

The Dead in Sin Made Alive

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And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to he prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of our flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; (by grace are ye saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus. ---Ephesians 2:1-7

NOTHING, my friends, is more profitable to Christians, than frequent meditations on what they once were, and what has a done for them by divine grace. Meditations on these objects are exceedingly well suited to increase, at once, their gratitude, love and humility. To such meditations our text naturally invites us. The apostle here reminds the Ephesian Christians of their former state and character, and contrasts it with their then happy situation, and mentions the Author of the at change, in consequence of which they had passed from death unto life. And lest any should suppose that such a change is necessary for none but those, who like the Ephesians had been heathen and idolaters, he intimates, that he and his fellow apostles, who were Jews, had been by nature in a similar state, and had experienced a similar change. To all the true disciples of Christ, then, whether Jews or Gentiles, and to you, my Christian friends, among the rest, the language of our text may, with propriety, be addressed. You know, that once you were dead in trespasses and sins; you know, that you once walked according to the course of this world, as children of disobedience, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind you know that you were by nature children of wrath, even as others; and you hope that God has quickened, or made you alive, and raised you up to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. This passage, then, contains your religions history. It describes what you once were, and shows what you are now, and what God has done for you. To illustrate more largely these several particulars, is my present design. To you the subject cannot but be interesting, and it will be little less so to you, my impenitent hearers, if you recollect, that in describing what Christians once were, we are describing what you are still.

I. Once, my Christian friends, you were dead in trespasses and sins.

1. In the figurative language of scripture, a man is said to be dead to any object, or class of objects, when he is wholly insensible to it, or unaffected by it, or unsusceptible of impressions from it. Thus Paul speaks of himself, as dying, or becoming dead to the world; meaning that he was less and less affected by worldly objects, and more and more insensible to their influence. So you were once dead with respect to your Creator, your Redeemer, to religious, to divine things, and to all the concerns of your everlasting peace. In other words, you were entirely insensible to these things; they did not affect you, they made no impression upon your minds, any more than if they did not exist, and, in fact, you did not at all realize their existence. You were alive to other objects. You possessed an animal life, which enabled you to have communion with the irrational animals in the pleasures of sense. You possessed what may be, called rational, or intellectual life, by which you were qualified to maintain intercourse and communion with your rational fellow creatures in the pursuit and enjoyment of worldly objects. But of that spiritual life, which renders the soul susceptible of impressions from spiritual objects, and prepares it for the enjoyment of intercourse with God and holy beings, you were entirely destitute. Being thus spiritually dead, you were, of course, devoid of spiritual sense. You could neither hear, nor see, nor feel. You could not hear God's voice, either in his word, or in the dispensations of his providence. He spoke once, yea, twice, but you perceived it not; nor did you ever truly hear a single sermon, though you might, perhaps, listen to many. You were also spiritually blind. You saw no glory in God, no beauty in Christ, no hatefulness in sin, no excellency in the plan of salvation revealed in the gospel. Like all men in their natural state, you received not the things of the Spirit of God, but they were foolishness to you; neither could you know them, because they are spiritually discerned, and you had no spiritual sight. Nor were you less destitute of feeling. You felt nothing of the load of guilt, which pressed you down; nothing of the wickedness and hardness of your own hearts; nothing of the goodness of God and the dying love of Jesus Christ. You did not even feel, that you were dead, but lay buried in a grave of trespasses, and wrapped up in a winding sheet of sins, as insensible of your situation as a corpse, and as completely cut off from all intercourse or communion with God and holy beings, as a corpse is from intercourse with the living; nor did you any more desire to rise from this state, than a corpse desires to rise from the slumbers of the grave. Many attempts, indeed, were made by the beings around you, to rouse you from this state, and sometimes they seemed, for a moment, to be attended with partial success. Like a corpse operated upon by the power of electricity, or galvanism, you exhibited

some faint symptoms of returning animation, or at least of irritability; your eyes were perhaps half unclosed, and you cast an anxious glance around; but the bands of death were too strong to be thus broken, and you soon relapsed into a state of complete moral insensibility. But,

2. While you thus lay, in a spiritual sense, dead in trespasses and sins, you were in another sense, alive, awake and active. Though dead to your Creator, you were alive to your fellow creatures: though dead to the future world, you were alive to this; though destitute of that life which the Holy Spirit communicates, you were vehemently actuated by that evil spirit, which, as our text informs us, works in all the children of disobedience. Hence, you walked according to his will, or which is the same thing, according to the common course of this sinful and apostate world. The tempter, as a strong man armed, kept possession of your hearts, as his castle, and by a constant succession of temptations suited to your depraved taste, he excited your appetites, inflamed your passions, and thus hurried you forward with blind eagerness and impetuosity in a course of self-gratification and disobedience to God. As the world around you lived, so you lived. Like them, you cast off fear, and restrained prayer before God; like them, you neglected your Creator, your Redeemer, your souls and eternity; and like theirs, your whole employment and happiness consisted in fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Some of you, especially during the season of youth, were most intent on gratifying the desires and appetites of the body. You drank deep of the intoxicating cup of pleasures, rejoicing in youth, and walking in the way of your own hearts, and the sight of your eyes. Others were more devoted to the service of those passions, which are seated in the mind; and to gratify them by the acquisition of wealth, or honor, or applause, was the grand object of your lives. In a word, you lived, just as hundreds around you, whose madness and depravity you contemplate with mingled surprise, pity and abhorrence, are living now. Meanwhile, God hearkened and heard, but you spake not aright. None of you repented of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" but every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.

3. Being then dead in sin, and children of disobedience, you were of course children of wrath; or in other words, objects of the just indignation and wrath of God. He was angry with you every day; and once and again insulted justice cried, "Cut them down—why cumber they the ground?" But mercy interposed, and you were spared. Meanwhile, you thought nothing of the justice, which threatened, or the mercy, which spared you, but were wholly occupied by your worldly pursuits; and with scarcely a thought of a hereafter, remained insensible as a corpse, over which the

thunders were rolling, and round which the lightnings of heaven were spending all their fury. You went on with the tempter enthroned, and strongly fortified in your hearts; sin spreading its deadly influence through all the powers of your soul, and all the members of your body; a frowning and angry God looking down upon you from above, his curse resting upon your persons, your possessions, and all the works of your hands; the world spreading all her allurements, to draw you on in the broad road to destruction, and hell opening wide in the path before you; while death, with his envenomed dart, stood waiting a commission to transfix and hurl you down to quenchless flames below. Such, my Christian friends, was once your character and situation. Such, my impenitent hearers, is still yours. Having thus shown what you were, we proceed,

II. To show what God has done for you.

1. When you were thus dead in trespasses and sins, he quickened, or made you alive. You lay, some of you a longer, and some a shorter time in the wretched state, which has been described, like the dry bones which the Prophet saw in the valley of vision, and there you had lain till now, had not sovereign grace interposed. But he, who had from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, in his own appointed time, began to manifest towards you his eternal purposes of love. The season approached, in which he determined, that the dead should hear the voice of the Son of man; and that they who heard should live. In preparing you for the great change, God dealt with you, not as machines, but as rational beings. He sent someone to call to you, saying, O ye dry bones, hear ye the word of the Lord. Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead. By the influences of his Spirit, the call was rendered in some measure effectual. These influences were, however, as yet exerted only in operating upon your rational powers and faculties. Your attention was roused, and turned to religious objects. Your slumbering consciences were awakened, and began to review your past lives and present characters; to compare them with the divine requirements and to upbraid you with your numerous deficiencies. Your understandings were convinced, that something must be done, and done speedily. The new objects thus presented to your mind, and the new interest which they excited, weakened the influence of worldly objects, and rendered you less eager in their pursuit. You began to read the scriptures, and other religious books, with something of a desire to understand them. You felt disposed, you could scarcely tell why, to associate with pious persons, to hear religious conversation, and to frequent religious meetings. You listened with more interest, than formerly, to the preached word; you felt yourselves personally addressed, and

the truths which you heard; sometimes pleased, sometimes offended, and sometimes condemned and distressed you. Thus your attention was more and more strongly fixed on religious subjects; and the interest which they had excited increased. But still you were far from being sensible of your true character and situation. You did not know, or even suspect, that you were dead in trespasses and sins; that your minds were enmity against God, or that it was impossible for you, in your situation at that time, to please him. Ignorant of God's righteousness, you went about to establish your own, and refused to submit to the righteousness of God. While engaged in this fruitless attempt, your minds were agitated and perplexed by various and conflicting emotions. Sometimes you imagined that you were almost a Christian, and not far from the kingdom of heaven. Then some new discovery of the wickedness of your hearts seemed to put you farther from it than ever. In consequence of repeated disappointments of this kind, you were often strongly tempted to entertain hard thoughts of God. You falsely imagined that you were willing to come to Christ, but could not; and that God refused you the necessary assistance. Hence you were often tempted to go back, and give up your religious pursuits in despair. But this you found impossible. The burden of guilt, and the deep anxiety which you now felt, would not allow you to rest, though you felt more and more at a loss what to do, or to conjecture the cause of your ill success. By slow degrees, however, you begin to discover the cause. The commandment, as the apostle expresses it, came to you more clearly and powerfully; and as its light increased, sin revived and you died. You began to perceive something of that spiritual death, of which you had not been aware. You found, that in you there dwelt no good thing, that your hearts were impenetrably hard and insensible; that all your religious duties had proceeded from selfish principles, and were of course abominable in the sight of God. Then you felt, more than ever, your need of a Savior; but, at the same time, more unable, or more unwilling than ever to come to him. But at length you were made to see clearly, that the fault was your own; that you would not come to Christ for life; and that you were dead, utterly dead, in trespasses and sins, and that unless God interposed to save you, you should remain dead forever. This led you to submit, unconditionally, to sovereign mercy, and prepared you to feel, that if ever you were saved, you must be saved by grace, and to give all the glory of your salvation to him to whom it is due. Thus the preparatory work was accomplished, and he, whose work it was, saw that all obstacles to the display of his grace were removed; and then, as the apostle expresses it, by the working of that mighty power which wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, he breathed into you the spirit of life, and you became a living soul. At first, however, you were

perhaps scarcely conscious of the wonderful change, or at least, were conscious of it only by its happy effects. But these effects were such, as could result from nothing but the communication of spiritual life.

You found yourselves as it were, in a new world. A new and interesting class of beings and objects, which had always surrounded you, but which you had hitherto never perceived, now presented themselves to your view; and the scriptures, which had heretofore seemed like the earth, at its first creation, a mighty chaos, without form and void, now appeared to you full of beauty, order and harmony. This was the consequence of your possessing those spiritual senses, which ever accompany spiritual life; and which enable the possessor to discern both good and evil. You now began, for instance, to possess and to exercise spiritual sight. The eyes of your understanding were opened to see wondrous things out of God's law. Among these wondrous things, one object appeared preeminently glorious, beautiful and lovely. This was Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. The light, which flowed from him, rendered both himself and other spiritual objects visible. The wondrous plan of salvation by him now opened to you: you began to know God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, a knowledge of whom is eternal life, and to understand something of the various offices, which Christ sustains with respect to his people. At the same time, you began to hear God's voice in his word and in the dispensations of his providence. You could now hear him speaking peace to his people and to his servants, and the Sound was music to your ears. You were also endued with spiritual feeling. Your hearts of stone were transformed to flesh. You became susceptible of deep and lasting impressions from religious objects, and felt a quick sensibility when they were presented to your minds. Nor were you devoid of spiritual taste. You could now taste and see that the Lord is good; you hungered and thirsted after righteousness; and as new-born babes, desired the sincere milk of the word. And while you were thus endued with new senses, adapted to perceive spiritual objects, the new life, which God had given you, began to spread through all the powers and faculties of your nature, rendering them instruments of righteousness unto holiness. Having thus restored you to life, God next proceeded,

2. To raise you from the grave of sin, and cause you to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. The situation, which had suited and pleased you while in a state of spiritual death, became disagreeable and irksome to you, when restored to life. The spirit of disobedience, which had wrought in you, was banished, and succeeded by the Holy Spirit, the author of life and

peace. You could no longer walk according to the course of this world, nor were you any longer children of wrath. God, therefore, by freely pardoning all your sins, removed the load of guilt and wrath, which, like the great stone at the door of Christ's sepulcher, had confined you to the tomb; called you out from among the dead, who had hitherto been your associates; added you to his church, as members of the great body of Christ; conferred on you the name and privileges of sons and heirs of God, and thus gave you a title to the heavenly inheritance, and did, in effect, make you sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Believing in him, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of the heavenly inheritance. By the influences of the same Spirit you were taught, as are all who have risen with Christ, to set your affections on things above, to look at things unseen and eternal; and to seek for that heavenly city, into which Christ as the forerunner of his people, has entered to take possession in their name, and to prepare a mansion, which shall receive them at death; when you shall actually sit down with him on his throne in the heavenly places, and live and reign with him forever and ever.

3. We are told what prompted God to raise you from the dead, and confer on you these unmerited favors, namely, his own sovereign, self-moved goodness. God, says the apostle, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; for by grace are ye saved, not of works, lest any man should boast. That nothing but sovereign grace thus saved you; and that nothing but God's self-moved goodness or love prompted him to bestow on you that grace, is evident from the description already given of your natural character and situation. You were by nature dead in trespasses and sins. Of course, you did not raise yourselves from the dead. You did not even know, that you were dead, nor had you one desire to be raised from death, till God gave it you, much less did you, while in that state, perform any good works, to merit God's favor. On the contrary, you were children of wrath, and deserved nothing but the wrath of God forever. Nothing but God's grace then, or in other words, nothing but his unmerited favor, raised you from this state, and nothing but his love led him to grant you that grace. But how could he love those who were dead in trespasses and sins, and consequently more hateful in his sight, than a putrefying corpse is in ours? I answer,—he loved you as in Christ, and merely for the sake of Christ, whom he had from eternity appointed to be your covenant head. Our Savior, you recollect, often speaks of a people, who were given to him by his Father. All that the Father giveth me, says he, shall come to me; and this is the will of my Father, that of all that he has given me I should lose none. Now of all who were thus given to Christ, he was from eternity appointed to be the covenant head. Hence we

find the apostle, in the preceding chapter, saying of himself and all other Christians, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Of this people, thus chosen in Christ as their head, and given to him, you, my Christian friends, were a part, and as such, God loved you. As he says to his ancient people, I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you; so we may consider him as saying to us, I have loved you in Christ, and for his sake, with arm everlasting love, therefore I have raised you from the death of sin.

Hence the apostle, speaking of Christians, says, God hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. Here then, my Christian friends, you may trace up the streams of your happiness to the fountain, and see them all flowing from the great abyss of God's eternal, sovereign, distinguishing love. And his design, in thus loving and saving you, was, as the apostle informs us in the verse succeeding our text, that in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Not for your sakes, then may he say, do I this, be it known to you, but for my great name's sake, that it may be glorified thereby. Not unto us, then may we in turn reply, not unto us, but unto thy great name alone, O Lord, be all the glory and all the praise.

APPLICATION

1. My Christian friends, has God done all this for you? Has he loved you with an everlasting love? Has he quickened you, when you were dead in trespasses and sins; has he raised you up together and made you sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus? Has he done all this for children of wrath, done it for you of mere grace or mercy, without any desert of such favors on your part? Need any thing, then, be said to convince you that you ought to love him, to praise him, to live to him and him only? If it is a sin not to be grateful for life, is it not a much greater sin to feel no gratitude for the gift of spiritual and eternal life? If sinners ought to love him, who created them, because he is the former of their bodies, and the father of their spirits, ought not you much more to love him for creating you anew in Christ Jesus unto good works? What sum would induce you to be again thrown back into the awful situation from which his grace has raised you? What would tempt you to consent to be again dead in trespasses and sins, under the power of Satan, and children of wrath, and in a state of awful uncertainty, whether you ever

awake? For what would you sell the gifts, which you hope a benevolent God has given you? Would you exchange them for all the worlds he ever created? If not, you ought to be as grateful, as if he had actually given you all these worlds; for, in fact, he has given you more. O then, bless the Lord, and forget not all his benefits. Let the love of Christ constrain us. Let me urge and entreat you, by the tender mercies of God, by all that he has done for you, by all that you hope for, to present your bodies and your souls a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2. Has God done all this for you? Then he will do more. Has he loved you from eternity? Then he will love you to eternity. Has he raised you from spiritual death? Then he will never suffer you to fall under the power of death a second time. Has he given you spiritual life? Then he will give it more abundantly. Has he made you sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus? Then, as surely as Christ ascended to heaven after his resurrection, so surely shall you ascend to heaven, and sit down together with him there forever and ever. This is evident from the design, which God had in view in raising you from spiritual death. He did it, as our text informs us, that in the ages to come, he might display the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. But should he cease to carry on the work he has begun, the riches of his grace could not be displayed; all the glory of his grace would be obscured, and all that he has done for you, would be worse than thrown away. For his name's sake, for his glory's sake therefore, he will continue to carry on the work he has begun in you, and render it perfect in the day of Christ Jesus. Be not then discouraged by the difficulties and obstacles you meet with; work out your salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that God worketh in you to will and to do. He will give more grace. He will perfect that which concerneth you; he will not forsake the work of his own hands. Plead with him, then, what he has done, as a reason why he should do more. Cry to him, with the Psalmist, thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, and my eyes from tears?

To conclude. We have already observed, my impenitent hearers, that what Christians once were, you are still. You are dead in trespasses and sins; you are walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, and are, of course, children of wrath. Whether God will ever raise you from this state, is altogether uncertain. He has no where promised that he will. You are altogether unworthy of such a favor. You are condemned already, and he may justly leave you to perish. If you ask what you shall do; God's answer is, Awake thou

that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. If you reply, “We cannot do this”,—I can only say, I have no commission to notice such an excuse; my business is to bring you God’s messages. This I have done in his own words. Consider how you will treat them.