

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Under Construction

(studies in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus)

Up from the Grave We Arose!

(Ephesians 2:1-10)

Study #2

Introduction: Bad news / Good news...

Life sometimes arrives in the form of Good News/Bad News...

You may remember that I was sick a few weeks ago. I was really touched when the church staff sent me a "Get-Well" card. I was a little saddened to learn from Jacob Rusch that the vote to send the card was close (3-2).

Some time ago, I presented my own proposal to the Elder Board for a new Job Description for the Senior Pastor. I was pleased that the Board was wildly enthusiastic about what I had written, less so that they immediately formed a Search Committee to try and find someone to fill the position.

I saw a post on Facebook last week from someone in the church who went on and on about how great my sermon was last Sunday. I was pleased until I kept reading and found out how great he thought the movie, "Zombie Nation," was.

All I'm saying is that given the broader context, good news can turn out to be not-so-good news. That's life.

That's also this morning's message, except that I am going to reverse order, and go bad news to good news.

My working theory today is that we will more fully appreciate good news when we grasp the broader "bad news" context.

That was the Apostle Paul's perspective, too, since, before he gives us some outrageously good news, he piles on some very bad news, first.

Life Without Jesus - Helpless and Hopeless (2:1-3)

Without Jesus, We are Dead to God (v. 1)

[1] ...And you were dead¹ in your trespasses and sins

Back at the beginning - Genesis 2 - the Bible records God's promise to Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, located in the middle of the Garden of Eden, he would die.²

Then, Genesis 3 tells how Adam and Eve ate from that tree and continued living for hundreds of years. So, we wonder. Was God kidding when He said that they would die? Nope.

When they ate, the process of mortality began to work in their bodies, guaranteeing eventual death.

But, when they sinned against God, they immediately ceased to have what they had enjoyed since the day of their making. They no longer had a vital, intimate relationship with God. They were immediately alienated from God. They died, spiritually.

Paul says that prior to believing in Jesus, you and I and all those reading this letter were in the same boat as Adam and Eve after they sinned: physically alive, but dying; estranged, alienated from God.

Today, outside of Christ, people are certainly alive. They enjoy a full range of emotions. They surf the web, chop wood, study, text, and drive a car.

¹ As Paul puts it, elsewhere in Ephesians - 2:12 - without God in the world; 4:18 - alienated from the life of God.

² The Hebrew says, literally, "*dying, you shall die*" (Genesis 2:17) - a prediction of a double death. Immediate spiritual death and eventual physical death.

But, that aspect of who they are that was especially designed to enjoy relationship with God is dead.³

People who have died physically can't cross the chasm and relate to those who are physically alive. So, people who are spiritually dead can't relate to the living God. It is as simple and tragic as that.

If this seems to be a rather dark way to introduce a passage or a sermon, be patient. It's gonna get really good, soon. But, as I've already said, good news is best appreciated against the backdrop of bad news.

And Paul's not finished with the bad news.

Without Jesus, We Sin Against God (vv. 2-3a)

Living in step with the world (v. 2a)

[2a] in which you formerly walked⁴ according to the course of this world

When Paul speaks disparagingly about **"the course of this world"** he's not talking about politics, and he's not longing for the "good ol' days" when things were better. (At every stage of history, there have been lots of things very wrong with the world.)

Paul's reference to **"the course of this world"** draws our attention to the fact that society flows in a certain direction.

It's like the current of the crowd after a Spurs game or at closing time at Sea World all pushing in the same direction.

The **"course of this world"** is away from submission and obedience to God, away from worship, away from trust in God.

That flow is evident at your child's Middle School, in your workplace, and in your neighborhood. Paul says that the current of that flow is fueled by someone.

Living in step with the enemy (v. 2b)

[2b]...according to the prince of the power of the air,⁵ of the spirit⁶ that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Our enemy - not an impersonal force, but a person, Satan - is directing the independent-from-God **"course of this world."**

This may look like Paul is just wagging his apostolic finger at his readers with a, **"YOU Ephesians / San Antonians are bad, bad, bad!"**

But Paul goes on to include himself in this ugly human mess.

Living in step with our own passions (v. 3a)

[3a] Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh,⁷ indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind

When we read in the Bible about us **ALL** being **"dead in trespasses and sins"** and that we **ALL "lived in the lusts of our flesh"** and that we **ALL "indulged the desires of the flesh and of the mind"** we are tempted to think, **"That's not me. Paul's describing a reprobate."**

But Paul includes himself (**"we"**) in the crowd of those who were separated from God because of sin, and that's quite an admission from a guy who wrote that even before conversion, he was a **"Pharisee of Pharisees"** and that, **"according to the righteousness found in the Law - blameless"** (Philippians 3).

⁵ Satan is called **"the god of this world"** (2 Corinthians 4:4, **"the evil one"** (1 John 5:19). In the book of Job (1:7), we read that he goes to and fro on the earth.

⁶ Paul will have much to say about the activities of Satan later in this letter (See Ephesians 6:10ff....). For now, we simply need to see that he is committed to directing us away from God and toward independent living and sinful rebellion.

⁷ **"Flesh"** as the term is used in the Bible can be morally neutral, or it can speak of the natural inclination of the whole person to oppose God's will and ways.

³ Luke 15 - The prodigal son was considered **"dead"** while he was sowing his wild oats, estranged from his father. When he came home, he was called **"alive."**

⁴ Walking - Greek imperfect tense, implying continual action, **"You characteristically were walking in these sins and trespasses."**

As far as we know, Paul lived an upright life. His strict moral standard as a Pharisee kept him from a lot of sins.⁸

But, now that he has come to know Jesus, Paul sees how far short of God's righteousness he had actually fallen. He sees the sinfulness of his heart before God.

I have come to believe that honest, self-aware people, in moments of calm reflection, will admit to what Paul admits to.

None of us really try our hardest to be good. We don't do our best to do good. We all fail to live up to our own aspirations and expectations, much less do we live up to the requirements of God.

The end result is that each of us is what theologians refer to as sinful or, "totally depraved." That term deserves some explanation.

If I told you that Medina Lake was "totally polluted" you might take me to mean that every gallon of water in the lake is as polluted as it could be. That would not be true.

But I might mean by the term "totally polluted" that every drop of water you take out of Medina Lake is, to some extent, polluted. No drop of it is absolutely pure H₂O. That would be true.

When we talk about people being "totally depraved" we don't mean that every person is as morally bad as they might be.

We do mean that any aspect of a person's life we might choose to explore will show some indication of pollution, some sign of sin.

- We don't think as rationally and reasonably as we should.
- Our emotional life is twisted, and we feel things we shouldn't feel.
- Our will drives us to make decisions that are contrary to God's will.

⁸ We know much about the moralism of the Pharisees - but we also know a good deal about their sin, because Jesus spent so much of His time rebuking them during His earthly ministry. They imposed heavy burdens on the rank and file, lived for the praise of man, were exclusivists instead of evangelistic, prioritized the trivial, covered up inner corruption, were hypocrites, and lovers of money.

That is all what it means to be sinners.

And, because each one of us is guilty of sin, the sober reality Paul expresses next is also true.

Without Jesus, We are Under God's Wrath (v. 3b)

[3b]...and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

By nature, I am a Smith. By nature, I am left-handed. And by nature - as is evident from my thoughts, words, and deeds - I am a sinner, a child of wrath, destined for an eternity separate from God.

Paul has given us a birds-eye view of the "bad news" status of us all, outside of Jesus.

We used to be dead, alienated from God. We used to be controlled by the power of sin, Satan, and the flesh. We used to be bound for God's judgment.

Now, Paul moves from the bad news to the GREAT News.

LIFE With Jesus - the Grace We Need (2:4-9)

God Has Saved Us! (vv. 4-7)

But God... (v. 4)

[4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us

God's strategy for bringing people to salvation was NOT to announce, "Get your act together. Then, I'll save you."

No. God is rich in mercy. He is extravagant in mercy. He pours out blessing where blessing is not deserved. That is grace.

My favorite picture of extravagance in the whole Bible is found in Mark 14. It's the story of the woman who anointed Jesus with costly perfume.

The disciples were indignant about the waste of this valuable perfume. But Jesus was so impressed by her act, that He told her that everywhere the Gospel went, what she had done would travel with it.⁹

What ties her act of anointing with the Gospel message is the theme of extravagance.

She used perfume way out of proportion to what was needed to anoint Jesus. Jesus poured out a blessing on us that was way out of proportion to what was deserved by us.

We, who were alienated from God and who were under God's condemnation now receive the blessing of spiritual LIFE.

...made us alive (v. 5)

[5] even when we were dead in our transgressions,¹⁰ made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

Christ died physically on the cross. But death wasn't the end of the story for Jesus. On the third day, God raised Him to new life.

And in the same way that He died, physically - meaning that His spirit and soul were estranged from His body - we were estranged from God (we were dead, spiritually).

For Jesus to move from death to life required the power of God. Same for us. We could do nothing of ourselves to help ourselves. So, we were "**made alive**" by the quickening work of the Spirit of God.

...raised us up (v. 6)

[6] and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus¹¹

⁹ And through the Bible, it has!

¹⁰ Paul states here what he states so often in other places as well, that God loved us before we made any moral improvement, when we were dead in our transgressions.

¹¹ The words "**made alive together**" and "**raised us up**" and "**seated us**" are all compound words in the Greek New Testament. The prefix "*sun*" (with) at the

Then, remember that Jesus' experience after the cross and resurrection involved being "raised", ascending into heaven. The Bible goes on to tell us that Jesus has now "**sat down**" at the right hand of God. (Hebrews 1:3; 10:12; 12:2)

That Jesus "sat down" is a big deal. In the Old Testament tabernacle where God was worshiped and where the priests ministered to God, there were no chairs or couches. The work was never done, so the priests never sat down.

But now Jesus has sat down at the right hand of the Father, signifying that His work is done.

And we also have sat down, because, when it comes to being or staying saved, there is no "work" for us to do.

With respect to our salvation, Jesus did it all, as He said from the cross, "**It is finished!**"

...to God be the glory! (v. 7)

[7] so that in the ages to come¹² He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.¹³

After sin made a wreck of everything, God worked to redeem the wreckage in such a way that we are blessed beyond measure and He receives maximum glory.

All of which brings us to two of the most frequently memorized verses in Ephesians - and for good reason.

beginning of each word emphasizes our solidarity in being crucified, resurrected, and ascended "with" Christ.

¹² Coming ages – could be referring to the centuries between Christ's death and resurrection and the second coming OR to all the ages that follow His death and resurrection, on into eternity. I personally see the plural of "ages" pointing to this never-ending glorifying of God through our salvation.

¹³ In Ephesians 1, Paul said three times (vv. 6, 12, 14) that what God has done for us He has done to bring glory to Himself.

We Have Only to Believe (vv. 8-9)

[8] for by grace you have been saved through faith¹⁴; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; [9] not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Working backwards, I want to say three things about salvation from these two verses.

Our salvation has nothing to do with our works

First, the performance of good works is not a factor in our getting saved or staying saved.

Our good intentions don't play a role in our salvation. Neither does our baptism, church attendance, giving, morality, sympathy for the marginalized, ecological consciousness, disdain for bigotry, or the fact that, by and large, we're all pretty good ol' boys and girls.

Second, if our salvation is not based on what we do, it must be based completely on what God has done.

Our salvation is given as a gift of God

Paul says, ***[8b] and that*** (referring to this whole "salvation by grace through faith" thing)¹⁵ ***not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.***

The whole package we refer to by the word, "salvation" is a free gift from God, no strings attached. It is really free to us. (It cost Jesus everything, but it's free to us.)

¹⁴ Note the parenthetical outburst of verse 5, "***by grace you have been saved!***" Paul just couldn't hold it in any longer.

¹⁵ Some believe Paul was referencing faith by the word "that," the sense being that even the faith we place in Jesus is a gift from God. While it is understandable that we might want to give God the credit for even the ability to trust, this is pretty clearly not what the verse is saying. Not only does the argument of the passage work better if "that" is referring to salvation, generally, but grammatically, "that" cannot be related to "faith" as it is a feminine noun and the pronoun ("that") is neuter. (So Chrysostom - Greek-speaking church father, and Abbott and Hoehner, both modern Greek scholars).

The result of God having arranged our salvation in this way is that it is impossible for anyone to boast about being saved.

While walking around in heaven, no one will ever say, "Just look at what Jesus and I did!"

Third, salvation is by means of grace (God's gift) and it is received as we believe (our response).

Our salvation is received by faith

If God wasn't gracious, there is not a one of us who would ever be saved. But if any one of us does not trust Jesus, we won't be saved.

We're not automatically saved just because Christ died and rose again. The benefits of Good Friday's death and Easter morning's resurrection are available to all, but they become operative only for those who believe.

We must each place the treasure of our trust in Christ for salvation. We must each receive the gift Jesus died to give us.

If Jeff Bezos wanted to gift you with a brand-new car, he could have some Amazon drones drop it off at your house today, gift-wrapped. But it would be up to you to respond to the gift and accept it.

Accepting the gift isn't "work". It's the "non-work" of receiving.

Receiving the gift of eternal life requires that you, *grasping* the fact of your alienation from God because of sin, *rely* on Jesus.

Faith alone in Christ alone saves - and to God be all the glory!

I know very little of how God will be glorified in Heaven.

We get glimpses of heavenly worship services from the book of Revelation, and I assume that active worship will be a big piece of what will be involved in bringing God glory on the other side.

But you and I aren't in Heaven now. We're on earth. So, how will God receive maximum glory now?

According to what Paul writes, it has something to do with how you and I, who have been saved by grace through faith, live.

Life with Jesus - Living FOR Jesus! (2:10)

God's Masterpiece - YOU! (v. 10a)

[10a] For we are His workmanship...

All people everywhere are the creations of God. Every person you will ever meet has been made in the image and likeness of God. But in Jesus we have been re-created.¹⁶

We have a new nature, a new eternal destiny, a new Father, new brothers and sisters.

This word we translate "***workmanship***" was used in the first century to describe a crown made by a master craftsman. It was the best that craftsman could do.

This is what we who have received His grace and mercy in Jesus are to God. His crowning achievement, the means by which He will be glorified here on earth.

The song says, "*I once was lost and now am found.*" Paul says it was way worse than that. I once was dead and have been made alive by God's grace.

Our journey into spiritual life began because of God's love. He took the first step toward us in grace. We responded in faith. He saved us and made us brand new, fit for heaven.

So, why doesn't God take newly converted people straight to glory? Why leave us hanging around here?

Simple. It's so that we who believe in Jesus will shine the grace and love we've received to a desperately needy world.

Our Masterwork (v. 10b)

[10b]...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

The purpose of good works

Again, just to be clear, we don't perform good works to get saved, to stay saved, or to prove we are saved.¹⁷

We perform these good works because we ARE SAVED. Grace received persuades us to do good works out of gratitude, to honor the One who has done so much for us.

Let's think of this, first, at an individual level.

Good works for YOU to walk in

Because the list of possible "good works" is long, Christians have historically boiled them down into categories.

So, as we turn to close and focus on applying Ephesians 2:10, I'm going to suggest that each one of us here today think in terms of categories when it comes to good works.

In terms of your relationship with God, you have what has always been referred to as the **Great Commandment**.

Worship

Jesus said, ***[Mark 12:30] "...and you shall LOVE THE Lord YOUR God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."***

You bring maximum glory to God when you worship Him and love Him.

¹⁶ See 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15.

¹⁷ Notice that Paul had already said, "***you have been saved***" (Ephesians 2:8). The perfect tense indicates a past event which has an abiding result.

You pray to God. You take time to worship Him, confess your sin, express your gratitude directly to Him, and ask Him to do the things that only He can do.

You sing songs of praise, give of your time, talent, and treasure and obey Him from the heart.

I see lots of you here today who are following that path. You're loving God and it's a beautiful thing to see.

With respect to how you are to treat others in the family of God, you have what is known as the **New Commandment**.

Love

Jesus said, **[John 13:34] "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. [35] "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

You bring maximum glory to God when you love your brothers and sisters in Christ.

You pray for your fellow Christians. You build relationships with them. You learn to relate in an honest, "masks-off" way. Commend those for obediences here.

I see so many of who are learning to love from the heart. Your love flows and you are a blessing.

And with respect to pushing the mission of Jesus forward, you have the **Great Commission**.

"Next steps"

Jesus said, **[Matthew 28:18] "...All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

You bring maximum glory to God when you help someone - whoever they may be - take a next step with Jesus.

You press Jesus into the relationships you have at work or school.

No matter where your friend may be, spiritually speaking, you help him learn about Jesus. You tell your friend about the blessings that come with following Jesus, of the eternal life He offers to those who believe in Jesus.

That's me and that's you applying Ephesians 2:10. Worship God. Love in Jesus' Name. Help others take next steps.

And what about us? Together?

Good works for US to walk in

[10] For WE are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that WE would walk in them.

Paul doesn't say "I am His workmanship..." and he doesn't say, "You are His workmanship..."

He writes of "**We**." First person plural. The thought is aimed at a group.

So, dream with me of being part of a group that walks in the good works that God has prepared for us together, because this is why I have wanted to walk though Ephesians with you.

Ephesians wasn't written to individual Christians who happened to all live in the city of Ephesus.

It was written to the *church* gathered in Ephesus.

Paul's vision for that church is that they would, as a community of Jesus followers, have impact disproportionate to their size and make a difference in Ephesus - together - far beyond what the individuals could do, separately.

That's why Christ-followers organize into churches. We want to multiply impact for Jesus by our combined energies as we worship, love, and carry out the Great Commission.

That's why Northwest exists. To wit...

- FOOD PANTRY - Any of us can carry food in our cars to give to people in need when we see the opportunity. But our Food Pantry allows us to give more and healthier food to more people in Jesus' Name. Plus, we get to pack grocery bags together (today!) AND we get to make friends with people who receive the groceries AND there are openings right now to help organize this ministry.
- ESL - We, together, get to make friends in Jesus' Name with people all over the world right here in San Antonio by helping them learn English. Call Jennifer Robison to join the team for 2019-20.
- BENEVOLENCE FUND - You can contribute to a special fund of money that assists people facing various health needs, emergencies, utility payments - all in Jesus' Name.
- ELEVATE - You can be a part of a team of people who serve kids, week in and week out.
- REFINING FIRE - This is our church's ministry to Middle and High School students. This summer, several service projects are scheduled where these students AND OTHERS (like you!) can shine for Jesus in San Antonio.
- YOUNG ADULTS - A weekly gathering of young adults, led by Josh Erwin, who help each other take next steps with Jesus. Talk to Josh to find out how you could help.
- ADULT FELLOWSHIPS (Men's and women's studies, ABF's, Care Groups) - These are groups where people are welcomed, loved, prayed for, and discipled.
- ENCUESTRO - A ministry that allows us to serve Spanish speakers in Jesus' Name - something that people like me could not do without the leaders of Encuentro.

- THE BRISTOL - Come to the meeting this Wednesday evening to dream and brainstorm and pray for the time, just a few short months away, when we will welcome our new neighbors.
- MISSIONS - We get to support numerous cross-cultural ministries together (Crossway, International Training Partners, Millers - in Madrid, Spain, Millers - in Sweden, Youth for Christ, Destino, Voice of the Martyrs, MOTE) that none of us could do by ourselves. There will be an exciting project introduced next Sunday about how we can each be involved in spreading the Gospel this summer in a way more powerful than any one of us could be alone.

The witness we can have in our city and across the globe is far greater, together, than it would be if we were each only shining individually.

So, churches like ours, filled with people who have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus, are designed by God to walk in good works - together.

[10] For WE are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that WE would walk in them.