

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects 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 not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Therefore remember that formerly you who were Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves, “the circumcision,” (that done in the body by the hands of men) – remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ, Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

In the past few weeks, we’ve been looking at some of the doctrinal principles of our faith. We do this because, if you believe the statistics, Christians in our culture, generally speaking, in spite of their education in other areas, are still quite ignorant about even the basic elements of their faith. Who is God? Who is Humanity? What is Sin? Who is Jesus? These are the very kinds of things Paul describes as milk – the elementary teachings of Christianity that he was so frustrated with the Corinthian church for not understanding. I wonder what he’d think of today’s church? What would Paul think of you and of me, personally, and our understanding of the faith? If he were our mentor, would he be pleased with the seriousness with

which we take Christ? Think about that – I have been this week.

I’m not trying to make you feel guilty, although God may very well be trying to do that. What I *am* trying to do is encourage you in your personal relationship with Christ and your study of Scripture.

The truth is, if you spent just 20 minutes a week interacting with your wife or husband or children, what would happen to that relationship? It would die on the vine – and some of you know first hand how true that is.

Nurturing our relationship with Christ will not be adequately accomplished by sitting through a 20 minute sermon on Sunday morning. If you’re dependent upon *that* as the whole of your spiritual food, I don’t care which church you go to, eventually you will grow apart from God in your actions and in your attitudes. One or two or three hours in church and Sunday school each week, while it is hopefully helpful, still won’t do what needs to be done to grow us up in our faith and understanding of God and the things of God. It takes a *personal* commitment and investment – just like a marriage does, like a parent-child relationship, like church membership, ordination; it’s true of really any relationship of value: what we get out of it is proportional to what we put into it.

Where do you invest yourself and your time? *That* is what’s stealing your mind and your heart.

In the past few weeks, we’ve examined the questions: Who is God? Who is Humanity? What is Sin? Who is

Jesus? Today, “What is Salvation? Would you take your Bible and turn to the book of Ephesians, chapter 2. Ephesians, chapter two.

What is salvation? That’s a topic we all have a strong interest in at one time or another.

Like the tourist who wandered a little too close to the edge of the Grand Canyon and lost her footing...did you hear about her? As she slid over the edge, in all her clawing and scraping, she managed to get hold of a little bush sticking out of the rock. She looked down and saw the bottom so far below. And so, terrified, she looked up toward heaven and called out, “Is there anyone up there?”

A calm, powerful voice came out of the sky, “Yes, there is.”

The tourist pleaded, “Can you help me?”

The calm voice replied, “Yes I can. Do you have faith?”

“Yes, yes, I have strong faith.”

The calm voice said, “Then just let go of the bush, and everything will be fine.”

There was a tense pause, then the tourist yelled, “Is there anyone *else* up there?”

Suddenly, she was interested in salvation, you see?

Then there were the three men, neighbors, who were discussing the proper posture for the most effective prayer.

The first said, “Everyone knows that you should be on your knees with your head bowed when you pray.”

The second said, “Oh, I think you should pray standing up, with your face toward heaven.”

The third man then spoke up: “I don’t know about either of those, but no doubt, the finest praying I ever did was upside down in a well.”

Suddenly, he was interested in being saved, you see?

But what is salvation, in the fullest sense?

In Ephesians, chapter two, Paul first reminds us why we *need* salvation – why we need to be saved. Verse one there, speaking to the Christians at Ephesus:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”

Although we human beings are created in God’s image, we’ve talked about that. Although we were created to live in relationship with God, the sin that came into the world with Adam and Eve changed us...it put a spirit of rebellion in our hearts...from birth; a pride that causes us to think we can live just fine *without* God, *without* the help of our Creator. And because of that pride, we’ve rejected our relationship with God, and we do things that displease Him. We live in ways...sinful ways...that are contrary to His. We think evil thoughts, sinful thoughts – thoughts that are

not like God's. Even though humanity was created for relationship with God, we've chosen to follow the ways of the world around us – to be disobedient to Him – to live lives that satisfy our present needs and wants. Paul says there in verse 3: ***we live to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature and to follow it's desires and thoughts:*** accumulating stuff, being happy, making money, loving the things of this world ***more*** than the God who created it all. We're not bent toward God and toward the eternal and spiritual stuff...the truly important stuff of life.

And while that posture may allow us to live out our 70 or 80 or 90 years on earth, what happens after that? We have a problem. Paul says that, because of this rejection of God, we were objects of wrath. We've displeased God with our lives, with the aim of our lives, and so when we die and go over the edge of the canyon, what happens then? When we realize that human life is made up of more than the "I got mine" philosophy of our world, what are we to do?

Verse 4 there, ***"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 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 not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast."***

In Jesus, God has given us an answer for our sin problem. We had offended God. In our pride, we had

sinned against Him and we had no way to repair that relationship. And so God, in His grace, sent Jesus, His sinless Son, to come and to pay our penalty for us, so that:
if we'll recognize our need of God's mercy,
if we'll sincerely repent, if we'll turn away from the ways in which we've offended God and broken that relationship, and
if we'll believe in Jesus, if we'll put our faith in Jesus as our Savior and as the redeemer of our relationship with God, we will be saved.

But what does it mean to be saved? What is salvation? Paul gives us here several pictures of salvation.

First, when we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus, we are ***made alive from the dead***. Until we receive Jesus, and when I say "receive Jesus," I mean until we turn from our sin and put our faith in Him," until we do that, we are dead toward God...dead in the eternal sense. Hopeless, cut off from the living, separated from God. This comes back to the Tree of Life, remember, clear back in the Garden of Eden? It was sin that cut us off from eating from the tree of life, from walking with God in the garden. The relationship was severed. Jesus brings us life again – a regeneration of our dead souls. We can walk with God again, our source of life. Salvation means being made alive from the dead.

Second, being saved means that we're raised up with Jesus and seated with Him in the heavenly places. When Jesus' work on earth was complete, we're told in Hebrews that He ascended to God and was seated at God's right hand. Paul says here that, when we are in Christ, part

of our salvation means that *we are with Him there* – not just that we’ll go there *someday*, although Scripture makes that clear in other places, but that *even now, we dwell near to God*. Salvation is living with Christ, near the Father.

And notice too, Paul says that we are *seated* there. If our repentance is genuine, if our desire for God is sincere, if our belief in Jesus is true, we need not twist and turn in the wind, wondering where we stand with God. We have no reason to doubt the love of God for us, His acceptance of us, His reception of us to His side. Paul says, when we’re saved, *we are seated with Christ* in the Heavens. All we have to do is turn and look up at the face of the Father whom we sit beside. We’re adopted into God’s family. Co-heirs with Christ, you see?

Here is a strong vestige of sin in human life: I know that many here today have grown up not really being sure that you were loved and accepted by your earthly father...or mother or both. Consequently, you have this never-ending drive to *please*, to earn a place in their hearts, to somehow earn the privilege of sitting at their side. And so it’s hard for you to believe that this acceptance and love of God the Father is part of your salvation, but it is. In Jesus, we are brought near to God and we’re seated there. There is no performance necessary. God has loved you from the beginning...He calls you to sit and receive His love for you.

Salvation means that we are raised from spiritual death...that we are raised up and seated with Christ in the heavens, and third, Paul says, salvation means that we *will see the incomparable riches of God’s grace in the coming age*.

What does that mean? It means that our salvation provides for us a *tremendous future*. Charles Carter says that the believer’s golden age is *always future*, and *never past*. Our anticipation of the riches of God’s grace carries us beyond the present, however threatening it might be.”¹ This is the life of faith – looking to the promises of God and to our future with Him. Living now, but always with an eye on what’s to come in this life and in the next.

Rowland Hill tells the story of a rich man and a poor man in his congregation. The rich man came to Mr. Hill with a large sum of money that he wished to give to the poor man and he asked Hill to give it to him any way he thought best. Mr. Hill sent the poor man a modest amount with a note that said, “More to follow.” Every few months came that amount with the same message, “More to follow.”² This is a picture of God’s salvation to us: always giving us good gifts in the present, but always promising that more grace will follow in the future.

Verse 11: *“Therefore remember that formerly you who were Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves, “the circumcision,” – remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through His blood.”*

¹ Carter, Charles. 391.

² Moody, D.L.. *The Biblical Illustrator*. Vol.19. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. p. 149.

From a Jewish point of view, there were only two types...two *rac*es of people in the world: Jew and Gentile, those who were near to God and those who were far away. In Christ, however, in many ways, a new race was begun. A race that allows both Jew and Gentile to come near to God.

Look there at verse 14: ***“For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two, one,”*** you see?

Verse 15, about half way down there: ***“Jesus’ purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away (the Gentiles) and peace to those who were near (the Jews.) For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”***

Our salvation means having membership in this new race. A race that is united with Christ. A race with a future. A race with a sure hope. A forgiven race. A reconciled race. A peaceful race. A unified race. A race that has been brought near to God, Paul says, through the blood of Christ, its perfect sacrifice.

To be saved means that we are made completely new – we’re new people, part of a new race. If we’re in Christ, we’re a new creation – the old has gone, Paul says to the Corinthians, the new has come.³

³ 2 Corinthians 5:17

I believe, in many ways, our Christian culture has made salvation to be nothing more than an eternal life insurance policy; a business transaction made with God and then put away in a drawer somewhere until it’s needed at death. Salvation has become for many a neat little prayer that we pray because we don’t want to go to hell. The gospel is something many people receive today because of what’s in it for them, which makes the benefits of salvation the object of worship...instead of the God who offers it.

This is not the picture of salvation we see here in Ephesians, or anywhere else.

By His death and resurrection, Jesus made a way for us, Jew and Gentile, to come home – to return to a right relationship with our Father in Heaven. Simply put, salvation means entering into, and then living in that relationship with God. Salvation is turning from self-love and self-service and self-worship and choosing to love God and serve Him and worship Him every day. It’s being His child in a relationship of honor and obedience and trust and communication, every day. It’s walking with God in the garden again all the days of our lives.

And then, as we depart this life, salvation means that we simply take again the hand we’ve walked with in this world and move on with Him to the next. One person, at his death, put it this way: “Blessed be God, though I change my place I shall not change my company, for I have walked with God while living; now I’ll go to rest with Him.”

Salvation is not a contract. It's not a deal. It's the gracious opportunity, given to us by God in Christ, for every repentant, wayward child to come home and live again in relationship with their Father.

Do you need to come home? Jesus Christ has made the way and your Heavenly Father is looking for you – He longs to see you, to walk with you, to save you from the problems of this life and from the punishment and torment of the next that *will be yours* without Jesus. Your Father is calling, come home to Him.

Or, maybe you've prayed "the prayer," maybe you've always looked at salvation as some kind of contract, and today you realize that you've never really had a relationship with your Heavenly Father.

Or, you realize today that the relationship has grown cold and distant – not because of Him, but because of you – your schedule, your busy-ness has pushed Him aside.

Salvation...is to walk with God, with our hand firmly in the hand of the Father. To dwell near to Him.

He calls you today, "Come near...come home." Softly and tenderly He calls. Is He speaking to you? Do you need to respond?

326 Softly and Tenderly