



“Alive with Christ”

Ephesians 2:1-10

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Sermon audio and text available at
www.waitaraanglican.com.au

Intro

I am a missionaries kid and a minister's kid, which meant that we had moved around quite a lot.

When I was in 5th grade, I was moving to my 5th school– I didn't end up going to this school on the first day because I got chicken pox. So two weeks later, I had my first day at this school. When you start your first day, you're ready to be as friendly as possible and wanting to make as many friends as possible, you wanted to belong to a group of friends. Well as I entered the class, the tables everyone was seated at were the rectangular ones, and there were 6 people all around the table. I was shown a place to sit down at the table on one of the corner seats, so that I would have one person seated on my right, and then the person on my left was seated at the head of the table. Well as soon as I sat down, the person who was sitting at the head of the table closest to me deliberately picked up her books and chair and moved as far away from me as she could and sat opposite me. What a way to begin school. Right from the start I felt like I didn't belong.

Have you ever experienced wanting to belong to a particular group – maybe it was the cool group at school? Maybe you were in the cool group. It was pretty tough to be in the cool group you had to be good looking, you had to be funny, you needed to have the right friends, wear the right clothes, and being in or out of a group affected

how you felt, your sense of identity, your self esteem. I think even as adults we like belonging to a group.

In today's passage, it's all about being in the 'in group' but we'll see that the criteria for being in is quite different. start's off with showing us where the Jews and Gentiles used to belong.

1. Where we used to belong?

"And you were dead....we were by nature children under wrath..." Ephesians 2:1-3

The first three verses paint a pretty terrible picture doesn't he? This is what you were without Christ – you were dead. The way that you lived, breaking God's laws and rejecting his rule, you followed Satan – the ruler of the kingdom of the air. Living this way made us spiritually dead. How do you feel about Paul saying these things about you? We were dead, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. In these verses Paul includes all of humanity. All people do what we want without any regard to God, we do what gives us pleasure, paul says All of humanity are by nature people deserving God's wrath. Can you picture yourself belonging to this way of living? If you're not saved through trust in Jesus, this is what your life is like, right now. If you're a Christian, this is what you were. Do you think of yourself like this?

Because This is a picture that Paul wants us to take note of – That before Christ we belonged to a way of living that made us dead. It's a bleak and terrible picture, but there is good news and that's by looking at where we belong now.

2. Where we now belong?

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” Ephesians 2:6

If you have put your trust in Jesus, you now belong with Christ, you are no longer dead, you have been made alive. All those who trust in Jesus are now with Christ in the heavenly realms. This is an unusual concept isn't it? I mean physically we're here in this world, but Paul says in verse 5 that God has made us alive with Christ and we are seated with him in the heavenly realms. I don't know if you've noticed but throughout chapter 1 and 2 Paul uses a lot of 'in Christ' or 'with christ'. Paul is showing us that there's a special relationship with Christ when we trust him, we have this union with Christ. So that with all that Christ has achieved, all that has been given to him, we somehow share and participate in that experience.

That's an extraordinary picture isn't it? How does this sharing with Christ works?

Illustration I like to watch masterchef and I find the group challenges quite interesting. You see, The group gets judged on how the whole group cooks. Now, there are many times a group wins – not because every person in the group did

excellently, but because there may have been one or two people that made excellent dishes it got the whole team through to the next round. Those people that failed their dish, still get to share with their team the victory. Even though they didn't deserve to win.

Jesus invites us to put our trust in, and when we do, we are in his team, we share in his victory, we are seated with him. Just as Christ was raised from the dead, so we too are raised. Just as Christ was raised into heaven, so we too are now sitting in heaven with him. Have you ever imagined yourself seated with Christ in the heavenly realms?

If we trust in Jesus, this is where we are now, seated in the throne room of heaven. We are in the 'in group' with Christ. And we've shared in what he has achieved. And that is an awesome privilege isn't it?

3. How do we belong?

"But because of his great love for us....we are saved by grace through faith..."Ephesians

2:4- 8

I guess the question then is how do we get there? How do we belong in the throne room with Christ?

Illustration – when I first started school at Waitara Public School in year 2, it would have been my 4th school that I attended. Whenever I went to a new place I found it hard to become friends with people. There was a group of people that I wanted to be friends with who were in my class, and I don't think they really wanted to be friends with me, but I got them to like me, how? because I would share my food to eat everyday. That's how I became friends with

them. In order for me to belong in their group, I gave them my food. This is not how we belong to Christ – here in ephesians 2, Paul clearly shows us that to belong with Christ is not about what we do, but because of what God does for us. It's because of his great love for us, it's because he is rich in mercy, and we are saved because of God's grace.

Now I think most people understand what mercy is – to show mercy is to let someone off the hook with a lesser punishment than they deserve, or to let them off entirely. To be kind and forgive someone for the wrong that they have done.

What about grace? What does it mean to show someone grace? We use it in sentences like, she walked the carpet with grace or perhaps we use the word grace at meal times. That's not the meaning of grace here in this passage. What does it mean for God to be rich in grace? Here in our passage it says, By grace you have been saved. By grace you have been made alive with Christ. Well what is grace? Grace is To give freely. Grace is a gift that is given freely.

I think this is a concept that we may find hard to understand. Because there is no such thing as a free thing – right?

I've been called up quite a few times on my phone and have the words – congratulations you have won a free holiday – and then only to hear the words – in order for you to get this free holiday you have to come to one of our presentations about timeshare. When we are given something free, it's still generally in exchange for something, like our time, information, or friendship. It's free but you have to do this and that.

Grace is when you give not out of expectation, not out of debt, not for any reward, not to expect anything in return. Grace is to give purely out of a desire to give.

Why do we find this concept so hard to understand?

I think part of the reason is because we are proud people. We don't like to be seen as being helpless. We've been taught to work hard, and we'll get that promotion that we deserve, we get that vacation that we deserve.

Remember our before picture. We were dead. And when you're dead you can't do anything.

When you're dead, you can't fix any mistakes you have done. A dead person can't fix broken relationships. Paul brings us down into the depths, and says in terms of our relationship with God – we are totally helpless, we are all destined for eternal death. We have to realise that we are helpless, and not able to do a thing to save ourselves. You may pay your taxes, you might be on the church roster for 5 different jobs, you might help the lady across the street, you might be generous to the church with your money or time, you are kind, you might read your bible and pray everyday, you might donate money to 4 different organisations – none of these things will save you, they are good things, but none of these things will help you to belong with Christ. There is nothing special about us, There is no room for pride, we cannot boast.. there's no room for us to look at another person and think they are evil and wicked people and that we are so much better than them. We are helpless and we rely on gods grace. Well maybe it's the other way round, maybe you look at others and think about how good they are, and that you don't deserve to belong with Christ.

Another reason that we might not be willing to accept God's grace is to be too overwhelmed by our sinfulness, our own disobedient, and feel like we are not worthy to even accept this

gift of grace. But my friends, nothing in our past, no matter how rotten you may think you are can stop you from knowing God's grace. Everyone, regardless of where they come from, what they've done, we are all in the same spot – we are or were dead. Our transformation from being dead, to being made alive with Christ is absolutely amazing. Being saved and belonging with Christ shows God's unmeasurable grace

Illustration:

I love watching makeover TV shows like the Biggest loser, or the Block. What gets me everytime is the last 5-10 minutes or so of the show. When they do the reveal of the before and after. I don't particularly care about how they did it, but to see the transformation between the before and after shot. Sometimes you just go WOW!! The greater the transformation between the before and after shot, the bigger the wow. Take a look at this after shot of bechham and the before shot. The difference his teeth. For me that's a not such a big change.

How about this after shot of this guy called Jimmy. Here was his before shot. Big transformation. We appreciate the change. We go WOW! We appreciate the transformation all the more don't we.

This is my favourite makeover so far.... The transformation of our church. From this to this.

Why am I talking about makeovers? Because in this chapter, Paul wants us to see what knowing Christ has done for us.

You were dead, and now you are alive, you can't get a bigger transformation than that. It's nothing that you've done, it's all through Gods gift to you, his grace.

Now if grace is news to you, accept the gift, put your trust in Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of God, which is spiritual life, the forgiveness of your sins, you get to be with Christ forever, rather than being eternally dead.

When you look at your own before and after – can you see the effects of Gods immeasurable grace?

When I've been asked to give a testimony to share how I have become a Christian, I often use to think and say that my testimony wasn't very exciting, I never had a Wow moment. But I was wrong in thinking that. Before Christ, I was dead, I was following my own ways, I was satisfying the cravings and desire of my flesh, I deserved eternal death. And yet, because of his great love for me, and who is rich in mercy, made me alive with Christ. That is an amazing transformation.

Do you know the grace of God? Is it possible that God's grace is something that you have known for a while, but perhaps over time, grace has lost it's impact. Or is it possible perhaps, deep down inside, grace for you is still linked with what you have to do. Is that possible? I think that's the case with a lot of Christians, and if that's true for you, be reminded again– it is by grace that you have been saved, it's not by your works, it is the gift of God.

How do we belong? It is by trusting in Jesus and accepting the gift that God freely gives to us.

4 We Belong with Christ - What now?

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works...” Ephesians 2:10

What impact has that amazing grace had on our lives

Illustration

When I started at Abbotsleigh, I distinctly remembered this longing for being back at my old Waitara Primary school. So much so that for at least the first two weeks there, I used to sit by myself on a small hill and just look out onto the playground and imagine that I was playing games with my friends from Waitara Public. Even though I was at Abbotsleigh, I was wanting to belong back at my old school.

Here in Ephesians Paul is wanting us to focus on where we belong now, and to live in a way that reflects the change that has happened.

Verse 10 says, for we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Doing good deeds is important to God because he has made us a new creation, and we were created to do good works. God does want us to do the right thing, he does want us to serve people, he does want us to be kind and loving.

But notice the first part of this verse, it’s first about what God has done for us. Those who trust in Christ Jesus are God’s work, we are the product of his work, and as that product we have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It’s important for us to understand, that these good works come as a result of us being saved. They do not contribute to our salvation. I’m sure that in the next few

weeks as we look at the second half of Ephesians, we will be able to unpack what these good works are that God has prepared in advance for us to do.

Today I wanted us to see what a marvellous and wonderful thing it is for us to belong with Christ. Do you know the grace of God?

If you think that you have to do good works to be saved, remember the grace of God. If you've been led away by sin, remember the grace of God, if life is hard, difficult, seemingly without hope, remember The grace of God. And when you face God on judgement day, remember the grace of God as he welcomes you into heaven.

Let me pray