

# Risen with Christ

Ephesians 2:1-10

Jesus surprised everyone when He rose from the dead. Even when the disciples believed they didn't understand it. But that didn't change the fact that they (and we) were raised with Him.

## Summary of the Text

Paul tells the Ephesians they used to be in a state of death in trespasses and sins, but were made alive by God (v. 1). This death was not physical because they were still walking around in the world, led by the prince of the power of the air (v. 2). They freely followed the lusts of the flesh and mind, and were by nature children of wrath like anyone else (v. 3). It's as if Paul gives the technical, theological explanation for: "You were no different and no better than anyone else." But he isn't rubbing their nose in it. The point sets the stage for the greatness of grace: "But God." It was due to the richness of His mercy and great love, not our loveliness, that when we were dead in trespasses, He made us alive, raised us up, and seated us in the heavenly places in and with Christ Jesus (vv. 4-6). Each of these three verbs have the prepositional prefix *with* (sun) attached: we were co-enlivened, co-raised, and co-seated with Christ. This happened for a specific purpose, so that in the coming ages God would display the surpassing (*hyperballon*) riches of His grace, seen in His kindness bestowed through Christ Jesus (v. 7). Because it is by grace you have been saved through the instrument of faith, which is the gift of God and not from yourself, salvation is therefore not of works so that no one can boast (vv. 8-9). We are God's workmanship, His masterpiece (*poiema*), created in Christ for good works, which God planned beforehand so that we would walk in them (v. 10).

## Co-Raised with Christ

Ephesians is arguably the densest book in the New Testament, packed with so many layers of truth in its six chapters. The theme is our identity "in Christ", a phrase used 36 times. Outside of Christ we were not sick or limping or confused, but dead in our sins and fully showing our spiritual morbidity by the life we lived in the flesh (vv. 1-3). The new life that God gave us came directly through Christ. We came to spiritual life and faith (whenever that happened in our personal experience) because and as a result of Jesus coming to life, and Paul emphasizes this by saying it occurred "even when we were dead in sins and trespasses" (v. 5). When Jesus came alive, so did we because our life comes from Him. Even if we hadn't even heard of Him, He possessed our life, which He planned to bestow in His good timing. We had as much to do with our new birth as we did with our birth. All we contributed was the spiritual corpse. This is why it's called grace, an entirely unmerited gift. Nevertheless, we really were made alive, raised up, and seated in heaven with Christ. The head is connected to the body, so what happens to Christ our representative head happens to us. We died with Him, so we also must live with Him (cf. Rom. 6:8). We have a hard time connecting our life to Jesus' because covenantal thinking is strange, and we also don't experience regeneration like we imagine a resurrection would be experienced. So the payoff of working through passages like this are big. New life, resurrection, and being seated with Christ in His reign at the right hand of the Father are present realities for the Christian (cf. Ps. 110:1-2). This does not mean our individual bodily resurrection has happened, but it means a lot of other things.

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## The Necessity of Physical Resurrection

In its simplest form, Paul's argument goes like this: Because Christ is risen, we are alive, forgiven, and empowered. It follows then that if Christ is not risen, we are still in our sins, the gospel is hollow, and our faith is empty. If Jesus didn't bodily rise, Paul concludes, then "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15:19). God likes matter—water, insects, trees, animals, mountains, stars, galaxies, and embodied human beings. The point of Easter is not that we get to go to heaven when we die. Jesus didn't die on the cross and then three days later show up on earth as a disembodied soul. *He's not dead anymore*. His body came out of the grave with the power of indestructible life. Had Jesus not resurrected from the dead, we would be dead with Him—co-dead, co-rotting in the grave, and co-not-mattering. We would eat, drink, and be despairingly merry, for tomorrow we die. But here we are alive, risen with Christ, seated with Him in heaven, and full of hope, joy, and purpose.

## The Ages to Come

The Jews believed in the bodily resurrection of the dead. Job: "And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (19:26). Martha: "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day'" (Jn. 11:23-24). Jesus didn't come at the end of human history, die, and have everyone rise with Him. Strangely, He rose 2000 years ago by Himself. None of His followers considered this a real possibility, even though He told them He was going to do it (Matt. 16:21, 20:19; Mk. 9:31; Lk. 9:22). The priests and Pharisees remembered Jesus said this, but it only caused them to secure the tomb so the body wouldn't be stolen (Matt. 27:63-64). The disciples weren't lurking around the tomb or wait in anticipation, not because they thought resurrection was impossible, but it made no sense for it to happen—what difference would it make? Maybe Pilate would just execute Him again. They didn't know this man was a new Adam, a new representative, a penal substitute to take away the sins of the world and conquer it with His grace. They didn't see atonement on the cross, but a captured, accused, cursed, and failed messiah (Dt. 21:23). Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4), but it took time to understand what this meant. Why did He do it this way? Why are we raised and seated with Christ in heaven, but down here on earth for this part of our eternal life?: "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (v. 7). The bounty of God's grace is given and revealed to us throughout the ages as His kingdom comes, marked by His kindness in Christ. Salvation and the full-orbed peace that follows it deepens throughout the ages. So far in this passage God has been doing everything: making us alive, raising us up, seating us with Christ. Do we do anything? It really is all grace, so no bragging, but as God's masterpieces, we do the works He has prepared for us. When you look around, do you see anything to do for God? It's early spring in the kingdom, and you know what that means—weeds, pine cones, dirt, moss, dead stuff—all the remnants of winter need to be addressed. But it really is spring, the sun is out, and the buds are showing. *Jesus Christ rose from the dead and we rose with Him*. We can handle this age and all of its troubles. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed.