

West Valley Church
Michael O'Neill
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Come Alive¹
Easter, 2018
Ephesians 2:1-10

How many of you have your smart phones with you today – either a Galaxy or iPhone or smart pad or whatever? Good! You are going to get involved with this message this morning. So you'll need to get out your phones and go to a website – menti.com.

If you need to connect to the internet, then connect to our church – wvc, and use the password “lovelearnlive.” Okay? Now when you get to menti.com, follow the instructions on your screen using the info I've given you.

So let's start with an easy quiz: Answer the question, “What category is your age?” It's okay – this is totally anonymous, I have no idea who is answering these questions, okay?

Here are the categories: 0-20, 21-35, 36-45, 46-60, 61-80, 81+. If you are logged in, you should see this quiz on your phone or pad. Go ahead and click your answer, and we will see what our age ranges are today.

Okay let's try one more: Give a one-word description of how you feel about Easter. You can vote up to three times. Now remember, your answers are entirely anonymous, so feel free to answer and please be honest. You can give positive responses, like “happy” or “rejoicing” or you can give negative responses, like “guilty,” or “stressed.” But just so you know, I've filtered out any profanities in English or Spanish. You also can't use emojis – only words! Sorry! Go ahead and submit your words, and watch what happens.

I'm praying that we can help you have a better understanding of Easter that will do far more than change the way you *feel*; our prayer is that it will change your *life* as you allow the supernatural resurrection power of Jesus Christ to transform you today – that you will come alive. Our prayer is that you would “Come Alive!” in your spirit, heart, and life today in profound ways.

Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He came to earth and revealed the Father's heart of love to us through his teachings and miracles. But the religious leaders felt Jesus was a threat to their institution and their power, so they riled up the people on trumped up charges to get Jesus arrested, had him brutally and mercilessly tortured, and had him crucified – an excruciating, agonizing

¹ Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1979); ¹ Mark A. Holmes, *Ephesians: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016); John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Ephesians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008)

death. Jesus willingly allowed all this to happen. Jesus, who is God and therefore is full of holy love, died in the place of humankind, who is sinful and selfish. He did it so that he could open the way for you to experience life here on earth through his resurrection – a life that is full of God-life, in unhindered relationship with God, providing all that you need. You can come alive!

This, and so much more, is all wrapped up in the resurrection of Jesus Christ for you. This morning I'd like us to learn what the resurrection has done for us by looking at a part of the Bible that comes from the Apostle Paul's letter to the believers that were gathering in a city called Ephesus. This is Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and we are going to read from chapter two and the first ten verses.

We've developed a habit around here of showing how we honor God's Word by standing together as it is read. So would you please stand with me as I read to us from this section of the Bible today?

“Once you were under God's curse, doomed forever for your sins. You went along with the crowd and were just like all the others, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air, who is at work right now in the hearts of those who are against the Lord. All of us used to be just as they are, our lives expressing the evil within us, doing every wicked thing that our passions or our evil thoughts might lead us into. We started out bad, being born with evil natures, and were under God's anger just like everyone else.

But God is so rich in mercy; he loved us so much that even though we were spiritually dead and doomed by our sins, he gave us back our lives again when he raised Christ from the dead—only by his undeserved favor have we ever been saved— and lifted us up from the grave into glory along with Christ, where we sit with him in the heavenly realms—all because of what Christ Jesus did. And now God can always point to us as examples of how very, very rich his kindness is, as shown in all he has done for us through Jesus Christ.

Because of his kindness, you have been saved through trusting Christ. And even trusting is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good we have done, so none of us can take any credit for it. It is God himself who has made us what we are and given us new lives from Christ Jesus; and long ages ago he planned that we should spend these lives in helping others.” (Ephesians 2:1-10, tlb)

Thank you – you can have a seat. There are some incredible insights into our lives and what Easter has done for us that we can find in this brief section of the Bible, that we need to realize today.

Let me start with this – before the resurrection of Jesus...

1. We were dead and didn't know it!

Paul said:

“Once you were under God’s curse, doomed forever for your sins...All of us used to be just as they are, our lives expressing the evil within us...”
(verses 1, 3)

Literally, Paul says, “Once you were dead in your transgressions and sins...” The latter is what caused the former; in other words, because we are all sinful, we are all dead in our sins. In another place in the Bible it says:

For the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23, nlt)

In other words, we are so filled with sin that it was like our daily job; we’d start and end our day sinning. And we got paid for it – but the pay was not dollars or pensions, it was death. Before the resurrection, we were dead in our sin. So you might wonder what Paul meant by “dead”? After all, people don’t usually write letters to dead people! So what did he mean? Paul is talking about the figurative or spiritual result of sin in a person’s life. We all sin, and death is the result.

You probably know that the Bible wasn’t originally written in English, right? It wasn’t written in King James English, either – Shakespeare did *not* write the Bible. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew – the ancient Jewish language. The New Testament was originally written in Greek. So when Paul wrote that we were dead in our sin, he used a particular Greek word for sin: **hamartia**. Hamartia is a shooting word. If you were to shoot something – say you were using a bow and shooting an arrow – hamartia would be the word you used when you *missed* the target. Sin is a failure to hit the target of life. That’s why sin is so universal; we’ve all done it – we’ve all missed the target of the highest and best that we were created for. We are all missing our fullest potential.

I think we have a wrong idea of sin. I think we would all easily agree that a murderer, or a school shooter, or a sex offender, the robber, the drug dealer and drug abuser, those are all sinners. But since all of us in this room are respectable people (?), we think that sin has very little to do with us. We would probably resent being called hell-deserving sinners. But *hamartia* brings us face to face with what sin really is: sin is the failure to be what we ought to be and could be.

Are you as good of a husband as you could be? Do you support your wife in her endeavors and ambitions and responsibilities? Do you inflict your family with your moods? Are you as good a wife as you could be? Are you supportive and understanding of your husband? Do you seek to help him succeed in his efforts, helping him become the best he can be? Are we as good parents as we might be? Do we teach our children with love and tenderness, equipping them to be successful in life? Or do we discipline them in anger? Are we as good sons and daughters as we might be? Are we thankful for our parents and what they do or have done for us? Are we respectful of their position in our lives? Are we as good students or workers as we could be, giving our very best to our studies or tasks, or do we settle for less than our best and shirk our responsibilities?

When we begin to understand what sin really is, I think we see that it isn't something that theologians invented; it permeates all of life and our lives are filled with it. Sin is the failure in *any* sphere of life to be what we can and should be.

There's another word for sin that Paul uses in this passage, though, and it is ***paraptoma***. It's a word-picture to describe someone who takes a wrong turn on a road, or worse yet, slips off the cliff alongside a road. It means literally to *slip* or to *fall*. So a person who fails to grab hold of Truth, or who slips away from Truth, is a sinner. Another English translation of this word that you might have heard of is "trespass" or "transgress." It means to be on the wrong road or the wrong property unlawfully.

Are we where we ought to be in life? Is our course the right one? You are here to make a difference in this world, to help others do better. Is that what you are directly doing with your life?

Sin is not only moral depravity or breaking the moral law, although that is certainly something it is, and something that we are naturally inclined to do. But the central idea of sin is failure; failure to hit the target, failure to hold to the right road, failure to make life what it's capable of becoming, and that definition includes every single one of us in this room. In its essence, sin is failure to uphold and obey the law of love.

But Paul also talks about *death* that comes as a result of sin, and it's important that we understand what that means, too. Being dead in sin as the Bible describes it here is first of all ***a spiritual death***. Life without God is no life at all. At best, we simply exist in a physical state. To be spiritually dead is to live without God's presence. If God were a bad God, that wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing. Who wants an angry, judgmental God always reminding us we can never live up to his perfection? But Jesus revealed to us a loving God who is quick to forgive and wants to give us a life that can be full and complete. Who wouldn't want *that kind* of God always present in their life?!

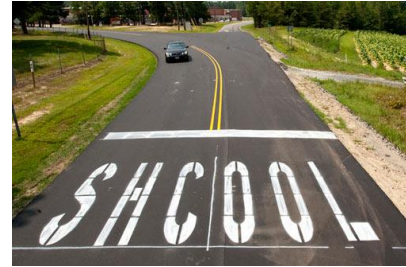
The problem is that sin is incompatible with God and God will not tolerate sin. The Bible says:

"The trouble is that your sins have cut you off from God. Because of sin he has turned his face away from you and will not listen anymore." (Isaiah 59:2, tlb)

Spiritual death is a reduction in quality from the original image of God and relationship with God, in and for which we were created.

But this death that the passage talks about is also ***a literal death***. God's original intention was that we would live forever and never die. That's the way we were created in the beginning in the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Life was there, and we were in unbridled relationship with God, making deathless life possible. But we as the human race sinned by disobeying God and eating of the tree that was forbidden. You see, God always gives us a choice, and we always choose wrong. Adam and Eve had only one job, and they messed it up! Sometimes it seems like we just can't get one thing right; we can't just obey one thing. You had "one job!"

Here are some examples of people who had just one job, and the messed it up:



“SHCOOL” – doesn’t it seem like they’d especially want to get that one spelled right?

Or how about this one:



“Elevator buttons” - I guess you’ve got a 50-50 shot of getting it right.



“Gumball Machine” – this employee did exactly what he was told to do – put the candy in the machine!



“Bananas” – apparently this worker thought it would take too long to write “bananas”



“Do Not Stack” – I have no words...



“Toilet seat” Whoever installed this toilet seat is going to have a lot of cleaning up to do!

“Confused door” – Do I push or pull? Or just stand here confused?



“Bridge” “Do you think anyone will notice?”



“Bunnies” I’m guessing the conversation in the back room of the pet shop went something like this...
“It’s almost Easter and the pet supply didn’t send us any bunnies!” “Maybe no one will tell the difference...”



Adam and Eve had only one job to do – “don’t eat the fruit from *that* tree.” They could do anything and everything, but what did they do? They ate *that* fruit! And the result was a literal death. The fact that Adam and Eve are no longer among us proves that reality. God hasn’t changed this law to this day. Sin, which we’ve all committed, always results in death. The Bible says:

“For as in Adam all die.” (1 Corinthians 15:22, niv)

But this death is not only spiritual and literal, it is something else; it is also ***a death of the will***. The problem with sin is that we lose our will for something greater; we become so discouraged and defeated that we figure that this life is as good as it gets, so we quit believing that there is more out there for us. And, we end up finding the habituality of sin is just too great to stop.

We spiritually dead, without God in our lives, we are literally dead – we all are going to die. The last time I checked, the death rate was still right around 100% for us. And we all lose the will to change any of it.

We were dead and we didn’t know it!

And because of all that...

2. We were disobedient and couldn’t change it!

That’s the problem with sin; not only are we sinning, and we *know* that we are sinning, we can’t do anything to stop it or change it. Jesus pointed out this truth when he said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.”
- Jesus (John 8:34, esv)

The Bible says that we are “slaves to sin” (Romans 6:20). That means that we have no choice but to obey sin, because it is the master and we are the slave.

It kind of reminds me of one of my favorite sports when I was growing up.

So when I was in high school I played baseball and basketball and football – I even tried soccer once. But by far my favorite was baseball – that’s what I started playing when I was just a little kid – probably six years old. I learned quickly that there is a rule in baseball when you are up to bat, and it’s this: three strikes and – what? You’re out.

Well, in this passage we’ve been looking at, the three-strike rule is in place. We’ve got three strikes against us: in verse two it says that we:

“Went along with the crowd and were just like all the others, full of sin.”
(verse 2a)

We are saturated in a world that is hell-bent on going a different way than God’s way. The structures of men and women are created to keep the rich and powerful rich and powerful and to oppress everyone else, especially the poor and the marginalized.

We have a culture that right now is out of control – there is so much hate going around. We’ve got leaders tweeting all kinds of ugly garbage in hate wars against each other. We’ve got the news reporting in ways that seem to push an agenda so you don’t know if what is being reported is real or fake – unless they are reporting in favor of whatever your opinion is. People can’t even speak civilly to each other anymore. And social media only makes it worse. I have one pastor friend who recently said that on social media, “the visceral reaction is the highest and first reference point.” That’s the world we live in, and we are soaking in it, and that’s one strike against us.

There’s another strike against us, and that’s the devil. Verse two also said that we are always:

“Obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air, who is at work right now in the hearts of those who are against the Lord.” (verse 2)

Listen, the Bible never disputes the presence of evil that is greater than us, greater than our sin, and in fact is the ultimate source behind our sin. It is that serpent of old in the Garden, the devil, who hates God more than anything and so therefore hates you, because God loves you so much. The devil is not greater than God, but for the time being he owns this earth – he permeates the very air of it. We surrendered the rights to it when we sin.

Strike one is (?): the world. Strike two is (?): the devil.

And if the world and the devil weren’t enough, according to verse three, strike three is that we’ve got our own sinfulness to contend with:

“All of us used to be just as they are, our lives expressing the evil within us, doing every wicked thing that our passions or our evil thoughts might lead us into. We started out bad, being born with evil natures, and were under God’s anger just like everyone else.” (verse 3)

Paul called this “the flesh” – what he meant by that is that our sinful nature is like our skin – we can’t step out of it. So we’ve got three strikes against us: we are out; we have death.

So we were dead and didn’t know it, we were disobedient and couldn’t change it, but here’s the great news, which the resurrection is all about...

3. We were made alive and didn’t earn it!

Because Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again, we have been set free from the death that sin brings.

Jesus didn’t deserve to die; *we* did because *we* sinned. But Jesus never sinned. It didn’t matter that the world is full of hell on earth; Jesus brought heaven to earth. It didn’t matter that the devil, evil itself is present in this world – he is stronger than the devil and the world. The Bible says:

“The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”
(1 John 4:4, niv)

Jesus was not covered in the skin of sin; Jesus is described this way:

“His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames.” (Daniel 7:9, esv)

So Jesus has taken all three pitches and knocked them out of the park for us. He is the one who has set us free. The Bible tells us this:

“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.” (Romans 5:6-11, nlt)

Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we’ve been set free from sin and death, and have been given new life. We didn’t earn it – don’t deserve it. Jesus Christ’s resurrection allows us to come alive! Remember that we said that sin created a *spiritual death*? Because of the resurrection, we have *spiritual life*:

“Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.” (1 Peter 3:18, nlt)

That means that our life here on earth can be filled with the presence of God in us, so that we can have strength, peace, joy, purpose, and each one of us has an important part to play in making a difference in this world, bringing heaven on earth! You can now have spiritual life!

Remember that we said that sin caused *literal death*? Now, because Jesus rose from the dead, death is no longer the final word on our existence; we can have life – truly full life – here on earth, and then can continue on in an even greater existence after we die:

“Jesus will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”
(Revelation 21:4, niv)

The resurrection makes all the difference for us to have this new life:

“Our earthly bodies, the ones we have now that can die, must be transformed into heavenly bodies that cannot perish but will live forever. When this happens, then at last this Scripture will come true—‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ O death, where then your victory? Where then

your sting? For sin—the sting that causes death—will all be gone; and the law, which reveals our sins, will no longer be our judge. How we thank God for all of this! It is he who makes us victorious through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So, my dear brothers, since future victory is sure, be strong and steady, always abounding in the Lord's work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever wasted as it would be if there were no resurrection." (1 Corinthians 15:53-58, tlb)

Finally, do you remember that sin has brought about a death of the will? That it renders us hopeless and helpless of ever being able to obey God and stop sinning? The resurrection of Jesus Christ has changed that too!

"Yes, Adam's *sin* brought *punishment* to all, but Christ's *righteousness* makes men *right with God*, so that they can live." (Romans 5:18, tlb)

Because Jesus rose from the dead and we are forgiven by God, we can have his presence in our lives, giving us the power to obey and live into this new and different quality of life:

"Do the good things that result from being saved, obeying God with deep reverence, shrinking back from all that might displease him. For God is at work within you, helping you want to obey him, and then helping you do what he wants." (Philippians 2:12-13, tlb)

We were dead and didn't know it: a death that is spiritual, literal, and of the will. We were disobedient and couldn't change it – we have three strikes against us. But we were made alive and didn't earn it! So all that is left is for you to accept Christ's death and resurrection in your place. Will you walk out of here in new, resurrection power life? All you have to do is accept it and come alive. Give up your life of spiritual death and literal death and the depressing death of the will, and give yourself to God through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Come alive into a new, transformed existence of spiritual life, literal life, and a life in which you can follow Jesus, as you allow him to work in and through you!

If you would like to declare today that you want to come alive, we have something for you. In a moment, you can come forward and take one of these. This is simply a piece of paper cut in the shape of the cross. But there's something else here – this is seed paper. When you take it home and place in dirt and water, flowers will grow out of the empty ground. That is exactly what God will do in your life. Allow the resurrection life of Christ to be planted in your life and watch new, beautiful life come alive in you.

The choir is going to sing, "Come alive." And as they do, you can come forward and receive one of these crosses as your way to say to God and to all those gathered here, "I am going to come alive in Christ!"