

## **Oh, What a Difference Christ Makes** (Ephesians 2:1-7)

“Before” and “after” advertisements. On the one hand they have the “before” shot. Overweight paunch, frizzy hair, scowling face. Then the “after” picture: toned body, updated hairstyle, smiling satisfaction. What made the difference? Just their product. “You too can have these amazing results for just \$19.99/month.”

Well, a lot of these “before” and “after” come-on’s are hokey or hyped. But there is one “before” and “after” that is genuine and guaranteed. It is the offer of salvation from God himself to you by grace through faith. For those who ask God for mercy and forgiveness on the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death, for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation comes guaranteed—not for 6 years or 60,000 miles—but for eternity.

Today we look at Ephesians 2:1-7, a verbal “before” and “after” of believers in the Lord. **When we believers consider our past, present, and future we exclaim, “Oh, what a difference Christ makes!”**

### **Our Past (2:1-3)**

Our past is in view in verses 1 to 3 and can be summed up with three words: dead, deceived, doomed:

*<sup>1</sup>And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. <sup>3</sup>Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*

#### **Dead**

The first characteristic of our souls before Christ met us was we were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins. It wasn’t like you were faint or withered or weak. No, you were dead.

Which of these two objects represents the condition of the soul before it meets Christ? Some people think this one (a withered looking one). Although it looks pretty dead, it actually has some vestige of life still. It just needs water, fertilizer, and some TLC.

But the Bible declares that before we met Christ at the point of our repentance and faith, we were quite dead, like this brick. Pour all the water on it you want, sprinkle fertilizer all around, and plant it sticking up and you still will have no life. A non-believer can get baptismal waters poured on him and try to fertilize his soul with church activities, but until that person is “born again” by the grace of God, he will dead. And you were dead in the past.

## **Deceived**

The second spiritual characteristic of our past was we were deceived. We formerly walked—lived our life—according to the course (*eon*) of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. Who's that? [Response: Satan. (Three times Jesus refers to Satan as the “ruler” of this world, John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; and once Paul writes of Satan as the “god” of this world, 2 Cor 4:4)]

And that is where we all formerly lived “in the lusts of the flesh indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” Whether that indulgence of flesh involved sexual sin or substance abuse, we were deceived into thinking that satisfaction and fulfillment could be found that way. It couldn't be. The Rolling Stones got it right: “I just can't get no satisfaction” by indulging the desires of the flesh.

Or maybe our indulgence was “of the mind,” thinking we could find satisfaction in intellectual pursuits and human philosophies to achieve power, prestige, money, and success. But those who think that fulfillment comes from indulging the flesh or filling the mind are deceived. Only in Christ will one find peace, freedom from guilt, a friend who will never leave, and a home eternal in the heavens.

## **Doomed**

Not only were we dead and deceived in the past, our future was doomed. The verse describes us in the past as being “by nature children of wrath.” This could mean that before we met Christ we had a lot of anger within us, we were “children characterized by wrath.” But the phrase is even more frightening. Because of our sin and rejection of the Savior, we deserved to be among those who will feel the wrath of God poured out in judgment. His wrath is the unvarying reaction of his holiness against all that is sinful.

All of us—even those who came to Christ in their childhood—are described accurately in our past as dead, deceived, and doomed. But those of us who came to Christ after being adults may be more aware of the pitiful condition from which Christ saved them. Michael Potts, one of the men from the Portland Rescue Mission, is going to be baptized next week. I've asked him to share with us all how the grace of God found him and saved him.

**[Testimony of Michael Potts:** My drug use started when I was 11 years old. As a child, diagnosed with A.D.D., the medication they gave me made me feel better than the way I thought I was supposed to feel. So I sought out ways to get a stronger version of the nectar that I thought would change my life. At age 11, I was introduced to Speed. I thought I was in heaven but now know it was actually leading me toward a hell on earth. I had got onto a ride comparable to the scariest roller coaster that anyone could ever imagine. My life at that point became very difficult. The only thing that I could pay attention to was how to hide from this pain I felt every waking minute of everyday. Drugs seemed to be the answer. This went on for 26 years.

Sometimes I have tried to change, to get off drugs, even to the point of entering seven treatment centers of one form or another. But every time it ended up in failure. I realize now there was always one key element missing in my life. GOD... I really needed a relationship with God, with Someone who loved me for who I am. Someone that I could cast all of my problems on and be assured that he will take care of me no matter what I've done. In the past I had heard about God and at one point thought about accepting him into my life. But I thought "Why would he want me, especially after the things I've done?"

On October 6, 2004 if you had been walking along the sidewalk by the PERFORMING ARTS CENTER in downtown Portland, you would have seen me passed out on the steps. When I came to, I didn't know where I was or how I had got there. I was perplexed because I didn't even live in Portland. My home was in Medford, 278 miles away, and I didn't know how I got here or how I would get back there. All I had was a few dollars and a used bus ticket, so I asked someone where I could go to get a shower. That person told me to go to the PORTLAND RESCUE MISSION. So I went there, got a shower, a meal and a kind word. At that point, I realized that I needed to make some changes in my life. And the only way I was going to that was with the help of someone or something that knew more than I did. Through the kind words of one of the men in the program, I felt that I had arrived, where I was supposed to be, where my new life starts. I had only what I could carry in a backpack. I asked what I needed to do to get into the program. I worked as a chapel volunteer, and about 2 weeks later I entered the program. I started to learn about the grace and salvation that God has for me. Just knowing that God loves me and has better things planned for me, helps me to know that God is and was the answer to all the questions that had been haunting me all these years. On the 26th of November 2004 I gave my life to the Lord, my life has changed for the better. Without God and the men in the program I don't believe I would be alive at this time. I now know God, through the sacrifice of his only son, has the love and salvation that I need to become the person that he has made me to be. And it's through him that I get to live a life that is so much more desirable than one anyone could imagine. What a difference Christ makes!]

### **Our Present (2:4-6)**

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

#### **Loved**

This verse begins with the comforting statement that God has a great love for you, even while you were dead in your sins. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our transgressions.*

Max Lucado tells a true story about a man named Kenny who took his family to Disney World. They were inside Cinderella's castle. It was packed with kids and parents. Suddenly all the children rushed to one side. Had it been a boat, the castle would have tipped over. Cinderella had entered.

Cinderella. The pristine princess. A gorgeous young girl with each hair in place, flawless skin, a beaming smile. She stood waist-deep in a garden of kids, each wanting to touch and be touched.

For some reason Kenny turned and looked toward the other side of the castle. It was now vacant except for a boy maybe seven years old. His age was hard to estimate because his body was disfigured. Dwarfed in height, face deformed, he stood watching quietly and wistfully, holding the hand of an older brother.

You know what he wanted, to be with the other children. He longed to be in the middle of the kids reaching out to Cinderella. But can't you feel his fear, fear of yet another rejection? Fear of being taunted again, mocked again?

Cinderella noticed the little boy. She immediately began walking his direction. Politely, but firmly inching through the crowd of children, she finally broke free. She walked quickly across the floor, knelt at eye level with the stunned little boy and placed a kiss on his face.

This story reminds me of another true story. But instead of a princess of Disney, we've been loved by the Prince of Peace. Rather than being physically deformed, we were spiritually dead. And Cinderella gave only a kiss. When she stood to leave, she took her beauty with her. The boy was still deformed.

But when Christ stooped to kiss our brow with the sacrificial love expressed on his cross, he took our suffering upon himself and felt our pain. He was wounded for the wrong we had done. He was crushed for the evil we did. The punishment which made us well, was given to him, and we were healed because of his wounds (Isaiah 53:4-5). [Story amended from *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado, page 86-87].

It is true that Christ loved you while you were yet in your sins. As Romans reminds us, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). And "*If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*" (Rom 8:31-32).

### **Livened**

We are loved. And it is his love that gave us life. "*Even when we were dead in our transgressions, (he) made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*"

The theological word for being made spiritually alive is "regeneration" or being "born again." When Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, Jesus told him "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus wondered how one can be born again, and Jesus explained it is a work of God by grace. "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" (John 3:14-16).

## **Lifted**

If you have received the love of God through Christ and, therefore, been made alive in your spirit, your position in heaven is already secure. The text continues in making this point. *“And (God) raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”*

It is an amazing truth that, even while we are still here struggling to walk as Jesus our Lord would have us walk, that God already sees us—right now—as ‘seated with Christ in the heavenly places.’

Because of this present reality, our future accomplishment is secure. Look at verse 7.

## **Our Future (2:7)**

*<sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

## **Displayed**

The way we will fulfill our purpose in this life will be to display the surpassing riches of God’s grace in the next. God has taken us rebels and made us his servants. And even more, he has taken us his creatures and made us his sons. He has taken us sinners and made us his trophies. The way he has forgiven our sins—and continues to purify us to be more like Christ—through grace will be displayed to his glory. We will be for eternity, trophies of his grace.

We’ve looked today at a rich paragraph of seven verses that makes me exclaim, “Oh, what a difference Christ makes!” Later in the service I am going to give you the opportunity to call for a microphone, stand to your feet, and exclaim why it is you say, “Oh, what a difference Christ makes!”

What a difference in our past, our present, and our future. We are glad to have our children participating with us in the service this morning. I want to invite ten of you to come up here to help us review what we have observed in this Scripture? [The children hold placards displaying the major points of the Ephesians 2:1-7 text.]

When we consider the “before” and “after” of our encountering Christ, we agree, “Oh, what a difference Christ makes.”