

EPHESIANS

blessed to be a blessing

WEEK TWO

Ephesians 1.21-23

There is no doubt that Christ has crushed every power that could ever possibly set itself up against Him or those who know and love Him. Sometimes it may seem that the darkness which is exposed in this world or in my own heart has control, but this passage tells us of the impossibility of this. Christ has been firmly placed in a position of rulership of the entire cosmos, where nothing is above Him. He rules with a wisdom and timing and perspective that we do not possess. Moreover, and this is no small thing, it is for the sake of the Church that this was done. Think about that. This people of God that He has been pursuing and gathering unto Himself for all time is graced with the privilege of having Him as their sovereign. And yet, although nothing is above Christ, He serves His subjects in a way that nothing is below Him. There is a wisdom and purpose by which His Spirit moves and works to bring restoration to this world by working in our own lives through healing, compassion, power, insight, transformation, and spiritual gifts. It is His will that His people, the Church, represent the fullness of Christ, so nothing is being kept from it. The Church is highly regarded, then, and He must want to do something very special with us. Stay tuned.

Ephesians 2.1-5

Has anyone ever treated you like “nothing ever happened” after you offended them in some way? I experienced this after saying or doing something mean to my cousin when we were kids. She was hurt and angry, and the next time we were to see each other a month later, I was so anxious and upset because I thought she would still be mad at me (and she was bigger than me and could really do some damage if she wanted!). To my delight (and humility), when she saw me approaching the house, she excitedly ran to greet me, laughing and pulling me in to play this new sliding game she had invented with sleeping bags. The memory is very clear for me, and I carry this with me as a fond reminder about how God sees and treats us. Truth be told, we could have been written off long ago. The consequences of our sin could have made our lives worthless and ineffective. The longer we are surrendered in Christ, however, the more He blesses us (now, brace yourself) with an acute awareness of how deep our sin nature goes – to the very core of our being, our hearts. Pride, defensiveness, selfishness, anger, greed, lust, self-condemnation, to name just a few ways that sin can manifest in our lives. We can easily hide it for a time, until pressure exerts itself on us, and suddenly we stand face-to-face with what God could see and hold against us if He so chose. But, hallelujah and grace be to God! He does not choose to hold anything against us! Rather, He has paid the ultimate price to make sure that condemnation has absolutely no power over us – ever! We were in dire need, and God acted to relieve our trouble with great mercy that does not run dry! I doubt whether I will fully comprehend the grace at work in our salvation. What we can understand, though, is that God is excited to run and greet us at the door to joyfully pull us into His loving arms and experience a freedom in life and relationship that exists only here.

Ephesians 2.6-7

Proof of life. It's that which is requested by loved ones when hostages have been taken and a ransom has been demanded. They want to know that the hostages are alive before they fork over the dough. As Christians, we were once hostages to our sinful natures, which could have easily taken us down! But (and this is a big but), in His kindness toward us, God reached into our hopelessness and snatched us up. Together with Christ, He raised us up to be resurrected from the deadness of the things that hold us back from real life. With all power and in all goodness that are His nature, He placed us in the seat of privilege, honor, and responsibility alongside Christ. Wow! It's a done deal. We are alive with Christ! This, my friends, is proof of life. And, the purpose of this proof is to display the exceeding abundance of His grace. It's such a huge amount of grace, ignited by such power that it is beyond human understanding. Yet, our lives in Christ are set upon this foundation of grace, are propelled by this power, and are meant to show the world how awesome and loving He truly is. God is in the process of bringing all things together according to His perfect purpose and plan. With deadness to our old natures behind us, may we live lives that display His grace, goodness, and power which are truly at work in us. Amen.

Ephesians 2.8-9

I love that time right after sunrise when the new sun rays are just striking the earth. I love the serene, low light invading the day, yet there is still a hint in the tree silhouettes that it was once dark. I imagine if we were to view this scene with a time-lapse camera, we would see the flowers and people and animals readily awakening to life again as the sunlight sweeps over the earth. This image can help us think of our new life in Christ: there is evidence that our lives were once permeated by the powers of darkness (the residual effects of our sin that rears its head every so often in our lives), but these powers have been overcome and drenched by the Light and are now in the past. We now walk in the lighted areas that have been exposed by the living Christ. By now in our journey through Ephesians, I hope that it is crystal clear that God has initiated everything in our new life with Him: our rescue from a dark, dead path on which we used to walk, our being awakened and raised out of the pit, and our being aligned with Jesus Christ to live fully in right relationship with God here on earth and forever in heaven. Reflect on this awesome baptism imagery! This is the ultimate gift given by the ultimate Gift Giver not only because it represents every spiritual blessing available, but also because we have no way of providing it for ourselves AND no way to ever possibly repay Him properly. So, we must receive it simply by faith, based on the fact that He loves us immensely and that it is through His good will and delight that we should have it. Imagine yourself receiving this gift well, unreservedly and without hesitation.

Ephesians 2.10

Yesterday, we read about how God has completely blessed us with new life in Christ and that this new life is to be received on faith alone. We don't have to try and earn it. Human creation and salvation are from God alone, with Christ as mediator of both. And while we are not saved by our works, we are saved for good works. What we must learn to accept wholeheartedly is that we are God's work-of-art. No kidding. Regardless of what others have said to us or the way things may seem, this is an established scriptural fact. We must try to believe this because it changes everything. It changes how we view ourselves, how we treat others, and how we live our lives. If we have allowed Christ into our lives and have given Him full access, then we are a new creative work, no longer controlled by the forces that are against God. Hallelujah! And, there is purpose in this creative work. The whole idea is that we have a new calling, and that is to live and give of ourselves in accordance with this blessing we have received. As this great gift has been given to us, we are to receive it, live from it, and extend grace and goodness, our whole selves really, to God and others. While the creative work has already been done, God continues to re-work us from the inside out, whether in our character or in healing the deeper reaches of our soul. He does this so as to allow fresh instances of grace to mold us and be expressed in and through our lives and into others. The important thing to note is that the will and determination to do good works must come from a natural outflow of our faith steeped in the grace that He gives. Otherwise, our works will be flat, shallow, ineffective, and lead to burn out. Repeat after me: because He is doing a new work in me, He wants to do a new work through me. Believe it! Live it!