

I am a sinner saved by grace \* Ephesians 2:1-10  
January 23, 2022 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

When I was in university, I struggled a lot with the idea of sin.

I grew up in the church and so I knew that the Bible talked about 'sin' and yet the world around me seemed to say 'That's ridiculous! We're not accountable to God! We are the highest authority in our lives and so we get to make our own way. The idea of sin is archaic and outdated and frankly preposterous.'

And so, since I kind of liked that idea, I tried to live that way. I tried to define right and wrong for myself and to do whatever I wanted. As long as I didn't hurt anyone, it was fine. And it worked for a while.

But then it didn't. In the still, small moments, when I was alone, when I listened to my conscience, something wasn't right. I couldn't shake the sense that I WAS in fact accountable to God and that my self-centredness and own selfish disinterest in God were actually separating me from the only true source of life in the world.

And so I remember one night, after a church gathering on campus, I went outside under the stars and said 'God, I don't have this all figured out, but I think I'm a sinner who's fallen short of your goodness, and I think Your goodness can save me, so forgive my sin and help me to follow you.'

It was no great conversion experience – no angels or blinding lights – just a guy like me admitting 'yes God, I am a sinner and I need Your grace.'

That's the theme that we're going to look at today in our 'Who are you?' series. We are sinners saved by grace.

And to understand why I say that, we're going to look together at Ephesians 2:1-10. Ephesians 2, verses 1-10. This is a passage of Scripture that really helped me to understand what was going on when I came to faith and so I want to unpack it with you, using my own story as a case study to see it in action. So join me in Ephesians 2, starting in verse 1. Ephesians 2, verse 1 starts with Paul thinking back to describe what was going on before the Ephesians came to faith and he says -

NIV Ephesians 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,  
2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

When I was in university, when I was defining right and wrong for myself, 'I was dead in my transgressions and sins.' 'As far as me,' I was dead in my transgressions and sins. That's why 'something didn't sit quite right' when I stopped long enough to listen to my conscience. I was

a good person, yes, I considered myself to be kind and polite and responsible and yet, spiritually speaking, I was dead.

Instead of following God's ways which lead to life, I was following the ways of the world which created in me spiritual death.

Now, to be clear, I was not doing the things that polite society would call sin. I didn't drink, I didn't smoke, I didn't sleep around; I unintentionally kept the ten commandments, all except one – you shall have no other god but me.

I failed on that one. I was my god. I sought my own will. My own desires. My own version of reality. And that led to all kinds of 'respectable sins' – anger, selfishness, jealousy, pride – I'd get disappointed when I didn't have my way; I'd try to manipulate circumstances to get I wanted; anything it took to keep me 'god' of my own life. But where did that lead? Spiritual death. As for me, I was dead in sin.

But it wasn't just me. Look at verse 3.

3 \*All\* of us also lived among them at one time [lived like that at one time], gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

It's not just me. We're ALL like this. All of us; we all put our own desires and our own purposes, before the desires and purposes of the God who loves us. We pursue what the world says is good rather than what God says is good. And that means that we were not just spiritually dead, but literally destined for wrath. For eternal destruction.

Now let's pause for a minute, because I think that some people, myself included, would have said 'What gives God the right to say what's right and wrong? And to threaten wrath if I go off the path? What gives God the right to hold authority over me? Why should I be accountable to Him?

The answer to that is wrapped up in last week's message. We're created beings. We have a Creator, a creator who loves us and lovingly handcrafted us. A Creator who made us for a purpose. And what happens when the creation doesn't do that purpose?

Well, think about it this way. I hear Marvin Ireland is an excellent workworker; let's say Marvin made a door stop that decided 'I don't want to stop doors; I'm going to do my own thing and do what \*I\* want.' What's Marvin going to do? Get rid of it, right? Wrath. A door stop that doesn't stop doors has gotta go.

Same thing with God. We were made to honour God, to enjoy Him forever and take care of His Creation; when we say 'no thanks, I have other plans,' that leads to spiritual death and eternal destruction because we are not fulfilling the purpose for which we were created.

Because of our self-centred ways, we are destined for wrath.

BUT – and this is one of the most important butts in all of Scripture -

4 ... because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,  
5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—

We were destined for wrath and yet God is SO rich in mercy, so full of compassionate love that instead of giving up on us, He chose to redeem us and to make us alive, even when we were dead in sin. He chose not to hold our sin against us, but bore the wrath Himself so that we could be forgiven and restored to Him! It's incredible!

I remember sharing that with someone once who had never heard it before and she said 'God would do that??' Yes. God would do that. God DID do that.

Because of His love for us, God redeemed us.

But here's the million dollar question – how do we take hold of that? I grew up in the United Church but our pop culture is so saturated with Catholic imagery (it was twenty five years ago) that I just kind of internalized the idea that take hold of this redemption by being good. We do good works to earn God's favour. We get to be good enough for God and then He smiles on us and saves us. But I tried to do that. And I wrestled with this reality - How good is good enough for God? How much good work does a spiritually dead person have to do before God makes them spiritually alive?

Well, that's a silly question. A spiritually dead person can't do anything. They're dead. They're dead in transgressions and sins.

But God, who is rich in mercy and full of steadfast love says 'you don't have to do it.' Verse 4 again -

4 ... because of his great love for us (not because of our works), God, who is rich in mercy, (not God, who needs to be placated)  
5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions— so how is it that we are saved?

It is by grace you have been saved.

Because of His great love for us, God freely saves us.

And look what happens – verse 6 - 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

7 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.

The point is not to show how good and obedient WE are; but to show how gracious and merciful GOD is.

And just to drive the point home – verse 8 -

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

The way we gain spiritual life is not by doing good works but by receiving God's grace, as a gift. Not by earning it, but by faith, trusting Him to save us and to restore us to Him.

That's what happened when I went out under the stars that night and prayed 'God I don't understand all this, but I do understand this much – I'm a sinner, You are kind and I need Your grace. I trust by faith that you will redeem me.' And He did.

And even that – admitting I was sinner - was not a work of my own. That night, I was able to see myself as I truly was, I was able to humbly admit that it was true, because God had given it to me as a gift.

I was a sinner saved by grace. We are all sinners saved by grace when we take hold of it by faith.

Now, just to finish out the passage, we need to think for a minute about verse 10. We don't earn God's favour by doing good but that doesn't mean that doing good is not important – after all – verse 10 says -

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:1-10 NIV).

Once we, sinners, are saved by grace, we go on to do the good works that God made us to do in the first place, honouring God and taking care of His Creation and each other.

Because God redeemed us, we do good in the world.

So, to summarize Ephesians 2:1-10 –

1. Because of our self-centred ways, we were destined for wrath.
2. Because of His love for us, God redeemed us.
3. Because God redeemed us, we do good in the world.

We are sinners, saved by grace, to do good in the world.

Now let's stop and think about what that means for us.

The application I think is pretty clear – We are sinners, saved by grace – if you are a sinner, receive God's grace and if you'd been saved by grace then live it out.

In a sense, the passage that we just looked at is like a before and after picture – you know the ones that pop up on Facebook around New Year – 'this is who I was, this is who I am now.'

In terms of Ephesians 2:1-10, are you the before picture (dead in sin, following your own desires with no interest in God) or the after picture? (saved by grace and living out God's purposes?)

If before, then receive God's grace. He is rich in mercy, overflowing with steadfast love for you. He created you for good and perfect purposes; don't waste your life being dead in sin; take hold of God's grace by faith. It doesn't have to be fancy, you just say in your heart – I'm a sinner, I need salvation – and God makes you alive in Christ and seats you in the highest places with Jesus, ready to live a brand new, Spirit led life. Receive that gift.

And once you have, once you've become the 'after' picture, then put that grace to work in the rest of your life. Let the mercy of God shape all that you do.

And this is where the identity piece really comes into play.

Knowing that I was/am a sinner, really shapes the way I see other people too. I have a great deal of humility and a great deal of grace towards other people, because I know that I was just as dead in sin as they are. Our sins may be different but our spiritual deadness is exactly the same. That's why I'm more than happy to be generous and patient and gracious with a person who is clearly living in opposition to God, doing stuff we'd ALL agree is wrong. Because I've been there too. And they need the grace of God just like I did. The term 'judgmental Christian' should be an oxymoron because the reality is, we have all been under judgment. Having been brought out from under it should make us long for those still under it to come out. Knowing I was a sinner makes me humble.

And knowing that I've been saved by grace makes me grateful. I could never pay the price to be good enough for God and yet He gave it to me as a gift. I want my life then to be a never ending expression of gratitude to God because of what He has done.

We were sinners, saved by grace. If you're a sinner, receive that grace; if you already have, then live it out with humility and gratitude.