

Sermon
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Spiritual CPR
Ephesians 2:1-10

I. Intro

A. Breathless

1. I've told you what a star athlete I was when I was a child, in little league, and given the Olympian physique you see before you today, I hardly need to recount all of the details to prove that. I've also told you how I used to play **soccer**, though I found it fairly pointless, and liked the fact that the field was big enough that you could stand pretty far away from the action and still look like you were waiting in the right place for the ball to come your way.
2. One time, early in my first season, I mistakenly found myself within close proximity to the actual game, and so I **charged at the ball**, or more to the point, since it was little league, toward the circle of boys kicking the ball back and forth in random directions between themselves. Somehow we crossed shins and knees, and I believe for a moment I was actually airborne, like **Charlie Brown** when Lucy pulls the football out from in front of him. When you come down flat on your back on the hard dirt of an unkempt soccer field, there is a thud, and this experience where for a moment you can't breathe at all. Your mouth is open, you can see the air around you, but you can't get it to come in. Other people gather around you in a huddle, almost breathing harder themselves to motivate you. But for a second, your lungs just don't do what lungs are supposed to do. I thought I had died.
3. The good part of getting the wind knocked out of you is that it passes.
4. But I want to hold us there in that moment for just a little bit longer today. Before we breath in and go back to normal life, I want us to feel that moment. **Because spiritually, we spend our entire lives in that moment.** Spiritually, we are trapped in the one second between breathlessness and breathing, between death and life.
5. The Scripture says that though

we were dead in our sins, we were made alive in Christ, because God loved us enough to do it. When we could not make ourselves breath again, God performed a kind of spiritual CPR and resurrected us. That's the message of today's text.

- B. We're in a series of sermons on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I told you a couple of weeks ago that this could be called "The Church Book," because Paul writes it at the end of his life, from prison, reflecting on the things that matter most to him. And he thinks of the church.
- C. I showed you why I thought he chose **Ephesus** to write to, after all of his travels. Ephesus was this great melting pot of the Jews, God's chosen people who had known and followed God, and outsiders, who had always been a hindrance if not threat to the Jews. I showed you **slides** of Ephesus and told you about the Temple to the goddess **Artemis**, and the great uproar the Christians caused by turning people away from false gods.
1. In Jesus Christ, the two were finally made one.
 2. The church book.
 3. Paul is amazed at the church, where diverse peoples are made one by belief in Jesus.
- D. And what unites these diverse people is this very text we look at today. **THIS** is the center of Ephesians and the heart of Paul's message.
- E. Let's pray that through the written word, which is eternal, God would **breath into** our mortal lives and make us part of a community that goes on forever.

II. PRAY

III. The Text

- A. This text really could be the **center of the entire Bible**, believe it or not. In all of this theological language is contained the heart of the message of the gospel, the story that Paul preached; the **Christmas** story is in this text. If you **memorized** no passage from the Bible but this one, you would be doing pretty good.
- B. The whole message is that though we were dead in our sins, lost, hopeless, we were made alive by Jesus Christ, not because of anything we did, but because out of love, God chose us by grace through faith.

C. **C.S. Lewis**, my favorite Christian

writer, put it this way. He tells us to imagine God like a diver going down to the depths of the ocean to recover a treasure. He writes, *“He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, . . . to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him.*

One may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover.”

(C.S. Lewis, *“The Incarnation”* in *The Joyful Christian*)

- D. With your average, modern American, I find it is very difficult to convince them of two things.
1. **First**, that their lives are in ooze and slime and old decay, needing rescuing, and
 2. **Secondly**, that they are a precious things that someone wants to rescue.

IV. The ooze

- A. I realize, if I am both honest and accurate, that I have not always been a Christian, though I have almost all my life attended church. There was a time when I was another religion, though I don't know what the name of that religion was.
- B. I remember attending a church camp when I was in high school, when I was living in southeast Texas. A southern preacher stood up and delivered a message that was a little bit hotter than the roaring campfire we were gathered around. He told us that we could do nothing to make God happy by our own efforts, that we didn't deserve to go to heaven, and it was only by God's choice that we might.
- C. Now, I've never been intimidated by people who were more educated or more credentialed than me, because I have a big ego. And so in the silence that followed this fiery talk, I said,
"That doesn't seem fair."
"Why not?" he asked me.
"Because I'm a good person. Why would God want to punish me?"
He said something very wise. He said, "Alright, I'll make the requirements even easier on you. Be perfect for one day, and I guarantee you that a perfect God will be pleased with you."
- D. That preacher realized something I didn't at that point. What I was believing was not actually Christian doctrine at all. The belief that we are generally nice enough people, or good enough, is not at all what the Bible teaches. Whatever religion that is, it isn't Christianity.
1. I stayed in bed all day the next day, and still failed.

- E. Paul says that we are lying here on our backs, **breathless**, unable to restore life to the lives that we've ruined. We are not weak or wounded. We are dead. We are not nice enough, we're unable to please God by our own efforts. **We are in slime, and ooze, and old decay.**
- F. Paul says at one point (Philippians 3:8) that all of the good things he has ever done are, what your Bible probably calls "trash" or "rubbish." The word in Greek, skoobalon, was used in a few places in ancient literature. It was once used to describe a dead body that had been washed up on the beach, it was once used to describe a battlefield a day later, it was once used to describe the things you pick up in a plastic bag when you take your dog for a walk.
- G. **We are not, in God's eyes, good enough, nice enough, deserving. We are flat on our backs needing immediate medical attention.**

V. Conversion

- A. You notice the strange language in vs. 2, that the Ephesians used to be ruled over by **“the ruler of the kingdom of the air.”**
1. I’ve heard way too many preachers breeze over that and just say that Paul had a funny way of referring to Satan there.
 2. Paul’s not making that language up. Paul is using the language of astrology that would have been well known in Ephesus. In ancient astrology, there were four elements: earth, fire, water, and air. Each element had a god, and the ruler of the kingdom of the air was Jupiter, the king of all the Roman gods, and the father of the goddess Artemis, whose gigantic Temple was the center of Ephesus, and one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. The ruler of the gods was the ruler of the air, because air we need at every second to stay alive.
- B. So Paul says, “When you worshipped the false gods, even the king of gods, the one who controlled even the air you breathe, you were still absolutely dead in your sins. You trusted in the most powerful god you knew, and he was unable to breathe life into you.”
- C. Paul is there to offer them a new God, a God whom he knew as **Yahweh**. The name is made of four vowels, yod heh, waw, heh. There are no hard sounds in it. It is the sound of breathing. As Rabbi Lawrence Kushner points out, when we die, do we stop breathing, or do we just cease being able to say the name of God?
- D. When we trust in our own good works, which are like dog crap in the eyes of a holy God, when we trust in the gods of this world, which are nothing more than statues we have made of ourselves, when we trust in money, which will rot, and houses, which will fall down, we are lying on the ground, not breathing, and often not even aware that there is air to breathe. **Trusting in anything less than the one true God is death.**
- E. The Bible says, you cannot make your lungs do what they are supposed to do. You cannot give yourself life. It says that in **creation**, God reached down and took clay, and breathed into it, and made man and woman. He breathed his own name into us, saying, “I am,” yod, heh, waw, heh, and in taking God’s name into ourselves, we came to life.

VI. The precious thing

- A. So if we have been lost in the slime, and ooze, and old decay, there is, nonetheless, something precious that Jesus wants to rescue.
- B. I think a lot about life and death when I take my kids to the doctor. My wife thinks going to the doctor to get a shot is a good thing. Somehow I feel that I am supposed to grab my kids up under one arm and run Heisman-trophy-like through a team of medical personnel to get them out of there.

- C. I took them to the doctor not long ago, and you actually have to hold the child while the doctor inoculates them, and they make the highest, most painful, most shrill screams that you've ever heard a child make, and you can't do anything, because you know they need their shots.

When I took my daughter we sat their mournfully waiting for the doctor to come in the room. Mom gave us a pen and paper to draw on.

"What do you want to draw?" I asked her.

"Sad face," she said. Apropos. We drew a little frown together. When you want to teach a child something as delicate as writing or drawing, you have to hold the child's hand in your own. You can't simply explain it from on high, you have to use your hand to guide hers to make the writing work. I have this eerie feeling that as I do so, God is holding my hand in his and teaching me how to father.

By the time the doctor arrives our little paper is measeled with frowning faces.

"Who do you want to hold you?" her mother asks.

"Papa," she says happily, not realizing what's coming next.

So I hold my child, and she screams when the needle goes in, and you just hold them, because you can't make it not hurt.

The nurse comes in afterwards with a sticker to put on my daughter's shirt, but looking at me, says, "Looks like Dad needs one too."

- C. We do everything we can for our kids' health, and if we could prevent them from ever hurting we would. But every parent knows that every child will one day breathe a last breath, hopefully in old age, but it will get us all. So we pray fragile prayers for our children.
- D. If God could take away the sting of death, I'm sure he would, but written into the very world that he created are the consequences of sin. We brought death into the world by pushing God away. Yet, even in the slime and ooze of a

sinful world, we are so precious to God, because we are his children, that he would dive down deep into humanity as Jesus Christ to bring us up again.

- E. So instead he inoculates us. He puts into us something that somehow keeps us from our mortality and makes us eternal beings. Paul tells us that by faith we are saved. It is by faith that God makes us alive again, so alive that even death doesn't get the last word.
- F. Teaching the faith
1. And I can do the same for my children. I can't guarantee that they will live forever. I can't guarantee that they will outlive me. But I can give them something that will guarantee that they will outlive death.
 2. We've taught our daughter to pray, and will do the same for our son as he grows. She has a bit more faith than I do. Not long ago she and I were out on a playground, and it started to drizzle, so we hid under a slide and waited. As we watched it come down, I felt like it was a good time to have a father-daughter conversation. So I said, "Honey, do you believe in Jesus?"
 She stared at me.
 "Um," I said, "Believe means, it's like think about. Well, no it's more like, um...."
 She looked out at the playground and interrupted me, "Jesus, no more rain!" A second later it had stopped, and she ran out to play, leaving me sitting under the slide like a troll under a bridge, wondering who was overhead.
 3. If I can teach her that the gods of this world are powerless, whether they are made of stone like statues, or paper like money, then I will have given her something that will last forever.
 4. This is what Paul is trying to give us. If he can teach us that the gods of the air are powerless, no matter how big their temples are in this world, that only the God who breathes life into us has power, he will have given us eternity.

- VII. This is what it means to believe
- A. That though I was dead, I am alive again
 - B. That though I thought life was fine, I realize haven't been breathing
 - C. That though I have made my life about as disgusting as I can get it, even though I keep in hidden pretty well from the people around me, I am still a child of my Father, and my Father will dive into the darkest depths to get me.
 - D. That though I have called out the names of false gods, trusting in things that would not last, God has breathed his own name into my lungs
 - E. That when I was an orphan, I was made a son of the king
 - F. If you already believe these things, simply that Jesus has succeeded where you have failed, then you've already become a Christian. Stating as much is just a formality. Being a Christian means what this text says. That I admit my best efforts can not bring me to life. And I need my Father to do it for me.

1 As for you, you were **dead** in your transgressions and **sins**, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the **ruler of the kingdom of the air**, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our **sinful** nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of **wrath**. 4 But because of his great **love** for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us **alive** with Christ even when we were **dead** in transgressions—it is **by grace you have been saved**. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his **grace**, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is **by grace you have been saved, through faith**—and this not from yourselves, it is the **gift** of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.