

# Ephesians 2:1-10

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, what does Easter mean for you? What is Easter really about? I was reflecting the other! week as I walked down the seasonal aisle in Tesco's, but for Tesco's or Sainsbury's or Cadbury,! Easter is a huge marketing opportunity. I was staggered by the range of eggs for sale. Although what do eggs have to do with resurrection, really? I guess if we went out the streets today and asked people what Easter was about, they would gladly proclaim it's about a long weekend, and they'd wish they still had the long weekend, probably, especially if it had been like this all weekend. Whole four days off, a wonderful thing if you're in England, of course, it's no time off at all if you're in Scotland, but there we go. And of course our politicians have had things to say about Easter, haven't they? David Cameron announced that Easter was a time of British values, tolerance, compassion, love. Nick Clegg, who famously is a self-confessed atheist, said on his Facebook page that Easter was a time of reflection and renewal, when everyone has a chance to take stock of what is truly important to them and their families.

I wonder if you've done that this past weekend. And Ed Miliband also had his little things to say, that he was looking forward to spending the weekend with his family and his constituency in Doncaster, and in the midst of Easter celebration, he wrote, our hearts go out to those who face difficult times overseas and closer to home. He particularly then mentioned those grieving lost loved ones in Kenya. Well, a good sentiment, I'm sure. But is that what Easter is about?

Is Easter about a bit of time for reflection? A bit of time for embracing British values? A bit of time for remembering those less fortunate than ourselves. Well, if we ask the Apostle Paul what Easter is about, he'd give us a very different answer. In a sense, he outlines that answer here in the start of Ephesians chapter 2. He's just described, at the end of chapter 1, how God exerted this great power in raising Jesus from the dead, in raising him not just from the dead, but exalting him on high above every power and authority in this age and the age to come, and above every name, as he says in verse 21. That is the power that God worked in that first Easter. But Paul wants us to know that that power doesn't just stop there. It's not just a distant memory. It's not just something God did to Jesus then. It's not even just something God will do to people who trust in him in the future. It's something that God does now in all who believe in Christ. Look at verse 5, look at verse 6 for a moment. Sorry, verse 5 of chapter 2.

Even when we are dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ. He has made us alive together with Christ. At Easter, Christians celebrate Jesus being raised from the dead. But Paul is saying here, that is what has happened to anyone who has faith in Christ. Not just that one day we will be raised from the dead when we have died and come back to life physically, although that is true, that will happen, but that even now, people who are once dead are raised to life. That's what Easter means for us. What has happened to Jesus happens to all who have faith in Christ. So what does this new life look like? Well, as we look at these verses, we see it means true freedom, a new destiny, and a new purpose. True freedom, a new destiny, and a new purpose. Let's look at the true freedom first, the verses 1 to 5.

[ 3 : 39 ] If you've ever watched television, I'm sure you've seen those kind of adverts which have the before and after. Here is a kitchen floor cleaned with your usual floor cleaning agent. It's still pretty dirty. Here is the new improved floor. Look how bright and sparkling, blindingly white it is. Idea, buy the new product. Well, Paul does something like that before and after demo here in Ephesians chapter 2. It looks at the contrast of what we were before, what everyone is before, to what everyone is who trusts in Christ after. So let's look at the before.

Verse 1. And you, talking to the Ephesian Christians, you were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked. You were dead, he says. In fact, he says that's true of all mankind. We were all dead. Now, as we look out in the streets, we see people walking around, looking very much

alive. So what does Paul mean about being dead? Well, he tells us, doesn't he, there in verse 1. Dead in trespasses and sins. Trespasses, crossing over a line, going where you shouldn't go, breaking a law of God. Sins, falling short of the mark, falling short of what we want to be, let alone what God wants us to be. And if we think for a minute, we know that's true of all of us, don't we? We know that's true of all of us. There was a film on film 4 just before Easter, Atonement. Sorry, James McAvoy and Keira Knightley, amongst others. The original story written by an atheist, Ian McEwan. But it tells the story of a young woman who lied at one point in her life, and spends the rest of her life trying to make atonement for that. Having lied about a man, and then getting into huge trouble, destroying his life through that lie. She spends the rest of her life trying to atone for it, trying to make up for it.

And yet she cannot. And actually, if most of us are honest, if we think about our lives, there are things we've done, there are ways we've fallen short of the mark. There are ways we've crossed over the line, which leave us dead, leave us wishing we could make it better.

Paul says we're all dead like that. We've all fallen into these transgressions and sins. It's relevant and real for all of us. And in saying that, Paul also spells out how we're trapped by that. Not only dead, but trapped. Look at what he goes on to explain about the way in which we once lived, the way we once lived, verse 2. Following the course of this world. Following the prince of the power of the air and the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of our body and the mind. And we're by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. So there are three things that keep us trapped. There's our environment, our enemy, and our own nature. The environment, verse 2. Following the course of this world.

The environment we live in. We're just caught up in it. We're just going away the world, we're going away of the world. Doing things which are falling short. Doing things that are crossing the line. We're trapped. The world around us is part of what causes us to do those things. But it's not just the environment, is it? It's also the enemy. He goes on.

[ 7 : 04 ] Following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. The Bible is very clear there's a real enemy out there, the devil. When Paul says he's the prince of the air, he's appealing to the idea that was around at the time of the air there being a kind of spiritual space, if you like, kind of between earth and heaven.

He says the devil's having control of that. He has great influence over the atmosphere in which we live. He is a personal enemy. He's hostile to God. And what was the devil's first trick back at the start of the Bible? It was to cause people to doubt God's goodness and doubt God's word. That's what he did in the Garden of Eden. And he still does that, doesn't he? Causes us to doubt the truth of what God says, the reality of what God promises.

So there we have an enemy who's against us. The environment, an enemy, and then there's our own nature. Look on at verse 3. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. So it's our own nature. When he talks about desires there, it's not just sexual desires and stuff like that, but it's all the desires within us. The desire to get even. The desire to dominate. The desire to have our ways instead of let other people have their ways. They're all part of the desires we follow, aren't they? I find that in my own life, like, always want to have the last word with my children. Why is that? It's actually my selfish desire to be in control. And I follow that desire. You see, we're all trapped. We're all slaves. Dead in transgressions and sin. Enslaved by an enemy, by the environment, by our own desires. And actually we see that all around us, don't we? Think back to the adverts we see in January. New year, new you. You can change. You can be different. It's always the promise every January, isn't it? It's even the promise we get in springtime. New fashions, new season. Wear new clothes, be a new person. Because actually there's this desire for freedom. Desire for newness. Desire for change. And Paul says, Paul is showing us that that desire has come to a good place. Because we need to be new. We are dead. We are trapped. So that's the before. That's the dirty kitchen floor on the left side of your screen on television. Now we get the after. The difference Easter has made.

Look at verse 5. Or verse 4. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead at our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. See, Easter is not just a past event. Not just something that happened to Jesus. Not just a future event where all who believe in Jesus will be raised physically when he returns. But it's a present reality for

anyone who's trusted in Christ. We are raised to new life. Look at the transformation.

[10:13] Verse 1, we were dead. Verse 5, alive. Verse 3, we were children of wrath. Verse 5, we receive grace. By grace you've been saved. And that gives freedom. Freedom to know God.

Instead of being dead. If you're dead, you don't know anyone, do you? You're just dead. We raise to life to know God. We see that in verse 6. God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. There's a relationship there. We're free to know God. And also free to live as we were meant to live. No longer enslaved by the world, by the devil, by our own nature. But free to live as we're meant to live. That is part of what Paul is pointing to there when he says we've been seated with Christ. What does that mean?

Look back for a moment to verse 21 of the previous chapter, the top of the page. Or verse 20 even. God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated Christ at his right hand in the heavenly places. That's where Jesus is. He's at God's right hand, ruling over all the spiritual forces in the universe, ruling over even that enemy who seeks to enslave us.

Where are we? We are seated with Christ. That means we have access to his authority, his power. We no longer need to be slaves to the enemy who wants to enslave us. We're free to be the people God has created us to be, and newly created us to be. So we don't have any power ourselves. But we do because we are seated in Christ. So that's the before and after contrast.

We have freedom. Instead of being dead and enslaved, we're alive and free in Christ. Now how does that happen? Does that happen through our own efforts? Does it happen because we earn it in some way? Well look what Paul says. How does it happen? Why does this come about? Verse 4 is because of but God being rich in mercy. Because of the great love with which he's loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

[12:32] We don't make ourselves alive. That's true. True natural life, isn't it? When you and I were born, it wasn't because we made ourselves alive. We were born into the world. So God makes us alive with Christ. Why? Well it's because of his mercy. Verse 4. He's rich in mercy.

It's because of his great love which is undeserved. He loved us even when we were dead, even though there was nothing lovely about us. It's because of his grace. The end of verse 5. By grace you have been saved. Grace is God's unmerited goodness to the totally undeserving. Nothing we earn. And Paul goes on, doesn't he? Verse 7. It's because of God's kindness. In the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. And that hints also of God's purpose, which we'll come to again in a moment. See, all this happens. All this Easter power changes us. Not because of what we've done, but because of who God is and what he's like. Because of his incredible love and mercy and grace and kindness. So what does Easter mean for you? Well firstly it means freedom. No longer trapped by the old way of life. No longer stuck in the habits and sins that we feel captured by. But raised to live a new life. Raised with Jesus. Raised to live the life we were originally intended for. So that's the first thing. It means freedom. Well secondly it also means a new destiny. We'll see that in the next few verses. Let's look back again to verse 2 first though. See the way in which we used to live. Which all people used to live. Verse 2. You were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world. Now the original language literally says the age of this world. The idea being there in the Bible of history in a sense can be divided between two ages. There's this present evil age as Paul talks about it in Galatians chapter 1. This age where characterized by a world turned against the God who made us. And that's the age we used to be part of. That's our old home if you like. But there's another age as well. Look at verse 7. God raises us in Christ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. In other words there's another age coming. We're part of this new age that's coming. It's our new destiny. Our new home. We've been transferred from an old age to a new one. It's like moving country. A few years ago I lived in America for a couple of years. We had a nice time there. I won't equate America to this present evil age. Don't worry. My American brother's here. But then we were transferred. We moved back to this country. So we had new laws. A new way of life. We started driving on the left again instead of the right. All that kind of stuff. And so it is. Paul says you have a new home. A new destiny. You've been taken out of that old way in which you used to walk in the ways of this world. You're set apart. You belong to a new age. You have a new home. Now we all know this world is not the way it's supposed to be, isn't it? We all long for something better. We long to turn on the news and not see the rubble of Tikrit and other cities destroyed by IS. In our own lives we've got things we know are wrong. A few years ago a Scottish band Travis sang a song called

Turn. He included this line, I want to live in a world where I belong. And that's what we all want, isn't it? We want to feel this place where we belong. I think it was last month. There was a terrible, terrible accident in Bath, near where my brother used to live actually, where I think it was a dumper truck came down the hill. And for whatever reason it smashed into some children leaving school. One of the eyewitnesses the BBC interviewed that night in the news said, it just felt wrong. I felt I shouldn't have been here. And he's right, isn't he? In the chaos and the destruction and the grief of this world, it's wrong. It's not what we were made for. Paul says, in Jesus we've been raised to be set apart from this old age where he walked in the ways of this world for a new age to come. We have a new destiny. We have a new destiny. And why is God giving us this new destiny? Why is he doing it? Well, it's there in verse 7, isn't it? In verse 6. God raised us up with Christ, seeked us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

See, actually, it's not about us, it's about him. It's so for all of eternity, everyone will see how amazingly great and kind and loving and rich God is in mercy.

[ 17 : 55 ] Right? Chapter 1, verse 19, talked about the immeasurable greatness of his power. Here we get the immeasurable richness of his grace. See, it's not about us. It's bigger than us, but it includes us.

That's what Easter means. It's not about you or me, but it does involve us. It's bigger than us. It's about God. So Easter means we have freedom. Easter also means we have a new destiny. A new home, if you like.

We also have a new purpose. Let's look quickly at verses 8 to 10. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God. Not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Naturally in life, we're quite into achieving things for ourselves, aren't we? We like to talk about our achievements, many of us. I'm sure we've all got friends who like to talk about their achievements so much that we really don't like to talk to them, because we just keep on going on about it. We often talk, don't we, about someone being a self-made man or a self-made woman. In a sense, that's part of human striving. We want to achieve something. We want to make something of our lives, make something of ourselves. Yet you see how these verses turn out completely on its head. By grace you've been saved through faith. This is not your doing. It is the gift of God. Not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For those who want something to boast about, Christianity is a nightmare, isn't it? Because none of us have something to boast about. If we're Christians, we've got nothing to boast about. All we contribute to our salvation, all we contribute to our own rescue, is our sin from which we need to be saved. So God has done this. Verse 10, we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. It's a radical judgment on human nature, isn't it? Actually, we cannot do anything good on our own. Anything we have is God's goodness. It's because God has remade us. We were broken. We need to be fixed. We were dead. We need to be made alive. God has done that. And why has he done that? Well, there are two reasons Paul gives us here in verses 9 and 10. So that, verse 9, no one may boast. It's not about me. It's not about you. And the second reason, verse 10, that we should walk in them. Walk in the good works God has prepared us for.

[ 20 : 32 ] That's a contrast to verses 1 and 2, where we, by nature, walk in transgressions and sins. We walk in dead ways. Now God has remade us, made us new. We're his workmanship, so that we walk in the good ways he's prepared for us. And you notice the order here. We aren't saved by good works. We are saved to do good works. We don't work hard so God will love us. We are loved by God, and so we're changed. God's work in saving us is the root that then bears fruit in our lives. Because without his work, we can't do anything. We're dead. We're dead. That's what Paul has told us before, isn't it? We can never be good enough to be accepted.

We can never be good enough to earn our way in the age to come. But we can trust in what has happened at Easter. Jesus has been raised, and so we live too. If we've trusted in him, we have freedom. Free from our old ways. We have a new destiny. We're part of the age to come. We have a new purpose. To live God's ways. Do the works he's prepared for us. Instead of our own ways, our old ways. The last couple of months I've been getting to know, a student at the university near here. And he's not a believer in Christ. He's a man with lots of questions. I think that's a good thing, to a point. But one of the things he said to me once is, I want to be a good person. I want to be

better. I don't want to keep making silly mistakes and doing stupid things and wrong things. And that's a great thing to want. But he cannot do it on his own. I cannot do it on my own. You cannot do it on your own.

What we need is the truth of Easter. We need to be made alive with Christ. To have freedom for our old ways. To have a new destiny and a new purpose. To live God's way, not for our own glory. Let's pray.