

The Walking Dead

Hey guys, my name is Marcus and I'm a pastor in training here at City Church. Kent mentioned last week that I'm eclectic and that I love watching wrestling, the Golden Girls, and Frasier, but I'm going to add to the list just in case you know, we need something to talk about when we hang out. I also enjoy anime and watching Project Runway. And don't tell anyone, but I also have started knitting. As my wife says, anything your grandmother would do I probably do. The passage we are going to be reading today is all about how God makes spiritually dead people alive in Jesus. So you know what we had to do right? We had to call this teaching The Walking Dead. Had too.

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn with me to Ephesians 2:1-10. So we finally made it out of Ephesians 1 guys. Give yourself a pat on the back. If you don't have your bible there should be a bible at either end of the row and I'm sure if you ask nicely then someone will gladly hand you one. If you don't own a bible, that's our gift to you.

So today is what I would argue is the clearest, most vivid description in the bible contrasting what a person's life is like before Jesus, and what life is like after Jesus. If you're in the room and are wondering what it means to be a follower of Jesus, this passage kind of nails it. If you're in the room and would say you *are* following Jesus, this is also a perfect passage because it'll help make sure that you mean the same thing the bible means when you say that. Even if you're new or have been checking us out for a while but completely reject the idea of following Jesus, this is a great passage to make sure that you truly know what you've rejected. Needless to say, today's passage is for all of us. This passage gives us a picture of what the bible would both call a spiritually dead person, and a spiritually alive person. So let's take a look, starting in v. 1.

[1] And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked

So out the gate, we need to acknowledge that Paul is using a metaphor here. He isn't trying to make the point that people are literally dead before they become followers of Jesus. Because that would be weird. We know he isn't this because he says right there in v. 2 "*...in which you once what?—walked.*" So Paul isn't saying we start off *literally* dead. But he is saying that something has made us *figuratively* dead. This idea of "the living dead," or "the walking dead,"—it goes all the way back to the first century. **Paul is describing here a type of living that isn't really living. A type of being alive that isn't really alive** It's a type of being alive where we are completely carried along by forces outside of our control. A type of living where you're just going around in circles and not getting anywhere. Where you are constantly chasing after the thing that's right around the corner only to find out that once you get there, it isn't what you had hoped it would be. And he's going to go on to explain what those forces are. So, you're alive, you're moving, you're walking around...but at the same time you are completely driven and controlled by things other than yourself. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the bible's version of zombies. You're welcome.

So he starts by saying that what has *made* us dead in the first place is our "trespasses and sins." Now, we've talked before about the difference between what people *think* sin is and what it *actually* is. For most people we tend to default to sin being "bad things we do." Sins are "bad things I do that I probably shouldn't do." But here, Paul describes sin more like a *condition*. It's something that is a part of us by

default, from the beginning. See the difference? On our own, we are “dead in our sin.” So what does he mean by that? Well, he goes on to unpack it, starting in the second half of v. 2:

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— [3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...

Okay, so Paul just unpacked what spiritual “deadness” looks like. And the way I read it, it looks like it has three primary components:

1. Following the “course of this world” (which sounds pretty old-school fundamentalist to me)
2. Following the “prince of the power of the air” (which sounds very Harry Potter-esque to me)
3. Living in the “passions of our flesh” (which sounds like the title of a trashy romance novel)

Now the language on these can be a little hard to grasp, so let’s do a few minutes on each.

Following the course of this world

First off is that being spiritually dead means “following the course of this world.” The idea is that there is a certain way that people do things in our world. There is a way that the typical American, the typical twenty-something, the typical person of our age and demographic and socioeconomic status, a way that all of those people do life. And left to our own devices, the most natural thing for us to do is to assimilate to whatever that is. To say it another way, as culture goes, so do we.

There is all sorts of research to back this up, but at its core it’s just the idea of us following the path of least resistance. If everybody else around me is fudging their resume to get ahead, I’m gonna fudge my resume to get ahead. If everybody else around me is moving in with their boyfriend or girlfriend, I’m gonna move in with my boyfriend or girlfriend. This isn’t rocket science really—whatever the bulk of people I’m around are doing, I’m gonna find it easiest to do those same things too. *You know, for all the talk about us being whoever we want to be and doing whatever we want to do here in America, we sure do spend a lot of our lives just doing what everybody else is doing.*

And Paul is saying that without Jesus coming and interrupting that in some way, that’s what we will *continue* doing. We’ll just keep taking the path of least resistance. Maybe not in everything—maybe we’ll have some things about us that are unique or different—but for the most part we’ll fall in line with whatever our friend group, or colleagues, or our favorite people on Instagram are doing. And that’s part of what it looks like to be spiritually dead. It means that you mostly just do life the way the typical American does life and no different."

Following the prince of the power of the air

So next up is the following the prince of the power of the air, which is such an odd phrase in the bible for Satan. It’s so weird and cryptic right. It’s not even cool like the ‘Fresh Prince’ of the air, sorry, that was cheesy. So Paul is referencing Satan, the very embodiment of evil at work in the universe. Now this idea of Satan is not popular with our culture at all. Unless he’s red and has a pitch fork right. But the idea is that there is evil at work in our universe, that’s not popular at all because that would mean that he’s real.

But Paul is saying that confidently, that there are dark forces that are behind many decisions that people make. Now there is a way to *overemphasize* Satan, where we think Satan is behind every corner waiting to get us. Where we think things like “I got a flat tire on my way to a prayer meeting—Satan must be out to get me.” And yah, it could be that or it could be that the roads are awful in Knoxville and you ran over a nail; but who’s to say” We laugh, but at the same time, there is also a way to *underemphasize* Satan—to go through life not believing that we have an enemy who would love nothing more than to see us destroyed. In Luke, Jesus tells Peter, one of his disciples, that Satan demanded to have him so he could sift him like wheat. Not sure what exactly that means, but it doesn’t sound fun.

Now maybe this whole idea of a personal embodiment of evil named Satan sound ridiculous to you. I get it. But let’s talk for a second. If you were one of these dark spiritual forces at work and you wanted to deceive people, what would be the best strategy for you to pull that off? Would it not be one where you convince people that you don’t exist? I think so yah. That’s what I’d like to call a “got’em move.”

Living in the passions of your flesh

Alright so last up, Paul says that being spiritually dead looks like “living in the passions of your flesh.” This one is hard to spot I feel like. For us in America, we live by and sometimes die by the notion of the “you do you boo boo”. Whether we say it or not, our actions tend to lean that way. “We have to be true to ourselves, otherwise we can’t do the thing.” From Paul’s perspective, that’s part of what being spiritually dead is all about.

Let me say it another way, if you are spiritually dead, your highest authority will be the “desires of the body and mind” as Paul calls them. In other words, the only thing that calls the shots in your life is the question “what do I want to do?” So I can’t clean my house. I don’t want to and last I checked my mom isn’t here to make me. I’d rather (insert thing you really want to do here). I can’t help my friend move because I don’t want to. I just can’t. Follower of Jesus in the room, let me pick on you for a second. For us specifically, we will say things like, I don’t want to read my bible, because I’d rather sleep-in just a little bit more or I need to watch that next episode of Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt. Or I can’t serve this person because I don’t want to, I’d much rather (insert your reason here). And here’s the thing, and I don’t think we realize what we are saying this, but what we are saying is that **“I am enslaved to my own desires. I can only do the things that I want to do, and I can’t do the things I don’t want to do.”** And Paul is saying here is that this is exactly what Jesus came to rescue us out of. This mentality is characteristic of a spiritually dead person—not of a follower of Jesus. If you are spiritually dead, you’re gonna spend nearly all of your time doing just the things you want to do. And when you have to do things you don’t want to do, you’re gonna most likely be bitter and resentful and miserable about it. The feeling of “this feels wrong, therefore it’s wrong” is still you following after your desires. If you’re a follower of Jesus, you have the freedom to do even the things you don’t currently desire. You get to serve and love others when you don’t want to do it. There have been plenty of times where when something happened in my wife Melanie and my life where people in our church family rallied around us and died to desire to be church family to us. We were brought and cooked food. When we had to go to the hospital, church family stayed with us from 10pm to 10am, forgoing sleep to be there for us. We even watched WWE Wrestlemania because they knew I really wanted to, that’s not high on many people’s desires to watch.

So Paul says that being spiritually dead looks like 1) following the course of this world, 2) following the prince of the power of the air, and 3) living in the passions of our flesh. If your life is driven by those things, if you look at your life, and this is a pattern, what Paul is saying is that you may be spiritually dead.

[Need to make sure people hear what I'm saying here] Now, hear me say these things are "present" for all of us, even if we *follow* Jesus. We are all tempted to fall in line with what everyone else is doing. To follow the next trend. We are all influenced by Satan in ways. We are all tempted to give into our flesh, These are all "influences" at times for everyone, follower of Jesus or not. **But the question is: are they influences or are they authorities?** If you're a follower of Jesus, you'll wrestle with conforming to what other people are doing, but if you're spiritually dead, you'll see no use in doing anything else. If you're a follower of Jesus you'll realize times that you gave into the influence of evil forces in your life, but if you're dead you won't even notice it. If you're a follower of Jesus you'll at times give into your flesh but if you're spiritually dead you'll never see a need to resist that at all. There's a difference between being influenced by something and being controlled by something. If you're spiritually dead, you're controlled by these things."

Now, *because* of all those things, Paul says next in the second half of v. 3, we...

and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

So Paul just up and used the word wrath on us. Huh. Not sure about you but that word wrath doesn't exactly make my top ten list of favorite words from the Bible, especially if it's referencing wrath towards me. And even if we're okay with the idea of wrath in the bible, we're more okay with it in the Old Testament kind of way right? We think that the New Testament is the part where Jesus introduces grace and unicorns and that's it. But Paul's not a fan of that understanding of the bible. Right here, in the *New Testament*, it says that God has *wrath* towards us because of our sin. So let's talk a bit about what that means and why it's the case.

First I think we need to understand what wrath is. Wrath, or anger, is what psychologists would call a "derivative emotion." Which means it's less of an emotion we experience on it's own, and more something we experience as a result of another emotion. In the case of anger or wrath, both of those are responses to something you love being threatened. For example, something we all have a connection to would be cancer. I think we can safely assume we all hate and have an anger toward cancer. We see how it kills and deteriorates the people we love right. If cancer only killed bugs, we would not hate cancer. But it doesn't. So in its most basic form, wrath is an expression of love. When something threatens to harm the things we love, we hate it or we show wrath towards it.

Now here's what makes it tricky in God's case—what he loves, and the thing threatening what he loves are sometimes the same thing. He loves us, he loves his creation. But because we are all carried along by these forces—the world, the devil, the flesh—we are also the ones *threatening* what he loves. And because of that, he has wrath towards *us*. But, and hear me say this, while God can have wrath or anger towards us, at God's core is love. 1 John 4:8 actually speaks to this by saying just that, that God *is* love. So God can be, and is *provoked* to wrath. But *love* is something that flows out of the core of his existence. And we're about to see just how true that is...

[4] But God...

Breathe that in fam. “*But God...*” Theologians have called this the “most glorious but” in the bible. Which is proof that theologians do actually like to laugh sometimes. Even if it’s toward cheesy bible jokes. So into this depressing picture of the hopeless, spiritually dead scenario we were in, God begins breathing life. Keep reading with me, v. 4:

[4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

This passage says that God, being rich in mercy—out of the very overflow of who he is—reached into our spiritual deadness and did what? *Made us alive*. The Jewish believers listening in Ephesus would’ve immediately thought of two things. First, they would’ve thought all the way back to Adam, the first human to ever live. They would’ve thought of Genesis 2, where God forms a man from the dust of the ground and then breathes into his nostrils breath, and it reads “and the man became a living being.” Second they would’ve thought about this beautiful story in Ezekiel (and sci-fi movie in the making) where God takes Ezekiel to a valley filled with dead people’s bones, and right before his very eyes pieces them together to form a living breathing army of human beings. Those are the pictures that would’ve come to the forefronts of their minds as they heard Paul say that God “made us alive.” These vivid, beautiful pictures of God generating life where there is no life.

Now, don’t miss this –*when* exactly does it say that God “makes us alive”? Does it say he does it after we say a prayer where we accept him into our hearts? *Nah*. Does it say that he does it once he finds out that we were serious about him and ready to live sold-out lives for him? *Nope*. Does it say that he does it once we prove ourselves worthy of spiritual life? *Nope again*. What does it say? I believe it says “*when we were dead* in our trespasses.” That’s when he did it. Meaning that belonging to Jesus is something he does, and we respond to. Not the other way around. More on that in a couple verses. For now, let’s keep reading. He says that in “making us alive,” God, v. 6:

[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Now this has all the feel goods, but it’s can also seem weird. “Seated with him in the heavenly places” sounds a little (insert a fictional something here) Two weeks ago Kent talked about part of following after Jesus is learning to live in the tension between two realities. In one sense we are earthly, imperfect and flawed humans, but in another sense we are quote “in Christ.” By making us alive, God has given us a new, better identity to live out of. And God doesn’t just make us alive in Christ and then go ‘good luck fam! No, it says he makes us alive, so that in the coming ages he might CONTINUE to show grace towards us. **Our relationship with Jesus begins by grace, and continues by grace.**

Now, Paul drives home his point, v. 8:

[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith.

We use this word “grace” a lot but just so we’re all on the same page, it means favor or intentional kindness. In the Greek here it’s *chariti*—where we get the word “charity. Meaning you and I were saved by the sheer grace, or charity, or generosity in God’s heart. And that the channel that flows through is “faith”—meaning a trust or a confidence in the one doing the saving. Paul’s point is that God does all the saving and that faith is simply the avenue through which we *experience* that.

And then, just to make sure we didn’t miss the point, Paul doubles down, second half of v. 8:

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

And then one more time for the homies...

[9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Paul’s point here, that he is playing on repeat, is that salvation, right relationship with God, belonging to Jesus and his family *is not—IS NOT—something you accomplish*. Not even a little bit. It is something *God accomplishes in your place*. Specifically, how he accomplishes it is through what Jesus did on the cross. On the cross, Jesus summed up a life of doing what you and I could not do. You and I, on our own, were not able to set our own course. On our own, we are just following the course of this world, Satan, and the passions of our flesh—that’s all there is. But Jesus comes and interrupts that reality in the most glorious way possible. He steps in and through his death on the cross, offers us grace and mercy, and *makes us alive* in him. He deposits in us the ability to open up our spiritual eyes, to receive spiritual life. And as a result, v. 10...

[10] For we are his workmanship, [I love that phrase] created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

I want us to focus in before we’re finished with this verse. You and I were created for good works. Now, we’re not *saved* by our good works, Paul makes that clear right, salvation was a gift, but here he says we are God’s workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus for good works. This is beautiful and maybe a little confusing. Hopefully this is helpful. If you want to earn God’s love, you’ve done it all wrong. You’re already loved. And because you are already loved that should fuel you to want to do for others. Is that similar feeling when you see someone do good and you have the feels and want to do good for others. Similarly, good works should always follow us being made alive not because we want to earn our way to God. Maybe an illustration will help.

If Mel and I are having an argument and I get so angry that I eventually start raising my voice, I start getting really angry and then eventually storm out of the room before the conversation ever ends. Do you think showing up with flowers a few minutes later is going to make everything all nice and right? It would be a sweet thing to do, yes, but it’s def no apology. There would need to be some form of reconciliation right? So let’s say this all happens again, and this time, after I walk out and think about what just happened I come back and apologize, and we talk through it all rationally, being able to reconcile that very moment. Then if I show up with flowers the next day, it will be a tangible reminder that we are good. It’s the same flowers but two different situations. In one it’s useless but in the other it’s beautiful. **Good works from a place of being made alive in Jesus are a beautiful thing. Good works from a place of trying to cover up our sin and deadness are a useless thing.**

As we wrap up, there are a few questions I think we have to wrestle with from this passage:

- **What does it look like to walk in spiritual life as opposed to spiritual death?** I think it would be silly to hear a passage like this without asking the most fundamental question it poses—"Am I spiritually dead or spiritually alive?" As I survey my life as a whole, what do I see?
- When you compare your life to people of your same age, stage-of-life, income level, etc., does anything about your life look different? If not, is it possible that you are just "following the course of the world"? *(And by that I don't just mean the only difference is that you go to church) Are you constantly just making decisions based on what everybody else around you is doing or do you realize you've been given the opportunity to walk in something better?
- Are you asleep to the reality that there is a real enemy who wants nothing more than to carry you along by his schemes or do you realize you can go to war against that? Is there an alertness, an attention, paid to that reality?
- Is there a consistent pattern in your life of acknowledging "this is what I would like to do, but in light of who Jesus is and what he's done, here's what I'm going to do instead." So when you look at how you handle your finances, your relationships, your time, is there evidence that you are denying your own desires in light of who Jesus is and what he's done.
- Are you constantly making decisions in your life solely based on what's best for you, without considering anybody or anything else or do you know that a different life is possible?
- Or, *do you see almost entirely spiritual life?* Are you regularly operating out of the reality of what God has done for you? Are you living in light of being "seated with him in the heavenly places"? Is there a constant awareness of what you're called to walk in, and a resistance to things that would pull you in a different direction than that?

Cool, let's pray....

Lord, thank you for this opportunity to speak to church family by sharing your Word with them. I pray that for those who would say they are followers of you, but their actions don't currently match up with who they say they are, that you would tug on their heart during today or this week. Encourage them to speak to someone in their LifeGroup or someone at church. Help them to repent and turn their face towards you. Remembering that you would love nothing more. For those Lord that don't know at all and this sermon was a little weird, I pray that you would help give them eyes to see a glimpse of who you are through this message as they think on it more. And for those that are following you faithfully, Holy Spirit continue to encourage them to follow and also bear with their brothers and sisters in their spiritual walk. Give them patience and love like you show us. Thank you Lord for your love and your grace. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

So, during the next couple songs we're gonna give you the opportunity to take communion. For followers of Jesus, communion is a chance to remember and celebrate what we've talked about this morning, that even when we were dead in our transgressions God made us alive. And the way he did that was through the body and blood of his son Jesus. When we take communion, we remember that Jesus went to the cross to make us alive. So anytime during the next two songs, if you're a follower of Jesus, you're invited to participate via the tables in the back.