

## Sermon July 21 2024 - Rev Jo Smith

At the end of chapter one last week we found Paul praying for the church. He prayed specifically that the church would grow in their understanding of God and that they would know God better. He prayed that they would know the hope to which God has called them, that they would know the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and that they would know the immeasurable greatness of his power toward those who believe.

Paul could've pointed to many different things to demonstrate God's power. He could have pointed to creation. He could have pointed to the parting of the Red Sea. He could have pointed to the fact that God is holding all things together at this moment in time. But instead, he pointed, at the end of the reading last week to the resurrection, ascension, and eternal reign of Jesus. So, we know God is truly powerful because the one who died on the cross for our sins has risen from the grave and is now seated at the Father's right hand. The empty tomb is the ultimate display of power for us who believe!

Well, at the start of chapter 2, Paul connects the dots between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of our hearts. We will begin to see that what we have experienced because of our faith, our belief in Jesus is no small thing. Your story is miraculous. Today's passage teaches us that God possesses the power to change us.

I hear people say all the time, "I just don't have the words to tell people about my faith. I don't have a good testimony." Well, our passage today exposes that statement as untrue. **The testimony, the story, of every believer is good.** You were dead, but now you are alive. You once had a heart of stone, but now you have a heart of flesh. You were far from God, but now you are close to God. The power that resurrected Christ from the dead has resurrected you from the dead. The power that has seated Christ at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places has seated you in the heavenly places.

I think I am going to be bold enough to say that no verses in the Bible more clearly lay out the message of the gospel for me than these. No ten verses more clearly describe what occurs within the heart of those who believe in Jesus.

In **chapter 2, verses 1-3**, we learn that we're dead in sin. But **verse 4** starts out with those words grand words, "***But God.***" BUT GOD...

In verse 4, we find the biggest but in all of the Bible, the greatest but of all time. You were dead. But God... You were a transgressor. But God... You were a sinner. But God... You were running from God. But God...

"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..."

What we see being highlighted here is God's mercy, love, and grace toward sinners. God hasn't loved you at your best; he loved you at your worst. It was while we were dead that God made us alive with Christ. It was while we were mocking him that he blessed us. While we were running away from him, he chased us. While we had nothing to contribute to God, he offered us hope.

Mercy is the act of someone not giving you something you deserve; grace is the act of giving someone something they don't deserve. Mercy is not punching someone in the face when they deserve to be punched; grace is buying that same person dinner. God is rich in mercy, meaning he's more than willing to not give us the judgment we rightfully deserve. But he's also rich in grace, meaning he's more than willing to offer us life and blessing. God loves you; he wants a relationship with you, and he's taken extreme measures to make that happen through the reconciling death of his Son on the cross.

If I were to give Ephesians 2 a theme, it would be the theme of reconciliation. Ephesians 2:1-10 shows us that we have been reconciled with God through faith in Christ's death on the cross. Ephesians 2:11-22 shows that the church has been reconciled with one another through Jesus' death on the cross. Reconciliation with God leads to reconciliation with God's people. Peace with God leads to peace with one another. A relationship with God leads to a relationship with God's people.

***"But now."*** We were held captive by this world - ***"but God."*** We were at each others' throats - ***"but now."*** Now things have changed. God has stepped in. Ephesians moves from the vertical aspect of the gospel to the horizontal. That horizontal aspect is what we'll focus on today.

There is this "then" and "now" aspect of these verses. The apostle is writing to these Gentiles - people like us - and is proclaiming the great things God has done. They were on the outside looking in. As **verse 12** puts it, they

were **“separated from Christ.”** But they were also **“alienated”** from the nation of Israel. The covenants, the promises, were not for them. They were without **“hope and without God in the world.”**

And there are those words again, **“but now”** in **verse 13. “In Christ Jesus,”** everything has changed. You were far off - from Him and God’s people - but now you **“have been brought near.”** Now - **verse 14** - He has **“made us both one.”** And there’s an image here that is so important. There was this **“dividing wall of hostility,”** and Jesus has torn it down.

Now it’s possible that Paul was thinking back to a literal wall - the one in the temple - back in the day - that kept the Gentiles out. That was smashed back in 70 A.D., along with the rest of the temple, by the Romans. And the apostle is saying, “You don’t have to live like that still stands.”

**Verse 15** says that the law, given to Israel to show them their need, and to drive them to Jesus - was torn down. Jesus came and fulfilled it - that **“law of commandments expressed in ordinances.”** The playing field was leveled. Now all nations have access to the Lord - through faith. And now, we also are on that same field together! As someone whose name I can’t remember right now said it “The cross of Christ isn’t just a bridge that gets us to God. It’s a sledgehammer that breaks down the walls that separate us.”

Jesus has brought us together, Paul goes on. He has created **“in himself one new man in place of the two.”** There now is peace. We have been reconciled together **“to God in one body.”** The **“hostility”** has been killed! Christ came and proclaimed **“peace.”** **Verse 17.** To the **“far off”** and to the **“near.”** To Jews and Gentiles. We’ve seen that in Matthew. And now, through His Spirit, **verse 18,** we have **“access” “to the Father.”** And everything has changed.

Listen to **verses 19 through 22** again. We’re **“strangers and aliens”** no more! By faith, in Christ, we’re **“citizens”** together. We’re brought into the nation - but also into the family - the **“household of God.”** And what’s more is that we’re being **“joined together”** - all nations - like spiritual bricks, making a new, greater, **“holy temple in the Lord.”** We’ve moved from, “You can’t go in the temple” to “you are the temple.” The “then” was awful. The “now” is awesome.

But let’s not just assume the “how.” We’ve been **“brought near by the blood of Christ”** - **verse 13.** That wall was torn down - and so was the veil in the temple - **“in his flesh.”** That’s His death. We’ve been reconciled together to God **“through the cross,”** says **verse 16.** It’s in Him and through Him that we’re with our Father and we’re together as family.

This is the gospel. This is the mystery that was revealed. Not just that we'd be united with God. But that we'd be united with one another. Jew and Gentile. All nations on earth. It's what God does in Jesus. He brings people to Himself. He brings people together. And it's beautiful. It brings glory to Himself. And it works for our great good.

God wants us to savor what He's done in Christ. But He also wants us to spread it. And yes, through our words - talking about the reconciliation Jesus has won. But also through our actions - through the relationships we make and through the stands we take. We don't just need talk. We need to see here what Christ has done. And we also know what Christ will do. The gospel again is Jesus reconciling us to God. And also reconciling with one another. And that gospel is all about the cross on which He died. But it's also all about the Kingdom His death brings.

The church is portrayed as a kingdom to reside in. The church is a holy kingdom. In verse 19, Paul says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints..."

So, together with all of the saints, we are residents of God's kingdom, a community of those reconciled to God and to each other through the cross