But God (The essential Divine Intervention)

Text Ephesians 2:1-7

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**Scriptures:** Exodus 2:23-3:9; Ephesians 2:1-7

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 103, 176, 440, 61, 204, 530

Series: Ephesians (Sermon #8)

Occasion: Baptism of a covenant child (‘Jasper’)

Theme: The apostle Paul first describes the desperate natural state of all humanity (governed by a sinful nature, in active rebellion against God, subject to Satan’s rule and exposed to the just wrath of God) and then contrasts this with the merciful, loving, gracious, intervention of God in making His children alive together with Christ so that his immeasurably rich grace in kindness would be revealed throughout all time for eternity.

Proposition: Brothers and Sisters in Christ, as those who have been mercifully saved solely by Divine intervention, God demonstrates his gracious kindness in us.

**Introduction**

We have all been helpless at one time or another. Firstly, when we were young babies like {Jasper} who has been baptised today. As babies we are dependent upon others for everything essential in life. For some there is great helplessness in the later stage of life when high-level hospital or rest-home care is needed. There are also challenging circumstances in life when a person may cry out for help; for example, when lost out at sea in the deep water. Then, to avoid drowning a rescuer in a boat or a plane or a helicopter is needed. Yet there remains the possibility of swimming to a shore, however tired the person may be. It may be that the drowning person is rescued just after they have stopped breathing and their heart no longer beats. In this case, cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) may restore both breathing and pulse. When CPR is successful the body (which is still alive) has been able to respond so that the heart restarts beating, and the lungs take in air again.

However, if someone is completely dead (no breathing, no pulse, no neuronal activity), then they are beyond the reach of any human assistance being without life. A dead person is utterly helpless. For the dead, only the supernatural intervention of God can help by giving life. This is true both in the physical and spiritual realms.

The focus of our text today is the spiritual condition of human beings like us. Firstly, we look at the deep darkness of spiritual death – mankind’s natural condition after the fall of our common ancestors Adam and Eve under the heading ‘*The bleak reality of dead humanity*’. Then we look at the ‘bright light’ of the gospel in the supernatural intervention of God who gives life in Christ to the utterly helpless under the heading ‘*The rich mercy of God in giving life in Christ*’.

1. **The bleak reality of dead humanity (v1-3)**

What would you say is the darkest section of the Bible? I say that it is Christ on the Cross when “*the sun’s light failed*” (Luke 23:45). “*He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not*’ (Isa 53:3). The only truly innocent man violently put to death by the guilty.

In Scripture there is also recorded the darkness of evil events brought about by the descendants of Adam against others like them, for example: child sacrifices to Molech (e.g. Lev 18:21); the rape of Dinah by Shechem (Gen 34:2); the decapitation of John the Baptist at the request of Herodias’ dancing daughter (Matt 14:8). These are all specific cases of deep darkness, but here in our text is a bleakness so widespread that we are all included.

In the first part of our text are some of the most dark, depressing, dire words that have ever been written. So utterly black is the message that many have stumbled over the awful truth which God conveys through the writing of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians. “*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*”.

Paul describes the Ephesian believers as having been ‘dead’ in the past. He is clearly not referring to physical death here, but to them having once been without spiritual life. To be spiritually dead is to be separated, severed and alienated from God; who alone gives life. Our common ancestors, Adam and Eve, died spiritually when they rebelled against their Creator. The break in their relationship with God was reflected in their expulsion from the garden of Eden. Scripture records that God “*drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life*” (Gen 3:24). Many years later they Adam and Eve both died physically. (Adam lived to be 930 years old).

We know that the characteristics of physically dead people include a non-beating heart, the absence of breathing and no brain activity. What are the characteristics of the spiritually dead?

1. They exist in active rebellion against God. This is expressed in the words ‘trespasses’ and ‘sins’ which are interchangeable here. Both terms express a failure to live according to the good commands of God.
2. They are subject to Satan’s rule (Gal 4:3; Col 1:13). The ‘prince of the power of the air’ is the Devil. He is a powerful, but limited, created being. As yet an active, but already defeated, enemy of God and His people.
3. They are unable to fundamentally change themselves (John 3:3), being enslaved to the ‘passions of the flesh’. These include (Gal 5:19-21) “*sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy,drunkenness, orgies, and things like these*”.
4. They are vulnerable to the just wrath of God in judgement (Rom 1:18-20). “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb 10:31)

What sort of people are spiritually dead? Just non-Jews (Gentiles) like the Ephesians – the ‘you’ of verse 1? No. Notice that Paul identifies himself as included in the ‘we’ of verse 3. Paul, a zealous Jew, educated under the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) had also once been a spiritually dead person. In our text the ‘you’ and the ‘we’ cover every descendent of Adam.

Brothers and sisters, we have been part of this bleak reality in the past. Unsaved friend, you are yet in this perilous state. The universal natural human condition is that of spiritual death. For example, in Psalm 14: “*They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one*” (Psalm 14:3). In his letter to the Romans, Paul makes the same point: **“***Are we Jews any better off?No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin*” (Romans 3:9).

The Bible is plain and clear that natural mankind is not just spiritually sick, requiring some assistance – like the person out at sea who needs a lifeboat and perhaps CPR. Mankind’s condition as a spiritual sickness is reflected in the ‘Arminian view’ which is widely taught in many Christian churches. Arminianism teachers that a person must take the first step towards reconciliation with God and that his or her salvation depends on this human action. It is worth noting that if this view is logically applied, babies (both pre-born and born) and young children cannot be saved. In the error of ‘Arminianism’ natural mankind is spiritually debilitated, in need of help, but still retains some ability to respond.

The truth is that a spiritually dead person cannot respond to the gospel and come to faith **unless** God first acts/intervenes to make them alive in Christ. The theological term for this is ‘regeneration’ and this was the key message of Jesus to Nicodemus when Christ said “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3). The experience of post-regeneration conversion is expressed in the words of the Hymn (STTL440) which we sang earlier: “*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me*”.

It is obvious to us all in the physical realm that dead people cannot help themselves in any way to do anything which physical – they cannot move, breath or think thoughts. They are without life. Similarly, it is true that in the spiritual realm, dead people cannot help themselves in any way to do anything spiritually alive – they cannot save themselves. They are dead in trespasses and sins without the forgiving grace of God in Christ.

Jasper’s parents understand this truth and have confirmed in their vows that their outwardly adorable son is ‘sinful by nature’. He was conceived in a spiritually dead state. He is largely helpless physically, but completely helpless spiritually. The word ‘intervention’ refers to ‘the action of becoming intentionally involved in a difficult situation in order to improve it or to prevent it from getting worse’. Like all of us, Jasper needs the intervention of God in His life, which brings us to our 2nd point.

1. **The rich mercy of God in giving life in Christ (v4-7)**

Imagine that you look out to the ocean and there you spot a human body floating in the water. That body is dead; there is no breath, no pulse, no brain activity. That body belongs at rest in a grave with a tombstone. But then look, God takes that dead body and supernaturally makes it alive again with breath, pulse and thoughts; like Jesus did for his friend Lazarus (Luke 11:43).

This miraculous ‘divine intervention’ is what Paul writes about in the second part of our text in the spiritual realm: **“***But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have 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 in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2.4-7).

Notice here the reasons why God choses to give life to the spiritually dead. The ‘grounds’ for His intervention on their behalf are His great love, His rich mercy, His kind grace. A person who is ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ is in no way attractive to the Most Holy God. Such a person is abhorrent. disgusting, detestable, repugnant, odious, loathsome. Yet God chooses to act in amazing grace, undeserved love and rich mercy.

**Just as** in the physical realm He raised up His own Son Jesus Christ having made Him who knew no sin to bear the sins of all His children by suffering under God’s righteous anger unto death, **so** in the spiritual realm He raises up those who are spiritually dead; unable to respond to Him in any way apart from His divine intervention.

The words ‘with Him’ speak of the union which all those who savingly believe in Christ have with their Saviour. One commentator has said “*what is said of the Redeemer can also be said of the redeemed*”. Just as Christ is both spiritually and physically alive today, so those who belong to the Lord are both spiritually and physically alive.

One day (unless Christ returns first) we will all physically die but if our faith is truly in Jesus then we look forward with certainty to the coming day when we will once again be physically alive, in resurrected bodies. We also look forward to the New Heavens and New Earth – a future inheritance which is so certain that Paul speaks of ‘us’ being in glory already ‘*seated with Christ in the heavenly places*’.

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, how are we then to live in light of this kind, loving, gracious divine intervention by which we are united to Christ both in His resurrection and His exaltation to glory? The answer is in the last verse of our text when we see God’s purpose in His work of making spiritually dead people alive in Christ without any contribution on their part. Here is the reason given in our text as to why God is so rich in mercy, love and grace: *“so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”.* The ‘coming ages’ include all of history from the time of Christ’s resurrection and ascension through to eternity.

Today all of us who believe are living evidence of the immeasurable riches of God’s grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. We each have stories to tell of God’s rich mercy in our lives. Stories which demonstrate that we have not saved ourselves. Testimonies of the immeasurable riches of God’s grace in kindness towards us in Jesus Christ.

I don’t know the details of what Jasper’s parents hope for in his life. Here are some possible parental aspirations; good physical health, the opportunity to develop his gifts and talents, perhaps that he might follow in his dad’s footsteps and become a builder? However, I think that the primary hope that Jasper’s parents both have for him is that he will be a child of God, that he will be saved, that he will come to know Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour.

We do not know whether the Lord has already made Jasper alive in Christ. That is certainly a possibility. This supernatural gift of spiritual life may happen from the moment of conception, being made evident in the life of a young person many years later. We have no absolute guarantee from the Lord that He will save the children of believers, like Jasper, but we do have every reason to hope and expect that this child is one of those whom God has chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

That hope and expectation is based upon God’s promises for example: “*And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you*” (Genesis 17:7); “*For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself*" (Acts 2:39).

Today we have petitioned God based upon His own word, saying: “We pray for this child and all the children of our congregation…. Fill them with your Spirit so they may respond to your promises with faith, hope and love”. In his natural state Jasper is as utterly helpless as we all are. Apart from God’s supernatural invention, not one of us can become spiritually alive. We are naturally like the dead floating in a vast ocean – utterly helpless in the spiritual realm.

If you can respond to the gospel call today with saving faith, then it must be that God has made you alive in Christ. It is all His work, so that in and through you He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness in Christ Jesus

So, the question is, can you respond to the Lord’s call: “*Seek me and live*”? (Amos 5:4). Jasper’s parents evidence by their lives that they have, and they hope that one day their son will do so also.

How about you?

AMEN.