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SPEAKER

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Grace Unleashed

PART

6

TITLE

We Are Made Alive

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:1-7



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Well, it's great to see you, Providence. We love our kids here at our church. I'll just be honest with you. It's sort of funny to hear kids talking about being children of wrath, but what they just quoted to us as a church family is the very text which we're in. If you brought a Bible today, if you want to look with me to Ephesians chapter two, verses one through seven.

It is great to see you, Providence, and it has been just a fantastic weekend as I just continue to hear of your faith in Jesus Christ and your love for people, your love for the saints, your love for our city, I just want you to know I'm just so grateful for you. The hundreds of folks who were here yesterday and who went, who scattered all over our city yesterday, serving. It's just so encouraging. There's so many people who, yesterday, even heard the amazing truth of the gospel that Jesus can forgive them of their sin. We even heard a few reports where more than one actually, he trusted Christ yesterday morning here in Raleigh as a result of people sharing.

Absolutely. Yeah, God's doing amazing things through your life. I want you to know I see it. I'm so grateful. It's such an answer to prayer. If you're a guest here, welcome. We are really glad that you have joined us. Here at Providence, we love the Bible. If you don't have one in your hand, there are a lot in the chairs near you. If you don't have one at home, please take that one home as a gift. We love God's word and it's because God's word tells us about God. It's God's revelation to us about who he is, who we are, and how we're to live in his world. When we gather, we love to open up this book. We love to read it, we love to study it, and we love then to ask God to give us courage to apply it to our life. What we're doing right now is walking verse by verse through this amazing book. If you are new with us, we're in chapter two, verses one through seven.

What we looked at last time, though, was a prayer. That was that even this book, how amazing it is, God's written revelation to us. But what we learned last week is that without the power of the holy spirit working in our life, even the power of God's word, when it hits our life, without his help, without his helping us to see it, to believe it, that we'll walk out of these doors unchanged even after reading it. What we need to do right now is pray and just ask God to help us right now. If you would, join me.

Father in heaven, we love you. We're grateful for your grace in our life. We're thankful for the Bible. We're thankful, God, that you ordained the man named Paul to be born, to live, to grow up. And even after such rebellion against you that you called him to yourself, that you saved him, that you opened up his eyes to help him to see and to know the value and the supremacy of Jesus Christ above all things. So much so that you inclined his heart to go tell other people, even the people in this city. Thank you for this letter that was written to those people who believed. Thank you for Ephesians and thank you that this letter has been preserved for us throughout all of these centuries.

And we pray now, God, just as Paul prayed for us last week, for his readers, we pray, God, that you would open up our eyes and help us to see amazing things within your word. We pray by your spirit that you would help us to believe. And you would help us to see and take hold of everything that's available for us. That you'd tell us here in Ephesians chapter two. And so, God, even in the hard things of this passage, I pray, God, that you would give us a heart that leans in to believe. That leans in to love you, to believe in you. So we ask for your help. Would you speak through weakness today? I pray, once again, in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, I just would readily confess to you that I'm not a photographer. My problem isn't technology. I have a phone. My problem is timing. I'm the guy who regularly after the event, after the moment, says, "You know, I wish I would have taken a picture of that." That's who I am. On a year like this year, that has so many memorable tragedies and floods and earthquakes and fires and hurricanes, I am so incredibly thankful for those individuals whose hearts inclined them to capture images just like this. Images of rescue. So that these moments can also be remembered. You see, if we didn't have portraits of people of courage and people of self sacrifice, people of strength helping other people who are significantly in need when other memorable things are happening in the world, we might conclude that the whole year was really just about tragedy. But, indeed, there was been significant and amazing things that have taken place. Significant love, significant rescues, significant courage and sacrifice.

When we come to Ephesians chapter two, verses one through seven, Paul is like a photographer. What he wants to do is capture the images of our life before Christ and after Christ. So that not only will we be able to remember the tragedy of our sin, but we'll also be able to marvel in the wonder of being saved, and being forgiven, and having been loved by God at such an extent. And you have to understand why He wants to do this. Why does He want to pull us back to show us what was happening in our life before Christ? Why does He want to capture those images and put those images right in front of our face to say, "Look," and when our heart is inclined to turn away because those images, they don't make much of us? Why is that Paul then takes our chin and turns our chin back and he says, "No, you need to look at these images?" The reason is because he wants us to remember.

You see, Ephesians chapter one and chapter two, it's moving in a direction. And here in two weeks, we will get to why he's telling us all of these things. Why is he stacking up all of these adjectives and superlatives? And why is he talking about all of these things that have happened in these peoples' life? This is a real church, real churches, around a real city, who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. And Paul is taking all of this time to show them where they were. Now why is that? It's because he wants them to remember.

Look at Ephesians chapter two, verse 13. Actually look at verse 11. He says, “Therefore, remember.” This is where he’s going. Verse 12, “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ.” Verse 13, “But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought nearby the blood of Christ.” Look at verse 19, “So then you were no longer strangers and aliens, but you were fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

So this is what he’s doing. Paul wants you to remember. For those of us in his room who have trusted Christ and have been forgiven of our sin, he wants us to look back at where we were so that we will remember that we are no longer there. And so if you go back all the way to Ephesians chapter one, if you look at Ephesians chapter one at a macro level, he’s really doing two things. He’s seeking to describe God’s blessings that have been poured out to us and then he’s seeking to pray to God that we, his readers, would apply those blessings to our life. That we would experience those blessings in our life, in our responsibilities, in our relationships, in our homes. But the fact is, he knows that knowledge of God’s blessings in our past will never create and stir up gratitude and adoration within our hearts until we see the peril and judgment that were ours before we came to faith in Christ.

And so here in chapter two Paul lays out these dramatic images for us so that we will remember. Look what he says. He says, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air. The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh. Carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you’ve been saved and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

So what’s happening here? I want you to see. Really there’s two things he wants us to see. And each one of these two big headings, he talks about three things on each one of them. First he wants us to look backwards and then he wants us to look at what he’s done so that we can look forwards. And so if you want to take notes. The first thing we see here is that we were in unimaginable peril before Christ. I use the word unimaginable because it’s uninventable. There is not a single person in the world who’s apart from Christ who thinks their life is in this much peril that God says that they’re in. No one could ever creatively think up the actual state that people are in and where we were in if we know Christ. It’s unimaginable and yet it was absolutely perilous.

You see, one of the things you have to understand about scripture is that scripture's evaluation about our condition before Christ, it's absolutely brutal. Whatever you can imagine in terms of a crisis, whether you're adrift at sea, or a POW, or missing in action in a war, or freezing in a blizzard. You have to understand that Paul describes our life before Jesus Christ as even more threatening. And the fact is that some of us in this room, we won't recall our life before Jesus Christ in these ways. If you've never trusted Christ, you may look at this and you may think, "Well, that's not my life now." But what you have to understand is this is God's perspective of what our soul was like, the condition that we were in, before He came to rescue us. This is His memory of where we were at. And if you've not been redeemed this is what He sees now.

And so let's look at these. There's three of them. This unimaginable peril. First is that we were dead in our sins. We were dead in our sins. Verse one he just sees it this way. He goes, "And you were dead in the trespasses," that means to cross over God's line, "and sins." The word sins means to fall short. And so here's the reality. He says we once lived. Now he's talking to believers that he knows have been rescued out of this, which is why it says we were dead, in which we once walked, we once lived. He knows we're not there now, but he wants us to know this is where we were. You see, the Bible says in Romans chapter three, verse 23 that for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. You see, God has a holy standard. He's perfect in every way. He give us instructions towards holiness. And the wage of missing that standard is death. Roman 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. But the gift of God, this gift of God, is this salvation through Jesus Christ.

And so you go, "Well, wait a minute. I'm still alive. Like I'm still here. I didn't actually die." It's true. We're breathing and living and moving and driving and things happened. We're breathing right now in our life. We're alive. And so what we need to do is back up and consider what kind of death he's talking about and it's best to go all the way back to when it all started, the Garden of Eden. Genesis chapter one, chapter two, God creates a world that we can live upon. God created people, Adam and Eve. And then God given them this instruction, chapter two, versus 16 and 17, it says, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

The first reference of death in the Bible. Adam and Eve had never seen death. They'd never seen a squirrel that's dead in the woods. They'd never seen a bird fall to the ground dead. They don't know what death is. And God says to them, "What I want you to see first is this. You see everything that I've created? It's all for you." And so if you notice the emphasis is on His provision. It's what God has placed on the banquet table for us to enjoy, not what God has wisely reserved in the kitchen. "You may surely eat of every." He's emphasizing His bounty, His generosity to us. Then He says, "But there's a need for faith. There's a tree, knowledge of good and evil, and I'm telling you don't eat it. It's not in your best interest. You've got to believe me when I tell you that it's not in your best interest. If you eat of it," he says, "in the day that day that you eat of it," in the day. You would assume that they'd be dead that day. "In that day that you eat of it, you will surely die."

They both chose to eat and death arrived. But it wasn't what we normally think. They didn't fall to the ground dead. There was three different kinds of ... Three things that happened though. First of all, what we find there is it was a relational death. It's fascinating to me that before they dealt with God, were held accountable to God, there was a reaction with each other. They recognized they were naked. They felt shame. They felt vulnerable. They were now in the presence of someone that wasn't perfectly safe. Somebody that was selfish. Someone who's a sinner. They felt exposed. And so it says they hid from each other. They put clothes on to say, "Don't look at me anymore." There was sin separates. It always separates. Death separates. What he's talking about here when he says that we were dead. We were separated.

One of the first things that happens in our life when we sin against God is our relationships with each other, they begin to break down. That's exactly what happened. Soon there was strife. They have a few kids. One of them murders another. And you see, every single time, whenever you see relational strain in the world, whether it's in your home, whether it's on the playground, whether it's in politics, whether it's ethnicities, races, nations, wars. Whenever you see relational tension between two people or more than two people, what you're seeing is the shadow, it's the reflection of death.

There's more than just relational death. There's a spiritual death. God came to the garden. He's walking and for the very first time in their experience with God is they felt like they needed to hide in His presence. God was their greatest good. He was everything to them and now all of a sudden, they're hiding from him. Why? Because death separates us. Not only from each other but also from God. See, absolutely overwhelmed by guilt in their life, they try to hide from God. Why? Because the feeding tube to their soul, they were all severed. The spiritual oxygen going to their lungs, it was severed. There was a break in their relationship with God.

And then all of a sudden there was the promise of physical death. This is what we know of. When you die, you physically die. That's what we assume. But a day would come when their bodies and ours will not sustain life. We will be separated from this earth. We will be separated from our loved ones. This is what he means when he says, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins." Relationally, spiritually, and one day physically, there's separation. And this was not God's plan.

Now that's not the only peril that we were in because he goes on on verse two and three and he says that we were held in captivity. We were held in captivity. Did you notice he says we followed the course of the world. We followed the course of the world. Sometimes when I look at the news, I try not to do it too often because it's just too discouraging. But sometimes when I look at the world and I think, "What in the world is happening in his world? It's crazy." Last night I was reading. There's a man. His name is Larry Flynt. He's a porn producer and he's put out in the Washington Times, or Washington Post, a \$10 million reward for information, dirt basically, that would lead to eventual impeachment of Donald Trump. Now I want you to think about this for a second. How bad must a moral dirt be to arouse the moral sensibilities of a porn mogul?

I realize that nobody in Washington is our savior, okay? And so I don't put any hope in any of them. But that's crazy. And this is what he's saying. One day when we were there and that all made sense. We followed the course of this world. We were in step with the times. Sin felt acceptable. Righteousness felt strange. Then he goes on and he talks why. And he goes we are following the prince of the power of the air, this spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. In other words, we were following the bread crumbs of temptation that was laid out by Satan that was leading us to death. And he says we all once lived in the passions of our flesh. We were enslaved, we were captivated by the impulses of our flesh. Our flesh says, "Hey, I want this."

And we go, "Okay. This is where I should go."

"Hey, I want this over here." And all of a sudden we went over there. And wherever the heart wanted, whether it was morality or immorality. All of that seemed perfectly acceptable.

Paul was saying, "Church, this is where you were. This is how God saw us." And then he talks about one more thing. Not only were we dead in our sins and held in captivity, but we were objects of wrath. You see what it says in verse three? He says and we're by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. Children of wrath. Now the word wrath, we normally think of the word wrath like fury or uncontrolled anger. Like wielding a sword and just flailing it around without really any rationale, reason or control. But in the Bible, that's not the picture of wrath. Wrath is God's settled stance against sin. It's His righteousness responding to rebellion.

You see, what's interesting is somehow we find room in our heart for wrath when we're offended by other people. And so when we find somebody who's in the courtroom and they've hurt someone that we love, or they maybe even have taken the life of someone they love, and they are declared guilty and there's a consequence. As a culture, as a society, we look at those things and we think, "That's right. There should be a consequence for that." But isn't it interesting that when that wrath is directed towards us, we find it strangely offensive? And the reason is because we simply don't see our life as offensive to God. We don't see our sin as offensive to God.

But Psalm chapter seven actually tells us that God has His bow and it's pulled and it's aimed directly at us. And the arrow that is lodged within his bow is wrath. It's His directed stance against our sin. You see, Hell was God's settled stance against sin that awaited us. And you have to understand this is how God saw our life before Christ. And you look at all this and you think, "This is terrible. I shouldn't have today. This is all really depressing." Now listen, the focus on these passages though, if you notice, it's not on how bad we were or how bad we could be, but it's on how helpless we were. You see, you have to understand that God endures the possibility of our offense to tell us of our condition before Jesus Christ because He wants to rescue us out of this and He wants those who have been rescued to never lose our wonder in being saved.

And so Providence, you need to this about this. We were in unimaginable peril before Jesus Christ, but that's not all that's true. And the second and last is this, is that we've been graciously rescued by Christ. We've been graciously rescued by Christ. The arrow has been averted he's saying. God is rich in mercy because he love us so much. He's done specific things to counteract where we were and I wanna show you each of those three.

The first is this, is that we receive life in the place of death. We were dead in our transgressions and sins, but it says but God being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. You seen, when God walked by the tomb of our soul, instead of turning away from the stench, God chose to pause long enough and direct His love at us to resuscitate our life. You see, do you see there is such a vast difference between a real Christian and someone who simply is seeking to supplement Jesus to life? Or someone who's simply trying to love a better life like Jesus? Or someone who's just a few moral degrees difference from those who don't believe in Jesus Christ?

The whole Bible says that to be a Christian is to experience a total rebirth of the soul. It's not just to be better as a person or try harder as a person. It's to move from a state of death to a state of life. This is why Jesus said in John chapter three, verse three, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Listen to me, if you are apart from Christ, the answer this morning is not to try harder. The only possibility is for you to be born again. To have your very nature re calibrated. To receive a new heart. A new DNA, new mind, new soul. He has to literally give you a new birth. And He will do that.

The second thing it says that we receive freedom in place of captivity. Look at verse six. He says that we, each one of us, we were all following sin and following our passions and following Satan. He says but God raised us up with Him and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places. SO the portrait here is this, is that once we were prisoners, bound by our sinful passions. He goes but now God has raised us up and sat us down with Christ in Heaven. We who were once captives have now been liberated. We've been freed.

And then the third thing is that we received kindness in place of wrath. I told you just a moment ago that in Psalm chapter seven, it says that God literally has His bow aimed at us before Christ and the wrath his arrow. Well, when we trust Jesus Christ, God does not lower the bow. He just replaces the arrow. And instead of the arrow being his wrath, what it says here is that He literally ... Right? He places the arrow of His immeasurable riches of kindness. So now he spends now and eternity looking, "How do I fire my kindness at him? How do I ... Or her. How do I encourage? How do I build up? How do I heal? How do I restore?" And He's gonna do this forever and ever. The ages to come He says.

And so here we were dead and we were captives, we were object of wrath. And what He says that in Jesus Christ He's actually turned every one of those on its head. We've been made alive. We've been given freedom and we've been given kindness. And the question is: How does this rescue happen? How is it possible? And how it happened was like this: Jesus came to Earth just as God promised. And Jesus lived on Earth without any sin. He was tempted just like you and I are and yet He never gave into it. He was perfectly righteous and perfectly holy. And so the wage of His life was life not death. The wage of His righteousness was life. But instead of choosing life, God in His mercy ordained that He die for us. The righteous for the unrighteous in order to bring us to God.

And this Jesus went to a cross. He had all the power and authority in the entire world and yet He willingly laid aside all of that authority and all of that strength, and allowed sinners to drive nails into His hands and feet. There on the cross, He's even saying, "God would you forgive these, for they don't know what they're doing?" Such act of love and mercy and grace that was poured out to us. And then the Bible says that He gave up His spirit, He died for that sin. He was buried and then three things happened. He was made alive. He rose from the dead. He was raised up and the He was seated at the right of the Father.

The invitation to us comes from Romans chapter 10, verse 9, is one of the verses that talks about what He invites us to. And he says this, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." This is how I came to faith in Christ. This is how you came to faith in Christ or you will come to faith in Christ. Is that we confess Him as Lord and we believe that He died on a cross and He rose from the dead.

Now watch what Paul does. This is stunning. If you've fallen asleep, this is the time to wake up because this is the best part of the whole message, okay? This is it. This is the whole point. Watch this. Paul uses three verbs to describe what God does to those who trust in Jesus. He says we were made alive together with Christ, we were raised up with Christ, and we were seated with Christ. Did you notice it's exactly the same three things that happened to Jesus? He was made alive, He was raised up, and He was seated. And Paul says that we were raised up. Were, not will be, were raised up. We were. It's already happened. We were made alive, we were raised up, and we were seated with Christ.

You see, each one of these verbs, they're all past tense. Meaning they've already happened. And they all share the exact same Greek prefix. Now when I say Greek, because Paul wrote in Greek, right? The New Testament was written in that language. And there was a prefix that's attached to every one of these verbs and it's the exact same. The three letters are S-Y-N. That's where we get synonymous, synonym. Together, with. That's why in each time it says you were made alive together with Christ. You were raised with Him. You were seated with Him.

You see, if you go to the court of law and you need an attorney, you're attorney actually becomes your legal federal head. Federal meaning together with. It's where lots of people are represented by one person. If you're in a work union, you hire a representative that goes and speaks on your behalf. It's a federal legal union. The quality and skill of your attorney accrues to you, whether good or bad. You allow them to speak on your behalf and whatever happens in the court to them, happens to you. You receive the same settlement. You receive the same consequence. And same with Christ.

You see, Providence, when we trusted Jesus Christ, the Bible says that we enter into a federal union where many are represented by one. A union with Christ so that His performance accrues to us. This is why Romans chapter five, verse 19, says, "For as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners," he's talking here about Adam. That Adam was our federal head. What happened to him cascaded to all of humanity. He sinned, we all inherited a sin nature. But notice, "So by the one man," now he's talking about Jesus Christ, "his obedience the many will be made righteous."

You see, for all sin, but if you know Jesus Christ, His righteousness accrues to you. Jesus was made alive, but if you trust Him, His life accrues to you. You're made alive with Him. Jesus was raised to Heaven and if you trust Jesus Christ, His resurrection accrues to you. He was seated at the right hand of the Father and if you trust in Jesus, than His authority, His seat, it accrues to you. We're not actually there. We're legally there. And all of His benefits, they accrue to us in Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel. It's not try harder. It's have a federal legal head, a savior, whose work and accomplishments accrue to you. He's our redemption. He is our righteousness. He is our resurrection. He is our hope. All the benefits of His victory, He gives to those who trust in Him.

And so a few applications before we close. First is this. Let's remember our life before Christ. This is Paul's intent for us. He's trying to lead us to remember where we were so that we're happy. See, remembering makes us thankful. It makes us hopeful to overcome the awful insecurities of our own imperfections day by day and week by week. It also ... This quality of looking back and remembering where we were, it directs our days moving forward. You see, second Corinthians chapter five, verse 15, says, " He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised."

You see what this means? It means when you remember who you were, and you remember what Christ did, you then learn that you're not the point of your life. That your interests and aspirations and dreams are not the interests and aspirations and dreams that God has for your life. That He has a plan for your life and it's not about you or me. It's about Jesus Christ. When we remember who He is and what He's done and who we were and what He's done in our life, we say, "God, I want to live for your son. I want to live for His glory." You see, in Christianity, whatever fails to spring from an overflow of the soul will not spring for long. And so let's remember.

Second thing is let's look to share Christ with others. There's two phrases in here that are absolutely haunting. In the context of telling us what we were but now we're not there anymore, he reminds us that other people are still there. He says that you are following the spirit who is now at work in the sons of disobedience. You look out and you see people who are not trusting Jesus Christ. You have to understand they are in the captivity that we were in. They're not worse than us. We've just been forgiven. We've been released. We've been set free from the prison. He also says that we were children of wrath like the rest of mankind. God's bow is drawn and aimed at every person on the earth, but those who have never trusted Him, the arrow is still wrath. So how will they escape?

Romans chapter 10, verse 17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing the word of Christ."

God says, "I'm gonna use my people who have been saved and who are amazed that they are saved to go tell other people what I've made available so that their eyes can be opened, their hearts can believe, that they can confess with their mouth, and they can be saved." This is His plan.

And then the third thing would be this. Let's place our faith in Jesus. This would be for those in the room who've never trusted Christ as your savior. I just want you to know that I recognize that your default, just like mine, is, "But I."

"You owe me money."

"But I need more time."

God says, "You're a sinner."

"But I'm working on that."

The whole of the Bible has nothing to do with, "But I." It has everything to do with, "But God who's rich in mercy." See, our only hope is Jesus Christ. You think about every other religion and every other founder of every other religion, they've all come to show us a way of salvation. Jesus came to be the way of salvation. John 14:6 says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except through me." He's not just showing you that's what righteousness is, he says, "I am your righteousness if you will trust in me."

So just on behalf of our entire church family, if you're someone here who's never trusted Christ, we commend you to look to Him, to believe upon Him, and be saved today. So let's pray together.

Father in Heaven, we thank you so much for your kindness that's given to us in Jesus Christ. We believe and agree with you in faith that this is what we were and we thank you, Jesus Christ, that this is now not who we are. For you have redeemed us. You have saved us. Not because of our merit, but because of your merit. And so, God, I pray as a church family that you would help us this week to walk in gratitude. Lord, to remember. To be amazed. To be looking at people, not as what they can give to us or what we may be able to give to them, but as someone who's desperately in need of you. So, God, would you help us to be on look out for what you've done? Would you help us to be on look out for people who are need of hearing what you have done? And, God, would you give us hope when we fail?

We thank you that our righteousness is established and fixed forever in Heaven because of Jesus Christ. We're amazed. It's our privilege, Lord, to sing and to give and to use these offerings, God, that your glory may be felt and known and seen throughout the ends of the Earth. So, God, we love you. Thank you for what you've done in our life. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



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