

# The Message

Note: No sermon is quite the same when you read it. You miss the inflections, the understanding that you gain in the hearing. Nevertheless, the words are shared with you here.

Date: July 18, 2010  
Scripture: Eph. 2:1-10  
Speaker: Mike Gammill

## ALIVE

One of my earliest memories hearkens back to our scripture passage. In Ephesians 2:1, Paul writes, “As for you, you were dead...” Do you remember being dead? He tells us, “You were dead.” However, I don’t necessarily remember being “dead.” That’s a strong word.

However, I do remember when I was five or six years old that I had graduated to backpacking skills. I was now big enough to carry my own sleeping bag. My parents got me a sleeping bag that had straps on it. On this one occasion, we drove up to the mountains and it was pouring rain. It was a torrential downpour; the raindrops were the size of your head. It was so cold you would wonder: Why isn’t it snowing?

As I looked out of the car window, I thought, surely, my parents will have the sense to stop the madness! To myself, I say, we’re not going to hike in this weather. But my parents persist and insist that we’re going to hike. When I protest, they tell me that I can stay in the car. A couple of years later I probably would have stayed in the car. However, at the age of five, I acquiesced. I put on my sleeping bag and we proceeded to hike in the terrible weather.

What would your five-year-old do? Whine? I think that whine isn’t quite strong enough of a word for what I was doing. I think I executed the vocal chords that God gave me—I screamed at the top of my lungs for, at least, an hour. Because of my actions, my parents sent me ahead of them on the trail. They waited until I was out of earshot before they caught up with me. But at that moment, when I was out of their sight, I remember feeling very alone and scared.

When I think of Paul saying, “You were [once] dead,” I hearken back to my childhood experience. It’s easy for us to forget our fear when we’re clean and dry and healthy and fed. It’s easy for us to forget what it’s like to be cold, hungry, and tired and not to have the resources to fight on. As Christians, we too easily forget that in our sins we were dead. We forget how hard it is to live life without God. Our life without Christ becomes the new normal. We forget how much Christ does for us everyday.

Paul reminds us in the following:

You were once dead in your transgressions and sins in which you once lived 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. 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. (Eph. 2:2-3)

We cannot miss how radical a statement Paul makes by including himself in this statement. He tells us that we were all guilty. This is Paul, Jew of Jews. Yet, he lumps himself in this category of those people who are living according to the patterns of this world.

What Paul shows us is that until we encounter the living Christ, no amount of church-going, scripture-reading, etc. is going to relieve us of sin. Only the Risen Savior can make you alive. Then Paul uses the words “objects of wrath.”

Whenever I watch a presidential speech, I am fascinated by two things. I’m fascinated by the little ticker that runs at the bottom of the television screen. For example, “The President says poverty is bad.” I like having this ticker in case I miss something in the speech. I would love to have something like that in the sermon in case you’ve missed something I’ve said.

Another fascinating point about such speeches is that the news bureaus conduct public opinion polls while the speech is being made. I would love to have that option, too. Therefore, as I preach, I would know how you’re feeling about what I’m preaching.

When Paul preaches about “objects of wrath,” I think the public opinion poll would be negative. I’m sure the people would think, “I have sinned? I don’t like being an object of wrath.”

Now, I have a different perspective. A couple of weeks ago, I was working at home at my computer. I was focused. My eight-year-old daughter asks me, “Can I have a piece of bubble gum?” Since I was focused on my work, I really didn’t hear her. So, she repeats her question. Finally, I realize that she’s standing there. “Mommy’s gone. Can I have my bubble gum?” At this point, I say, “Yes,” so that she will leave me alone. I’m not saying that this is good parenting.

Now, I do understand what will be the logical consequences of such an act on my part. In my brain, I’m counting...one...two...three... In less than ten seconds, my five-year-old daughter is at my side asking, “Can I have my Starburst now?” In this moment, do I have a choice? Of course not!

Let me be clear—I do not believe in fairness. I am continually telling my children that life is not fair. I don't know who teaches them that life is supposed to be fair, but I know that in reality the world my children live in is fair. And if I say "no" to the Starburst, there will be a thing called wrath. And it is going to come down on my head in the form of a five-year-old. In that moment, she would say that wrath is good and that sin is real in my daddy and he deserves my wrath.

We don't like the concepts of sin or wrath when it's applied to us. But we need it to explain it to others. Recently, I was reading that the problem with the church today is that we talk about sin too much. The author thinks we shouldn't talk about sin at all. I think he's crazy. The problem with his idea is that it takes place in a fake land; it's not real.

I need a real faith that explains the truth of the matter and is not just something to make me feel good. Paul tells us that sin is real and objects of wrath are real. Surprisingly, that idea is actually comforting to me. If we're in a situation where we're suffering and life is hard, this passage gives us that certainty that those who are causing such suffering will be held to account for what they've done by our Father in Heaven.

Our Father in Heaven actually does care. He cares about sin. When one person hurts another person, he takes note. As a Christian, I know that when someone does evil in this world, I know that I'm not the one that has to get revenge. My responsibility is to forgive and let God sort out the rest. This is the message of comfort. The Ephesian Christians were a poor people. They were persecuted and were suffering, but they knew that God was going to sort it out in the end. They knew they could trust God.

The reality is that we have, at one time in our lives, been in the same situation—dead in our sins. But through Christ, we've been raised from the dead. God has taken our heart. Paul continues:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace... (Eph. 2:4-7)

My question following this section of the scripture is simple: Who has authority over your sin?

If we give the enemy authority over our sin, he is going to do as much as he possibly can to cause destruction. But if we give Christ authority over our sin, he can redeem it and bring glory to his name. For example, when I was first called to Christian ministry, I had a little debate with God about whether I am fit for the task he has given me. I still have this discussion. God says, "Mike, I want you to work in the church and preach."

I respond, "Every pastor I know is kind and compassionate and caring. I'm not like any of these people. I'm not like them. Have you met me, God?"

God says, "Shh, go."

So, I go. I'm nineteen and I'm working in a church. Inevitably, I come into a power struggle with someone and I say the wrong thing at the wrong time and feelings are hurt. I have a choice. I can give the enemy authority over my sin or I can give Jesus authority over my sin. If I give the enemy authority over my sin, it looks as if I am defensive and I become proud. I think I can just ignore the problem.

If I give Christ authority over my sin, it means that I go to my boss, tell him what happened, and we come up with a plan. I then go to the person, talk about the problem, and work it out as fellow believers in Christ. As I began to do that, God began to redeem those mistakes I made. Not all these mistakes were sins and not all these problems were necessarily my fault. I began to see that Christ redeemed the conflict and the relationship with the person I was in conflict with would be better than when it started. Giving Christ authority over my clumsy social skills made everything better by the end of the day.

When we give Christ the authority, he gets the glory. And we show the world what it means to be a Christ-follower. With my less than wonderful social skills, I told God, "I'm not a popular pastor." And God replied, "I don't need another popular pastor. I need you to be you—genuine and real."

This message goes for you as well. In our scripture passage, Paul continues,

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:8-10).

The message God gave me when he called me is no different from when he called you. The work that he has created for me to do is unique to me. The work he has created for you to do is unique to you.

I believe that there are things that God has created for you to do that only you can do. If you don't do them, no one will. There's a work that only you can do.

We have been prepared to do good works. God has prepared us to do good works. Once we were dead because of sin; now we are alive.