

“Saved” // Ephesians 2:1–10 //

Love Incorruptible 3

GCI Introduction

Missions—it’s not just for seminarians anymore! What a great time to be alive in terms of the Great Commission. We live in an era unprecedented in its changes for gospel opportunity.

I’ve often told you that I believe the next wave of missions is going to come on the wings of business. **Missions experts** talk about the “**10/40 window**,” an area of the world where there is little to no access to the gospel. But for many of you **businessmen and women**, the 10/40 window is a wide-open door.

Which is why I’m excited to see us officially launch the Global Cities Initiative. We’ve had the vision to mobilize our people to reach global cities for a while...but with GCI, now we have some excellent resources in place to equip you and send you out to strategic cities around the world.

We say it all the time: “Do what you do well for the glory of God, and do it somewhere strategic for the mission of God.” That’s what GCI is all about. So, **if you think God might be calling you** to relocate your career overseas—or **if you just want to know more about how to partner** with us—come to our meeting, at Brier Creek, on February 20.

Introduction

The passage we are going to dive into today is regarded by many to be THE single most important passage in the Bible. In many ways, it serves as a litmus test for whether you understand what the gospel actually is.

The passage is **Ephesians 2:1–10**...

In this passage, Paul introduces a word that a lot of Christians use as shorthand to summarize their relationship with Jesus, but it’s a word that really confuses some outsiders—sometimes even **scares them**.

The word is **SAVED**.

- I’ll admit that sometimes I cringe when I hear it, because I get this image of a pudgy SB preacher wearing a too small, out-of-style suit yelling out the word with his eyes popping and the veins in his neck bulging out, pronouncing the word in 4 syllables—SA-V-E-D.
- Or I think of awkwardly placed billboards along interstates throughout the Southeast, or confrontational tracts left in public bathrooms posing the question, “Are you saved?”

But, what I want you to see from this passage is that while it is a word that might make you cringe, there is probably **no better word** that summarizes what happens to us when we meet Jesus. And, in fact, one of the reasons it makes us cringe is because it encapsulates the helpless state Jesus had to rescue us from.

That’s where Paul starts his explanation of the gospel—what is true about us that made Jesus’ rescue operation necessary.

In Ephesians 2:1–10, the Apostle dispels 2 very deeply ingrained myths that our culture believes about evil:

The 1st is that the main problem in the world is other people.

Everybody recognizes that our world has evil in it,

- but we assume *other* people that are **the primary problem**.
 - We put locks on our doors or filters on our internet to keep evil out.
- Or we think people **unlike us that** are the main problem.
 - **Conservatives think liberals are the problem**. Liberals are destroying family values and undercutting the backbone o

society and trying to remove gluten from everything we eat.

- **Liberals think conservatives are the problem.** They are prideful and bigoted and they don't recycle.

That goes hand in hand with the 2nd myth—that deep down, we're not really that bad. We're basically good people who get confused and lose our way, or we're just weak.

- The famous psychologist Carl Rogers expressed the predominant thinking that has shaped our culture's view of man throughout the last century. He said that we are **basically good**, and our main problem is that we have lost touch with our inner goodness; and oppressive or distorting societal structures have obscured our goodness.
- (Of course, he never stops to consider where those societal structures came from—and who invented them.)

Paul blows up both of those myths in the very first sentence of Ephesians 2.

1 And you were dead in trespasses and sins...

1st, notice the word "you:" *You* were dead in trespasses and sin. Not, other people, but *you*...

There's only one category of people: sinner. Sin is a fatal disease that exists in the heart of every person.

And that's the 2nd word that challenges how our culture thinks of itself: "dead." Our problem is not that we're good people who occasionally lose our way and do bad things; we are spiritually dead.

Many people think of sin as bad ACTIONS that we do: stealing; lying. Etc.

- But the word "dead" shows us that **sin is not so much an action as it is a CONDITION.***

- Our bad actions are symptoms of our dead condition.
 - You don't have the flu because you cough and sneeze and run a fever; you cough and sneeze and run a fever because you have the flu.
 - We're not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.
 - Every parent, of course, sees this in their kids. I've told you that no one taught my kids how to be jerks to each other. never sent them to sin camp. My kids didn't learn selfishness or rebellion from their environment.
 - When my youngest daughter was 2, if she didn't want to eat what Veronica and I were trying to feed her, she's take whatever she didn't want and look at us in the face and dump it on the floor. She didn't learn that from her environment. My wife and I don't do that. "You made peas again?" Veronica and I don't run around the house clinging to the remote screaming "MINE" back and forth to each other.
 - Selfishness was inherent in my little girl's nature.
 - That's because all of us, Paul says, are spiritually dead.
 - Now, you say, "**Spiritually dead?** That makes it sound like we are we're capable of nothing good... or we are all a bunch of moral monsters. And I know that's not true."
 - No. Being spiritually dead doesn't mean we are all as bad as we could be—yet, or that we all sin in the same way.
 - Say you have **20 dead corpses** on the battlefield. Some may look worse than others. Some may be severely damaged, barely recognizable anymore. Others may show little to no signs of damage. Some may be advanced in the decay process others may not be.
 - But in the end, it doesn't matter if they look okay. The important detail is: they are all dead.¹
 - **I read a study recently, out of UNC. New research shows** that 100% of people who die, 100%!... are *dead*. They aren't partially dead, or sort of dead, or theoretically dead. They are

¹ John MacArthur, Ephesians 2

dead. 100% of dead people are totally completely and entirely dead.

- **Because we are dead in our sins**, no amount of religious behavioral change can fix us. Behavior changes only affect the outside—but they don't deal with problem the inside.
- **Illus.** You ever see that **Tupperware container** in the back of the refrigerator... in it is a piece of chicken from a restaurant... and you wonder, "I wonder how long that's been in there?" It's been so long that you can't remember it. So, you take it out and smell it... and then you wake up like 4 hours later? Now, how many of you when that happens, you say, "You know, the problem is it doesn't have enough spice. Little barbecue sauce should take care of that. Good! Now I can't smell the rotting meat anymore!" No, the problem is, it is dead. When you put it in the refrigerator it was dead. At least I hope. You can preserve it for a little while. But because it is dead it has already started the decay process.
- **We are, in our nature, already spiritually dead, and we are rotting:** We may smell ok for a while, and we may even learn to cover up the areas of stench in our lives with religion or manners or culture, but we are dead.

You say, "Well, this sermon has started awesome." Oh, **just wait**. It gets worse. In **Vs. 2–3**, Paul begins to unpack for us what spiritual deadness looks like: [1] And you were dead in trespasses and sins, [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air,²

- **You were followers of Satan.** The core of Satan's rebellion is "I will." According to Isaiah, he said it 5x: 'I will ascend to heaven; I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'
- **I problem...**

² Put up all of vv. 1–3 here

When you and I joined Satan in that rebellion, we become his son or daughter, and his spirit begins to shape and lead you.

the spirit that is now at work in the *sons of disobedience*,

So, from there, we began to [3] among whom we all once lived in the *passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,*

- Other things, rather than God, became our master. We were supposed to carry out the will of God... instead obeyed the impulses of the body and mind:
 - Our body says "have sex," or "Eat," or "drink" or "take it easy" or "get angry," and we do it.
 - Our minds say, "make your own decisions," or "do things your way" and we obeyed.

and (because of this, we) were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

You say, "Wait, J.D. Wait. Surely you, and I guess Paul, overspeak. I've made some mistakes, but DEAD? Followers of Satan? His sons and daughters? Children of wrath? I know people who believe in God and do good things...

- ...What about the guy who throws himself on a grenade to save his buddy, and he doesn't believe in God,
- or the woman who sacrifices everything to give her kids a shot out of poverty and she's not a Christian. Aren't those good things?
- SURE. But in light of our biggest sin—replacing God's authority in our lives with our own and living for our glory instead of his—our good things don't really seem that good.
 - **I think of it like this: Imagine 2 ISIS guys** planning a bombing of a school... one shares a sandwich with a buddy.
- **What if our rebellion to God was the same way in God's sight, but a billion times worse?**
 - Our cosmic treason against God is so evil that it's hard to even call our goodness "good."

And, btw, just because you haven't experienced the full outworking of your depravity doesn't mean it's not present in you. The capacity to do evil is in all of us... a lot of times conditions keep it from growing into fruition.

- My wife and I watched one the other night on **Lance Armstrong**... and you look at the end of his life—Who does that? Cheats and lies so brazenly, turns his back on friends; smears those who threaten him. But then you watch it unfold.
 - Drive to just win...
 - Lie...
 - Lots of money and reputation involved...
 - Smear those who threaten to expose the lie...
 - And I'm watching that thinking, "I could do that... that... I've done that very thing. Not on that scale, but I'm not under the pressures he was under."
 - V: Like a real live episode of *Breaking Bad*.
- Then we watched another one on Allan Iverson—a professional athlete who'd ended up in a really bad place, and my philosopher wife said, "You know, if I'd grown up in a situation like that, and faced temptations like that, who is to say I wouldn't have become like that?"
- We shake our heads at these people, but honestly, who am I to judge? In those circumstances, I might very well have turned out the same.
- The point is what the old Puritan John Owen used to say, "*The seed of every sin is in every heart.*"
- Recently I had someone in our church tell me about a trip she took to **Rwanda**, where an unspeakable genocide was carried out by one people group on another. She said, "We drove into the mountains to a Tutsi village that had been wiped out during the 1994 genocide. One Rwandan man stood at the very spot where his family and hundreds of people had been slaughtered. Through a translator, he described the horror of what he had experienced that day. I felt sick. Afterward, we held hands on that spot and

prayed. I'll never forget when our team leader began her prayer: 'God, forgive me. The wickedness that drove men to commit these crimes is the same sin in my heart. I am no better, no closer to salvation, but for your grace.'

- Our church member went on to say, "I always thought I had pretty boring testimony, but standing there on the scene of that massacre, I realized I have been saved from the same depths of depravity as a mass murderer."

Before we go on to vs. 4, let this sink in: You, and I, DESERVE the wrath of God. We really are dead in our sins. Our blasphemy against God deserves the eternal punishment of hell. **Hell is a terrible place,** and educated people don't like to even talk about it, but Jesus believed in it, and he talked about it all the time.

And Paul STARTS here, because in order to really understand the gospel, or place any value on it, you have to understand what you were saved from.

You see, a lot of times—I think—we try to jump right to the good news of the gospel without grappling the bad news. "Just get to the part about Jesus. Stop dwelling on this."

But **every physician knows** that if you misdiagnose the disease, you'll mis-prescribe the cure. If you don't really understand the problem, you'll never really embrace the cure.

- Brad Hambrick, our counseling pastor says he sees this all the time in marital counseling.

People come in and they want the solutions. But they don't really want to talk about their problems, because, well, that's uncomfortable. Just fix it!

Paul's point in Ephesians 2 is that we all do this with God. We want the answer, but we really don't want to hear about the problem.

But **if you don't really wrestle with the extent of the problem** (of you and the rest of mankind)³, you'll never love the gospel, or be committed to spreading it. problem.

- **Listen, believing the Christian gospel is inconvenient:** It makes all kinds of demands on you: It makes you do things with your money, reach out to people sometimes in ways that make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe. If you don't understand it's necessity, you'll think of it as cumbersome to your life.
 - I think of like this. Have you **ever had a parachute** strapped to you? Big, uncomfortable. Imagine you had to wear one when sitting on a plane. That would be incredibly uncomfortable. But imagine you knew the plane was going down. You'd not only put up with the inconvenience, you'd consider it the most valuable thing you possessed, and you'd be trying to convince everyone else to put theirs on.
- **Until you understand the problem, you'll never cherish grace:**
 - Spurgeon: The reason we think too lightly of the Savior is we think too lightly of sin. Only he who has stood before his God... **feeling the rope of God's judgment about his neck**, will be the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him."

So, hear it: You are dead in sin. The problem is not your environment or confusion or a poor self-image. You are dead.

You are by nature a child of wrath, a son and daughter of disobedience, a follower under the influence of Satan. **You're not going to hear this verdict** on humanity on Dr. Phil or Oprah, but Paul says that's what is true and that's why you needed to be *saved*.

- **That's why I can't get away from the word "saved."** What word is a better equivalent? I didn't need to be improved, edited, updated, rebooted, or enhanced; I needed to be forgiven, restored, redeemed, and resurrected. I need to be *saved*.

³ Put back up Eph 2:1-3

- "Sin didn't knock me down to God's JV team or put me on probation or put me on a slower track to get me mansion in heaven. Sin wiped us out. It killed us."⁴
- **I didn't need a Jesus who would come as a life-coach who would help me turn over a new leaf**, I need a resurrected Savior who could give me new life.

PAUSE. Vs. 1-3 is a lot of bad news. And it could have stopped there. God would have been fully righteous in doing so.

But vs. 4 contains probably the **LARGEST conjunction** ever uttered, what John Stott calls the greatest two syllables ever spoken in the English language:

4 But God...

(Let the **force of that** hit you for a minute. You were helpless. But God...

- Helpless, But. Not. Hopeless, because hope came from another place.
- When you were dead in sin, God bared his mighty arm and went to work.

4 But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,

- Many **theologians and Christians** talk about salvation so coldly and mechanically... like it's a formula.
 - It was love that drew salvation's plan...
 - **Robert Coleman** (little boy who thinks he was giving his life for his sister)
- That **kind of love is rare**. But God showed it for his enemies!
- **It wasn't just love, it was mercy... and a mercy we would never have shown.**

⁴ From Louie Giglio sermon on John 3, "Choose Life."

- **Some people think**, “Oh, if I were God, I would be more merciful to people.” That’s because you don’t understand the heinous wickedness of our sin.
- **Consider this:** In Scripture, **every time** God and man are compared, God is more merciful, more patient, and more loving. *Do not flatter yourself that you’re more forgiving than God.*
- **Martin Luther:** “If I was God, and the world treated me as it has him, I would have kicked the vile wretched thing to pieces.”
- I’ve heard it said: *Until the gospel seems too good to be true, you haven’t really understood it.*⁵

But God, the greatest words in the Bible...

~~(4 But God~~ being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ when we were dead in our sins, made us alive together with Christ...

- Notice this is all in the **past tense**. (Tenses in the Bible are important.)
- It’s in the past tense because Paul is **referring to what Jesus already did** on the cross. He’s not talking about some gradual religious process of coming alive, where you get slowly become a good, God-fearing person. He’s talking about something that Jesus did for you all at once, in this past.
- On the cross Jesus became our sin. He died a sinner’s death.
 - He was treated by God like he was a follower of Satan, a son of disobedience, a child of wrath.
- He bore our sin in our place.

Sometimes people wonder, “Why did Jesus have to die for us to be forgiven?” Why can’t God just wipe the slate clean, blow the whistle, ok, “All skate, everyone back in the rink.”

- **Wrecked car**—who pays?

Around our church we say that you can summarize the gospel in 4 words: **JESUS IN MY PLACE**.

- He **lived the life** we were supposed to live, and then died the death we were condemned to die.
- Jesus **did not merely die for us**; he died instead of us.

Paul continues, **6 ...and (God) raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places...** Again, **past tense: not “will seat us,”** but **“has seated us with him in the heavenly places.”**

- Listen: **In God’s eyes, I am already seated** with Christ at the place of honor around God’s throne. **I couldn’t be in a higher place** in heaven, closer to God.
- Not if I gave a billion dollars or prayed 4 hours every day or managed to go a whole decade and never sin.
- He’s literally put me in Jesus’ seat.

Do you know what kind of confidence that can give you in life?

- **I’m as sure of heaven as Jesus is...** because he literally has become my salvation.
 - **When I say I’m sure of heaven**, sometimes people hear that as arrogance. “Wow, who do you think you are?” You think you are that righteous? No, Jesus was that righteous and he paid my sin debt in its entirety. We traded places, and I’m going to heaven on his account, not mine.
- **And now, when I approach God in prayer**, I know God hears me as if I were Jesus. That’s what it means to pray “in Jesus’ name.” We don’t say “in Jesus’ name” at the end of prayer to signal to God we’re almost done, but because I’m praying from his seat, based on his record, not mine.
 - **Sometimes when I come into church** and I’ve had a great week... and I’ll think, “I’m sure God hears me now!” Other times... THE GOSPEL is that God doesn’t hear based on how I’ve lived, but on how Jesus lived in my place.

⁵ R.T. Kendall

- I sometimes describe it to kids **like a report card**... trying to get into Harvard—otherwise known as **the Campbell Univ. of the North**—with C’s and D’s. (1750 on the SAT)

Vs. 8 begins Paul’s great summary of the gospel: **8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man 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.”**⁶

Those verses give us the 4 most crucial things to understand about salvation: The basis, the instrument; the result; and the confidence.

(1) The basis of salvation is grace

- **“By grace you have been saved.”**
 - “Have been.” it’s passive. You don’t do it to yourself, God does it to you.
 - “Grace” means that it was based on nothing good or meritorious about you; it was a *gift of God*.
- It was not a reward for good behavior.
- It was not because you were less bad or had a good heart or had great potential.
- It’s not even a reward for showing faith!
 - Do you see that word “this” there in vs. 8? **“By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your doing”**?
 - What does “this” point to? In Greek, the “this” is placed in the sentence so that the word applies to both faith and salvation.
- IOW, both the salvation AND the faith to receive it are gifts of God to you.

⁶ Leave up the whole time

- As we learned in **chapter 1**, salvation is the work of God from start to finish. *God restored* you to your senses; *God drew* you to himself and even gave you the ability to believe.
- **He woke us up in the ambulance** and invited us simply to let him save us.
- **Nasser illus. You may have heard salvation described something like this:** “I was drowning in a sea of my sin and Jesus came by in a boat and threw the life vest out to me and pulled me onboard and saved me.” Our friend David Nasser says that that sounds really good, but it’s just not the gospel. The gospel is that you weren’t just drowning in a sea of your sin, you were dead, floating face down in a sea of your sin, and Jesus came and pulled your lifeless body into the boat and breathed eternal life into your lungs.⁷

(2) The instrument of salvation is faith

- Paul says, **“by grace we are saved through faith.”** Very important, many Christians are confused. Faith is not simply a religious feeling, or becoming more Christian, or rock solid confidence in Jesus with no doubts.
- Faith is the hand that lays hold on Jesus.
 - **OT picture:** hand on the head
 - Very important: Faith is not simply a religious feeling, or becoming more Christian; faith is the belief that Christ has accomplished it all, just like he said he did, and simply resting your hope on that.
 - **Some people wonder if their faith is strong enough to save them** (I’m not sure I have enough faith—I think of it like this—**Illus. tribesman getting on plane: “one guy filled with doubt, riding in the plane; another filled with understanding, standing on the tarmac).**
- Faith is choosing to base the hopes of your soul on Jesus.
 - **God has already—past tense**—completed the purchase of your salvation. When you claim that as your own, it becomes yours.

⁷ Adapted from David Nasser

(3) The result of salvation is good works

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works...*

- **You're not saved by good works**, but if you're saved you will do good works.
- That's because when God saves you, he unites you to Christ and begins to **infuse his life** into you.
- There's no way to be hit with that kind of force, to have that kind of power working in you, and not change.
- **I think of it like this:** I was downtown, and as I was walking to my car, a piano fell from a tall building and landed right on my head—you, know, like in the cartoons—just flattened me into the pavement...anyway, it made me a little late
- Have you experienced the grace of God?
 - How can you say you understand and believe the gospel and not love him?
 - *How can you say you love God while enjoying those things that put him on the cross?*
- **You're saved by faith alone**, but the faith that saves is never alone.
- **You're not saved by good works**, but if you're saved you will do good works.

(4) The confidence of salvation is that what God started, he will finish

- 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God *prepared beforehand*, that we should walk in them.
 - Prepared beforehand = *predestined*. God has already pre-planned these good works for you. He's already created the opportunity for them and pre-supplied the power for you to do them.
- *Literally, in Greek, the word is "poema" (similar to our word "poem.") God has started writing a poem with your life,*

composing your life into a beautiful song that glorifies him. And what he has started, he will finish!

- That word is used only one other place in the Bible, referring to God's creation in Genesis 1. At creation, God spoke something into nothing. He didn't start with raw material. He **started with nothing and created everything**. He spoke a light that did not exist into absolute darkness.
- **When God saved you**, he took a righteousness that did not exist in you and spoke it into being.
 - And the same powers that spoke the universe into existence began to create righteousness in you.
 - The darkness in your soul is no more able to resist the transforming power of God than the night is able to resist the sunrise.
- Which means that all you have to do is yield yourself to Jesus to let him do them through you.
 - Christianity, you see is not about you doing anything for God, but letting Christ do everything THROUGH you.

So this is it, God has woken you up in the ambulance. Will you let him save you? If you will say "yes" to him, he will seat you in the heavenly places with Christ, immediately, and start a process in you that cannot be stopped.

You say, "Ah, but I feel so dirty and weak."

- Of course, you do!
- Luther's phrase: *simul justus et peccator*. The gospel is that you and I are ~~simultaneously more wicked~~ than we ever realized, and yet more accepted and loved and alive in Christ than we could ever have dreamed. At the same time.
- Paul says in Romans 8:10 that simultaneously our bodies are "dead in sins" and the Spirit in us is alive in righteousness. And we feel that.
- But the point is that you are to embrace what God has said about you, and as you do, he will **infuse into you the power** to become what he has already declared you to be.

Christianity is not about becoming righteous enough to be accepted by God; it is about accepting Christ's righteousness as your own. SO, **here's the question:** Have you ever received this offer of salvation personally, for yourself?

You can do it right now... reach out your hand to lay on the head of the Lamb; receive the gift of salvation for yourself.