

Ephesians 2:4-5

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[0 : 00] Please have a seat and open up to Ephesians chapter 2 again. And over the next few weeks we're just going to be looking at a few verses per week.

So we're going to do a slow-mo replay of Ephesians 2, 1-10. And today I want us to do a slow-mo replay of just verses 4 and 5. Let me read them. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

I used to be on Facebook. I'm not on Facebook anymore. Sorry, you can't add me. But when I was on it, I used to follow the Thames Valley Police Facebook page. Don't ask me why.

And now and again, they would post recent convictions of criminals and describe their crimes. At one time, a post came up of a criminal who had done some pretty disgusting things.

And they had caught and convicted him. And a woman commented just below on the Facebook post. And I saved these words. This is word for word, copy and paste. She wrote this.

[1 : 15] I just don't understand how so many people not only have these thoughts, but the urge is so intense, they know it's wrong, and still feel the need to pursue the urge and break the law.

Surely there has to be a reason for it. I just can't come to terms with the amount of people being born like this. Something must happen to cause this.

It's just so wrong. Now that woman has an excellent insight into the human condition. And she asks a big question.

What causes this? And we can look around at the world right now and be wondering exactly the same. If you've been watching the news, the names Constance Martin and Mark Gordon raises the same question.

What causes this? Or you can look at the wars in the headlines right now. You can look on the streets of Ealing. You can wonder about this question in your office.

[2 : 19] You can agonize over this question as you struggle with your family. Or maybe you're here tonight looking into your own heart and wondering the same thing.

What causes this? Well last week we saw what the cause of all this is. It is something to do with the human condition.

That the cause is it's deep within. Look at verse 1. Without Christ, without God's grace, by nature we are what? Dead in our sins.

So take away grace from the human condition. And there is only spiritual deadness. Only an opposition to God and his law.

That Facebook post was coming face to face with this deadness. But Ephesians doesn't point the finger at the convicts in the headlines to say, well that's the deadness over there.

[3 : 20] No, Ephesians speaks to the Christian. To you and me brothers and sisters. And says, this is what we were like without God's grace.

You may not have been in the headlines, but our situation is far worse than we think. Before Christ, we are by nature down to the very core, dead.

Running from God and following the world, the flesh and the devil and heading straight off a cliff. So if you did a super powered x-ray of the human heart without Christ, we are spiritually, morally dead. This is the problem of the world. It's not a lack of role models. It's not just a lack of education. By nature, you can think of the world, it's a stinking corpse.

We are by nature a stone cold body lying in a mortuary. So that Facebook post can actually be pointed to any one of us.

[4 : 30] I just can't come to terms with the amount of people being born like this. Yeah, that's me. We are all born like this.

By nature, in all of us, there is a whole reservoir of evil ready to be unleashed. But it's not good enough to just ask why.

It's no use to just ask what causes this and then leave it there. We need to ask a just as perplexing question, but just as important question.

Not just what causes this, but how can you change this? How can you even fix people like this?

These wars, these politicians, look at these thefts and burglaries.

Look at my colleagues and my family and my school. Look at the way the world is going. The world feels like it's going to hell in a handbasket. How on earth can you fix something like that?

[5 : 39] Something so entrenched and ingrained into who we are. How can you fundamentally change the dead human condition? Well, there's only one answer.

And Ephesians 2 couldn't be any clearer about it. How do you change the dead human condition? God needs to make us alive. We have in these verses tonight the answer that you and this world is crying out for.

We're doing a slow-mo replay of Ephesians 2 over the next few weeks. And this is the slow-mo replay of salvation. The slow-mo of how this unfixable world can be fixed.

How the dead human condition can really be changed. And as we watch this replay, we see something extraordinary.

The change has already begun. In fact, it's already begun where? Who's this being written to? It's begun in the Christian.

[6 : 47] How can you fundamentally change the dead human condition? Well, Paul is writing here to say, Christian, look to your own life. And you will see God made us alive.

And this is my first point I want us to see today. God made us alive. It's my first big point and then two shorter points after that. God made us alive. Let's look at verse 4.

Verse 4 is the turning point of this whole passage. In fact, this is the turning point of the whole human condition. And can you see that turning point? How does this verse start?

Verse 4. But. It starts with a contrast. But is a turning point. Not that. But.

Instead this. So you know when you see the word therefore in the Bible? Have you heard? When you see the word therefore, you need to ask, what is the therefore? Therefore.

[7 : 46] Well, here's another one. A but butts in. Right? A but butts in. A but changes something's direction. It's a turning point.

And so when you see the word but, you need to ask, what is it butting into? What came before this? What could have been? Well, it butts into what we were before Christ.

It's the turning point of a fallen humanity by nature on its own. And what were we like? Verse 1.

Hear it again. Leave this world on its own.

Step back and leave us to our own devices. Let each of our lives just play out and run their course.

And we will just follow the devil off a cliff.

This is the way that the world would just flow on its own. No hope. No life. Nothing. But. Something happens.

[8 : 55] Something butts in. Verse 4. But. God. The world. We were only going in one direction. But God.

Did something. But God. Didn't leave a world on its own. And what did he do? What is the thing that he did? Well, we need to jump.

Just jump ahead to verse 5 to see that. Verse 5. When we were dead in our trespasses. God. Made us. Alive. This is the turning point of history.

This is the turning point of the human condition. You were lost. Christian, you were following the world, the flesh and the devil. Back to God.

Middle finger up to him. But God. Reached down. Picked you up. Turned you around. Brought you to himself. And made you alive.

[9 : 54] Look again at the slow-mo replay of this world. God has reached down and brought the dead back to life.

And as you experience the deadness of this world. As you see it in the headlines. And in work. And at school. And in your family. And maybe tonight you even see it in yourself.

We know. We know we need something drastic. Seminars don't end wars. Role models don't stop these urges inside of us.

No. What do the dead need? What does someone like Putin need? Putin needs to be made alive. Constance Martin needs to be made alive. Your colleague you pray for needs to be made alive. If you're not in Christ here tonight. You need to be made alive. And this is what salvation is.

[10:57] To become a Christian. It's not just a lifestyle update. This isn't just a new hobby. Christianity is not our attempt. To get our lives back on track.

No. To become a Christian. To be saved. Is God doing something in you. It is God raising you from the dead.

When we were dead in our trespasses. God made us alive. If you're trusting in Christ here today. Then something has actually happened to you. There is a point in your life. Where you were dead in your sin. And God came down to you.

And he made you alive. We often call this conversion. From our own experience. It's the point when we stopped following the world.

[11:55] The flesh and the devil. And we started following God. And we don't always know when this point is. It might have been in the womb. Maybe it was when you were three seconds old.

You might look back at your life. And you've always believed. That's the case for me. I can't. I look back. And I can't pinpoint a moment. Of conversion.

Maybe it was in the womb. I don't really know. I can't pinpoint it. Or maybe you can. It was in the womb. It was in the womb. And you look back. And you're pretty sure it was during that sermon. Or you think, you know. Yeah, it's probably when I was praying on that walk. Or when you were just alone that one night. Or when you were reading the Bible. And the light bulbs just went on. Or maybe you can't pinpoint it. But you know it was kind of around that time. It was kind of that year probably. But you can't figure out the moment.

[12:53] Things were kind of gradual. But you know things weren't the same again. Well, whenever it was. Whether you know it or not. There is a moment when something happened to you.

You were stone cold dead. And then God made you alive. And if you got a super powered MRI scanner on you in that moment.

At that point. And you could scan your spiritual self. You will see your inner heart go from no pulse to beating.

You will see that the texture of your heart go from stone to flesh. You will see the temperature chart go from stone cold toward God.

To warmth and love toward the Lord. And this is what the Bible sometimes calls being born again. Remember that woman?

[13:59] What she wrote on Facebook? I just can't come to terms with the amount of people being born like this. Exactly. So what do we need?

We need to be born again. Salvation. It's not only about the forgiveness of sins. And it is about the forgiveness of sins.

But it's not only about the record of our sin being wiped out. But at heart salvation is about you being brought back from the dead. Salvation is God reaching down into the mortuary and making you alive.

And so this means that for those in Christ, something has actually changed in you. Because just think about it. If we were dead, and deadness means, do you remember last week, following the world, the flesh, and the devil, being ruled by those things.

Our hearts went in that direction. If that's what being dead is, then what does being made alive mean? It means going in the other direction.

[15:13] When God makes you alive, you begin to resist the course of this world. This is why, Christian, this is why you feel the flow of the world push hard against you right now.

This is why standing up for Christ at school or at work, it's not only awkward, it's painful. This is why, when the world is celebrating law changes and lifestyle choices, that we're lamenting over.

This is why we don't feel at home here anymore. This is why you cannot escape that deep down longing for heaven. You are now not following the course of this world anymore.

And so being alive, it also means you've stopped following the devil. The lies of the devil, the lie that we are fine without God, that's his big lie.

We realize how untrue that is. We hear the gospel and we realize, no, that's nonsense. And what about the desires of the flesh?

[16:27] Well, that warmth that you saw in that MRI, those are new desires in you. When God makes you alive, he puts new desires in your heart.

He gives you a new heart. With desires now to love God and obey him and worship him. To come to church and be with God's people and love and serve and forgive really hard things. Things that you could have never done before. That is God bringing new life into your heart. So don't take that for granted.

Those desires that you have, that they may be small, you may be young in your faith, but those desires are not a small thing. That is God raising the dead.

Now, we do need to say that those old desires that pulled us away from God, that those old desires, they don't disappear entirely.

[17:34] This side of heaven, we will wrestle with sin. And so if you're a Christian here tonight, and you're struggling with desires that you know aren't right, and you recognize them, and you're frustrated by them, and you just want to love God and lead a faithful life, but you see these desires and you think, you think no Christian should have these desires that you're feeling.

I want you to realize, if there is a pull of desires in you, don't think that's because you're dead. It's because you're alive. It's like a fish swimming against the flow of a river.

So think about that. If you see a fish floating at the top of a river, just going downstream, just going with it, what do you know about that fish? That fish is dead, isn't it?

It's floating, just going with the flow. There's no fight in it. But when you see a fish fighting against that current, what do you know about that fish?

It's alive. Well, to have the desire to even fight what you're fighting, that is because God has made you alive. When God saves you, something actually changes in you.

[18:59] And maybe you can see exactly that in your life. You look back and you can see that turning point. You were completely lost at uni. You were just going with the crowd.

You were heading down a scary road. But God changed everything. You were working the nine to five. You didn't realize that there was anything else.

You were blinded to anything past this world. But God shook you out of it. You were in that relationship. Your desires were pulling you there.

You didn't realize where you were heading. But God made you alive. And if you're feeling that deadness today, if you're wondering if there is any hope for this world, any hope for you, speak to any Christian here.

The answer is yes. God can make you alive because he made me alive. So what does this world need? What does your school need, your colleagues, your family?

[20:02] We need something to butt in. God needs to make us alive. The dead cannot make themselves alive. Go to a graveyard and stand by a tombstone and tell that body underground to make themselves alive.

But what's going to happen? Nothing. Well, what is going to happen to this dead world without God? If God just stepped back and there was no grace, no gospel, no God, no action, nothing, then this world, every one of us, would stay dead in our sins and fall off that cliff edge.

But God didn't do that. He made us alive. And how? How did he make us alive?

He made us alive with Christ. It's my second point today. It's going to be shorter. God made us alive with Christ. God made us alive with Christ. There's something key to how the dead human condition can be made alive.

Do you see that in verse 5? God made us alive together with Christ. Now those two words, with Christ, this means what it says it means.

[21:22] Along with Christ. Side by side with Christ. When I was made alive, I wasn't on my own. Someone else was made alive as well. I was made alive with Christ.

So have a think. And this isn't a trick question. When did that happen? When was Christ raised from the dead and God made him alive? This is talking about the resurrection.

That first Easter Sunday. And Ephesians is saying when Jesus' body was laying still in that tomb, when his heart was silent and his veins were ice cold, but then his heart started pumping.

Blood flowed through his veins. Resurrection life surged through him. He took that deep first breath. He opened his eyes, sat up, folded those grave clothes.

The tombstone rolled away and he stepped out into that Sunday morning light. Ephesians is saying when that happens, you Christian, you left the tomb there with him.

[22 : 43] You took those first steps with him. God made us alive with Christ. But you might ask, how? I wasn't there.

That was 2,000 years ago. How was I with him? Well, when God made you alive last year or 10 years ago or when you were 6 years old or when you were in the womb or whenever it may be, when God made you alive, that was you sharing in Easter Sunday.

The same resurrection power that surged through Jesus on that Sunday morning, that same power is what surged through you in that moment. And in fact, it's what's in you right now.

And so when you look at the Thames Valley Police Facebook page, how can those people change? What do our leaders need? What does Putin need? What do your colleagues need?

What do your school friends need? If you're not a Christian, what do you need? This world needs to be with Jesus. That is the only way life comes into this dead world.

[23 : 57] You need to be with him, united to him. So take it from someone who was dead but is now alive, trust in the Lord Jesus and you will be with him.

This is why we run Holiday Bible Club. This is why we have Hope Explored. This is why the language classes, this is why your prayers aren't in vain.

This world is so desperately dead and only in Christ can the dead be made alive. This is what salvation is. This is how God butted into this world.

He reached down into the mortuary and made us alive with Christ. But I want us to finish by asking, why?

Why? Why all of this? If we were dead in our sins, if we hated God, if justice demands that God's anger should be on us, if this is the natural flow of this world and in sin we want this, if this world is dead, why is there a but God?

[25 : 08] Why doesn't Ephesians 2 just end at verse 4? Why does God, why has God done anything at all in this undeserving world?

Why isn't this world in an instant just plunging down into hell? Well, the reason is found in God. Look again at verse 4.

But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ.

There is only a but God because God is rich in mercy. And it's my final point today. God is rich in mercy. Now, mercy means not giving us what we deserve.

That's what mercy means. Mercy means not giving us what we deserve. So justice alone, cold hard justice alone demands that God step back from this world.

[26 : 18] That we just live our lives and just let this world head off that cliff. That's fair, okay? That's what we deserve. But mercy, mercy is God not letting that happen.

Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. Mercy is God butting into our lives. It is this kindness, this goodness, a love toward the undeserving, the love with which he loved us.

so look back at your life. Why can I say I was lost when I was a teenager but God found me? Why can you say I was heading down a dark path but God pulled me back?

Why can we say I was going to hell, I deserved it but God gave me heaven? Why any of this at all? Why is there a but God?

Well look what comes after it but God being rich in mercy. You can look back at your life tonight and you can see what could have been, see where you were, you can see how you came alive and you can know that is because God had mercy on me.

[27 : 43] He chose to love me. He chose to not give me what I deserve but instead give me everything I don't.

And why does God show us this mercy? It's not anything in us. It's not because we were a little bit more deserving than others. No, the reason is not in us.

No, look again, God being rich in mercy. We can only be here today because God in his being who he is our God is rich in mercy.

And I want us to notice something about this phrase. Firstly, do you notice it does not say despite who God is he happened to be merciful to us. It does not say although it is out of the character of God to be merciful yet he had mercy.

No, it says God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ. It is in the character of God to have mercy.

[28 : 58] When God reveals himself to Moses in Exodus reveals who he is. Do you remember how God announces himself? Do you remember those words? He says the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious.

Our God is not this mechanical robot who knows all facts and just dishes out justice like a maths equation. No, a God like that steps back from a dead world but that is not who God is.

Our God being rich in mercy reached down to a dead world, reached down to you and me and gave the dead life. You are alive not despite who God is but because of who God is.

So if you know anyone whose name is Mercy tonight they need to know that they are named after a wonderful thing. And secondly notice how merciful he is.

God is rich in mercy and that is because big sin requires rich mercy. The bigger the sin the richer the need for mercy.

[30 : 11] And how big was our sin? How big was our deadness? Big enough that the Son of God needed to die for it. The cross is proof that sin is big but that means the cross is proof of something else.

The cross is proof that God is rich in mercy. If the Son of God gave his life for me if that is how big my sin was then my God is rich in mercy.

I was speaking to another Christian once about their salvation and they were reflecting on their past and how God saved them and they just asked why me?

Of all people why me? it is a good question to ask and we can even add why any of us? Why did God make any of us alive with Christ?

Well do you know? Because God is rich in mercy. How do we have any right to be here, to be alive? We have no right. We deserve none of this and that's exactly the point.

[31 : 24] we don't. But God is rich in mercy. Let's pray.