

## **“Spiritual Resurrection”**

24 May 2020 - Led by David Boyd

### **Welcome & Call to Worship:**

Good morning, folks! Welcome to our third service in the series on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Last week, Sam was talking about the incomparably great power of God that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms. In our passage this week we will see that Paul uses the exact same language to describe what happens when we come to faith in Christ. He says that “God raised *us* up with Christ and seated *us* with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” That means that although our bodily resurrection will not take place until the last day, our spiritual resurrection has already happened! Now I don't know about you, but if that thought doesn't make you want to sing, then there is something wrong with you. Our first song this morning is the new one we sang a couple of weeks ago, “His Mercy Is More”, written by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa. It reminds us that our phenomenal rescue came, not only through incomparably great power, but at incomparably great cost. *His mercy is more.*

**Praise:** His Mercy Is More

### **Prayers of Adoration and Confession:**

Let us pray. Gracious God and loving heavenly Father, we come to worship and adore the One who created this world and everything in it. We marvel at its amazing design and diversity, and all we can say is what a wonderful God we have! While we stand and wonder at Your creation, we are so thankful that Your sinless Son left the glories of heaven to pay a debt He did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay. We thank You for Your amazing grace. All we can say is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we adore You. We thank You that we can safely entrust our lives to You, knowing that we are safe in Your hands. We come to You with humble hearts asking for Your forgiveness for our lack of faith and trust in such a wonderful God. We ask that You will forgive us for our disobedience and for our failure to obey the promptings of Your Holy Spirit and our negligence in our duty towards both You, our heavenly Father, and our neighbours. Help us, dear Lord, to have open hearts to receive Your Word today and to work it out in our lives. We pray that our worship today would be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. In Jesus' name, amen.

**Reading:** Ephesians 2:1-10

### **Sermon:**

Thanks for reading for us, Ian. Over the past few months, we have all watched in shock and disbelief as COVID-19 has wreaked havoc upon a world we had thought invulnerable to such things. We had faith in our technology and our modern health systems to protect us from what looks to all intents and purposes like a biblical plague. Now, we are trying to come to terms with the fact that

our world has changed irrevocably, and that, even when we do get an effective vaccine, things will probably not return to the way they were before.

Events like this give us pause to reflect on where our world is headed. We wonder what the future holds and what our destiny will be in a world of pandemics and impending climate catastrophe. We have very real doubts in our minds and we wonder if the world is coming to an end. The Apostle Paul had no such doubts. Paul knew the world was coming to an end and he knew exactly what that end was going to look like. Paul received a revelation on the road to Damascus, and that revelation informed his thinking and drove his actions for the rest of his life. Everything he did from then on was governed by this vision that he had of the end-time.

### I. God's Ultimate Goal

In the first week of this series in chapter 1:9 Paul shares that revelation with his readers, that God has “made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment.” Paul then goes on to explain that this mystery, God's will – His ultimate goal – is “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” What Paul is talking about here is the union of heaven and earth that John describes so vividly in Revelation 21. This glorious vision of the future is the ultimate mission of God that Paul was convinced was his mission too. And so, by extension, if we are Christians and have been adopted into God's family, the Church, it's our ultimate mission also. Last week at the end of chapter 1, Paul returns to the theme of the union of heaven and earth under Christ when he talks in v.20 of how God “raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms,” Jesus' own resurrection modelling what God will do for all creation with the resurrection at the last day and the final coming together of heaven and earth.

### II. God's Gift Of Grace

Which brings us to our passage in chapter 2, where Paul continues his theme of unity, but now focussing on the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church of Christ. In vv.1-3, Paul begins by stating that we all alike were dead in our transgressions and sins, controlled by the cravings of the sinful nature. Nobody can say that, “this doesn't apply to me, I am not like that.” It's in our very DNA! As a result, we are all alike under the condemnation of God and are consequently objects of His wrath. Our deadness signifies the hold the devil has over us and our complete inability to help ourselves.

But! That glorious “but” in v.4, “because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ - even when we were dead in transgressions.” Paul says that despite God's hatred of sin, His love for us was so strong that He raised us from our helpless and hopeless state and gave us new life. Paul then points out the undeserved nature of this miraculous intervention, with the simple statement, “it is by grace you have been saved.” God achieved our rescue by “raising us up with Christ and seating us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (v.6). In other words, we have died to sin in Christ's death and have been raised to new life in His resurrection, echoing the model of the marriage of heaven and earth from Ch. 1:20.

The purpose of this is revealed in v.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.” Our presence in the new creation is to serve as a reminder of the awesome power of God’s love and just how glorious the victory of Jesus at Calvary actually is. And just in case any doubt remains, this is followed by the familiar mantra, “for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves – it is the gift of God.” Even the faith in Christ’s work that saves us comes to us as a gift from God. God is the architect of our salvation from first to last.

### III. Not Saved *By Good Works*

Paul underlines the fact that salvation is by God’s gift of faith alone by stating in v.9 that it is “not by works, so that no one can boast.” Now, the Reformers saw this as referring to people trying to save themselves by their good works, reading into the text the issues that they had with the mediaeval Roman Catholic Church. Now, while the Reformers were no doubt completely correct in seeing that good works can’t save anyone, it’s almost certain that that is not what Paul is talking about here.

Paul’s main concern in Ephesians is the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians, which is why he takes pains in Chapter 1 to show that God’s ultimate goal is the unity of all things under Christ. If God’s ultimate desire is the unity of all things in the new creation, then it follows that the Church, the advance guard of that new creation, should be united. In fact, he spells it out later in Chapter 2 when he says, “for He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility” (vv.14-16).

You see, Jews and Gentiles were not natural bedfellows. The Jews self-understanding of themselves as God’s chosen people had led to a prideful nationalism and an air of superiority over those they referred to as “Gentile dogs.” The “works of the Law,” such as circumcision, Sabbath and the food laws were the boundary markers between the covenant community and unbelievers, and, as such, were a source of pride for Jews. The problem with this was that Jews could come to believe that these external signs of covenant membership were enough to guarantee salvation. It is just like someone who’s been baptized into the Presbyterian Church and attends religiously every week but has never committed their life to Christ believing that their salvation is guaranteed. They may take pride in their membership but that is the only benefit that they will receive without saving faith in Christ.

That’s why I think that it is these “works of the Law” that Paul is talking about in v.9 when he insists that “works” are not grounds for boasting. Paul insisted that, as the Gentiles had been filled with the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ, there was no longer any need for these traditional marks of membership. Now, tensions arose within the church because some Jewish Christians had a hard time accepting that, and we can see just how big an issue this was in Galatians. 2. Paul publicly

confronts Peter for succumbing to pressure from hardline Jewish Christians and separating himself from table-fellowship with his Gentile brothers and sisters. Paul is adamant that, as he stated in v.6, all alike have died with the Messiah and have come to new life in Him, that new shared life is the one and only source and marker of their identity, and it comes entirely by grace, so it's not something to boast about!

#### IV. Created *For Good Works*

And then finally, in v.10, Paul tells us that "good works," far from being the antithesis to faith, are actually what this new humanity has been created for, by God. At the end of this chapter, Paul talks about this new Christian community of Jew and Gentile, united in Christ, being built into a holy temple in which God lives by his Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Tabernacle and then later the Temple, were the visible symbol of the covenant between God and the family of Abraham. The place where the divine presence dwelt, where heaven and earth came together. They were a sign and a foretaste of the promised new creation. Consequently, Paul is saying that this new temple of living stones is where the divine presence is now to be found; where God lives by His Spirit; where heaven and earth come together; the new sign and foretaste of the new creation. This people, in Christ, will be known for their good works as they pray and work towards God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

The widespread belief in our society is that Christianity is for those who can clean up their act and keep the rules. Paul is saying quite clearly. **That. Is. Not. The. Case.** He is saying that none of us are any better than anyone else. He is saying that every one of us is an object of God's wrath. Good works can't save us. Religious observance can't save us. The only thing that can save us is admitting our total inability to keep the rules, throwing ourselves on God's mercy, and trusting that what Jesus did on the cross is enough to save us. When we do that we can say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Amen.

There is only one song we can sing after that:

*God of grace amazing wonder, irresistible and free  
Oh the miracle of mercy, Jesus reaches down to me.*

**Praise:** IPH 500 God Of Grace

#### **Prayers for Others:**

Let us pray. Dear heavenly Father, thank You for the access we have to You through Jesus Christ, thank You for Your call to prayer, Your invitation to talk. In these different and sometimes dangerous times we are glad of this refuge, this well to which we can come to rest and drink.

Heavenly Father, it has been good and a learning experience to pray for the Muslim community throughout their fast of Ramadan and we ask that as the fast is completed and they celebrate the

festival of Eid that we would continue to pray for them and show love, hospitality and serve them as the opportunity arises. We pray particularly for the country of Iran which has had many cases of COVID-19 and is suffering economically. We ask that You will help those in authority to act with wisdom and compassion and that those on the front line of the medical and caring professions would be given all the resources they need to carry out their job. For those who follow Jesus in Iran we ask for Your protection and pray they will have freedom to worship. Many have been arrested, are in prison and stuck in long, drawn out legal processes and so we pray that the authorities will act with justice and we also ask for similar freedoms and justice for those of other faiths.

We are thrilled that so many are coming to know Jesus personally and we pray for them, that they would grow in their faith and that they would find communities to disciple them and encourage them as they follow Jesus. We ask particularly for the Tamraz family, a family tasked with leadership in a church in Tehran, who have been arrested many times and face a court case on the 1<sup>st</sup> June. We ask that truth and justice will prevail and that You will sustain them through this difficult time.

Heavenly Father, thank You for all who have been tasked with responsibility for teaching our young people in universities, schools, creches and at home. Thank You for their expertise, diligence, and desire to do a good job despite the severe restrictions imposed upon them in the current crises. Today we particularly pray for those who were to do their Leaving Cert and for the teachers who are to do their assessments. We ask that this process will be accurate and fair and that each student will be able to use the grades and results given to them to move forward into further education, apprenticeships, or employment. For everyone involved in this stressful process we ask, though daunted, they will work to the best of their knowledge and ability. Father, You are good and full of compassion and we ask that You help everyone to see a positive way through this time.

Heavenly Father, we ask that in our church our relationship with You will become stronger, that we give ourselves to You with a deeper commitment in response to Your love in Jesus. With the Psalmist we say, "my soul thirsts for You" and we have been encouraged to hear of an increased interest in prayer, reading the Bible and listening to services such as this that is being reported in Ireland and other countries. We are thankful for the time given to us to explore the important questions of life and for the deep desire and longing for You which has resurfaced in our enforced shutdown. We are grateful that the truth about You *does* answer the questions of life, including giving us a hope in death. With Paul we pray that we would know You better, that You would enable and help us experience and understand You to a greater measure each day. We pray this for Your honour and glory, so that we will serve others and have a peace that passes understanding. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

**Closing Praise:** IPH 487 And Can It Be

**Benediction:**

And now, “may the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen.