

Finally Alive – But God / Ephesians 2:4-7

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

As I get older the truth of that simple statement gets more profound ... it is important to remember because it seems it gets harder to remember. At a time when we might, because of our maturity and experience, BE MORE CERTAIN, we find that we often can't be because we simply aren't so certain about what we remember.

So here, Paul says in verse 12 of chapter 2 ... remember:

Ephesians 2:12

12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Remember from where we came. Never forget it. Why? Because if we forget our need for a Savior – we will no longer CHERISH HIM ... we won't love and cherish God, in Christ, as we must.

And it is true - - we, as Christians, MUST CHERISH God.

All things working good depends on our love – present, current love for Him:

Romans 8:28

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

All that is prepared for us depends on our loving Him:

1 Corinthians 2:9

9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" —

My crown of righteousness ... my final award - - awaits only those who "cherish", or love His appearing ... we long for Him:

2 Timothy 4:8

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Sometimes it is stated negatively:

1 Corinthians 16:22

22 If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!

Again - - unless we REMEMBER from where we came - - what He did for us - - then we will stop loving Him - - our motivations will be diminished. So Paul says - - REMEMBER.

Peter says the same:

2 Peter 1:12–15

12 Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.

13 I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder,
14 since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

15 And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

You need to, at any time, need to be able to recall these things that God has done for you.

So that is what Paul does in Ephesians 2 -- and we looked at the first 3 verses last time we were together ...

What I want to do today is line up the first verses -- and the 3 GREAT PROBLEMS OF MY PAST with the next 4 verses that give the SOLUTION TO MY PROBLEMS IN CHRIST.

3 GREAT PROBLEMS

Think of a dilemma -- a situation you might find yourself in where you would feel scared, hopeless -- a dangerous situation.

Have you ever been in a situation like that?

Something was happening -- someone -- and you are terrified ... doomed!

Whatever situation you might have found yourself in -- or might imagine being in ... nothing is to be compared with the real situation you were in before Christ -- or you are in if you are not a Christian sitting here this afternoon.

DEAD IN SIN --

Ephesians 2:1

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

CAPTIVE TO AN ALIEN POWER --

Ephesians 2:2

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—

CHILDREN OF WRATH --

Ephesians 2:3

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.

No one in the world is going to tell you the truth about the PROBLEM you were in (or are in) except a Christian who loves you enough to expose your need for a Savior. This is the truth of who we all were.
As we said a couple of weeks ago -- this is THE WAY WE WERE.

Now -- what?

But God.

Two words -- But God.

Ephesians 2:4–7

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.

So often this truth - - the truth of BUT GOD - - resonates from the pages of Scripture.

- Adam and Eve sin - - and face the promised judgment of immediate death – eternal separation from God. There is no hope for them - - nothing they could do to avoid it --- BUT GOD ... He steps in and kills an animal and clothes their nakedness and in so doing - - grants them unmerited favor --- He gives them grace.
- The earth spirals into unchecked sinfulness. Everyone’s thoughts are only and always wicked. Worse than TOTAL DEPRAVITY - - IT IS A TIME OF UTTER DEPRAVITY. God is “sorry He even made creation” - - just a way to express for us His attitude toward man’s sin. So He determines to destroy all that He has made. There is no power or force that can thwart His intention. BUT GOD --- then extends grace to Noah - - a plan to deliver him and his family AND ALL WHO WOULD TRUST HIM ...
- The people of God are subject to a tyrant – a wicked subjugating Pharaoh. Without an army, without any reasonable hope of resistance, they live in constant despair. Their heads are hung low. BUT GOD - - sees their plight, remembers His promise, and sends a deliverer. Now, backs against the wall - - literally a wall of water ... the Egyptian army drives toward them and there is nowhere to go - - BUT GOD ... opens up the waters – delivers His children – and destroys the armies of Pharaoh.
- Sarah and Abraham - - old - - really, really, old ... living on the last vestiges of a promise made years ago. There is no hope for them - - and Sarah knows it ... expressing her disappointment in laughter ... BUT GOD ... grants them a son – Isaac - - who will be the child of promise.
- Mary - - a virgin - - called by God to be the earthly mother of His only Son ... impossible! BUT GOD.

How many times does this truth come to us - - and now Paul says, it must come to you PERSONALLY --- you need to be reminded that there has never been a more impossible situation than the condition of your dead, trapped, and under wrath condition ...

BUT GOD.

So let’s match up the problems with the solutions - - and here is how we will do it.

Ephesians 2:3

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.

Ephesians 2:7

7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:2

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—

Ephesians 2:6

6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Ephesians 2:1

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

Ephesians 2:5

5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

Okay - - the first one.

We were all children of wrath.

Ephesians 2:3

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.

There was no injustice in this. We were all positioned to receive exactly what we deserved. We had made ourselves enemies of God. We did this. We willingly did this.

Romans 1:18–19

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

More ...

Romans 1:20–23

20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

We did this - - all of us - - each of us. There was an exchange made, willingly, against evidence, against nature, against God's kind revelation of Himself to us --- WE ENTERED INTO WRATH.

We deserve it.

So we are all without excuse.

There is no blame that can be laid against God for the reality of our being under His wrath - - and destined for wrath.

Romans 2:5–6

5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

6 He will render to each one according to his works:

There is no more horrible imagination.

It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of God ...

Hebrews 12:29

29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 10:30–31

30 For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people."

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

BUT GOD ...

Ephesians 2:3

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.**

But God - - instead of our heading for eternal destruction - - we are now headed, in the ages to come - - to a DISPLAY OF GRACE.

Ephesians 2:7

7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

NOTICE HOW HE SAYS IT ...

In the coming ages God is going to show you --- grace ...

- **In kindness toward us**
 - Kindness. What a great word. What a great habit. What a great gift. To be shown kindness. Think of it - - God has planned an eternity of kind acts for you. There is no way to quantify what He has in store for us.
 - **This kindness has quality and quantity:**
 - **QUALITY - - RICHES**
 - **QUANTITY - - IMMEASURABLE**
- **SOMEONE SAID - - WHEN GOD'S KINDNESS TOWARD US ENDS, ETERNITY WILL END.**

We were captive to an alien force - - servants of Satan – and his world.

Ephesians 2:2

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—

We were followers - - walkers - - dead men and dead women walking.

And that was, remember, just a natural drift. We didn't have to do anything to be carried along by the world. That is how we measured life - - that is how we measured happiness - - success - - our motivations came from this world.

And it was always a disappointment.

Life was never all it seemed cracked up to be.

Happiness is just an elusive dream – a passing whim.

And success ... as soon as we attain any measure of success by the world's standards - - the world changes the standards.

Yet the only hope we had was to try and try and try again. We sought motivations in dreams that we knew, in our hearts, were never likely to transpire.

It was a miserable existence.

And some of you perhaps still walk that way - - it is miserable.

BUT GOD ...

Ephesians 2:6

6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

That talks about a complete reorientation. We might still live here - - but we are seated there.

We might still walk here - - but our steps are guided from above.

There is a new course in life - - and we realize that to live, to really live, is to live on another plane entirely.

Colossians 3:1–3

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Christians can struggle to understand this - - or to see how it works, practically. But we shouldn't. We really think this way often.

I saw Michael Thurman yesterday - - he and Pam just got back from the Dominican Republic ... a great vacation despite the threat of weather - - but now, back to the grind. Back to class with the elementary kids they both teach --- but when the pressure rushes in they can imagine they are back on that beach - - and there is a refreshing in it.

Now that is somewhat the power of imagination - - but really, for humans, it is real ... they were really there. They know what it was like. So they can remember - - and be refreshed by it.

This is the same - - it is not an imagined thing - - it is real. We really have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places. And there, we know, there is no misery, no pain, no disappointment - - no death, no despair, no POLITICS!

AND THAT IS REFRESHING TO US --- IT PULLS US UP AND THROUGH.

Tony Bennett said it this way:

“I Left My Heart in San Francisco”

The loveliness of Paris seems somehow sadly gray
The glory that was Rome is of another day
I've been terribly alone and forgotten in Manhattan
I'm going home to my city by the Bay
I left my heart in San Francisco
High on a hill, it calls to me

For the Christian - -

We would say ...

The loveliness of Bowling Green in the fall seems somehow sadly gray
The glory that was my youth is of another day
I've been terribly alone surrounded by friends
I'm longing for home - - to my city in the sky ...
I keep my heart in the heavenly places ...
High on a hill, it calls to me.

We don't read the news the same way - -

We don't read the lab report of cancer the same way - -

The good news doesn't take us as high --- and the bad news doesn't take us as low ...

Because there is news this world knows nothing of - - headlines for me come from the pages and the promises of Scripture!

I was dead in sin.

Ephesians 2:1

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

Dead - - is dead. No life. No breath. No movement. The thoughts stop. The eyes don't see. The ears don't hear. The mouth no longer shapes words.

Dead.

Sin and disobedience had taken their toll.

Nothing can bring something dead back to life - - nothing ...

NOTHING BUT GOD ...

Ephesians 2:5

5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

One thing about death that can always be applied - - IT STINKS.

Even a small mouse - - trapped in your walls, dead - - will make itself known.

The stench of rot - - that is what we all were.

But God - - smelling the stench - - did not turn away in disgust - - but instead said to His Son --- I WANT THAT DEAD THING ALIVE AGAIN ...

And your life will be the price - - the satisfaction to make that possible.

Die for them --- so that they can live!

Christ came into the world to save dead sinners.
Some think they are alive - - and to those He offers no life.
But to those who realize their condition - -
They were under wrath ---
They were following the power of Satan ---
They were a stinking death ...
To those He gives life, and freedom and everlasting promise of immeasurable riches!

How?

Simple – by faith.

Ephesians 2:8

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

We believe ... that is what we do.

We trust that when He says there is no threat of wrath for those who rely on Christ - - then we are expressing saving faith.

We trust that when He says the dangers and the threats of this world are no match for Christ that is in us - - then we are expressing saving faith.

We trust that when He says “I die, so that you might live” - - then we are expressing saving faith.

So we trust Him - -

- With our families ...
- With our marriages ...
- With our finances ...
- With all of our worries ...
- With all of our fears ...

We live in faith believing that He has done what He said He has done - - that He is doing what He says He is doing - - and that He will do all that He has said He will do.

BUT GOD ... all the difference --- all the difference.

What is going on right now in your life - - faith says to that situation - - BUT GOD.