

(10 AM) - How to be Saved

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Preacher: Mike Clarke

[0 : 00] This is the 10am service at Holy Trinity on the 11th of May 2003.

The preacher is Mike Clark. His sermon is entitled How to be Saved and is based on Ephesians 2 verses 1 to 10.

May I begin by saying happy Mother's Day and happy Grandmother's Day. I hope that it's a particularly happy day for all of you who have done all of this work for the rest of the time.

I'll hopefully get in touch with my mum. She's not awake at this stage. She's in Africa. So, yeah, I've got to wait a bit longer before I can do the phone call and do the right thing. Junk mail. It's a drag, isn't it?

But every now and then you get something quite interesting. And I thought I'd bring along a package that I received a little while ago now in Sydney. I don't know if you get stuff like this over here.

[1 : 04] My name is E. Valentine. The first thing is a letter. My name is E. Valentine. And you have already cleared both the preliminary rounds in the sweepstakes. You, therefore, could win one of over 1,880 prizes worth a total of over \$1 million.

The sooner you apply, the more prizes you qualify for. Please, don't lose a minute. Here is my check for \$1 million up the top there with Mr Clark typed in as well, which is nice.

It says, you have a chance to win big prizes whether you say yes or no. In fact, I may have already won \$125,000 if my numbers on this check match the one that they're drawing.

Now, if I say no, I put my answer in the no envelope. But if I say yes, in the yes envelope, I stand to win this elegant moon watch.

But wait, that's not the end of it either. Count the number of kings you find. Each means a bigger early bird prize chance when you reply within seven days.

[2 : 11] I have three kings. And even there, your good fortune continues because the gold and silver keys enclosed could open the door to not one, but two cars worth \$100,000.

Now, what do you think my reaction was when I received this? Wow. These people want to give me a lot of money and a car and a holiday.

God bless their little hearts. Of course not. Only an idiot would think that. Straight away, I thought somewhere there's a catch. And I was asking, what does it cost?

What do I have to do? Why? Well, because everybody knows that no one gives you something for nothing. There will always be small print. You'd have to be naive and gullible to think otherwise.

We all know this, don't we? There's no such thing as a free lunch. Beware of Greeks bearing gifts. See, there is no such thing as a free gift.

[3 : 15] Now, I'm sure that some of the more tenderhearted among you are saying, well, come on, Mike, that's a bit harsh. What about Christmas? Surely at Christmas, the spirit of free giving triumphs?

I want to say no. You think about Christmas, which is as close as we get. But even at Christmas, it's not really like that. You think, what happens at Christmas?

Every year, I've got my presents, which I'm going to give to my relatives, and they give presents to me. Now, what happens if Uncle Bruce doesn't give a present one year? That's it for him next year.

No presents for Brucey. Like, as far as I'm concerned, Christmas isn't about free gifts. It's just a present exchange program. Bar humbug, I say. And today, though, I want to talk to you people about something called grace.

Something which transcends this world that we're talking about. Something which is totally alien to this world. Grace means getting something for nothing.

[4 : 14] Grace means getting something for nothing. And it's a gift that God offers to you. Now, if you're here today as a visitor, or maybe if you've never quite understood what all this fuss about Jesus is, I hope that you'll listen carefully, because we're going to hear about this gift.

We're going to hear about it by looking at how it's transformed the lives of some people who've received this gift. If you keep your Bible open to that passage which we had read, Ephesians 2, it might help to think of the passage as we read it in terms of a before and after advert.

You know those ones where you see the person beforehand and then you see whatever's happened afterwards because of the product. And you're meant to say, wow, there's been a big change here. So think about it as like this.

As people who are in the after, after grace, after they've received grace, looking back at what they were like before. And before I begin to have a look at the passage, let me just pray that we'll understand it.

Heavenly Father, we praise you for your word. We thank you that you have not left us in the dark, but that you speak to us. And Father, that you give us such wonderful news of the transformation that you offer to us, of the free gift of your grace.

[5 : 36] Father, help me to speak clearly. Help us to understand what it is that you say to us today. Amen. Well, what were these people that Paul, this is written by the Apostle Paul, by the way, what were these people that Paul writes to like before they received grace?

So we're going to have a look at the before panel first of all. Verse 1. You were dead. The Bible says that before people know Jesus, they are dead.

Simple as that. Dead. What does he mean by that? As I think back on growing up, one of the most painful rituals for the Clark family occurred every year, and it was the annual road trip.

Any of you suffered like this? Just by the way, I'll take this opportunity. It's Mother's Day. Mothers, what's it all about? What is it that causes you to want to take your family for 12 hours on a trip up to Brisbane or down to Melbourne or somewhere like that?

What's going on about that? Where's the value of that? I just used to hate it. The car seats were sticky. You'd be driving forever. Your sisters would get their hair on your shoulders.

[6 : 51] It just used to drive me nuts. And, oh, look, there's the big banana. Oh, yes, the big poster worker. Whatever. All the way. But there was always one good thing about these trips, wasn't there?

For me, I always found that you did get to see quite a few Australian native animals squashed onto the road. And I always found that quite interesting because there was always a challenge to work out what that animal was.

For some animals, it wasn't too hard, you know. Wombat. Kangaroo. But for some of the smaller marsupials that had been hit by a semi at 100km, well, it could have been anything, really.

All that was left was this little furry puddle. But, you see, all of these animals, they had something in common, didn't they? For all the active life that they once lived, you know, eating, sleeping, bright eyes, bushy-tailed, hunting for food, hopefully.

These animals were now dead. They were stuck to the road and they weren't going anywhere in a hurry. See, when you're dead, you're stuck. You can't do anything to change your situation.

[8 : 00] You're completely powerless. And that's Paul's point here. Before, remember, that's what we're looking at. Before God gave his grace to these people, they were stuck in sin.

Notice it says, you were dead through the trespasses and sins. It's better to see that as dead in sin. Okay? They couldn't help but do the wrong thing. And notice something.

It's not just this group of people in Ephesus that he's talking to. While this letter is addressed to them, in verse 3, he says, this is about all of us. Me and you.

What God says here, he says to us. Because all of us were once in this situation. How do you respond to that? Powerless.

Dead. Stuck. It's offensive to hear, isn't it? I used a fairly colourful example, but the diagnosis couldn't be more serious, could it?

[9 : 01] And we can't just dismiss it because it doesn't come from me. It doesn't come even from Paul, this guy 2,000 years ago. It comes from the God who made us and who knows us better than anyone else.

But just in case you think that our powerlessness lets us off the hook in terms of it's not our fault. We're obviously just in this situation. God has a bit of a surprise for us in verses 2 and 3.

See, in verse 1, we're dead. We're powerless. We're stuck. In verse 2, suddenly this same group of people are starting to do things. Actively. They're following. They're gratifying.

They're choosing things. See, though it's true that we can't change our situation, at the same time, we do what we want to do, what we choose to do.

There is a kind of dead life, if you like, where we actively live out our rebellion against God. Have a look at verse 2. In verse 2, we followed the ways or course of this world.

[10 : 04] We followed other people, the dead following the dead, in behaviour, thoughts, attitudes, opinions, actions. We chose to go along with them.

We weren't forced into this. More shockingly still, verse 2 tells us that while we did this, we were actually following the devil all this time. Verse 2, the power of the air.

The ruler of the power of the air, sorry. The Bible is very clear on this one. There's no neutrality. We have all chosen to follow Satan. Isn't that disturbing?

And it's the fact whether we choose to believe it or not. In verse 3, we've chosen to follow the desires of flesh. See, one of the effects of Adam's rebellion against God has been that every baby born into this world has been born with a sinful nature, a bias against God and his ways.

See, the problem is not just out there. It's not just the world. It's not just the devil. It's actually inside us. Now, I find that hard to believe. I've just had a baby five months ago, and most of the time it's very hard to believe that he is actually already a rebel against God.

[11 : 17] But that's what the Bible says. And this sinful nature is a bit like a drill sergeant which screams orders at us all the time. Go on, lie! Go on, steal!

Go on, lust! And what do we do? We just obey. We rush in to sin. We keep sinning. We keep doing the wrong thing until gradually we start to think, well, this is normal.

Everyone does this. It's not sinful nature. It's human nature. In the eyes of God, it's called sin. It's called rebellion. Can you see, then, that while we might be powerless to change our situation, we're not innocent victims in God's eyes.

We're without excuse. We're culpable. And God is right to see us, as he does in verse 3, as children of wrath, or more accurately, as objects of wrath.

You don't want to be in the before box, dead in sin, facing an angry God who hates what we've done, who will not tolerate our rebellion, but will punish it.

[12 : 22] But remember, that's only half the story. The Bible says it can all change. In fact, for these people, and for many people, it has all changed.

Look at verse 4. Wonderful words in verse 4. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

In the after box, where Christians sit, the Bible says they are now alive. Have you actually ever seen this happen? Have you actually ever seen something which is dead come back to life?

It's outside of our experience, isn't it? It's a crazy thought to think. We've never seen something like this. I've brought a little bee, which I found out there, which I passed on some time ago, and I'm prepared to give anyone who can make that bee come back to life \$1,000.

It's just sitting on the corner there, so come and see me afterwards if you'd like. It doesn't happen, does it? And yet the picture here is that these people, as though they are dead, blackened stumps, which are suddenly blooming again, as though they are corpses, which are now alive and fully alive.

[13 : 41] And see, in terms of what death means, well, life means the opposite. Where before we couldn't help but do the wrong thing, we were stuck in sin. Now, after, we can choose to do good.

Choose to do what is right. Where before we served the devil and we had only punishment ahead. Now, after, we stand forgiven.

Peace with God. Where before we were objects of wrath. after we stand as God's children, as his friends, as those who he just wants to shower his goodness over.

Have a look at verses 6 and 7. These are incredible verses. It says, raised him up. Christ raised him up with him. God raised him up, us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

After. Isn't that a wonderful picture? That's what it looks like to be in the after box. And most wonderfully of all, if we are in Christ, we have nothing to fear about literal, physical death.

[14 : 52] This isn't just a metaphor. This isn't just talking about these nice ideas. The Bible says, we have been raised up with Christ now. If you know John Donne, one of the great English poets, he captures this thought wonderfully in this poem, which says, Death, be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.

For those whom thou thinkest thou dost overthrow, die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me. One short sleep past, we wake eternally, and death shall be no more.

Death, thou shalt die. If you've received grace, then you have so much to look forward to. You have no need to fear God's anger at your sin anymore.

You can look forward to a hope, an eternal hope, of life with God, where you can just experience his riches and his blessings forever and ever and ever.

What a wonderful thing. What a change. Now, I once saw a weight loss ad where they did the before-after, and the point was that the woman was meant to have lost a lot of weight.

[16:08] She came out and she was flouncing around and looking wonderful. But when I actually looked, I couldn't actually spot much of a difference. She wasn't wearing tracksuit pants anymore, so that was one thing, and she'd brushed her hair and she'd put makeup on.

But frankly, not much else had changed. But this passage, you can't miss the difference, can you? They're chalk and cheese. They're completely different.

Well, I guess having shown you the difference that's possible, let me now tell you what the Bible says about how this is possible. See, how you, sitting here, can move from before to after.

What needs to happen? What must we do? The Bible says that you can move from death to life today if you trust in Jesus Christ and what he has done for you.

It's not really about what we do, it's about what he's already done. Look at verse 4 and 5 again. God made us alive. It's his work. And it had to be God, didn't it?

[17:12] Because we were powerless. How did he do this? Well, we're told that he sent Jesus, God's son to earth, as a man, to die on a cross at the hands of his enemies so that he might take the punishment which we deserved.

That he might face the wrath of God himself. And in exchange, he might offer us his perfect life. But Jesus didn't stay dead as we've heard.

Jesus rose from the dead. And anyone who trusts in him can be given this wonderful life. You don't have to clean up your act. You don't have to do anything to be given this gift. You don't have to get yourself together.

The point that keeps coming through these verses again and again is it's not to do with what you do. There are no catches here. Look at verse 5. It is by grace you have been saved.

Or verse 8. For it is by grace, just in case you missed the point, it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this, not your own doing, it is the gift of God. Even the faith that you need to believe in what Jesus has done for you is a gift which Jesus gives to you.

[18:20] He has done everything. He will do everything. We just need to accept it. You can move from before to after no matter what you've done, no matter who you are, no matter how much you've screwed up, no matter what you've done in the past.

Jesus offers you something for nothing. Well, we've seen the before, we've seen the after, we've seen the how, but I wonder if there's a question that we need to address last of all.

Why? Why does God give us this gift? Why should Jesus go to such lengths to give up his own life to rescue enemies? It doesn't make sense.

Why does he do it? Why? Can you see the answer is in the passage? It's so simple. It's so profound. Verse 4. Out of the great love with which he loved us.

God loves me. God loves you. I'm sure most of us have seen the movie Shrek. Shrek is an ogre.

[19:30] He burps. He eats small monsters. He makes candles out of his earwax. He's disgusting. Who could ever love such a fella as Shrek?

That's what the movie's about, isn't it? And yet by the end, if you've seen it, you know that there is someone who does. The princess. Someone who loves him despite all his faults and revolting habits.

And you know, as we watch the movie, we're cheering for the big guy, aren't we? We love that it works out so well for him. You know why? You know why this story works so well?

It's because the love that the princess shows him is so different from the love that we see from our friends, from our families, from our colleagues, from everybody in this world.

See, how does it work in this world? It's like this, isn't it? I'll love you if you're beautiful. I'll love you if you're talented. I'll love you if you do right by me.

[20 : 27] If you love me first. I'll love you if you get your act together. I think we love the movie Shrek because deep down we all want to be loved like Shrek is loved.

To be known completely. Not having to hide our faults, our mistakes, our shame. Not having to pretend that they're not real and yet still to be accepted perfectly.

Loved completely. Today's passage tells us that God loves us that way. We are loved that way. Isn't that extraordinary?

God has shown us his love in a way that is unmistakable by dying on a cross for us when we're at our worst. You see, you might think of yourself as kind of lovable and popular and friendly and relatively, relatively you're okay.

But really, none of us deserve to be loved like this, do we? I mean, you think of Shrek. It goes beyond Shrek. Even Shrek, for all of these disgusting habits that he has, there's a lot to like about him.

[21 : 33] He's courageous. He's a loyal friend. There's some really strong characteristics and qualities. That's why we like him. And yet God loved us while we were dead in our transgressions, while we were still his enemies, while we were serving Satan.

Part of me wants to say, why do you do this, Lord? Why do you waste your love on people like these? Until I remember that, well, that's me. I'm thankful.

So we've seen before, we've seen after, we've seen how. And we've seen why. Which box are you in? Before or after?

Notice a couple of things. It's not about what other people think. It's easy to fool people, really, isn't it? You know, I don't know you. You can certainly fool me. You can probably fool the people sitting next to you.

You might even be able to fool Paul Barker. It's easy to fool people about where you stand before God. But let me tell you, it's not possible to fool God. He knows your heart.

[22 : 42] And the other thing to notice is, notice there are only two boxes. You've either experienced grace or you haven't. You're either dead or you're alive.

There's no middle ground of making up your mind box. Can I speak first of all to those of us who are in the second box who have experienced this grace? If you're a Christian, then this passage is a fantastic encouragement to never stop thanking God for what he has done for us.

To never, never forget that he has given us everything when we deserve nothing. So let's thank him with our lives. Since we're no longer stuck in sin, let's stop sinning.

Let's choose to be free from it. It's not calling the shots anymore. Let's stop following the world and the devil blindly and instead, since God is now working in us, let's commit to doing the good works that he's got prepared for us from the very beginning.

Have a look at verse 10. For we are what he has made us. We are God's workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

[23 : 53] That's how we thank God. So let's do that. If you don't know Jesus, if you haven't trusted him, then you're still in the before box.

You're still stuck in sin and you face an angry God. But he offers you a free gift now. Something for nothing.

There's no catch. You don't have to stay there. You don't have to pay anything. I plead with you, if that's you, to throw yourself on God's mercy now. Ask for his forgiveness and trust in his love.

Do it. And the wonderful promise of scripture is that if you do trust in him, you will be made alive. You will cross over. All this can be yours.

I'm going to finish by praying a prayer which will appear up on the wall there, I think. If you know that you haven't experienced grace, if you know that you don't know Jesus, then maybe as I pray, you might like to pray in your head as we go.

[25 : 02] Let's pray. Dear Father God, I'm sorry for my rebellion and sin against you. Please forgive me.

Thank you that you love me so much that you sent Jesus to die on the cross to take the punishment I deserve and give me eternal life with him.

Amen. Amen.