

## Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2

“ And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the [a]course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

# "The First Resurrection"

This morning we will continue our study of this glorious summary of the Gospel that we find here at the beginning of Chapter two in Ephesians. In the first three verses the Apostle has reminded us in very strong terms about the natural state of man in our fallen condition after the sin of Adam.

- He concluded that we are by nature children of wrath and thus deserving of God's just punishment.

But as we pointed out two weeks ago, that reality is sandwiched by the glorious truth that God has made us alive, hath quickened us, so that this is now our past nature, a past that is to be kept in the past. In the verses that follow we will learn more about God's Grace, about faith and about our obedient response to such Grace, but for this morning I want to focus on our being made alive!

- I want us to reflect on both the power and the wonder of what this means for us and the world!

This being made alive or quickening, which the Apostle clearly teaches as something that has already taken place in the lives of all the Saints, sounds like a resurrection and in fact I believe that the Bible calls it that when the Apostle John refers to it in Revelation chapter twenty as the First Resurrection!

Venturing into Revelation can become controversial because of the nature of that book and it is something many avoid:

- Even John Calvin did not include that Book in his commentaries!

So while I may approach dangerous ground here, I think it is important and will not only give us a better understanding of what Paul is teaching here but bring great comfort as well.

I want to acknowledge a great point that Jeff made in his message last week that can help us understand all this:

When discussing the heart, Jeff did a great job of explaining how a simple word like heart can have various meanings.

He explained importance of discerning what meaning is appropriate:

Saying that someone's point got right the heart of the matter, that Joe had a heart attack, that Sue's heart was broken or that Kathy drew a cute heart for valentine's day are all very different things said using the same word.

- We can usually know which meaning is being used by the context of someone's statement, but it can get very confusing if we do not pay attention to that context.

The same is certainly true when we come to a word like resurrection.

**If I speak of The Resurrection, I am most likely speaking about what happened on Easter morning when Jesus was raised from the dead! That is certainly the focus that the Apostle Paul has in presenting the Gospel in I Corinthians 15!**

- **In a different statement I could be referring to the resurrection of all the dead before the Great White Throne Judgment.**

**Resurrection can also be used to refer to any other person who has been brought back to life and we have several examples of that in the Bible as well. And finally it can mean a revival or resurgence of something...**

- **Like resurrecting a family tradition or those Russians who long for a return of the monarchy with the resurrection of the Romanov family.**

**So when the Apostle says in verses one and four that God has ‘made us alive together in Christ,’ just how are we to understand quickening or resurrection?**

- **As we did with understanding our depravity, we must again consider the Book of Beginnings!**

**So first a little quiz: What did God tell Adam would happen if he ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden? That’s right: He said he would die, in very strong terms, like dying the death! So, did Adam drop dead the moment that he ate the fruit, or even later on the day that he ate it? Was God wrong?**

**The answer to that is pretty obvious and so it causes us to consider what dying the death actually meant.**

**As we saw in our last message it brought upon Adam and the human race all that Paul summarized in those first three verses.**

- **Adam’s death, and our death is both spiritual and physical.**

**Adam’s relationship with God was broken and his physical body was also broken and began to decay & die on the very day that he partook. And yes, even though Adam would live some 930 years more on this earth, his physical death was sealed on the day that he rebelled just as God promised.**

**Now what we need to understand is that just as there was a lapse in time from the day Adam died spiritually until the day of his physical death, our restoration or salvation follows the same pattern:**

**At our conversion, we are made alive in Christ and raised up into the heavenlies spiritually in the here and now, and yet our physical resurrection will come at the end of this age.**

- **This is what it means to be born again, to have new life in Christ, or as we shall see in a moment to be partakers of the first resurrection!**

**Revelation 20 gives us a brief outline of the events that take place from the end of the Old Creation with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 until the final judgment at that Second Coming of Jesus. With the victory of Jesus over sin and death, Satan is defeated and can no longer claim the nations as his own: As we often sing in Psalms 2 & 110, the nations of the earth are now being given over to God’s Son!**

**Thus chapter 20 describes Satan’s demise in this way, “ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”**

**As we learned at length in our study of the Book of Acts, this period of history is when the Spirit of God will fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus and John goes on to describe it this way:**

4 “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.

➤ This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

After the Spirit’s work is completed, Satan is loosed so that he can foment another rebellion which is quickly crushed with the return of Jesus at His Second Coming which ushers in our physical resurrection and the judgment of the whole world:

11 “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

- So the Bible teaches that we are brought back to life spiritually at the beginning of our walk with Christ!
- And we are brought back to life physically at the end of this age which ushers in our glorious eternity with Jesus.

Again, our restoration mirrors and reverses the fall of Adam where he died spiritually on the day he partook of the forbidden fruit and died physically at the end of his life. Now I think it is common and even normal for us to be very excited about the second resurrection of our physical bodies at the end of time, while not always thinking about the significance of the new life we have at the first resurrection.

Remember, Paul says that God HAS made us alive, He hath quickened us! This is why a proper understanding of this gives us great comfort and actually impacts the world at large!

- It is we as Saints, living this new life we have been given, who the Holy Spirit uses to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.

So with that in mind I want us to quickly review another very familiar passage about resurrected life!

In John chapter eleven we have the account of Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead. Now as we approach this account we must remember two important details:

This is NOT an example of our final resurrection at the last day because Lazarus was not brought back with His glorified body and would still face the reality of physical death as we all do at some later time. This is true with all the examples of resurrections we see in the Scriptures...

- With of course the exception of Jesus, Who was raised as the first-fruits of our final or second resurrection.

We will one day share the glorified flesh with which He was raised as the Apostle Paul teaches so clearly in the resurrection chapter [I Corinthians 15] What the account of Lazarus does illustrate, along with the dry bones we have often studied in Ezekiel 37, is what the Apostle Paul taught us about our fallen nature in the early verses of chapter two:

We are as dead in trespasses and sin just as Lazarus was in that tomb.

- **Our nature, left to itself is subject to God's wrath and wills only to rebel against God.**

**We those two thoughts in mind I trust we can see this account with new eyes to help us see the glories of our first resurrection! We will pick up the account in verse 12 where Jesus makes sure that the disciples and all those who would later read the account understand that Lazarus is truly dead.**

**As we saw in those illustrations a few weeks ago, he is not a sick patient waiting for medicine or a drowning person hoping for a life preserver:**

- **Lazarus has died and needs to be resurrected.**

**12 "Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." 13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him."**

**What was the lesson that Jesus wanted the disciples and all of us to learn?**

- **That He is the one that brings life, and life abundant, beginning with our first resurrection!**

**38 "Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone."**

**Martha is concerned about the stench and Jesus prays and then cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" Now the important thing to remember this morning is that Lazarus did not come forth in a glorified body, but like us, in a body that would live and die. It is an example of what we should expect from our first resurrection! In fact, we see that Lazarus is also an example of our need for sanctification as we discussed a few weeks ago:**

**44 "And he who had died came out bound hand & foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."**

**Lazarus was set free and would go on to eat and drink with Jesus and serve Him, even face persecution from the religious leaders who hated Jesus.**

**This helps us to see why the New Testament writers tell us NOT to return to the old life: Imagine Lazarus asking for his grave clothes back, or wanting to go back into the tomb?**

**We are to be excited about this new life that we have in Christ and to remember that we are to "be priests of God and of Christ, and [to] reign with Him." Our new life should change us and the world just as Lazarus did:**

**Listen to Paul's admonitions to the Saints at Rome after sharing the Good News: Romans 6:4 "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**

- **The newest of life that is the first resurrection!**

**5 "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."**

- **We have been called out of the tomb, and those graveclothes have been removed!**

**7 "For he who has died has been freed from sin."**

- **The old man who was by nature a child of wrath subject to God's just judgement had to die!**

8 “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

- We are no longer in the grave, but have been called forth in the first resurrection to the new life that we are to live in Christ!

That is the story of salvation and what the rest of this Epistle to the Saints at Ephesus will be all about!

**Communion Meditation: John 11**

“21 Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

22 But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24 Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”” [we believe and God helps our unbelief!]