



This Sunday we moved from Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church (1v15-23) to his worked example of God's 'incomparably great power' at work in them (cf. 1v19) in 2v1-10. For God has performed the most extraordinary 'before' and 'after' transformation in those who follow Jesus.

1. **The 'before' – realise that you were dead without Jesus (v1-3)**

Paul gives God's chilling diagnosis on his own heart, the Ephesians' hearts, our hearts, and the whole of humanity's hearts without Jesus: spiritually dead. Without Jesus, our souls are dead. We are beyond help and beyond hope. Our souls are enslaved (v2-3) and they are condemned (v3).

These are hard words to hear, but it's essential to our understanding and acceptance of God's grace that we accept this difficult diagnosis.

2. **The 'after' – rejoice that you have been made alive with Jesus (v4-7)**

In some of the most extraordinary verses in the Bible, we learn that if we trust Jesus, we are dead no longer. We have been 'made alive' (v5). And not just that, we have also been 'raised up' and 'seated' in the heavenly realms (v6). All this has come to us 'with' (v5-6) and 'in' (v6) Christ – it is personal, not simply a process. It has been done because God loves us, not out of obligation. Note all the different ways Paul describes God's feelings towards us – his 'love' (v4), 'mercy' (v4), 'grace' (v5 & 7) and 'kindness' (v7).

If we are Christians, we have been made alive. The most extraordinary transformation has occurred within us. So we can rejoice! We will groan too (Romans 8v23), but even in our darkest times, we are still seated with God as long as Jesus is seated there.

3. **'So what now?' – walk in the good works Jesus has planned for you (v8-10)**

Rather than wrapping up at v7, Paul continues by unpacking an almost throwaway line from the end of v5. This new life we have has nothing to do with anything we have done, Paul wants the Ephesians and us to know. We cannot earn our places in heaven. We have already been 'made alive' with Christ. We cannot and need not try to bring ourselves to life. And yet there are 'good works' in v10. Not 'good works' to earn God's favour, but the good things God has created us (his 'masterpieces' in the NLT) to do. Works that will serve him, bless us and help others, no matter how humble they might appear.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. What would you say have been some of the definitive 'before' and 'after' moments in your life? (No need to be overly spiritual!)
2. How do we feel about this diagnosis of our hearts before we knew Jesus, v1-3?
 - How would this diagnosis go down in your workplace/family/street?
 - Why do we find it so hard to swallow?
 - What do we lose if we fail to think of ourselves as sinful?
3. What does Paul emphasise in his description of the new life we have in Christ, v4-7?
 - Why do you think Paul used death/life imagery here?
 - What do we lose if we have an overly clinical or mechanical understanding of how we have been saved?
4. How do you personally find the balance between rejoicing (as surely we are supposed to do in response to this passage!) and groaning (cf. Romans 8v23).
 - What helps you to rejoice?
 - How can we help ourselves and one another to rejoice?
5. How are the 'good works' Paul encourages us towards different from the good works we might perform to try to earn our salvation?
 - How do we in our sinfulness get them mixed up?
 - How does knowing that God has created us for 'good works' change how we feel about our Christian lives and service (especially the humbler parts)?
 - What 'good works' might God have in mind for you to do this week?