



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 2: 1-7

Ephesians

“From Death to Life”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] A visitor would come in, he would have heard a very interesting passage of scripture this morning which is Ephesians 2:1-7 in which Paul in a very clear way describes our former condition before we came to Christ and how desperate we were. But how greatly the grace of God has intervened to save us and change us.

Ephesians 2, beginning with verse 1 Paul writes, “And you,” that is you gentiles, “were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formally walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” Let me make just a couple of comments on that verse, that description of the prince of the power of the air.

It is a description of Satan. He is the prince; he is one who has authority. The power of the air probably is to be understood that word power is a collective term of the demonic forces of over which he has authority. And the air is there’s some debate as to what that refers to. Some suggests that it refers to the unseen realm, the spiritual realm, the world of the spirits.

And yet it is consistently in the New Testament used of the atmosphere above the earth, what we might call the second heaven or the place where the clouds are and that’s how I’m going to take it, recognizing that of course it’s true that they occupy the spiritual realm, but since the word is always used in terms of the air that we breathe and the atmosphere that seems that he’s saying that they occupy that region.

So he is the prince of the demonic powers that occupy that area and of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. As I recall, the authorized version, the King James version begins that second part. He's the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working. That translation would suggest that the spirit is the prince, the devil, that they are the same.

And some do take it that way, but I'm more inclined to understand this as a second force. That it's grammatically the same as the word powers, of the powers and it would be translated here of as the New American Standard version translate it of the spirit. So he's the prince of the spirit, that is the spirit of this age. He inspires that spirit, that attitude that is against God and opposed to His work.

So this is the devil, this is Satan. He is a prince. He is a being of great power and authority over the power or the powers of the air and over the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. “Among them, we too,” that is we Jews, you gentiles were dead and you were walking according to this course among the sons of disobedience and among them, among the sons of disobedience, we too, we Jews, “formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

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), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our study of it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we do come before with thankful hearts. We come to this passage in the Book of Ephesians that reminds us in no uncertain terms, in very clear and direct statements of our hopeless condition apart from your grace. And that is Paul's purpose, Father, to remind us of what we were in order that we might have a great appreciation of it, a great appreciation of what you have done for us and what we are.

Because apart from that grace, we would continue to be sons of disobedience, we would continue to be children of wrath, dead in our trespasses in sins, worthy of that wrath and worthy of nothing short of it. But God, but you intervened with mercy,

with love to make us alive together with Christ and thank you for the life you've given us, that we pray that as we study together we might be moved to a sense of gratitude, that we would have greater gratitude leaving this time together than we had coming in and may you prepare us with our time of study this morning for the week to come, that our lives might reflect the grace that you have shown us and exercised toward us and the change that you have brought in us.

By grace we have been saved and nothing short of that. Thank you, Father. And pray, Lord, not only that you would bless us spiritually with instruction and edification, building us up in the faith, but you might give encouragement and provision to those who have need in the material things of this life. We're all in need, Father. We know that everything that we have, we have as a gift from you.

Your grace extends to every aspect of life and we thank you for what you have done for us and are doing for us and will continue to do for us. And yet we remember those who are in particular need. We pray for the unemployed, we pray for the sick, we pray for the grieving. We pray that you might supply them with all that is needed.

Build them up in the faith and we think of material needs and physical distress, we think of the tragedy to the north in Oklahoma City and we pray for those who are engaging in rescue efforts at this time. We pray you'd give them strength and we pray that if there are any individuals still alive within that destroyed building, that you might spare them and bring them out, bring them to the attention of the rescuers and save them.

Pray for those who grieve, we pray that you'd bless them and we pray that through all of this that you might bring blessing out of tragedy and enable individuals who perhaps were not thinking in terms of spiritual things before and eternal matters to cause them to do so. And remind us all through these things, tragedies like them that life is brief and it can be snatched away at any time.

Thank you that we are secure in your hand, but we are reminded by these events how evil the world is in which live and that we were once a part of that. But you have saved us. You have delivered us. You have seated us in the heavenly places, that's where our citizenship is and we praise you and thank you for it.

Now we pray your blessings upon us. We pray that as we sing our final hymn that it would be good preparation for our hearts as we study. We pray that you'd bless us this evening as we come back for the meeting of the church and the Lord's support

and remind, remembering His death and His resurrection, His ascension and His coming again.

And we pray that as we focus upon Lord and think of Him that you would bless us greatly. Bless our time now, bless our time this evening, bless our time throughout the week and we would honor you and pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] One of the great books in the western world and the masterpiece of the Middle Ages is Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, story of Dante's imaginary journey through hell and up to heaven. He imagined hell to be an inverted cone at the center of earth composed of nine circles and each of those circles became increasingly worse.

And the story begins with him descending through each circle until he came to the last circle where the worst of sinners were kept and there he sees Lucifer. Well, it concludes with Dante leaving and later climbing a mountain until he reaches the summit and enters paradise where he sees a vision of God. So it moves from the depths of hell to the heights of heaven and I mention that because it's similar to Paul's outline of our passage in Ephesians 1:1-7 in which he moves from the tomb to heaven, from death to life.

Paul's method here is one of contrast and it's a method designed to show us the greatness of grace. And so it takes us on a kind of journey through the spiritual morgue where we once were to the heavenlies where we are now seated with Christ Jesus. And there's great value in considering that contrast because we can't really appreciate what we are as Christians, what we are as believers in Jesus Christ and what we have as Christians until we understand what we once were and what we once lacked.

And what we lacked was everything. That's where Paul begins. He says, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." We lacked life. We were dead he says. And he's speaking in absolute terms when he says that. He's not speaking figuratively. We were dead. We were not sickened to death, not half dead as Calvin says, some want to say, but dead in a real and present death. We were lifeless. That was our spiritual condition.

Kent Hughes, the pastor of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois gives a somewhat bizarre illustration of this. He writes that he has a photograph of the corpse

of the philosophy Jeremy Bentham who was the Father of Utilitarianism. The pictures shows his body sitting in a chair dressed in 19th Century clothes because when he died he gave orders that his entire estate be given to the University College Hospital in London on condition that his body be preserved and placed in attendance at all of the hospital’s board meetings.

Now this was faithfully carried out and every year to this day according to what I read, his body is wheeled into the board room and wheeled up to the table and chairman says, “Jeremy Bentham, present but not voting.” And there’s no way they’ll ever persuade him to vote because Jeremy Bentham is dead.

Now Paul says that’s our condition. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. He says, first of all, you gentiles in verse 1 were dead. A church in Ephesus was principally a gentile church and he’s writing to them, principally is gentiles, but Paul will then go on to include himself and the rest of the Jewish people because he says in verse 3, we, that is we Jews were in no different condition. That’s the condition of mankind, all mankind.

We are dead in our trespasses and sins. Now obviously there is life of a sort, men move about enjoying good healthy, they are intellectually active, they engage in business and romance and they talk philosophy. There is life. There is biological life. There is intellectual life. There is emotional life, but there is no spiritual life. The soul is dead. It is cut off completely from God and from the life of God.

And that’s Paul’s meaning. Men are as unresponsive to God and to the things of God as a corpse is a call to vote. Paul puts it very plainly in other places of scripture, too, if it’s not plain enough here, but he says in Romans 3:9-18, citing the Old Testament, a passage that I often quote because it makes it so clear. He says there’s none righteous. And that’s absolutely. There are none left to ourselves. There is none righteous, none who understands, none who seeks for God.

And he goes on to speak more fully about that, but all of the things that he says in that passage are the symptoms of death. And the cause of this death, this spiritual death is sin. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, the wages of sin is death and we were once dead because of sin.

Now sin, very simply, can be defined as missing the mark. There is a very good illustration of that in the Old Testament. In Judges 20 there is a description given of some warriors of the Tribe of Benjamin, 700 warriors that are left-handed

warriors and very skilled with a sling, so skilled, it says, that they could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

Now that word miss is often used of sin. It's the word for sin in the Old Testament. And so sin is missing the mark. It is falling short of God's standard of His righteousness. The shorter cataclysm of the Westminster Confession of Faith defines sin as any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. Sin is transgressing, breaking the law of God or not conforming to the law of God.

Either way, it's missing the mark and the first man to sin was Adam and because he is the father of us all, because he is our federal head, our first representative, all mankind fell with him. We can think of it in terms of a fall that might occur on a mountain. Imagine a group of mountain climbers making their way up the side of a great mountain, say the Matterhorn. They're all roped together with Adam in the lead. Then Adam loses his footing and falls.

Because of the rope, every one of the climbers is pulled over the edge with Adam and plunged to the valley below. That's the situation with the whole human race which is roped, so to speak, to Adam, connected to him as our head. When Adam decided to sin, he brought us all down with himself in his disobedience.

Now that may seem to you and I know it seems to many to be unfair that we would suffer the consequences of another man's sin, but that is exactly what the scriptures teach. One example and one clear example of that is Romans 5:12, “Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” One man sinned and that caused sin to spread throughout the race because he was the representative head of us all.

And the evidence that we have all fallen is, as Paul says, that we all sin. We have all inherited Adams guilt. It has been imputed to us and we have all inherited his condition of sinfulness. The stream was polluted at its source and Adam as that source and his sin has spread to all mankind. It has affected us all.

But if you find the principle of representation objectionable, then realize that by that same principle of representation, the way is open to rescue. The way is open to restoration and life. And Paul goes on in that same chapter in Romans 5:17 to say, “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who believe – rather those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”

In other words, what Adam did in the fall, Christ has undone through His righteous act on the cross. He is the second representative head, the last Adam and he restores to life and blessing all those whom he represented. So while men followed Adam over the edge, so to speak, because we were all roped to him, at the end of the line was the Lord Jesus Christ and He stands fast. Because he did not sin, he was able to offer up the perfect sacrifice for sin and due to His obedience in death, all who are united to Him through faith, all those whom He represented are saved by Him, the last Adam reverses the fall of the first Adam.

Apart from His saving work, we would all be lost forever because we were born guilty, born with sin reigning in us. The very course of a person's life proves that and that's what Paul goes on to show. He says we are dead and then he gives a clear evidence of it in verses 2 and 3 where he speaks of our former manner of life, our previous conduct, what Paul calls our walk.

Because of sin we were held captive to three forces, the world, the flesh and the devil and our behavior was directed by each of them. We didn't walk according to righteousness. We didn't follow God's standard; we didn't walk in His way. He says formally we walked according to the course of this world. Literally according to the age of this world which brings together two ideas, the age, this present age which is an evil age in contrast to the age to come, the Messianic Age when righteousness will reign.

So we walked according to this age and according to this world, this cosmos which sometimes simply refers to the material universe, the stars and the planets, but usually it refers to an evil system, to society that is organized without reference to God or organized against God. It is secular; it is materialistic. It is man-centered, it is self-centered.

It's a system that's defined as the circle of earthly goods, riches, advantages that's seduced from God and are obstacles to the cause of Christ. So it would include such things as the love of money, the love of pleasure, the love of prestige, the desire of status and many other things such as that. That's the system that we were born into and that we were a part of, that governed our life and our conduct and our thinking.

And secondly, he says we walked under the influence of the devil. We walked according to the prince of the power of the air. That's not very fashionable in modern times to believe in a personal devil. Paul says, though, that he exists. The bible is

very clear about that. Men want to present the devil as nothing more than a personification of evil, but the scriptures are clear that he is a real personality.

Bible states, for example, that he is the ruler of this world. Now he is the ruler of demons and the god of this age. And here, Paul calls him a prince. He's a person. He has a personality and one with power. He is a leader. He directs the power of the air, a reference to the vast demonic hosts that dwell in the air it would seem in the atmosphere above the earth.

And Paul goes on to state that this prince, this powerful individual, this being is now working in the sons of disobedience. Exercise control over the unsaved of this world. Now that doesn't mean that all of the unsaved, that all unbelievers are demon-possessed. Not at all. But it does mean that they are all under, in some way to some degree, his influence. He promotes the spirit of this age which is hostile to God and hostile to God's people.

The Lord called him a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies. And that's his influence among this world. He is the father of lies; he is the author of evil and violence and error. And through his spiritual forces, which are vast and which Paul will elaborate more in chapter 6 describe what we wore against principalities and powers, spiritual forces in heavenly places.

And through all of that, through that vast host of demonic power, he inspires the spirit of this age, he inspires men in their unbelief and he blinds men to the truth. That's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that he has blinded the minds of the unbelieving. That fits with this description our Lord gives as the father of lies. He blinds men to the truth.

And that is the condition of this lost world and we were once a part of that, he says. We, too, were at one time blinded by him and energized and inspired by him to be disobedient, to be sons of disobedience. And so we walked according to this world. We walked according to the prince of this world and the third influence that he lists here is the flesh.

Paul writes in verse 3 that we, “lived in the lusts of our flesh.” We followed the desires and the thoughts of a corrupt, sinful nature which produces lust and immorality, jealousy, anger, envying, drunkenness and many other vices. Paul lists them in Galatians 5:19-21 as the deeds of the flesh and other vices could be listed in addition to that.

And so formally before Christ, before we trusted in Him and exercised faith in Him, we were subject to enslaving influences from within and without. From within with the flesh and without the world. And then in addition to all of that, beyond them and in them both from the devil himself.

That is true of all mankind without exception, Jew and Gentile alike. That’s what Paul says in verse 3. Among them, he says, among the sons of disobedience, we too, we Jews along with you Gentiles lived in the lusts of our flesh. That’s mankind naturally and left to ourselves, not a very attractive picture. We were dead in our sins and captive to evil influences and willingly held captive. No one is coerced by the world or the devil to sin.

We naturally follow the impulses of the flesh. We were sons of disobedience. We were willing participants because our heart is naturally inclined toward evil and we naturally follow that inclination. Now all of this, if we want to put a doctrine, a label upon it, falls under the heading of total depravity, a term that describes our condition.

Because of the fall, all men have been tainted by sin in every part of our person. Total depravity does not mean that we are totally bad. It is sometimes misconstrued to mean that, that we are totally evil, that we are all equally evil and that men are not capable of any good. Doesn’t mean that at all. Doesn’t mean that all human beings are equally depraved. It doesn’t mean that nobody is capable of any good.

And we see that just in the course of our daily affairs. We see many individuals doing good things and our Lord recognize that, scriptures teach that men can do good things. The Lord recognized this capability in bad men when he said in Luke 11:13, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

No one would deny that men have acted bravely, generously, hospitably. All men can do humanly good things. Paul in Acts 28, when he speaks of his shipwreck on the isle of Malta describes the inhabitants of that island pagan individuals but describes the kindness that they exercise toward these shipwrecked individuals and speaks of it as extraordinary kindness.

So men are capable of that. Total depravity doesn't mean that men can't do any good thing. Total depravity simply means that no part of a person, the body, the mind, the will, the affections, no part of our person has been left untainted by sin. Sin has caused death and death has caused corruption. All men are equally dead but not equally corrupt.

We are not all alike in our behavior and in our previous life, our former life as part of this world we were not all equally bad. There were variations of that. Let me illustrate the difference. Suppose you are on a battlefield and there were corpses all around. After days and days of fighting they would look different.

If you came upon the body of a young soldier who had just fallen, there might not appear to be any signs of death in him. He might even appear to simply be sleeping. While if you came upon a body that had been lying there for some time for some days, the corruption would be far more advanced and his appearance would be obviously that of death and corruption.

But is there really any difference between the two? Does one have a greater advantage over the other? No, not at all. They're equally dead. And so it is with all men spiritually. We enter this world equally dead. Death doesn't have degrees. It's just that some men wear their spiritual death better than others. But regardless of how good men might be in relationship to one another, in relationship to God, we all fall far short. That's what Paul says in Romans – rather Romans 3:23, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” fall far short of His standard of perfection.

Man's situation has been compared to a group of people standing on the bank of a great river, say the Mississippi River which in some places is a mile wide. And a group of various people are standing there, there are some young, some old, some weak, some strong and each one takes his or her turn trying to jump across the river.

Well, the little children and the old people struggle and they maybe jump a few inches or maybe a foot out into the water, don't do very well. And the older children and the young adults, they do much better. They jump a few feet out and then perhaps there's some athletes there. They're very strong and very skilled and they're able to fling themselves far out into the water.

They're far better than the original group, that group of young or old people, but none of them, not even the best of them comes anywhere near the other bank. They all fall terribly short. And in life examples can be found of men who have done

noble deeds, heroic and kind deeds who are far better than most men, men that we admire.

But compared to God, all of us, even the best of us, fall short because sin has affected all of us, causing us to be dead spiritually, dead to God, but alive to sin. Vigorous in sin and trespasses. Now that's total depravity. And as a result of our sinful condition, Paul says, we're by nature children of wrath even as the rest.

We were objects of God's wrath by nature from birth. We have inherited our sinful condition. We were born with it and the evidence is seen in our lives and it is seen from a very early age. We sometimes speak of infants as innocents because they haven't actually done an evil deed. But the evil is there. And its lurking in the heart and it doesn't take long to show itself.

And parents know that, particularly if they're attentive to their children and they know their children and they see that very fact. And some parents see it in other children more than in other children. It manifests itself more clearly. There's a story about a small boy, a cute little guy who goes to school for his first day and his first day of school he walks up to his teacher and he hands her an envelope.

And the envelope has a black border around it. Teacher opens it up and then finds that it contains a card printed with the words, a message of sympathy to tell you that my thoughts and heartfelt sympathy are with you. The mother had written the card and then she puts the words thank you and good luck.

She was a mother who knew her child. She knew his capabilities, as cute as he was. And that's true of all of us. We are all by nature sinners and children of wrath, even when we were children, even as the rest. That's the condition of all mankind and it is a desperate condition. It is a lost and a ruined condition, a condition deserving of wrath, one in which we are helpless to change our course, helpless to alter things, and a condition that introduces us to what have to be among the two greatest words in the bible, but God.

We were dead, we were sons of disobedience, children of wrath but God, being rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ. That little word but has been called a mighty adversative, carries us from death to life, from the tomb to the heavenlies. It introduces us to the answer to the human condition which is God and His mercy.

One of the great statements of the bible is Micah 7:18, “God delights in mercy.” And that’s why we receive it. We do not receive mercy because we deserve it. We don’t. We receive it because God delights in it. He delights in showing mercy. And that’s the theme that Paul develops here. But God being rich in mercy giving abundant help to the helpless for that’s what mercy is.

And that’s what God has done for us. He has shown us mercy. And the reason, the motive for His rich mercy is His great love. He is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us. It’s as though Paul is piling up that word Love to make it very clear that we are what we are. We have been shown mercy because of the love of God, the great love with which He loved us.

The reason for mercy is not to be traced in any redeeming virtue in us. Paul has made it very clear that there is no redeeming virtue in us. We are dead; we are sons of disobedience, left to ourselves we are deserving of nothing but the wrath of God. The mercy of God can be traced to God Himself and only to God and to His infinite inscrutable love, His unconditional love.

And to that, Paul adds in verses 5 and 7, God’s grace and kindness. So he gives us four qualities when he describes God and describes His character. Mercy, grace, love and kindness. Those are the great characteristics of God that the authors of the scriptures love to write about and rejoice in. Because of His love, because of His mercy, His grace, His kindness, He has saved us, He has made us alive.

Paul says raised us up from the dead spiritually, forgiven our sins, given us spiritual life and fellowship with them and all the blessings that go with that fellowship and that life and that future that is ours. We begin now as a result to understand things that previously we did not, to see things differently, to desire spiritual things that before we were blind to and had no interest in.

Now because of the grace of God and the life that He has put within us, we have new perspective, new desires. We have begin to live differently. He has made us alive. And not only that, but He has also raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places.

We have ascended into heaven Paul says. Not physically, of course, but spiritually. And that means that the power of the heavenly realm is for us now. It was against us. We were children of wrath, but now that infinite omnipotent power of God is for us. We are seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

Paul puts it differently in Philippians 3:20 where he says our citizenship is in heaven. But we live in this world, we live in Satan’s domain, but we are not a part of it. We are a part of heaven. That is where our loyalty lies. That is where our citizenship is. We are citizens of heaven, people who are seated, as it were, in heaven and we have the rights and the privileges of heaven now in this life in this world.

And we have all of this because of Christ. By virtue of our union with Him, we were made alive together with Christ, raised up with Him, seated with Him, seated in the heavenly places Paul says in verse 6 in Christ Jesus. Because He chose to be our substitute, because He chose to join Himself to us as our representative, we have these blessings. He’s gained them for us.

The power of heaven, as a result, has now been brought down to us in our lives and we are already enjoying it in part, not in full, but in part. And the fact that our representative head, our federal head is in heaven presently is the guarantee that we will someday actually be there with Him too to enjoy that power and that life to the full.

That’s where our inheritance is presently. That’s what Peter tells us. Writes in 1 Peter 1:4 that we have reserved for us in heaven an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away. It is there because we are there in our substitute, our representative head.

The reason we have all of this, the reason we have this life and we have these blessings, we have this great position, the reason for it, the motive behind it is that the love of God and the goal of these blessings is the glory of God and that’s what Paul says in verse 7. “In order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

A Roman matron was one asked, “Where are your jewels?” And she responded by bringing out her two sons and saying, “These are my jewels,” and for all eternity that will be the situation for each of us. We will be, for the Lord, the brilliant displays of His great grace, mercy and love.

Now that being so, how should we live now? We have been made alive. Should we then not live as men and women who are alive and not as dead? There are many who profess faith in Jesus Christ but who live as though they were still dead in sin, still in love with the world as though they have no connection with the heavenlies.

But if we are alive with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly places, then we cannot live as citizens of this world. We are not citizens of this world, not spiritually. We are aliens. We are foreigners passing through. Oh, we have a citizenship, it's true, and to the degree that we live as citizens of heaven, we will be effective citizens on this earth and we will make a contribution to our government and to our state and we will be loyal and helpful, but only to the degree that we are good citizens of heaven.

Spiritually we are aliens, we are like the patriarchs who are passing through. We are like Abraham who is described in the Book of Genesis and then in Hebrews 11. You look at his life and it's very interesting. He was a man who had been blessed greatly by God but he built no cities, he built no house, he lived in a tent. He and the patriarchs lived as aliens in Canaan. They wandered. The only thing that Abraham built was alters.

He did not live for this world. The author of Hebrews tells us that he was looking for a city that has foundations, its builder and maker is God. And that's how we are to live in this world, as citizens and that we are to be good American citizens, but our citizenship is not here. It is in the world to come. And so we are to live differently because we are different from the rest of the world. It's difficult to live that way and we feel the pressures of the world and we are pressured to conform.

The Corinthians were very much like that. They were a fleshly people, a worldly people and so Paul had to exhort them and instruct them and in one way in 2 Corinthians 6:17 he writes, “‘Come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean.’” He does not mean separate yourself from the world and live in ascetic kind of life like a monk or a recluse somewhere. We cannot do that.

In fact, he tells the Corinthians, we cannot take ourselves out of the world. But we're to live as different from the world. We're to live as a people unto God and not the things of this world. Well, grace enables us to do that. Grace changes our lives. It gives us new desires and it gives the ability to live according to those new desires and live different lives.

Clarence Macartney tells the story of the conversation of Colonel James Gardiner, a Scottish officer, the son of an officer. He was a daring soldier who had many escapes, narrow escapes from death, but none of them made him think seriously

about eternal issues or led him to abandon his immoral life. His mother prayed fervently for him, but nothing changed. Gardiner was so given over to this way of life, to this immorality that he lived that he said that the omnipotence itself could not reform him without destroying his body and giving him another.

Well, one Sunday evening in 1719, he had an appointment a rendezvous with a married woman at midnight. But as he sat in his rooms impatiently waiting for the time to come, he happened to pick up a book that had been given to him by his mother before he left home, a book entitled *The Christian Soldier or Heaven Taken by Storm*. As he was reading the book, really not paying much attention to it, he dozed off and he had a dream.

And in this dream he saw a sudden blaze of light and saw Christ on the cross surrounded with glory and he heard a voice saying, “Oh sinner, did I suffer this for thee and are these the returns?” At that moment he knew himself to be a sinner deserving of hell. He cast himself upon the mercy of God and he was a changed man. The struggle with his former manner of life continued for some months, but in time he gained release from it, the bondage ceased and over time he was given the assurance of forgiveness.

We sometimes struggle with that early in our Christian life, am I truly forgiven? But in time he gained that assurance. There was progress in his life. But through it all he never returned to that former way of life. In fact, he lived out his life as a great witness to Christ who found him and changed him.

Years later as he lay dying on a battlefield, he turned to a fellow soldier who was also dying and he said, “You are fighting for an earthly crown, I am about to receive an heavenly.” Conversions aren’t always that spectacular and changes in the Christian life are sometimes slow, but everyone who has trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, who has cast himself or herself upon the mercy of God has been given new life and the immediate forgiveness of sin.

Whether we appreciate that or not, whether we have come to an understanding and the assurance of our forgiveness, it is immediate and it is complete upon faith. And all of that when we least deserve it. Verse 5, “When we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive,” He forgave us. Not when we were fit for life and fit for forgiveness, but when we were unfit for life and unfit for forgiveness. That’s when mercy prevails.

Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” The good news of salvation of Ephesians 2 is that God doesn’t wait for us to be good, until we are fit for Him. We are never fit for Him. We are dead left to ourselves. We are helpless left to ourselves. The good news is He comes to us where we are in our condition of death and commands us through the gospel to live and by His grace we do.

And He, by His grace, then transforms us and blesses us. And He is presently doing that for all who believe in Jesus Christ. Adam fell and because we were all, as it were, roped to him as our representative, as our federal head, we all went over the edge with him, but all who are roped to Christ have been raised up to heaven. We have been given life; we have gone from the tomb to the heavenlies, the power of heaven itself, that heavenly life is at work in us presently.

And all of that because of God’s mercy, because of His love, His grace and kindness. If you experience that, to obtain that life, you cannot work for it. Haven’t the ability. Apart from the grace of God you are dead. To obtain that life, you must simply receive that life and receive it through faith alone by trusting in Christ alone for salvation as the one who died as the representative head, the one who took the place of men as their substitute in judgment and trust in Him, in His work upon the cross for salvation as the full payment for sin.

Recognize that you are a sinner, that you are helpless, that you are dead in your transgressions and sin and turning to Him, turning to the only one who can save. Believe in Jesus Christ. May God help you to do that. If you do not know Him as your savior, may He help you to look to Him and trust in Him and help each of us to appreciate more fully the great grace and love and kindness and mercy that He has shown to us and is presently showing to us and will throughout eternity. May we live in light of that, as citizens not of this world but of heaven itself. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for the great blessings that you give to us. Consider this passage and I see a very bleak picture of man naturally left to himself. And we are reminded by this of what we once were, of our former condition. But we are reminded of that in order that we might have a greater appreciation of what we are, of the grace that has been extended, of the power

of God that we enjoy, your power which raises the dead and has raised us spiritually to life.

And not only raised us spiritually to life, but has raised us up to the heavenlies itself and seated us there with Christ. And that is where our future is. Because our representative head is in heaven, we too shall be in heaven. We thank you for that, Father. And pray that in the meantime, in the brief time that we have on this earth that we might live in a way that reflects that grace, that we might live as citizens of heaven, as men and women who are seated there with all of that power given to us, transforming power and live lives of faith due to the gratitude that we have for the grace that you have given us.

We thank you for Christ, we thank you for your grace, we thank you for the Holy Spirit with whom our hearts have been sealed and who imparts the life of Christ to us. May we walk according to His leading in all that we do. In His name we pray, the name of our savior. Amen.