions paint? ***Follower of satan and the ways of the world, disobedient, gratifying our flesh, derserving of wrath***? Paul calls us ***“dead.”*** Bones, dried up, lifeless. It’s a body lying still and silent, unable to force oxygen in and out of its lungs. Something that is dead can do nothing to help itself in any way. That’s how we were born and how all humanity has entered this world since the Fall into sin.

So the question I want you to think about this morning is this: Are you alive or dead?

You might think that’s a silly question. We are all currently breathing. We can raise our hands, bend our fingers, turn our necks, smile and open our mouths to sing wonderful songs. Physically, you can be alive when you appear to be dead. Spiritually, it’s the other way around. The bible says that you can be dead when you appear to be alive.

In 1Timothy, Paul says that those who live for pleasure are dead even while they live. James, the brother of Jesus, says that if you claim to have faith in God, but there are no fruits of that faith, then you don’t really have living faith because you’re dead.

The thing is, people who are spiritually dead oftentimes have no idea that they really are. Everything on the outside of their life looks the same. They have a home, just like they always have. They eat food. It fills them up. They have children, a spouse, parents, hobbies, friends. They watch the game. They go to school. They have struggles. They shed tears. They feel pain. Sometimes they even attend their church. In other words, their life can look exactly like – yours, but their spiritual life is inexistent.

Paul describes this “walking dead” phenomenon that we may not be able to see, but our God does. He sees it every day in this the world in which you live. And he’s even seen it in your life. So are you dead without even knowing it?

Paul says there is really only one way to know. He says that you are alive if you have been saved by grace. But before you go on assuming that you have been, consider what that means. “Grace” as you defined it, is when God gives you the opposite of what you deserve right? It’s a reward you didn’t earn and a gift you should never get; which means you are only saved if you know you deserve nothing close to it. And you can’t go half-way here. You can’t be kind-of saved by grace or mostly saved by grace. You either are or you aren’t. And if you fully are, then it means that you know something about yourself.

It means you are willing and ready to call yourself a full failure, fully wretched, a complete waste of created space, entirely worthless in every way, and good for absolutely nothing. So, are you saved by grace?

Many can’t go that far. Do you know why? Because nothing else works that way. Did you know that employees at Ford are graded on a scale of 1 to 27? 1 is the entry level, lowest spot on the totem pole. 27 is the chairman of the board. Once you get to 9, they give you your own parking space. A score of 13 gets you a window in your office. Work your way up to 16 and you get a private bathroom. The more good you give to the company the better life gets for you.

Isn’t this how everything works? If you want the best job, you have to work hard. You want your college paid for? You need to either work really hard in the classroom or really hard on the playing field. You want your relationships to be a blessing? You need to put in the work! Being a wretched waste of created space doesn’t get you too far in life does it?

At the very least, you would think that for all our mistakes we would need to correct them right?

When a child is out playing in the rain, they’re covered in mud, and they want to come inside, what do their parents usually make them do? Grab the garden hose right? Hose off all that dirt.

One would think that God would require us to do the same spiritually—that we would have to do our best to hose off the sins that pollute us from the bottom of our hearts so that he would let us back into his grace. But remember the God’s-eye view of reality Paul just gave us a moment ago. He said we were **dead** in our sins, not just dirty, hurt or wounded by them. We weren’t like the soldier who gets shot in the leg, but can still somehow manage to crawl to safety. Sin shot us through the heart dropping us where we were, unable to move. Dead. That is the person without God.

So thank God for verse 4. Thank God for one of the shortest yet most important words in the English language and in the whole Bible. The word “but*.”“****But God,”***

“But” doesn’t only take something good and turn it bad.  “But” also takes something bad and turns it good, especially when the subject is God. You see this phrase all over the Bible.

For example, look at Genesis 50.  Joseph has been sold into slavery by his brothers.  Forgotten in prison.  And how does the story end?  Telling his brothers with tears in his eyes, “***You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives”.***  Or take Psalm 73, a psalm that basically says that if you have God, you’ve got all you need.  ***“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”***

***“But God… “*** those two words are overflowing with gospel.  In reality, sometimes those words are all that we have to cling to. The one thing – the only thing – that changed our status before God is God.

You’ll notice as Paul gives us God’s view of our past and present this morning, he goes from one extreme right to the other. Why is that?

Paul understood something….that “we can only grasp the gospel’s sweetness if we first grapple with its offense – you can’t save yourself.” Only when God has leveled our, “But God, I’m the Chosen One” arrogance can we appreciate his uplifting assurance, ***“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us made us alive with Christ even though we dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!”***

Once you were dead to any real love for God. **But God.** Once we were deceived by our own lust of living for your name instead of God’s name. **But God.** Once we listened to the words of the devil himself instead of having a high regard for the Word that created heaven and earth. **But God.** Once we lived to satisfy the cravings of our flesh. **But God.** Once we were God’s enemies, children of wrath. **But God.** Once we were dead, **but God** said live. How? By taking our God-despising sin and placing it on his Son. That’s grace. Jesus became an object of God’s wrath for us. That’s grace.

In the book of Philippians, Paul describes what Jesus humanity meant for him. He says, “***He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*** Jesus came down to this, this world of the deadness of sin. He made himself subject to death. And when Jesus had paid the full price for our dead hearts of sin, Paul says, ***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.***

And then Paul says one more thing. A passage that might be the clearest passage in the Bible on where faith comes from. **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – (9) not by works, so that no one can boast.**

God the Holy Spirit, takes a person who is dead in sin. Lifeless spiritually. And leads them by faith to the grace of God, embodied in our Savior Jesus.

Grace dripped from everything Jesus said and did during his lifetime. He didn’t seek out the proud and powerful, he went to the hurting and the lost, the sick and suffering. He didn’t tell stories about sinners who did their best and tried their hardest to win God’s love. He told stories like the parable of the workers in the vineyard, which demonstrates that citizenship in God’s kingdom is not a matter of working or earning, but a matter of God’s grace, freely given. He reminded his disciples, people like us, that we can’t have a righteousness surpassing that of the Pharisees, it’s impossible, and so we need his grace, freely ours, freely given.

Christians, you are saved by grace! Not because you are God’s gift. But because it is God’s gift. That’s Grace. We know that word. We sing that word. We love that word. And we know how grace works. I was dead…but God made me alive with Christ.

Martin Luther put it best: “*Grace works alone!* *Grace works in spite of us, to remake us, to save us, to make us into God’s masterpieces, designed and equipped to do the good works he has prepared for us to do. We are saved by grace alone!”.*

Today, see what God saw from you in the past- someone who was dead, a skeleton of a being, trapped in your transgressions and sins. But more than that, look at the way God sees you today through his grace. You have been made alive in Christ, to be his masterpiece, to be his handiwork. To God alone be the glory for his amazing grace!