

Treasuring our Faith

Intro

- Two Humbling Reminders
 - Redeemed Sinners
 - It must always be said and we need to be reminded that every person who steps up here to teach is just as much a sinner as anyone else.
 - We are all sinners who have been redeemed by the grace of God. In fact, it will be more accurate for me to introduce myself this way: **I am Tolu, a recovering sinner.**
 - So if there is anything here that impacts your heart in that it convicts and draws you closer to God, it is not from me, it is from God. Pay attention to the movement of God upon your heart
 - Transient nature of life
 - How the world has changed! Compared to last year, we are seemingly living in a different dimension as it were. However as we live through this pandemic, certain things have remained unchanged, such as:
 - The Sovereignty of God

- The sacrifice of Christ on the cross
- The utter futility of life apart from God
- Our sinfulness and brokenness
- The transient nature of life
 - Over 1M people have died since the beginning of the pandemic
- Our vulnerability and lack of control
- This pandemic is an eye opener of sorts. **It forces us to face truths that are often blurred by busyness, hurriedness and an insane pace of life.** We are forced like Moses in Psalm 90 to reflect on life, death, and the Sovereignty of God

Recap

- Purpose of the letter to the Ephesians
 - As opposed to many of Paul's other letters that were written in response to questions or requests, this letter seems to come from a reflective posture as Paul paints what you might call his theology of life.
 - In Eph 1:3-14, Paul launches into this praise song highlighting the magnificent grace of God, the miracle of forgiveness, our identity in Christ, the guarantee of

our inheritance, the loving plan of God, the culmination of all things in Christ Jesus,, etc..

- In this one long running sentence, Paul captures the entirety of God's plan for humanity

- And the outstanding thing here is that none of this is based on our merit.

There is no reference to what we must do to partake of this feast

- This is **decidedly the initiative, and activity of the Triune God.**

- Therefore we have no room to boast, and nothing needs to hinder us from participating in this feast, not our past, nor our sins nor our race.

- We are being invited into being the beloved children of God

- I want to be clear that by mentioning that our sins are not a prerequisite, I am not by any means excusing sin. There must be a fight and a resistance against sin, that is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Repentance must be a way of life to us, the bread with which our mouths are filled...unless you are perfect

- What I am saying is that our sins are no match for his grace...what an amazing love from God to us...and due to this, we strive forward, knowing our end is Christlikeness

- A Revealing Prayer

- In the later half of Ephesians 1, Paul moves to praying for the saints.
- He prays for enlightened hearts so that we know 3 things specifically
 - The hope we have been called to
 - The glorious riches of his inheritance in the saints
 - The great and immeasurable power he has made available to us
- Paul then pivots you give two illustrations of this immeasurable power
- Exhibit A - the death and resurrection of Christ, and what that means.
- Exhibit B will be our passage for today, which is Eph 2:1-10
- Let us stay here for a bit. Exhibit A is Eph 1:20-23
 - **20** *that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,*
 - **21** *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*
 - **22** *And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,*
 - **23** *which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

- Here are a couple things to note that this great immeasurable power accomplishes

- The miracle of resurrection
- Seated at the right hand of God - highest honors before God
- Far above all rule and authority, dominion, power, name...in this age and the age to come
- Head of the Church
- Fullness of him who fills all in all - there are various opinions on what this might mean (Chris is filling up all things including the church vs in Christ rests the fullness of the Godhead) but it changes little in the context of what we are looking at today

- Application

- Of all things that Paul could pray for - and I am sure these churches faced a number of challenges, take note of what he prays for
- Often times, our prayers are a window into the state of our hearts and what we value
- What do your prayers say of your heart posture?

Text

- Our text today is from Eph 2:1-10
 - **1** *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins*
 - **2** *in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--*
 - **3** *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*
 - **4** *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,*
 - **5** *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--*
 - **6** *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*
 - **7** *so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*
 - **8** *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*

- **9** *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
- **10** *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Observations

An Exhibition of God's power

- And so we come to our text today
- Here's my charge and prayer for all of us today
 - I pray that as we go through this text, we come to grapple with our ongoing sinfulness, what Christ has saved us from, the process of sanctification and the sweetness of grace - so that we may come to treasure the precious faith that has been handed to us.
 - My prayer is that, with humility, we will continually examine ourselves to ensure we are cherishing this faith. Never out of duty, but out of the sweetness of this joyful two-way communion with the Triune God
- Three observations: (1) Our Depravity, (2) Our Redemption, (3) Our Way of Life

- Before we jump into the observations, I want to state what will become very clear to us soon, which is - we are either dead in sin or alive in Christ. There are no middle grounds in who we are becoming

Our Depravity (vs 1-3)

- In this section I will primarily speak of the condition of mankind without Christ. For those who are in Christ, verses 1-3 represents our state before Christ and a pointer to the struggles we currently encounter before we become fully united with Christ
- The only appropriate way to describe our condition, without Christ, is that of death. It is a representation of the meaninglessness of our existence without Christ.
 - Verse 1 is meant to remind us that without Christ, we have no realization of God.
- We are not only dead in our sins, Paul paints a bleak and meaningless picture of how we live in verse 2-3
 - *1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins*
 - *2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--*

- *3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

- Verse 2 highlights the way of life of everyone that is not in Christ. **Note that we, without Christ, are living in accordance with an agenda set forth by the enemy of our soul.**

Let's read verse 2 again

- *in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-*
- What the accuser, the Satan, is primarily after is not your job or career or marriage, but your soul - your relationship with God
- There is a system to the way of life that is apart from God. It is a system that opposes God. Note that it can be direct and conscious or subtle where we live according to the current of society
 - **The question we must be asking ourselves is this: who is truly directing the course of my life? Am I being guided by my pursuit of security, stability and wanting control? Or am I learning to live in total submission to Christ?**
 - Is Christ really Master and Lord of my life?

- **How is this showing up in how I spend money?** What about where I am putting my time?

- In verse 3 Paul switches from second person pronoun to first person. Since the churches he wrote to were most likely gentiles, he includes himself by ensuring that we are aware that all are under the curse of sin, apart from Christ.

- *among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

- Apart from Christ, we live in accordance with our desires. Without God, our desires are in control. Desires here represent legitimate cravings that are distorted and twisted

- And so the natural end of man is wrath.

- Imagine with me if this is all there is to the story...yes we might be successful in our careers, maybe we've enjoyed life by whatever criteria...but quickly we come to the same conclusion as the teacher in Ecclesiastes, vanity upon vanity, all is vanity.

- Without Christ, all is meaningless...what we chase after, no matter how noble is only a **shrouded emptiness**. There seems to be some meaning there but very quickly, either your nature or that of others, shows you the futility of life

- Sometimes we look at life and think, if God is so powerful and good, how come bad things happen, especially to me?
 - Implicit in this question is the assumption that the problem is out there and that there are some individuals who deserve something other than the wrath of God
 - This is us believing in the supremacy of man - we expect God to kowtow to our desires, and we judge him based on how he acts in alignment to our expectations
 - I want a God who is omnipotent but not Sovereign so I can wield his power
- Here is how we should ask the question
 - How on earth can a Holy and Righteous God know how sinful I am everyday and not destroy me?
 - Why does his judgement on me tarry? Why am I not consumed by his wrath?
 - When we ask these question, then we are coming to realize the true depravity of our nature, apart from Christ
- The answer to this question lies in verse 4, which we will cover in our next observation

Our Redemption (vs 4-9)

- If we are truly seeing the hopelessness of our state, then we can understand how momentous the next set of verses are
 - *4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,*
 - *5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--*
 - *6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*
 - *7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*
- The primary actor is God
 - Verse 4 reminds us of a fundamental truth - **the primary actor and the one who takes the initiative to reconcile man and God is the Triune God**
 - Such was the pitiful state of our existence that God extended his saving arm and grace towards us - while we were yet dead in our sins, God made us alive together with Christ
- The Heart of God
 - *4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,*

- *5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--*
- Consequently, I hope you see the bleeding heart of God's love for you - though our sins they are many, his mercies are more.
 - **Your sins are no match for God.**
 - **You matter to God**
- We did nothing to deserve this mercy and grace. In fact, it is impossible that we could do anything to merit the grace of God. Why? Because we are dead in our sins.
 - Quite frankly we consistently sin and rebel - acts that disqualify us.
- Yet he extends his arm of fellowship to us.
- **Paul want us to get the gravity of the situation, so he re-emphasizes our deadness in sin,** and sets it up as a prop to show the heart of God for us
 - *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--*
- The mercy and love described in verse 4 is not as a result of something we did that merits this response. Rather it is an expression of who God is
- Furthermore, we see the heart of God in guaranteeing our end/destiny

- *5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--*
- *6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

○ Here's what one commentator said about verse 6

- *Not only have Christians been raised with Christ, they have also been seated with him in the heavenly realms. What is true of him (1:20) is true of us. If he is exalted to God's right hand, so are we. We are joined to him so that we are where he is.*
- *Several other texts speak of being exalted with Christ (see Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:48; 2 Cor. 2:14; Gal. 4:26; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1–4), but no text states this idea as forcefully as Ephesians 2:5-6. The intent here is to underscore the life believers now have with Christ, and with that life comes privilege, honor, security, and responsibility.*
- *This is not, however, the same as saying we are actually seated in heaven.*

- To be clear, this is not saying we are demi-gods or we wield the power of Christ literally for our own ends as is espoused by the prosperity gospel. The phrase heavenly realms points to the reality of God and his work in and through Christ.

- **What is true of this passage is that our end is guaranteed, as long as we are in Him**
 - We know how the story ends, and it ends in us being fully united in him..

- **The purpose of all that God has done is so that the church can be an exhibit of the immeasurable depth of his grace in kindness - and by so doing, draw men unto himself**

- Amazing Grace

- After describing our redemption, Paul expands on the means of our salvation (first mentioned in verse 5, by saying this
 - *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

- This is perhaps one of the most common sayings of Paul's letters. However we must not let familiarity with this text blind us to its sweetness

- **Ephesians 2:8-9 is an exhibition of the character of God. It is God, coming to help me and you accomplish what we cannot accomplish by ourselves**

- Let me highlight a couple things to help us better understand the wonder of these verses
 - Grace is not simply unmerited favor but demerited favor.
 - Unmerited favor means we simply were not deserving.

- Demerited favor is giving something to someone that has earned the opposite. What we have earned is judgment and wrath
- Grace is God coming to help us do what we cannot do by ourselves. However, Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. This is why faith is involved
- Faith in this passage is not simply a mental assent, it is the means by which we receive this salvation.
 - Faith, here, means to believe in God. It is our response to God's offer of salvation
 - To believe God implies we abandon all other attempts to save ourselves and accept what God has done in Christ. It means we truly accept the Lordship of Christ
- I do want to be clear that faith isn't something we conjure up by our strength or by gritting our teeth.
 - Having faith in God is never a result of our works. One commentator puts it this way: *To say "I have faith" does not so much say anything about oneself; rather it says, "God is a trustworthy God"*

- Faith comes from God. It is nurtured by God as we engage with him. Faith by itself isn't meritorious, It is not a form of merit God sees in our hearts and then responds to us.
- Rather it is the means by which we appropriate the divine exchange, where Christ died for our sins and we get his due reward.
 - Why? Because we cannot reconcile ourselves to God. We cannot pay for our punishments
 - If you cannot accomplish something by yourself, your only option is to receive it as a gift. The only way we can receive a gift is to trust the giver, hence we have to trust God
- Since **salvation by grace through faith is a gift, and not of our own works, we ought to always bow in humble and joyful adoration, each time we remember we are in Christ.**
- This should be so because of a number of reasons but let me give you 3
 - **The Object of God's Love:** Sinners, dead in their sin
 - **The Price of God's Love:** The death of Jesus, the Christ
 - **The Timing of God's Love:** While we were dead in our sins - before we were changed

- We have no room to boast

Our Way of Life (vs 10)

- And so Paul concludes the exhibition of God's power in saving humanity by painting a picture of the new creation by saying these words
 - *10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*
- Let's draw a couple observations from this text
 - Note the theme of **God's divine activity** at work again. God is the primary actor in our lives. He is the one who initiates this new creation. Two implications
 - We have no room to boast
 - We should be rested in him - for **we are the result of his activity.**
 - **Not only this, we see a picture of his providence, reminding us of who is really in control**
 - You are his workmanship. You are his masterpiece
 - **Please do not hear me say you are somehow great, all that and a bag of chips. NO, not at all. At best we are recovering sinners**

- I am saying that because you are a “result of his activity,” you matter to God!
- You are an exhibition of his grace - go back to verse 7. Yes, you, no matter where you are, and what you have been through, you are exactly his poema, his work of art. And while this includes creating your physical being, this expression extends to what God has in mind for you, your union with Christ
- Because we are **an exhibition of the immeasurable depth of his grace, good works must come out of us**
 - To be clear **we are not saved by good works. We are definitely saved for good works.**
 - John Stott’s words are apt in saying: *“Good works are indispensable to salvation—not as its ground or means ... but as its consequence and evidence”*
 - Paul, probably more than anyone else, made it clear that good works are never the grounds of salvation, rather, they are the fruit of salvation

- We cannot claim to be saved by the power of God, and, overtime, continue to live in unrepentant sin. It doesn't matter you said a prayer or teach bible studies or you are the pastor
- This is why we must examine ourselves to see if we are of the faith
- The “good works that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” are not referring to a particular good work although we know it can be inclusive of that.
- Rather, **Paul has in view the whole course of our lives as those in Christ.**
Paul is saying God has predetermined the values of those who are Christians, those who are in Christ
- Naturally you might ask the question, what are these good works? What is this overall direction of the Christian life that God has predetermined?

Applications

- Themes from the rest of Ephesians
 - Immediately following this text is the issue of Jews and gentiles
 - For us it applies in the areas of race, politics, views on the pandemic, etc

- Let us take our cues from scripture on how we should treat others who differ from us
- In light of all we have touched on, I want to highlight some of the good works that we should be walking in, as an exhibition of the glory of God, a showcase of his the immeasurable depth of his grace towards us
- Gratitude
 - I do not know what else to say but to show gratitude to the One who would go so far for me.
 - **The truth that he raised me from the deadness of my sins and made me alive together with Christ is mind blowing enough. What unravels me is that as much as I rebel against him, he won't let me go. He will not let you go**
 - It blows me away that God has foreseen the depths of our every sin and darkness, and yet due to his love and mercy, he still wants us in his family
 - **Fellowship with the Triune God is a privilege and an opportunity we truly do not understand.**
 - **It is a tremendous gift that I get a glimpse of when God uses the joylessness of my sins to create a longing in me for himself**

- Humility

- Out of this gratitude then comes an **imperfect realization of my brokenness**. I am coming to see how much I am in need of help. .
- Although God has raised me from my sins, I often find myself longing for the very thing he saved me from.
- I see in my self-sufficiency that I am like the children of Israel who were saved from Egypt but keep desiring to go back into bondage
- Revelations 3:17-18 is a beautiful yet unfortunate portrait of our self sufficiency
 - *17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.*
 - *18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.*
- As if this were not bad enough, we wrap our identities around what people say about us, what we have accomplished, and what we are currently doing.

- We carve out idols out of anything and everything that brings a sliver of satisfaction
- And so with this imperfect realization of my depravity, humility, becomes the note of our lives
 - What is humility? Humility is a real and intent filled preference for the way of God

- Repentance

- Martin Luther's first thesis reads thus "[When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "Repent," he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.](#)"
- It is from this statement that you might have heard this phrase - **All of life is repentance.**
- Repentance is never meant to be a one-time inaugural activity. Rather our mouths must always be filled with the bread of repentance. Repentance is to be our continual posture, which highlights the broken and contrite heart.
- There is no true walk with the Triune God without repentance...unless you are perfect

- **If we are serious about our faith, we will continue to discover new layers of our un-surrendered self.**

- **The depth of our depravity is quite deep...Yet his mercies and forgiveness is deeper still**

- **If we are to ever grow in our faith, we must take repentance seriously.**

Repentance isn't crying or showing remorse, although it can be accompanied by these things. **Repentance is primarily a turning away from sin and a turning to God.**

- So here's a question for you:

- **How often is deep, soul repentance part of your communion with God?**

How often do you cry out to God for deliverance from your sins.

- How often do you reflect on the **present sin patterns and habits in your life?**

- **How often do you examine yourself to see if you be of the faith handed to us by Christ? Not the values defined by society?**

- **How often do you check the norms by which you live and compare that to what the Bible says**

- Sharing our Faith

- If our lives have been so characterized by the grace and mercy of God, should we not, as God provides the opportunity, share our faith
- Note how Paul in this passage outlines what might be a playbook on the essential themes in sharing the gospel.
 - He highlight the problem of us being dead in our sin, in verse 4 he points to God as the primary actor in reversing our condition, bringing us into his family by no merit of ours

- A way of Life

- As you already know, there are numerous other good works we can point to but what I am more particular about is that we develop a way of life, whereby we continually set aside time to behold, with unveiled face, the glory of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18)
- My charge to you is that you treasure this faith that has been handed to you, this intimacy with God that he procured through the sacrifice of his beloved and only begotten Son

- I pray that we will come to see apprenticeship to Christ as the greatest opportunity we could ever be given and that we run this race with great joy, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith
- What God gets out of your life isn't your good looks or career achievements or the good American life or your high maintenance lifestyle or being married or having kids or preaching the word of God
- What God gets out of your life is who you are becoming
- 4 great questions if there is time