

“It Takes A Miracle” (Part 2)

Ephesians 2:1-10

Series: Ephesians [#6]

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Introduction

Today is our second of three looks at the first 10 verses in Ephesians 2. The overall message of this section is that “*It Takes A Miracle*” to rescue us from sin, death and judgment. Last week we saw ourselves in “*Death Valley*” in the opening three verses—the reality that everyone who has not come to God through Jesus Christ is...

- dead in sin;
- dominated by Satan and his forces;
- a slave to his/her sin;
- and, condemned in that sin.

“*We need a miracle*” to be rescued!

The good news begins in verse 4 with the word “*But.*” And what a contrast it is! Now, chapter 1 gave us the *good news* of some of the spiritual blessings every believer has received in Christ. This good news is presented as contrasts to the bad news of the first three verses. Today we are focusing on “*God’s Miracle*”—the transformation and the privileges it brings.

God’s Miracle.

God’s miracle transforms people from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. In Ezekiel 37 the prophet describes a vision God gave him. In this vision God placed Ezekiel in the middle of a valley. All around him, filling the entire valley, were old, dry bones—the remains of people long dead. God led him around, up and down over the bones, throughout the valley to survey the entire scene. Then God asked him, “Can these bones become living people again?” *What a question!* Ezekiel replied to God, “You alone know the answer to that.”

As the vision continued, God told Ezekiel to prophecy over the bones that they would live again. After Ezekiel did this, “there was a rattling noise across the valley.” Flesh and skin formed and, at God’s command, “breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet.”[NLT] *What a vision!*

But what’s the point? It became clear as God told Ezekiel, “these bones represent the people of Israel.” Ezekiel lived in exile in Babylon. He and many others were there as part of God’s judgment on the nation for being unfaithful to Him. The first two-thirds of this 48-chapter book states judgments coming to God’s people and other nations. The last third has a message of hope. Here God gives hope—even though the nation was *dead*, out of their

land, not functioning as a nation, He *will* bring the nation back to life, both as a nation and also, more importantly, spiritually.

This is a striking image of what God will do someday for Israel. In it we also can see a picture of Paul's description of believers which starts with verse 1 and gets back to the main thought in verse 4,

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins . . . But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (1, 4-5)

Could anything be more radical? One moment *dead*—no spiritual life at all, just like those heaps of dry bones. Then, the next, *alive*—full of everlasting life, the life of God.

Paul wrote along this same line in Colossians 2:13-14,

“When you *were dead* in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, [God] *made you alive* together with [Christ], having forgiven us of all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

From being dead in our sin with no way, no hope to ever change that on our own, to being alive with God.

This is an accomplished fact for every believer.

- Jesus, in John 5:24 said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, *has eternal life*, and does not come into judgment, but *has passed out of death into life*.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

And this is not just a potential or conditional transformation, but a certain and everlasting one—we “[*have*] *passed out of death into life*,” we *have* “eternal life.” It is as certain and secure as God's promises and power. Yes, God's miracle transforms us from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ.

God's miracle also transforms us from being slaves to sin and Satan to being raised up with Christ. Last week we looked at our slavery to sin and Satan in verses two and three:

- we “walked [lived] according to the course of this world,” according to the present evil age of this world;
- we “walked [lived] according to the prince of the power of the air” [Satan, the prince or ruler; and the vast host of fallen angels or demons, who are the power or authorities of the air].

- we were dominated by and indulged our sinful desires.

But ... in Christ, God “raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” We were not only given life, but we also were “raised up with Christ.” This is an added and distinct feature from verse five. The picture takes us back to Christ’s physical resurrection by the surpassing greatness of God’s power, described at the end of

Just as Christ’s resurrection broke the chains and power of death and sin, so it broke to chain and power of sin and Satan’s forces over those who believe. Notice that this has already taken place—God *has raised* us up. He is not speaking about something future in this life nor at the day of our physical resurrection, but about a present reality for every believer that God accomplished when we believed. Yes, we are now spiritually alive. *And*, we are no longer slaves to sin and Satan. We no longer live under his authority and dominance in this evil age. In Romans 6:4 Paul wrote “...so that as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” This is the truth behind a verse in one of Charles Wesley’s hymns that says, “He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free; His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood availed for me.”

We are freed from slavery to sin to serve the living God! All people have the desire to be free from slavery to sin. To be sure, most people do not see, and often cannot express the desire clearly. But there is a universal quest to be free from the things we know are wrong, the evil, the things that bind us—*but we just can’t do it*. Our best efforts, the best man-made religious, the best moral and philosophical systems cannot do it—only God can do it for us. In Christ, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, we are cleansed, we are freed from “dead works” and can now live with and serve the living God (9:14). In Christ we now have *God’s power, heavenly power* to free us from sin’s domination.

And, yes, we have a responsibility, as Paul described it the opening verses of Colossians 3,

“Therefore [since] you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Yes, God’s miracle frees, it *transforms* us from being slaves to sin and Satan to being raised up with Christ.

God’s miracle transforms us from being condemned before God to being seated in the heavenly places in Christ. Remember, verse 3 tells us that by nature we were “children of wrath.” We were condemned in our sinfulness and sin before God. But, verse 6 tells us, we have not only been brought to life, not only raised up with Christ, we also have been seated in and with Him “in the heavenly places.” *What is he talking about?* There are a number of different pictures in the Bible about being seated in the heavenly places.

- It points to a high position, rule and authority.

- To rest from work (of Christ in Hebrews 10—but that is not the point for us here).
- Also, to our reigning with Christ.

Remember that these *good news* descriptions are a contrast to the *bad news* of verses 1-3. When we look at this setting, the emphasis is on: now, as well as later in heaven; and, not only being freed from the power and dominance of sin, but freed from all condemnation and living, ruling with the power of Christ. Paul opened Romans 8 with the statement, “there Also, in Romans 5, God tells us

“For if by the transgression of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness *will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*”

This is not just about the future kingdom or eternity. It is also a position and quality that begins at salvation.

It is not about political, social or economic rule, but spiritual rule—again, we are no longer subservient to the power of sin and Satan’s forces. This does not mean that sin and Satan’s forces no longer can threaten and touch us—we just have to go to chapter 6 where Paul talks about our ongoing spiritual warfare to realize that. We can be touched and threatened, *but* we no longer sit in the prisoner’s box, found guilty and awaiting sentence. We sit along side and with the Judge—Jesus Christ.

These are three highlights of the great, miraculous transformation God works in believers. We are transformed ...

- From being dead in sin to being alive in Christ.
- From being slaves to sin and Satan to being raised up with Christ.
- From being condemned before God to being seated in the heavenly places in Christ.

The Bible describes many privileges for believers. These verses zero in on two great privileges that come from receiving God’s miracle. First, we are transformed for good works.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

This is a good verse to memorize—in fact memorize 8-10.

Let’s note some basic points on the words in verse 10. Paul’s word order is different than our English versions. He put the word “his” first for emphasis—that’s one of the ways they had of underscoring a term to tell the reader “This is important. This is what I’m emphasizing.” It wouldn’t make sense to try to carry that word order over into English, but we need to note his emphasis. He is saying, “We are His [*His*] workmanship.”

Then look at the word “created.” The word is a passive form, underscoring that this work was done to and for us. Literally, “*having been created.*” Next, “in Christ Jesus.” There Paul goes again, continually reminding us that all we are and have as believers is “in Christ

Jesus.”

Now, the purpose. We were transformed, “created in Christ Jesus for *good works*.” We are not *saved* by any good works. We know this...

- because, as we noted last week, on our own we are spiritually dead and cannot do any works that are truly spiritually good.
- We know this also because verse 8 tells us our salvation is “not of [our]selves” — i.e., not by anything we have done.
- We know this also because verse 8 also tells us that salvation is God’s “gift” to us—you don’t work for, earn gifts.
- And we know this because verse 9 states clearly—our salvation is “*not* as a result of good works so that no one may boast.” It is not a reward for the good things we do.

We are transformed, created in Christ Jesus for good words.

Just as we are not saved by, so also we are not “kept” in our relationship with God by our good works. First of all, Jesus gives us “eternal” life that no one, He says, will or can take away. “*No one*” means just that—not Satan and his forces, no other person, not even ourselves. Just as we are saved by God’s grace, we are kept by God in His grace. Paul got very blunt on this point in Galatians 3:3,

“How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?” [NLT]

God transformed us and left us here on earth so that we would glorify him through “good works”—attitudes, motives, thoughts, words, actions that line up with His perfect character and reveal His goodness and greatness. This includes all of what we think and do—everything we do is to be in line with God’s character and will and for His glory.

You may say, “Isn’t that asking quite a bit from me?” *This is where it gets even better*. The last part of verse 10, which might appear to be just a phrase- ending embellishment, is actually a pivotal point. We were created in Christ Jesus for good works “which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” I get excited, and am humbled, every time I read these words. Before time began, God prepared everything He wants you and me to do...

- the specific timing, situation, and actions.
- He has prepared it all—our responsibility is to “walk in them.” To follow God’s leading, His path by faith.
- God has prepared good works He will perform in and through you as you trust Him and live by His power.
- And if it is God’s work, *which it is*, then once again there is no ground for any of us

to boast in what God does in and through us.

- All of our specific “*good works*” are in view. When we get to chapters 4-6, we will see the kinds of things God has prepared for us.

God transforms us for good works.

Secondly, we are transformed for displaying God’s glory. Go back up to verse 6.

“and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

We were totally unworthy; yet, here and now and forever we will showcase God’s great grace.

The fact that...

- we were dead in our sin, but given life in Christ;
- that we were slaves to sin and Satan, but were raised up with Christ;
- that we were condemned in our sin before God, but were seated in the heavenly places in Christ ...

is an everlasting display of God’s grace, and brings great glory to Him. All of our abilities and accomplishments should have the purpose of bringing glory to God.

Have you ever wondered why some people who have accomplished great things still end up unhappy and unfulfilled? Our accomplishments do not bring lasting satisfaction and fulfillment because they are not meant to. Our natural focus is wrong: it is on the person who achieved it, on ourselves, rather than God. Are we continually seeking “the things above?” Check your focus regularly. When a well-respected and greatly-loved professor retired, he was honored with a portrait of him in the University. When it was unveiled there were many compliments. The professor said he deeply appreciated it, because it really was a splendid painting. But, he had one concern—“In the future people probably won’t ask, ‘Who is the man in the portrait,’ but, ‘Who painted it?’” It’s a matter of focus.

Every believer has, you and I have the great, invaluable privilege of bringing glory to God today and forever!

Conclusion.

Yes, “It Takes A Miracle” to rescue us; and God provides that miracle. As we come to some quiet time with God, I have two questions. First, have you been made alive with Christ? The Christian faith is not just a list of truths to accept. It certainly is not a do-it-yourself religion of good works. It is all “in Christ.” Christ is God’s gift to you by His grace. If you have not come to God to place your faith in Him and accept His grace, you are not alive, but dead. We are going to look at receiving this gift in more detail next time, but you don’t have to wait until then to act. Reach out to God now, and talk with me about this

today.

Then, if you know you have been made alive with Christ, where is your focus? Is it really on “things above,” on the spiritual and eternal? We all know it is easy to agree with and say “This world is not my home, I’m just passing through,” but that it is just as easy to put down deep roots, to get entangled by many things of this earth. As you thank God for this marvellous gift of His grace to you, check and reconfirm your focus.

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