

LIVING AS GOD'S MASTERPIECE

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Scripture: Ephesians 2: 1-10

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And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Word of God for us to wait upon and allow God's Spirit to speak through it and to bring to our hearts, our minds, our understanding, what God wants for each one of us today. So let's open our hearts to Him. Would you join me as we pray together?

Lord Jesus, speak to us through Your Holy Spirit in ways that we can understand this text as it applies to each one of us, that at the end of it Lord, we would be moved from one place to another in a trajectory that You invite us to walk in being Your disciples. In Your name as always, we pray this. Amen.

As I looked at the first ten verses of this epistle that Paul has written, I thought that if we did an outline, it would fit into three categories:

- **The past** – in terms of where we were walking according to the things of this world, according to the prince of the air, living in the lust of the flesh – that's in the past.
- **The present** – we're alive in Christ because of the work that Jesus has done. We are told that we are in Him and that we sit along with Him in the heavenly places. We are in this position because of grace, not by anything that you and I have done but by grace alone. And all this for what?
- **The purpose** – we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, prepared beforehand by God so that we might walk in Him.

As I looked at it, I thought we need to work backwards here in terms of what we need to grapple with. I wanted for us to start with the 10th verse that says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ for good works."

THE PURPOSE: WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP

God's intent for us was to showcase His workmanship that would ensue through the good works that He had planned for each of us. Earlier in Matthew's gospel, Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." There needs to be good works that come out of being disciples of Jesus. I believe that in this chapter, Paul tells us how that can be possible and also to be careful to use these good works as a kind of litmus test to check whether we are in the place that we ought to be. We'll come to that a little later.

We have often heard people wonder, and we probably have as well – Why am I here? Why has God placed me here in the world? Is there a reason for it? Is there something that will not happen if I just meander my way through it? We find that there are many people who leave their countries and go out to the Himalayas or to other places in search of finding out who they are and what is the purpose of their lives. Why have I been born in this particular era, at this time, in this country, within this family, in this school? Why am I part of this college, or this company, or this firm, or this church? Endless questions that have to do with the reason for us being here. Am I here just by sleight of hand?

Paul tells us very clearly: No! there is a fundamental purpose to our being here. He says, “You and I are God’s workmanship; we are His masterpiece. God has made us what we are.” In other words, you and I have been crafted by the Almighty God. He looked at me, He looked at you. He made us differently, but at the end of it He pronounced us good. We are His masterpiece. Wrap your minds around that word – masterpiece. We are His workmanship.

As Isaiah says in 64:8, “Yet, You Lord are our Father, we are the clay; you are the potter. We are all the work of Your hands.” God took us and He fashioned us in a beautiful way and then looked at that and said, “You are My masterpiece.” Look around at the things God has created. He has not made anything trashy. Look at the sun, look at the moon. You see the stars as a canopy over the earth, you see the mountain ranges, the beauty of the oceans, the wildlife, the fish in the sea, the majestic elms, the beautiful roses and carnations and lilies, the gorgeous colors of the parrots, the majestic flight of the eagles, you and me. His workmanship, beloved, the masterpiece of the Almighty God. That’s who Paul says we are. We are God’s masterpiece! The next time you look in the mirror, tell yourself: I am God’s masterpiece; that’s what God says about me.

He went even beyond that. He went beyond making something that was good and beautiful and a wonder. He also gave something to us to empower us, to give us life that would be lived well and fruitful. Till today, my favorite passenger aircraft is the Boeing 747. I think it’s a majestic bird. You see it sitting on the tarmac, four stories high, that wonderful nose, the huge span of wings. Such a sight to behold! And yet, that aircraft wasn’t meant to sit on the tarmac. It’s majesty, it’s look was not meant to be wowed from the ground. It needs to be in the air. And for that, there are four Rolls-Royce engines that take it up into the skies.

So also, God looked at us, His wonderful creation, His workmanship, His masterpiece and said: For us to fulfill our reason and our purpose, we need to be empowered. How did He empower us? He said that He would merge us with Christ – the masterpiece that we are along with the Master. And with this empowerment would then come the ability to fulfill the purpose that we are here on earth to make sure that there are good works that ensue from our lives. Being in Christ would help us to stay focused on what we need to do and how to live our lives. Being in Christ would empower us, and the result would be that good works would come out, that we would be led to let our lives produce fruit that would be good and consistent with the reason that God made you a masterpiece, joined you with Jesus, and gave you a purpose here on earth.

Now there are many reasons why we are here on earth and what we need to do, but I’m narrowing it to the context of Ephesians. Paul is reminding us that as God’s workmanship blended into Jesus, good works must come out. Therefore, just being joined together with Jesus is not enough, that joining must result in good things happening as well. Our wills must so align with the will of Jesus that His purpose for you and for me could be made known and fulfilled or be accomplished.

James in his epistle, gets more vocal about faith and works. He talks about the whole idea of faith and works in this context of just being joined to Jesus and then saying, "I'm now in Jesus; I'll just sit here and wait for Him to take me to heaven."

James 2:14-17 *What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.* He repeats this in vs. 26: *For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*

So we need to make sure that works ensue from our union with Jesus in accordance with being God's masterpiece. Now that was the plan and is the plan for. You and me who claim we are in Christ Jesus.

This theme in Christ resounds right through Paul's writings. You can count the number of times he keeps saying – in Him, in Christ we are justified, in Christ we are redeemed, in Christ we are sanctified, in Christ we are resurrected, in Christ we are baptized, in Christ we are empowered, redeemed and so on and so forth. In Christ! For the Christian, there's no other place. That is our place beloved, to be in Christ.

And that's a good place for us to pause and ask ourselves the question: Am I where God wants me to be? in other words, Am I in Christ? Am I open to the question: am I doing good works? If the answer to that question is, "I'm not too sure about that," then I believe you're in the right place and the right time today. Because beloved, this word is for you. Paul says that if that's where you are, then we need to back up a little. Paul says, "There was a time when we didn't see our lives through God's lenses," and he calls it a place when we were dead in our trespasses and sins.

So, here's what I'm saying: We are God's masterpiece enmeshed in Christ so that good works will come forth. If the good works are not coming out, it's a good litmus test for us to check everything before this: Am I in Christ? Am I doing anything wrong?

THE PAST

Let's go back because Paul starts in the past. We are dead in our sins. We are walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of this world, etc. Then we see what Christ has done.

What does 'being dead in our trespasses and sins' refer to?

In vs. 2, 3 he says, *"You used to live in sin just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil who is the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature."*

In other words, being dead in our trespasses means that we obey the evil one, we follow our own passionate desires, and we live by our own sinful nature. 'Dead in our sins,' is how Paul puts it.

But good news invaded this place because God couldn't bear to see us in our sins. So, we see in vs. 4 that mercy, love and grace came together to take us from this 'dead to sin' state, to being 'alive in Christ' state. Dead to sin, alive in Christ; and the thing that came to save us was God's mercy. Why mercy? Because we didn't deserve it. God's love, incredible love! "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." And God's grace – unmerited favor. We didn't deserve it. The penalty for our sins was death; and that's what we deserved. And yet, between this 'dead to sin' and

being 'alive in Christ,' God's love, grace and mercy settled there and gently gave us a way to move away from that place of being steeping in our sins.

THE PRESENT

Vs. 5 – “Even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.” Understand that! He goes on to make sure that we don't say: “Oh, I do a lot of good things. I live a good life. I show kindness to the disenfranchised. Sometimes I help the poor people.” He says, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It's the gift of God; even the faith to accept what God has given to us in mercy, even that faith God has given to us. Then he says, “Not as a result of good works so that no one may boast.” It is not because of anything that you and I could have done that we are saved today. It is by the grace of God.

We see Paul saying, “Here's the past. Here's 'dead to sin'. And here's what God has done to bring you into this beautiful present of being alive in Christ. And then he says, “Here's what the days and months and years ahead should look like – that in Christ you would have good works, that you will see yourself as a beautiful masterpiece of God's creation.

What a beautiful place to be in, and yet I know that maybe some of you are listening and saying: “I accepted Jesus a long time ago. I've been baptized, I went through confirmation class, I'm a born-again believer. I believe I'm a disciple of Jesus. But apart from knowing that one day I'll get to heaven, nothing has really changed in my life. I don't see this thing that you're talking about, in my life. I always thought that I was brought from this place of being dead to sin, to being alive in Christ, but I don't see it in my life. I'm still lying, cheating; I'm still living in sinful ways, indulging in the same addiction, still an angry person, still nursing hate and anger and bitterness. I don't enjoy joy or peace or worship. In fact, I don't see myself as God's workmanship designed for good works through Jesus. Is there any hope for me? How do I get from where I am to this place of wonderful affirmation of joy and peace and fulfillment?

Beloved, if that's the place that you're in today – you're not seeing good works coming out of your life, but you're seeing your passionate, lustful desires being fulfilled, your sinful nature being indulged, caught up in wrong-doing that has maybe even compromised your witness, or living under Satan's power rather than the power of the risen Lord. you know you can't be happy in that place. Joy must have left a long time ago. Maybe each day is just going through the motions and maybe you can even recall the beautiful expressions of peace that used to envelop you before. And you wonder: Is there hope? Can I get back to the safety and comfort and productivity of being in Christ? And the answer to that is a resounding YES.

A story is told of a man living in England who wanted to get across to the United States in the early days when the US was just beginning to open up. He saved all the money that he could and was finally able to buy a ticket. He went to the store and bought some bread and fruit and packed it. He got on the ship and every day he would walk around. Then when he heard the dinner gong announcing that lunch or dinner were being served, he would go to his little room and he would take out this package and eat a slice of bread and some fruit, and then tie it back again and keep it safely. Days went by. One day a steward saw him and asked, “What are you doing?” He replied, “This is the food I brought on the trip and I'm using it for my meals.” The steward looked at him incredulously and said, “Why are you doing that? Don't you realize that the ticket you bought also came with food – breakfast, lunch and dinner?” Here was this man, living at subsistence level because he hadn't understood what that ticket had meant when he got onto that ship.

Beloved, when we were saved and placed in Christ, we came with extraordinary riches at that point as well. as we look at how to move from being in this place where we have no joy and peace, just going through the motions – Yes, I’m born again. Yes, I think I’m going to heaven. We say, Who am I in Christ? Why is Paul continuing to say, “In Christ, in Christ?” well, beloved, this is what you need to understand.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. When you were saved, you were moved from the domain of darkness to the domain of light. Colossians 1:13 says, “He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” When we were saved, we were moved from this kingdom that belonged to Satan to the kingdom of Jesus. He redeemed us with His precious blood and forgave us all our sins. We have been moved away from that place. We are in the place of light.
2. We need to understand that you and I are God’s workmanship. We’ve got to accept that. maybe over the years, Satan has convinced you that you’re ugly, you’re good-for-nothing, a loser, a failure, you can never be forgiven, you’re defined by your past, you’ll always be alone, and all the rest of that. but, do you know, beloved, the number of things that the bible has that tells you about who you are in Christ? I want you to look at this list and if it’s too small to read, write to me and I’ll send it to you. There are such beautiful things that we are told:
 - I’m an accepted child in Christ
 - I’m secure in Christ
 - I’m significant in Christ
 - I’m the salt and the light of the earth
 - I’m a branch of the true vine
 - I’m free forever from condemnation
 - I’m God’s child
 - I’m Christ’s friend
 - I’ve been justified
 - I’m united.

Just look at this list; that’s who we are in Christ. It’s time we stop believing the lies of the evil one because we’re no longer in his domain. We’re in the domain of Jesus, the domain of light. He tells you and me who we are, and He has such beautiful words that refer to us.

3. We need to understand what it means to be in Christ. Many years ago, I read a book that told me just very graphically: Here I am and this is Christ, and I am in Christ. Therefore, I am secure, safe, I understand Christ’s will for my life, where Christ wants me to go, I go. You may say, “I know that but I also hear Satan calling me.” Yes, you will hear him but he can do nothing to you because the bible says, “No one can pluck you out of His hand. My sheep listen to My voice, I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. No one can snatch them out of My hand.” No one. Satan can’t do that. you’re safe in Him.

I remember a chorus. I just love those old choruses that we used to sing – they had such gospel truth embedded in them.

Safe am I, safe am I,

In the hollow of His hand;
Sheltered o'er, sheltered o'er
With His love forever more.
No ill can harm me, no foe alarm me,
For He keeps both day and night,
Safe am I, safe am I,
In the hollow of His hand.

In Christ beloved, that's who you are and where you are, safe in the hollow of His hand where no one can snatch you away.

4. Understand what good works means for you. You need to ask Jesus always whether this is something He wants you to do. Because remember, however hobbler a thing may be, if it isn't His will for you, it will be burnt up as hay, stone and rubble. However good and noble it is, if it is not God's will for you to do it, it doesn't have any weight in the kingdom of God. So always ask Him to confirm for you the work of your hands as the Psalmist would say.

Let me give you an example so that this doesn't just seem too out there. Let's say that the previous Christmas (before the pandemic) we had filled up different things that could be given to the poor – blankets, a torch, a cup, plate and some water, some things to eat – and we had packed all that up and told you to take it and distribute it wherever God was leading you. Say you sought God and said, "Lord, where do you want me to go?" and God told you to go to Colaba. You then said, "Lord, Colaba is a long way from Powai, and there are plenty of needy people here." And you went around to Kanjur Marg and you distributed it there. (For those of you not in Mumbai, one is a faraway place while the others are close by). That was not doing the will of God although people benefitted from it. It would have been a good thing from the perspective of the world, but it was not a kingdom thing. Make sure, being in Christ, that you always go to Him and say, "Lord, is this what You want me to do?"

5. Understand that in Christ, you are a new creation. The old has passed away and He is making everything new. You are a work in progress. Don't get frustrated and say, "Oh my goodness! I fell again." no, just allow Him to pick you up, dust you off and say, "We're moving on." That's the process of sanctification that we continue to allow Christ working in us, to move into new areas, to leave all the old things behind, to find new things that are worthwhile in accordance with His will, and to make sure that we are in this place as God's masterpiece in Christ, and fruit and good works flowing every moment of every day.

Dearly beloved, for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. So, let's make sure that we live as ones who are crafted by the Creator God. Let's make sure that we walk as ones who are in Christ. And finally, let's ensure that good works are evident through our union with Christ. May God bless you and bless His word to us. Amen.