

# Ephesians 2:1-10

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[ 0 : 00 ] So this is God's word. Starting at chapter 2, reading from verses 1 to 10. It's 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 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 Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is 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.

Let me pray. Almighty God, we come to your word, the Bible, and we thank you that this is how you have decided and ordained and planned to speak to us, your people, and specifically to speak to us this morning through this part of the Bible.

[ 1 : 55 ] And so we pray as God's people that you would move our hearts, that you would change us, that you would help us to focus and think and listen, and that you would transform us to know you better and to live as your people.

We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. There are quite a few of us who are parents in the congregation, who are part of the body of Christ.

And for those who are, I think a lot of them would agree that the birth of their children is a phenomenal moment in their life. For me personally, you know, it's amazing to hear the first cry, to know that, you know, that children, all my children were born when you first heard that.

But perhaps you may have heard about the remarkable story of a man called Raphael Samuel. It's a story from 2019.

A 27-year-old man, born in Mumbai, decided to sue his parents. Why? He decided to sue them because they gave birth to him without his consent.

[ 3 : 13 ] His mother gave a statement. I must admire my son's temerity to want to take his parents to court, knowing both of us are lawyers.

And if Raphael could come up with a rational explanation as to how we could have sought his consent to be born, I will accept my fault. It's a ridiculous story.

Because straight away, you see the logical clash there. A baby cannot decide anything. It's entirely dependent on the power and initiative of its parents. They don't give life to themselves, and neither are they involved in their own birth.

At no point does the baby tell their mother to push harder or decide if she needs a C-section. Birth, life, is something that happens to them, not something that they have, like they're conscious or involved in themselves.

If that is true for earthly life, let me tell you, it is as equally true for spiritual life.

[ 4 : 23 ] What we have here is that the physical body, the physical process of new life, teaches us about our souls. We need to hear that.

It's almost a bit of a reality check, because what can happen is, we can think and move and do life and exist and do the rest of it, and what happens is, we can merge our spiritual life and earthly life together.

It's not the picture that the Bible gives of us spiritually, because if we merge the two, what we believe is that, if we can start to believe this, this is what we can start to believe, that if we look within ourselves, that we have enough within, in ourselves, to be the best version of ourselves.

That if we want to change, if we want to be better, if we look within, that we in ourselves have the power to become new, to be a better version of ourselves.

And in a sense, when we're saying that, we're actually saying that we're like a baby trying to deliver itself. It's not possible. For a baby to be born, it is only possible if it's delivered by its mother, maybe helped along by a midwife, an external pair of hands.

[ 5 : 55 ] But here is the truth of what happens on a spiritual level. It is the living God who gives the external power we need to walk in new spiritual life.

so that we can stand and walk in his ways. Paul exposes this kind of, maybe absurd thinking in Ephesians 2, showing us really, if we want to change, if we want to have new spiritual life, we don't need a life coach, or to look within ourselves, what we need is resurrection.

We need resurrection. And so this is where we're going to move and think about this morning, in God's word. The first thing that we hit in our passage today, keep it open and look with me, the first thing that we hit is a problem, and the problem is devastating.

It is a devastating analysis of the human condition. It's totally devastating. Look with me in verse 1 of chapter 2.

You see what he says about what this church that he's writing to, the people of Ephesus, that he's writing to a church here, the God's holy people of Ephesus.

[ 7 : 14 ] You see that at the beginning of chapter 1. Look at what he writes to them. He says, As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. That is heavy language, isn't it?

That's really heavy. He's saying that their default condition was a lot more serious than they realised. What he's saying is that they're not just spiritually sick and need healing, but they're spiritually dead, needing new life.

That's the same message that he says to us as we read God's word together as a church. And notice with me how they used to live, how they used to walk, you might say.

What we see is that there are three alternative powers, three guides, false guides, you might say, that the people before they'd become Christians, when they used to walk in this way, three alternative things that they used to follow.

The first comes in verse 2. You see? It says, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world. No one's born into a cultural vacuum, but you are in part, all of us are, a part of the culture and the society that you're born into.

[ 8 : 42 ] What that means is the environment that you grow up in, it impacts how you live, what you value, it's passed down from your family, but also the wider society. You know, we are Scottish, British, that's different, you grow up with that as part of your sort of cultural heritage.

It's equally true for those who grew up in the city of Ephesus and the surrounding region. It's obviously different to the landscape we've grown up in. In that landscape, politically, the trade in the city was all, it was kind of pagan, it was supernatural, dark magic.

In the city of Ephesus, they grew up with pagan spiritual forces and worship. It was a philosophical system that emphasised fate and human effort to reach the top.

All of that is something that the Ephesians were born into and would be part of their psyche. It becomes the way they grew up and what they would follow and everybody else would, around it, have this kind of way of thinking.

To become counter-cultural is to swim against the tide of the way that you're brought up to think. But to do that in their own strength is impossible.

[ 10 : 01 ] to swim against the cultural tide of which you're brought up in. So that's the first thing. They followed the ways of the world.

Look at the second thing that caused them to live this way. See, also in verse 2, he said, they followed the ways of this world and then we have, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Not only do you have the world, but you have a spirit who is leading them astray. It is a spiritual enemy. The ruler of the kingdom of the air has a name, the devil, Satan, and he's at work tempting people to follow their own desires, to look after number one.

He's powerful and again, just like the world that is impossible to resist, it is impossible to resist him, Satan, whilst we are spiritually dead.

final way that we used to live. The final guide verse comes in verse 3. Look with me. So we've got the world, got the devil, and then we've got all of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying

the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.

[ 11 : 29 ] We have the world and the devil, but not only that, we have this condition that we're born with where we follow what we want to do. If we want something, we tend to go and try and get it, and when our desires aren't met, what do we do?

Well, anything like me, you get angry, blame other people, or get it at any cost, trample over people to make sure you get what you want.

When we live like that, it's because we want to be in control of our own lives. We believe that we have the right to make our own decisions. What right does anyone else have to tell me what to do? We say under our breath. It would be bad enough if that's where it finished, but the problem with walking, with living like this kind of inherent selfishness is the painful consequences.

we try to control things, we try to look after number one, we try to do life in our own strength, but we can't, and we don't just turn ourselves, but those we love. And flashes of anger burst out of us when our control evaporates.

[ 12 : 43 ] Here's the problem with all of that, the big problem. we have a total inability to be different. Trying harder, looking within, reading a book on anger, it might help initially, but it is just a mask.

It's modifying the behaviour, the external, what people think of you on the outside, while inside nothing has changed. And eventually, what will happen is that you burst and it all floods out again, the anger comes to the fore and it drowns you and whoever is in the vicinity at that time.

Like the rest, God's word says, like the rest, by nature, we were deserving of his anger and wrath. That is hard to hear.

It is hard to hear, isn't it? It's hard to accept, it's challenging to the way we think about ourselves and who we are, that naturally our default lifestyle deserves his anger.

Let me tell you that that is everyone as well. And you might sit here and think and listen to me and think about what I'm saying, how dare he say that about me?

[ 14 : 04 ] How dare he? You could be angry at me for suggesting that you deserve God's anger. But I'm no different to you either.

That's how I walked and that's how I lived and I deserve it too. So it's the same for everyone.

We're all drowning in our pursuit of control and we have zero power to save ourselves. We desperately need an external pair of hands to deliver us. Just like that baby, we need God to reach down and deliver us and give us new life so that we can finally breathe.

There is a pivot that comes in verse four. I think it's up there with the greatest sentence in the Bible. It's so good.

Look at what it says. We have a boat. this terrible bad news who we are and then we have but it's so good that the journey doesn't end in verse three. Verse four, but because of his great love for us, God who's rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

[ 15 : 31 ] It's by grace you've been saved. today is Easter Sunday. It's a day all across the world that Christians at different points in the day as the time changes are celebrating Jesus risen from the dead.

The true story of what happened on the third day following his crucifixion. The cross where the exchange happened, where Jesus who had perfectly walked in perfect new spiritual life, where he died, and this man who never gratified any sinful desire or craving, never once followed the world or never once followed the evil one, even though he was tempted by Satan, he resisted.

And this is why he came. You see, this is the heartbeat of why he came, why he died, so that that swap could take place and we could be given his perfect life.

You see, God's power, you know, it's not an impersonal force that is applied coldly without feeling or warmth, but the power of God is a concrete foundation that underpins why he moved heaven and earth to raise us in the same manner he raised his son.

Did you catch it? As we read that verse, what underpins why he would move in such great power to raise his son and to raise us because of his great love.

[ 17 : 11 ] Because of his great love. God is rich in mercy. His power is triggered, his power to raise the dead, his power to raise his son and to raise us and to give us new life, it is triggered by love and mercy.

That's the bedrock. Love and mercy. Isn't that refreshing to know that love and mercy are the centrefold of history? That's what triggers God to act in great power.

Isn't that what we want to see? Isn't that what we see when we look in our world and we see the authorities in our world and what triggers them to exercise their earthly power? We might see that on the news.

Could we say that as we see the news and we see great demonstrations of human authority and power and could we say that what triggers them to use their power is love and mercy?

I'm not so sure. What triggers the loving God to act in power is his never ending love and his never ending mercy.

[18:19] mercy. Because of this great exchange. The exact same power that emptied the tomb is now there giving anyone who would put their trust in him new life because he loves you.

now you might stop and pause here and think well why did God exert all this power?

Why all this love? Why this divine design behind it all? And as we dig into the gospel, as we dig into what God has done through his son and we see him as the initiator of all this, what we see is layers to the gospel.

And here's the fundamental reason. Here's the reason that lies behind it all. That God's power that he raises in Christ because of triggered by love and mercy, why does he do that?

Why does he do that? Well here's the reason. It comes in verse 7. It's to show the riches of his grace. The riches of his grace.

[19:25] Now that might sound like a strange thing but we'll unpack it. Verse 7, let's read it. In order, see, and God raised us up with Christ, seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, that's verse 6.

Why verse 7? In order that in the coming ages he might show, he might display, he might demonstrate the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. Grace is more than just a prayer you say before a meal. If someone is gracious, we use that, don't we, in normal everyday, it's someone who shows you kindness that you didn't deserve.

We see people being gracious to one another. We might see that out there in the world. People, you know, letting people off the hook when they drop the ball or forget something important and you might have even heard somebody say to somebody else, that's so gracious of you.

When God raises us to new life, it shows the riches of his grace. That God's ability to forgive, to show kindness that we didn't deserve, is rich, it's unlimited, it's beyond what we could comprehend.

[20:41] If you could measure it, if you could measure God's love, let's say all his love is all the water in the oceans. God's love his love for you is like taking a teaspoon of water out of the ocean.

You couldn't, how many teaspoons? You can't, it's immeasurable. But the reality is actually, it's actually more than that. Because even putting a measurement on is limiting it.

There is a finite amount of water in the world. Maybe another word you might use to describe the infinite amount of God's love is unfathomable.

You know what a fathom is? A fathom is a measurement that fishermen use. So when they put their anchor down in the water, they could measure how far the anchor went down to the bottom of the sea, and they'd say, as it went down so far, they'd say one fathom, two fathoms, three fathoms. The bottom of the sea is three fathoms deep. If it didn't hit the bottom, when you went through all the chain on the anchor, you'd say, it's unfathomable.

[21:55] We can't get to the bottom. We can't measure how deep the ocean is. It's deeper than we knew. That's God's grace. His kindness to you, the riches of it, it cannot be measured.

It is unfathomable. So, in raising us from death, from our sin, he displays unfathomable grace.

Grace so rich and vast, it cannot be measured. There is no sin. There is no sin. There is nothing that you've done that is too big. And no man of sin that cannot be covered by his love, that cannot resist.

You cannot, if God, there's nothing that he can't overcome by grace that can resist God's power to raise you from the dead state that we used to live in. The minister, he's died now, John Stott, he said this, grace is God reaching down, faith is man reaching up, but even the reaching up is enabled by God.

Verse 8 testifies to that as a reality. Look with me. For it is by grace you've been saved. Through faith.

[23:14] And this is not from yourselves. It's the gift of God. God. We see the beautiful shape of how the gospel, how God works in us.

Because of his love, we can track the logic. Because of his love, he showed his power by raising us to new life. He did this to show this richness of grace and how vast it was, unlimited.

But he did all this by giving us a gift, which is the ability to trust him and place our lives in his hands. It destroys any idea, any idea that we must depend on ourselves.

We can, but God can. Even the ability to trust, to believe is a gift. Not only did we never pay for it, but we never can. And it's ludicrous to try.

Imagine the child on their birthday receives a gift and afterwards turns to you and says, how much do I owe you? You try and convince them, no, no, no, no, no, it's a gift.

[ 24 : 15 ] You don't owe me anything. I bought this out of my own money because I love you, enjoy it. But they're insistent, no, no, I don't deserve it. I must pay you back. How would you feel as the gift giver?

Don't they understand how much I love them? That they don't owe me a penny. It's a gift. Faith is us reaching up to God.

Grace is God coming down, but he is the source and giver of both. You don't owe him anything and he doesn't want you to try. And so how do we respond?

In light of the cross, in light of the resurrection and God's power at work in us, this must change, it has to change our day-to-day reality. This grace given by God, it restores.

We are remade in him. Verse 10, look what Paul writes. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

[ 25 : 26 ] Like a new baby doesn't lie in its cot the rest of its days. A baby's meant to grow and learn and adapt and be taught and take its first step. It looks to its parents. But we look to the living God.

Like a baby still dependent to grow, we're dependent on our creator to take baby footsteps to walk in what we're made for. We are made to walk in works that God has prepared before us for us to do. And because our future is secure, we're entirely free to walk without pressure. without pressure.

There's no pressure on you to walk in this particular way.

There's no pressure on thinking you have to try harder to be a good Christian. No, you're free to walk in light of the fact that your future is secure. You just take that and let it marinate in your soul. You're free. You're free to walk and not try harder. Not try harder in your spiritual life, not try harder in your actual life, in the life that you live out there in the world, trying to make yourself look good to other people.

[ 26 : 42 ] You're free from any of those burdens. you're free to walk without pressure. Entirely free. That is like finding water in the desert.

If you're used to trying harder and always trying to achieve through the good you do. Why?

Because the works you walk in, whatever they are, whatever it is, prayer, worshipping the living God, loving the church, your neighbour, those works that you walk in, they're not ideas built from scratch, they're not brainstormed on the back of a napkin.

No, they are prepared for you in advance by the God who gave you new life. So you get to walk in them. He gave you faith and he made you into who you are and he's given you these works to do perfectly aligned for the person that he's made you into.

And so when you walk in them, you demonstrate his new creation. power. Instead of following the world, instead of following Satan, instead of following your own fleshy desires, you have new desires.

Created new in Christ to do good works. That's why we're made new to walk in his ways. It's a living God that gives us our feet. And so when you feel the crunch of life, you get to look at what God has put in front of you, not what someone else is doing or what God has planned for them, but what he's planned for you is unique to you.

[ 28 : 18 ] And the power that raised Christ from the dead will enable you to do it. So as we come in for landing, we don't have to try and walk like Jesus.

We are empowered by the same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. We're empowered to walk like him because his resurrection power is at work in you. You were given new birth.

God came and delivered you from death to life, from faithless to faithful, all because of his great love and mercy for you. The reality of that power is a certainty and the empty tomb is the proof and the reason why we celebrate.

If you find yourself struggling to walk, take this on board, you have resurrection power. The same power that rose Christ from the dead is at work in you today.

And he has prepared you and he's working through you to walk in his ways. You didn't give birth to yourself and neither do you have to walk by yourself either.

[ 29 : 30 ] But also, if you're hearing this and perhaps you're still looking into the Christian faith and maybe you're still thinking things through, this is what is on offer to you.

This is what Jesus promises to you today to raise you up. He promises to make you walk in a straight path and he promises to make you into the masterpiece he intended.

Remember Raphael Samuel. You don't need to sue your maker because he's given you the life you were always meant to walk in. Let's pray.

Almighty God, we love you and we're so thankful for what you've done in our lives.

And we thank you that this is not wishful thinking. Like we said, it's not something brainstormed on the back of a napkin but this is what you've decided before all eternity to call us to yourself and to raise us with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and that you'd give us that same power to walk in your ways that we don't have to live trying harder but we can trust in this eternal reality that our future is secure because Jesus is alive, that he is risen from the dead, that he has paid for all our sin and our future is certain.

[ 31 : 08 ] And so help us today. Help us to turn to you afresh. Maybe even turn to you for the first time. And I pray that you would, we would know the risen power.

I pray that we would know you deeply, personally, intimately. And I pray that we know your blessing. We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.