

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: Did you hear about the new temporary theme park on the seaside in Somerset, England? It was put together by Banksy, a famous British graffiti artist turned social activist. It's called **Dismaland**. The 50 artists who created it addressed numerous social and political issues but it is all deadly *dismal*. It shows all our dreams and our magical imaginations of life dying. One commentary I read said, "*We aren't simply viewers of this art. We create it.*" Would you visit that park? Actually, you don't have to.
- B. We have a friend who embraced Christianity for awhile some years ago. She loved the idea of fellowship with God. But what eventually drove her away from our faith was what the Bible said about sin. She refused to believe that people were sinful. The Christian faith is always very bad news—dismal news—before the good news.
- C. We've been looking at the diamond-like facets of the good news of Jesus Christ. We looked at new birth and the drama of God's courtroom where sinners are declared righteous. Today we go to the cemetery. Turn to **Eph. 2:1-10**. *Illus.*: **Dr. Erwin Lutzer** used to take his preaching students at Trinity on a little field trip. He'd take them to a cemetery over in Deerfield, have them gather around a grave, and then tell one of them to preach to the guy lying there. "*Preach the gospel to Mr. Reed here!*" he'd say. Then he'd remind those preachers that preaching to the lost is preaching to the dead, and only the Holy Spirit can bring them to life. **The wonder of God's grace is that he uses the declaration of the good news of Jesus Christ to literally wake the dead.** Eph. 2:1 says, "*As for you,*

I. "YOU WERE DEAD IN YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS AND SINS."

- A. Transgressing God's laws of life immerses us in a world of the walking dead. Sin doesn't just get us in trouble. It isn't just bad. It kills us. It is lethal. We are cut off from the life God gives. **We're like cut flowers.** They may look good for a few hours but they're dead as doornails, and there's

nothing you can do to revive them. People dead in their sins don't reform. They can never try harder or turn over a new leaf. **They can't even believe.**

- B. **V.2** continues the thought, "*You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live...*"

Though we like to think of our sin as an occasional misstep in an otherwise good life, the Bible says that sins were our way of life. Our way of life was shaped by three factors: **the world, the devil, and the flesh.** Death was our environment.

1. **V.2**, "*When you followed the ways of **this world.***" No matter where you live, the world displaces the true God; the world uses people and treasures things, it puffs up and beats down. That pervasive spiritual culture shapes all our thinking and behavior, the way someone raised in racism becomes racist or someone who lives amidst lies learns to lie even when the truth would do.
 2. **V.2**, We also "*followed the ways... of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*" That's the **devil.** We were his pawns, duped by his constant lies. **He was in our heads provoking constant disobedience by his lies and by the pain he causes.** He put a God-disobeying spin on everything that happened in your life. And all of it was to steal God's glory for himself. He used us all mercilessly to make a play for the throne of Christ. He is, after all, the **antichrist.**
 3. **V.3**, "*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of **our flesh** and following its desires and thoughts.*" The world. The devil. And here, **the flesh.** In the Bible, "the flesh" is code for our sinful nature—our natural bent to do just what is described here: *gratify our own desires and thoughts.* We did all we could to indulge our desires. We could even do good deeds for selfish reasons.
- C. Not only were we dead in our sins, and utterly sold out to sinning because of the world, the devil and the flesh, but **v.3** says, "*we were by nature deserving of wrath.*" That

means that even before we did actual things wrong, we were already so deeply sinful, so deeply and hopelessly bent to sinning, that we were deeply offensive to the high and holy God. That's what "*deserving of wrath*" means. His judgment hangs over our heads. **We lived in Dismaland. We were already citizens of the cemetery.**

We are without excuse, without hope, dead to rights, and waiting for the verdict of hell, and then the next verse begins, "*But God...*"

II. "BUT GOD MADE US ALIVE WITH CHRIST"

A. Before Paul even gets to that statement he makes two statements about God, almost as if to say, "*You won't believe what I have to tell you unless you know this about God.*"

1. **God "*is rich in mercy.*"** Mercy means *not* giving someone the righteous punishment they deserve. **To give someone mercy is to give up a just outcome.**

I'm poor in mercy. If someone around me needs mercy, I have to turn my pockets out and dig in the seat cushions. When it comes to giving a break to someone who doesn't deserve it I'm a miser. When it comes to forgiving someone who hurt me, I'm Scrooge.

But not God. God gives mercy away extravagantly, like there's no tomorrow. *Illus.:* I spent over an hour in a prayer room this week with a life-sized painting by Ron DiCiani depicting Jesus' mercy to the very one who caused his death.

2. The related reason why **God made us alive is "*because of his great love for us.*"** God doesn't save us just to clean up his messy universe. He loves us, and though you hear it from me again and again, there is no more moving or accurate picture of that love than the father running to meet his prodigal son. The son *didn't* love his father. He only turned toward home because he was hungry. He had no thought at all of being loved, yet "*while he was still a long way off his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*" And

then he said, “*This son of mine was dead but is now alive!*” God’s love for you and me is why he made us alive with Christ.

B. **V.5**, “*God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.*” So did God detect a shallow pulse and set out to revive you? A little blush of color in your cheeks? Did you give him the tiniest nod of recognition? No, you and I were utterly lifeless in our sins. And we were thoroughly revolting in our sins. God began the work of salvation in you when there was *nothing* in you or me to signal our interest or our readiness or our repentance. Dead as doornails!

C. **Where does that take us?** V.5: “*It is by grace you have been saved.*” It isn’t only that we did nothing to be saved, but that we had given God so many reasons *not* to save us. We deserved his wrath!

Don’t overlook the word *saved*. Who can save a dead person? Who could save us from God’s own wrath but God himself! God saved us, and he did it simply because of his grace. In *mercy* we did *not* receive his wrath, and in *grace* we *did* receive his love.

D. V. 5 says, “*God made us alive with Christ,*” and v. 6 explains that: (1) “*God raised us up with Christ,*” and (2) God “*seated us with him [God] in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*”

1. “***God raised us up with Christ.***” When when Jesus rose from the dead we were “*in him.*” We walked out of Dismaland. That’s one of the symbols of baptism. Our dead lives—dead in transgressions and sins—are resurrected with the breath of God—the Holy Spirit. Our bodies may still be mortal, but we are not. We are immortal and we are filled with God’s own power—the Holy Spirit—who raised Jesus from the dead.
2. The other part of our being made alive is that **God** “***seated us with him [God] in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.***” After his resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven to sit at the Father’s side. And we are *in him* there. Remember where we were? Dead and doomed.

We stood on the very edge of hell itself and now look at us!

One of the most important things you can learn as a Christian is your position in Christ. You are *not* under Satan's control. So long as you remain in Christ, he is under yours! Whatever you once were—a victim, a criminal, a failure, an orphan—you are no longer because you are *in Christ*. That is your identity now. You are a saved sinner, **but more!** You are a child of God, **but more!** You are a part of God's people, **but more!** You are hidden with Christ at the right hand of God.

God's purpose in this extraordinary salvation is in **v.7**, "*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.*"

III. GOD MADE US ALIVE WITH CHRIST AS AN EVERLASTING DISPLAY OF HIS INCOMPARABLY RICH GRACE

VV. 8-10 tell us what heaven will marvel over forever.

- A. **Vv.8-9**, "*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.*" Somewhere during this sermon maybe you whispered to yourself, "*Well, yes, but I did pray. I did ask Jesus in.*" But you were dead! How could you even do that? Because God in his grace gave you even the faith to trust him. And he showed all this kindness to us so heaven might be forever filled with the praise of his glorious grace.
- B. **V.10**, "*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" I was reading the other day about a display of Picasso's art. It said he'd go on walks with his girlfriend pushing a baby buggy and he'd collect junk along the way and then turn it into art. Big deal! God took me and you, spoiled to the core, dead in a sewer of sin, owned by Satan, and for no reason other than love, he rescued us and then made us his masterpieces by turning us into little Christs, people willing and wanting and able to do good for the

Lord's sake. And so we will do it, not only now but forever. We will spend eternity seeing one another doing amazing good things, and never forget where we once were.

To add one more wonder: God prepared these good works for us to do long before we were even born, on the far side of all the sin that destroyed us. They were our destiny even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins. God set out to make us glorious good-deed-doers and then saved us by his grace so that we might be like Christ himself.

Conclusion