

March 26, 2006  
Lent 4

*"Alive in Christ"*

---

## **EPHESIANS 2:4-10**

---

**B**ut because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

I am holding in my hand part of a grape vine from my back yard. If you were to look at this more closely you would see that it is green and has life in the branch. If I placed it into some water or put it into the ground and kept it moist, it would produce roots and eventually become a grape vine. I could also take this branch and graft it onto another vine. If it is done correctly the vine will accept the new branch and give it the nutrients and support it needs to produce fruit. However if I take a dead branch such as this and put it into water or place it into the ground it will not sprout roots, send out leaves and begin to grow. Also, if I attach a dead branch to a vine it will not suddenly become alive and begin to shoot out leaves and eventually bear fruit. Dead branches cannot come to life unless of course God performs a miracle.

Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches." He takes dead branches, attaches them to him self and they become alive and even bear fruit that is pleasing to God. In the words just read to you we are told that we are alive in Christ. The opposite is also true. We are dead, totally dead and without hope, if we do not have Christ and if we have not been made alive in him. Jesus said in John 15, "Without me you can do nothing." It is my prayer today that we will once again be overwhelmed with how God's grace took spiritually dead people like us and made us alive in Christ. Each of us sitting here is nothing less than a living miracle, and a living testimony of God's amazing grace.

### **1) Look at how dead we were**

First let's take a closer look at how dead we were. "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." In his mercy God made us alive in Christ when we were dead in transgressions. A verse previous to this says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." All people, without exception, are born into this world with sin inherited from their parents that makes us dead and leads us to actual sins. The daily transgressions or actions resulting from sin are the evidence of being spiritually dead. Before Jesus told Nicodemus the well-known words, "God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son," he first told him, "You must be born again." We need to be born again and brought to life by the work of God in our lives. With this work of God we remain dead and unable to come to life and

belong to God.

Spiritually dead people have a strong common bond with each other. They like to follow Satan and the ways of the world, rather than the ways of the Lord. If you had your Bible open you could look at another verse previous to the words we just read to you. It says, "In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air." Spiritually dead people get along well with each other. They enjoy listening to what the devil offers them instead of what God offers them in his Word. We once enjoyed being part of that group. "All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts." One Christian wrote this of the spiritually dead person: "The unregenerate person is earthbound. His ear is deaf to any word from heaven; his eye is blinded to the glory from on high. He lives as a walking cadaver in a spiritual graveyard."

Once a spider built a beautiful web in an old house. He kept it clean and shiny so that flies would patronize it. The minute he got a "customer" he would clean up after him so the other flies would not get suspicious. Then one day this fairly intelligent fly came buzzing by the clean spider web. Old man spider called out, "Come in and sit." But the fairly intelligent fly said, "No, sir. I don't see other flies in your house, and I am not going in alone!" But presently he saw on the floor below a large crowd of flies dancing around on a piece of brown paper. He was delighted! He was not afraid if lots of flies were dancing around and having fun. So he came in for a landing. Just before he landed, a bee zoomed by, saying, "Don't land there foolish fly! That's flypaper!" But the fairly intelligent fly shouted back, "Don't be silly. Those flies are dancing. There's a big crowd there. That many flies can't be wrong!" Well, you know what happened. He died on the spot. Spiritually dead people see others so happy as they follow natural instincts. They are attracted to those whose define sin having fun, and foolishly think they can white out the evil they have done with a little bit of good.

A man bought a little white mouse from the pet shop. He then took it and put it into the cage to feed his pet snake. Fortunately for the mouse the snake was coiled and sound asleep. But the mouse knew that in time the snake would come alive and eat him. So the mouse began working furiously, piling up the shavings to cover the snake, foolishly thinking that covering up the snake will make the problem go away. You and I were once so dead spiritually that we even thought we could cover up the disastrous results of sin by a little good done here and little good done there. The man felt sorry for the poor mouse. He reached in and rescued him. That is what happened to us. God had mercy on us and rescued us when we were dead and without hope.

## **2) Look at how alive you are in Christ**

The contrast could not be greater between our former condition of being dead, without hope and without God, and our new condition of being rescued and alive in Christ. God's mercy made you alive in Christ. God was rich in mercy, abundantly rich and generous, as he reached out to you and me in compassion. Why did God take a dead branch like and give us new life in Christ? Certainly he did not see some good in us. We were dead, following the devil, following the world and following our own base instincts.

How great is God's love for us? Think about taking every part in the John 3:16 and attach the word greatest to it. "God" . . . The greatest LOVER "So loved" . . . The greatest DEGREE of love "The world" . . . The greatest NUMBER "That he gave" . . . The greatest ACT "His only begotten Son" . . . The greatest GIFT "That whosoever" . . . The greatest INVITATION "Believeth" . . . The greatest SIMPLICITY "In him" . . . The Greatest PERSON "Should not perish" . . . The greatest DELIVERANCE "But" . . . The greatest DIFFERENCE "Have" . . . The greatest CERTAINTY "Everlasting Life" . . . The greatest POSSESSION. Spiritually alive people never grow weary of hearing how much God loves them in Christ and they never grow weary of the words from John 3:16.

Because you are alive in Christ you are already seated in the heavenly realms with Christ. He is the vine and you are the branches. He is the head and you are his body. He is the shepherd and you are the sheep. Listen to these comforting words, dear people who are alive in Christ. "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." It does not say God will raise you up and seat you in the heavenly realms. It says that he has already done this. Colossians 3 says, "Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." One Christian wrote commenting on this verse in Colossians and Ephesians, "If in God's eyes you ascended into the heavenly places in Christ, then as far as God is concerned you are not even here. You are where Jesus is!"

Because you have been made alive in Christ, and you are dead branch, now alive and attached to Christ, you can spend the rest of your life and all of eternity standing in awe of what God has done for you that has nothing to do with any effort on your part. It says, "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 that you have been saved, through faith-and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast."

What does the Lord have planned for your life in the future, in this life and for all eternity? He wants to sit you down and parade in front of your eyes of faith every day the incomparable riches he has provided for you in Christ. Every day is a holiday or we might say "Holy Day." Every day is another opportunity to see more of God's grace and taste his goodness to us. In our family, we celebrate birthdays by having someone sit on the throne. The throne is the rocking chair in the living room. Then we go to the bedroom, bring out the presents and sing happy birthday. You are sitting on a throne, living and reigning with Christ, already seated in the heavenly realms, and the Holy Spirit is going to bring presents out to you each day, constantly reminding you of the blessing of being a child of God. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm says of our Shepherd "Thou preparest a table before me in the presences of mine enemies, Thou anointest my head with oil and my cup runneth over." Every day is an opportunity to tell each other, "This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it." The basis of that rejoicing is the fact the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. The foundation of your faith and the keystone of the arch is secure and his name is Jesus.

These riches are incomparable. The Greek word is "uperballo" from which get the word "hyperbole" which means an exaggeration. The blessings you have in Christ appear to be too good to be true but they are not an exaggeration. You see how real they are today. They will be there for you tomorrow and the next day. "When we've been there ten

thousands years. Bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise, Then when we first begun."

If this idea of sitting on a throne and constantly having these riches in Christ opened up to you does not thrill you this morning, then listen further to what it says about those who are alive in Christ. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Jesus said he was the vine and we are the branches. Then he said, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit." Because you are in Christ you are God's workmanship, God's new creation. When God make something it always turns out good. In the original world it says, "And God saw what he had made and it was good." The same is true of the life you have in Christ and the fruits of faith or works that flow out of love for Christ. They are beautiful because they always come through Christ. Jesus said in John 15 "You are clean through the word I have spoken to you." The Lord has works planned for you because you are alive in Christ. He has mapped out your life this coming week and given you an opportunity to glorify him and make his name holy and help his kingdom come and his will to be done.

It is amazing, truly amazing, how dead people like you and me were brought to faith and made alive in Christ. Alive in Christ that's the story of our lives.