

Sermon outline and notes:

© Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

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Ephesians 2:1-5 “Risen With Christ Now!”

Intro. On previous Easter Sundays, I have emphasized and demonstrated the truthfulness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe that the resurrection of Christ has more historical evidence to support it than any other event of the first century. I do not for a minute believe that the apostles of Christ would have given their lives for a lie that they just made up. We do not celebrate a religious myth, but a glorious event supported by much historical evidence.

But what does the resurrection mean? In what way is it relevant? A recent poll shows that 75% of the people in our nation believe that the resurrection of Christ in a physical body literally occurred. But the problem is that it doesn't mean much to many of them. The doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ doesn't seem to affect their lives. For example, 59 percent of those who believe in the resurrection of Christ rarely attend church.¹ You can take one person who believes in the resurrection of Christ and another person who does not and often you will not see much difference in their lives. But the resurrection sure made a big difference in the lives of the apostles, and it should make a big difference in our lives.

Well, there are three aspects of the impact or relevance of the Resurrection of Christ. First, it clearly has a bearing upon the person and work of Christ. Romans 1:4 says that Christ was declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. The resurrection vindicated Jesus, proving that He had committed no sin. It also demonstrated that God had accepted His sacrifice for our sin. Surely, God sent Him to be our Savior. Secondly, it has a bearing on the hope of our own resurrection and immortality. Since Jesus rose from the dead, we believe that we also shall rise from the dead some day. Just a few days before His resurrection, Jesus said in Jn. 14:19, “Because I live, you shall live also.” He said in Jn. 11:25, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (KJV). Even our bodies shall be redeemed when we too shall rise from the dead. And last of all, the resurrection of Christ means that you and I can share in the resurrection life of Christ *now*, not just in the future when the resurrection of the body takes place. In v.5 of our text Paul says that God has “made us alive together with Christ.” V.6 says that God has “raised us up together.” That has already happened spiritually. Paul said in Rom. 6:4, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Christ died for our sin, but He was raised from the dead; He was exalted to the right hand of God, and then He came in the person of the Holy Spirit to indwell the lives of believers. As a result, the resurrection means that we can have new life in Christ now!

So this morning I want to talk with you about what the resurrection of Christ means to us *now*. I only have two contrasting main points this morning. First of all, I am going to show you that we need resurrection life as we consider from our text first of all:

¹ Results of a telephone survey conducted in March '07 among 1,204 randomly selected American adults. The study, undertaken by the Center for Missional Research of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

I. OUR DEADNESS IN SIN

In v.1 of our text, Paul says the Ephesian believers were at one time “dead in trespasses and sins.” In v.5 he says “we were dead in trespasses....” So what does Paul mean when he says that the Ephesian believers were at one time “dead in trespasses and sins”? Paul is obviously not speaking of physical death, but the spiritual death.

In Mt. 8:21 a would-be follower of Christ said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” But Jesus said, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.” Jesus was obviously not speaking of the physically dead. They cannot bury anyone. It is clear to me that Jesus was speaking of the spiritually dead. Jesus was saying that the spiritually dead can take care of such matters. On the other hand, believers should give priority to the things of God.

To understand this kind of death, you have to realize that there are different kinds of life. There is plant life. I would not be content to merely live as a plant. Plants have no mental life, no consciousness, etc. Some look pretty. Some produce good food. But I want not want to have just the kind of life that plants have. Then there is animal life. That’s the kind of life my dog has. She moves about and even does some tricks. She acts like she is just another member of the family. But she does not possess the next level of life, which is human life. We humans can reason; we have will; we have a much broader range of emotions, including the feeling of guilt. Unlike animals, we were created in the image of God, and some of the attributes of God are still present to some degree in our lives. But even higher than that life is spiritual life, the life of God in your soul. We’ll talk more about that later. Those who are still dead in sin are void of this kind of life. In fact, if you look over to 4:18 you will see that Paul spoke of unbelievers who were alienated from the life of God. Spiritual death is separation from God. It’s being void of God’s kind of life.

Now I want to share two biblical truths about spiritual death. First of all:

A. Spiritual Death Is a Judgment from God - We see from vv.1 & 5 that there is a connection between sin and death. Do you see it? God told Adam that he would surely die in the day that he ate the forbidden fruit. We know that he did not die physically, so he must have died spiritually. Sin brought on death. They were driven from the Garden of Eden, & they no longer had fellowship with God. Rom. 6:23 says, “the wages of sin is death.” And since we are sinners by nature, v.3b indicates that we are children of wrath by nature as well. We are born with human life, but not with spiritual life. We come forth from the womb spiritually dead, under the condemnation of Adam’s sin. That is why we are “by nature children of wrath.”

You are not only spiritually dead because of Adam’s sin, but also because of your own sin. I would say that by the time most children are 6 years old, they willfully sin against conscience. At that point God holds them accountable for their sin, and there’s no doubt about it; they are certainly spiritually dead.

Yet the sad thing is that unbelievers do not realize that they are dead. Or they would deny that we are dead. After all, if you are dead, then you would have to admit that you need God. Only God can give life. But one thing I like about the Bible is that it tells us the truth about ourselves, and about God. The false prophets of our day want to assure you that man is just a little sick. Or we’re just a little ignorant, and need to be taught better. Some of these self-esteem preachers even say there is nothing wrong with us except the way we view ourselves. They say you just have to think positive, and get the negatives out of your life. But the Bible says that by nature we are spiritually dead, not just bruised! So with God’s help, the first step in obtaining the life of God in your soul is to recognize that you are spiritually dead, & in need of life.

I have already noted that just because you have physical, mental, and emotional life, that does not mean that you are alive spiritually. You could be ignorant and not know it. I've heard people say that they grew up poor, but they didn't know it, because everyone they knew was poor. Even so you can be spiritually dead and not know it because most of the people you associate with are also dead. What about you today? Could it be that *you* are spiritually dead? How can you know if you are spiritually dead? Well next, let's consider the fact that:

B. There Are Signs of Spiritual Death - You know there are signs of physical death. There is no pulse, no breathing, no response, and the body grows cold. Even so, there are signs of spiritual death. Let me share some with you. For example:

1. The Spiritually Dead Are Driven by Evil Influences – The spiritually dead are driven by 3 evil influences mentioned in our text. First, in v.2 Paul says, “In which you once walked according to the course of this world....” The word translated “course” literally is the word for “age.” That means that you will be pressured to conform to the shifting standards of this world. You will think like the world. You will behave like the world. You will dress like the world. Humanism, materialism, and hedonism will be the primary forces that direct your life as you yield to the world. Secondly, the last of v.2 says you live “according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” This is clearly a reference to Satan, who elsewhere he calls “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). 1 John 5:19 says, “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (NIV). If you are not living for God, you are living under the control of Satan. There is no middle ground. He will lead you into a life of disobedience to God. Finally, if you are not yet a Christian, you are under the control of the sin nature. Paul says in v.3, “among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind....” An unbeliever is dead to God, but very much alive to the passions and lusts of the sin nature. As long as you are dead in sin, you will be controlled by sinful desire. They will drive you to do things you will often regret.

So based on vv.2-3, can you say that you are spiritually alive, or still spiritually dead? If you're not sure, consider with me another sign of spiritual death:

2. The Spiritually Dead Are Unresponsive to God - Physical death can be defined as an inability to respond to stimulus. Many of us have had the experience of being with someone soon after their death. You can call their name but they will not respond. You can kiss their lifeless cheek, but they cannot return the gesture of love. In spite of all of your efforts to get that person to respond to you, when they are dead, they are incapable of responding.

Spiritual death is similar. Without a relationship with Christ, we are dead to spiritual things. Have you ever invited someone to church, only to discover that they have no interest in hearing God's Word? 1 Cor. 2:14 explains why. The apostle Paul says that the natural man does not welcome or discern the things of God. He will have little interest in the things of God.

For example, the Scribes and Pharisees heard the words of Jesus, but they could not receive them. Jesus said, in quoting Isaiah, that they had eyes, but could not see. They had ears, but could not hear and understand.

Do you generally have little or no interest in hearing God's Word, or in prayer, or in His church? If so, you are probably spiritually dead! A spiritually dead person is interested in food, so they may come to a church supper. A spiritually dead young man may come to church because they are interested a young lady. A spiritually dead person may come to church looking for a friend. A spiritually dead may come to church looking for financial help. A spiritually dead may come to church if they put on good entertainment. But a spiritually dead person will *not* come to church just

to worship God, pray, and learn God's Word. As we shall see in just a moment, a spiritually dead person is interested in the things of the world, and the desires of the flesh. So based on your interests, are you spiritually dead, or spiritually alive?

By the way, this truth about spiritual deadness also applies to the work of believers. Only God's Spirit can make a difference in spiritually dead people. Only God's Spirit can create in interest in the things of God, and bring conviction of sin. Only the Word of God is living & powerful (Heb. 4:12). So we must do 2 things to see people saved & made alive. We must pray, and then we must share God's Word with people. If we do our part, God will do His part, and cause the spiritually dead to become responsive.

So we have seen two basic signs that a person is spiritually dead. Do these signs describe you? If so, you are not just spiritually weak; you are spiritually dead! And if you continue in a state of spiritual death, you will continue to be separated from God for all eternity. So what do you need? If you are thirsty you need water. If you are hungry you need food. If you are sick, you need medical care. And if you are dead you need a resurrection! So even though Paul paints a bleak picture of the human condition in vv.1-3, he says in v.4, "But God..." Our hero, God, enters the picture, and now there's hope. As a result, our text not only speaks of our deadness in sin, but also:

II. OUR DELIVERANCE THROUGH RESURRECTION LIFE

Though we all by nature are dead in sin, v.5 says that God has "made us alive together with Christ..." He said in v.6 that He has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." It is clear from our text that we can have new life in Christ. You need the life of God in your soul. And this life is now possible. Paul said in Eph. 4:24 that we can "put on the new man which was created according to God."

You say, "How is this possible?" After all, the Bible says we were spiritually dead. We were living in disobedience to God. We were by nature children of wrath. How could we be made alive? Well notice from our text:

A. The Basis of Our New Life - My friend, I can assure you that God wants you to live. Look at v.4. It says God is rich in mercy. We deserve eternal death, but because of God's great mercy He doesn't give us what we deserve. As God looks upon our wretched state of spiritual deadness in sin, how much mercy would He need to pity us enough to do something about our condition? I don't know the exact answer, but since He is *rich* in mercy, I know He has enough mercy.

Not only is God rich in mercy, but He also has great love for us. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." How much love would it take for God to send His son to die in your place? It would require great love indeed. Well the good news is that v.4 also says that God made us alive "because of His great love with which He loved us." God has proven His love for us, and it is certainly great enough to save you from death, and impart new life.

Oh, it is so clear that God wants you to have life, not death. I know you can have life today, because God is merciful & loving. So once you realize that you are dead in sin, and that God loves you and wants to save you, then you need to understand:

B. The Means of Obtaining this New Life - How can you get this life? There's nothing a dead person can do to make himself alive. Only God can impart life. Only Christ rose from the dead. So once you have repented of the sins that have brought death, you must:

1. Unite with Christ – Become connected to Christ. V.5 says we are “made alive together with Christ.” Spiritual life comes from Christ. I received life when I received Christ as my Savior. And I continue to have life because of my union with Christ. The Bible says that Christ is the Head of the church, which is His body. So long as the Head is alive, the members have life. So long as Jesus lives, every soul that is united to Him and is a member of His body lives. 1 Jn. 5:12 says, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” Receive Jesus and you have life. Reject Jesus, and you will continue to be dead in sin. Sin has brought spiritual death, and only when I receive Christ as Lord and Savior are my sins forgiven, and I can have eternal life which begins now.

A person can die in an automobile accident. But if they are an organ donor, they will take that person's heart out and put it on ice. It is essentially lifeless & dead. It is no longer beating. But the heart surgeon can connect that heart to a living person, and once again, it will beat with life-giving blood.

Even so, we must be united with Jesus Christ in order to receive life. If we have a connection with Him, we can have the life of God in our soul. But how can I become united with Christ?

2. We Must Trust in Christ - V.8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith...” We are saved from spiritual death through faith. First that means that you must believe God's diagnosis of your deadness in sin. Before a doctor can help you, you must first accept his diagnosis. Are you going to believe God's Word, or deny it? Then by faith you must accept God's answer to your spiritual deadness, Jesus Christ. He was crucified for you, and raised again to give you life. Faith is the means whereby we receive the benefit of what Christ has done for us. Finally, true faith has works. You must obey the gospel by receiving Christ as Savior and committing your life to Him.

But I have some good news and some bad news. First, the bad news. Can a dead man believe? The answer is no. One who is spiritually dead cannot respond to God. That is why in two places my text says that you are saved by grace! V.8 indicates that salvation and the faith to receive salvation cannot be worked up by you who are spiritually dead.

Ah, but now the good news. V.8 also says that salvation, and the faith to receive it, is the gift of God. Even the faith to believe is a gift of God. Likewise, 1 Cor. 3:5 also says that saving faith is a gift of God. Phil. 1:29 says that God has given us faith to believe. So my friend, if God through the preaching of His good news given you an understanding of your deadness in sin, and if you realize that you are believing the Word that I am preaching, then respond with the faith that God gives you, before you lose that faith and the opportunity to be saved.

Conclusion: Many of you have experienced the death of a loved one. When death comes, you would do just about anything to restore their life. Well think of the Heavenly Father who looks upon the world that is dead in sin. Though *we* are powerless to raise the dead, *He* has the power to give life. Furthermore, He loves us so much that He was willing to send His son to die for us that we might have life. If you will repent of your sin, & trust in Jesus as your Savior, God will give you new life, a different kind of life, as different as night & day. You will experience joy, peace, and love like never before. Trust in Christ. Let your spirit be united with Him, and this new resurrection life will be yours now!

I also make appeal to the many believers here today. Let us behave as those who are alive from the dead. Let us not set our affection on the foul things of this dead and rotten world, but let us cast off the grave clothes of our former lusts, and wear the garments of light and life. Let the resurrection of Christ truly impact the way we live our lives each day!

Sources: W.A. Criswell, *Ephesians: an Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974); Oliver B. Greene, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1963); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967); John MacArthur, Jr., *The Believer's Life in Christ: Study Notes on Ephesians 1:1-2:10* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1989); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); E. K. Simpson, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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