

## Resurrected in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Many years ago now I can remember obtaining a tape of a sermon of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones who was a famous preacher at Westminster Chapel, London from 1939 to 1968, when he had a major operation and decided to retire. He died in March 1981. The sermon was on a C90 and I never heard the end of it because the tape ran out before he had finished. This meant the sermon was over 90 minutes long and it was on just two words. The joke use to be at one time was when two Christians met and the both found out that they had spent a year or two at attending Westminster Chapel, the questions was, “Which year were you at Westminster Chapel then.” The reply would come back, “Romans 4”. “Before my time then, I was Romans 8!”

I cannot remember the passage or text that Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones was using on the tape, but I can remember the title and it could have come from this passage in Ephesians 2. The title of the sermon was ‘But God’. ‘But God’ – that was it. Tonight I promise that I will not go on for an hour and a half, I will be shorter than that.

But God. In the NIV you will not find that phrase in this passage. This is because it separates the but and the God, however it is there in verse 4.

**“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,”** (Ephesians 2:4 NIV)

If you look at many versions the But God is together. Take the New Living Translation

**“But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much,”** (Ephesians 2:4 NLT)

And many others versions keep the *But God* together. This verse is the pivotal verse or beginning of the pivotal verses in the passage we read earlier. It is the place where things change. Verse 4

**“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—”** (Ephesians 2:4-8 NIV)

The reason for the change is because of three things

God’s Love – not a little love, but a great love. It breaks God’s heart to be out of relationship with anyone. One man who had a great influence on my life was one Gordon Cornell. He was my local Junior Covenanter leader. Covenanters is a national Christian, non-denominational organisation for young people aged 10 upwards. For many years Gordon use to go lead a Juco camp of boys aged 11-12 at West Runton, near Sheringham on the Norfolk coast and Sue and I went a couple of times as officers. She was a cook, I was Sports Officer. One year I remember there was a group of boys who were being particularly difficult and Gordon had had to have severe words with them. When the boys left the camp Gordon was heart broken. Not because they were difficult, not because he had had to have severe words with them. It was because they left without shaking Gordon’s outstretched hand and showing that bygones would be bygones. He said afterwards that this was the first time it had ever happened and he was devastated.

God is like that with humanity. He wants to have a good relationship with everyone because of his love for humanity. He wants to show his love in many ways. He has shown his love supremely by coming to earth and living as a human being and then being prepared to die for that humanity. But his love must mean that his heart is broken daily when people continue to reject him and his love to them.

God's Mercy – then we have God's mercy, his rich mercy. His mercy means that he is faithful to us, to humanity even when it was against him. There is a problem and at times love cannot be enough to solve that problem. God's problem seemed unsolvable. On one side there was God's love and his purity and on the other the awfulness and rebellion against God of humanity. However God's mercy kept him in there until a solution was found.

That brings us on to the third thing

God's Grace – God's grace made it all happen. It was God's grace that meant Jesus dying on the cross and then rising again from the dead. It is God's grace that means we to are *Resurrected in Christ*. It is God's grace that saves us, nothing in and of ourselves does, purely God's grace. All we have to do is to accept the free gift that God gives us in the form of salvation through Jesus – his life, death and resurrection and then we are *Resurrected In Christ*.

So God's love, his mercy and his grace means that we are now *Resurrected In Christ*. Verse 6

**“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”**

(Ephesians 2:6-7 NIV)

How we are here and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms is difficult to comprehend, but it means that when we accept what God, what Jesus has done for us, then our place is booked, but note it is not for our benefit, but so that God can show us how wonderful his grace is, how marvellous his kindness is, and it is all expressed in Jesus. We have so much in Jesus, all because of 'But God'.

So if But God is the pivot, there must be a before and after. Something around which the pivot, pivots, and it is a before and after.

Before we were in the heavenly realms with Christ, before being *Resurrected In Christ* we are described as being disobedient, as being dead. This is disobedient to what God wanted and dead in a spiritual sense, we were separated from God. This happened in three ways

World – Firstly there was the world. Verse 1

**“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world....”** (Ephesians 2:1-2 NIV)

We followed it. It is perhaps even easier now with all the advertising that goes on which infers that if we do not have this of that, then we are not where it is happening, we do not really belong. And we all like to belong. But the world system, the world's mindset is to take people away from God, rather than to God.

The world in which we live has a big pull and even in the church we have to make the distinction between following a trend for a trend's sake, or using a new way of telling the gospel to make it relevant to the world, the culture in which we live. As Jesus said

**“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.”**

(John 17:15-16 NIV)

We are to be in the world, using its technology which has all been giving by God to bring the timeless message to people, that God loved them enough to come as God the Son to die for them and that they can be *Resurrected In Christ* because he was raised from the dead.

Devil – But we also have the problem of the devil. He wants to keep us from God as well. Verse 1 again

**“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways...of the ruler of the kingdom of the air,...”**

(Ephesians 2:1-2 NIV)

The devil wants us to be disobedient – he does not want us to follow Jesus and so he tries all he can to stop us. A good book to read to see how he does this is *Screwtape Letters* written by C S Lewis. Lewis writes a series of letters between a young demon and an old hand and the old demon is giving advice to the young one about how to handle his human. It is a good read and in the humour of C S Lewis as well.

Self – however it is all too easy to blame the world and blame the devil for all that is bad about us. We live in a culture where nothing is my fault – it is my upbringing, my schooling, that fact that this or that happened to me. Now I do not want to belittle the effects that all those things have on someone. Things that happen to us when we are young can have a huge effect on us for the whole of our lives, but as Paul writes in verse 3

**“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”** (Ephesians 2:3 NIV)

Our sinful nature, me, is always at odds with God. This is not to say my body is because the body cannot be sinful in and of itself. If we go down that route we end up with extremes. One was what Sue and I saw on Friday night. We went to see *The Da Vinci Code*. Having read the book we went to see the film and saw the monk Silas, firstly wearing a chain around his thigh which cut into his skin and also flagellating himself with a whip hard enough to cause wealds on his back – he was trying to control the body by punishing it.

For some at times the body is to be ignored because it is bad and evil and against God. So the body is not looked after because the body doesn't matter.

But both of these are wrong thinking. The body is OK because we are integrated, body, mind and spirit and so when we talk about our sinful natures, it means that things we think up ourselves of how to disobey God, even when we know we are not disobeying him.

So we become condemned, doomed, objects of God's wrath. But God. So what is the change afterwards?

Alive – Firstly we are alive in Christ. We are Resurrected In Christ. Just as Jesus was dead and then rose again, was resurrected, so we who are dead are too raised from the dead, we too are resurrected to live. We become alive.

Exalted – We are also exalted. Verse 6

**“And God...seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,”**  
(Ephesians 2:6 NIV)

Think about that – if you know and follow Christ you are exalted. You are at the top. You have a throne in heaven. We are royalty

Remember that this is not for your sake but for the glory of God. It is to glorify God, not myself.

But there is more. We are called upon to do  
Good Works – verse 10

**“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** (Ephesians 2:10 NIV)

God has prepared good works for us. As John Calvin, a great theologian of former times said

**“It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone”** (John Calvin)

We only come to Christ by faith, not by any merit of the works we have done – we cannot earn heaven points, like airmiles. Nothing we do will do that. However Calvin was saying that just to sit on ones faith and do nothing else was also contrary to the work of God, to the word of the Bible. There are too many Christians who are spectators in the Christian life, in the church – they have the faith and are therefore saved – praise the Lord, but they have yet to move on **to do good works, which God prepared in advance for them to do** (Ephesians 2:10). And Jesus gave us all one task when he said

**“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”** (Matthew 28:19 NIV)

The works prepared for us by God are the best and the greatest. And also there is no retirement age. Nowhere does Scripture talk about working for God until and then retire.

The tasks may change, but the works continue, because from our perspective it is that *But God*. The fact that we are *Resurrected In Christ* and just our gratefulness should mean that we can never retire from our **good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do** (Ephesians 2:10).

This last week I was rung up from someone at the church we use to be in and the phone call was to tell us that Phil Muggeridge had died. Phil was a local builder who built the extension to the back of the church and we got to know him quite well. He was well past retirement age when he built the extension for the church, but I heard that he died from a heart attack when he was up a ladder – working.

May that too be said of us when we die continuing to **do the good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do** (Ephesians 2:10).