



Text: Ephesians 2:1-10¹

Title: "Something in you was worth the death of the Son of God" – Really?!

Date: March 21, 2010

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

This week I ran across an article that was so good I emailed a copy of it to the Deacons. It was written by Mark Galli, one of the editors of Christianity Today magazine and it began with Galli recounting a sermon he had heard recently on one of his frequent travels across the United States...

A few months ago when I was traveling, he wrote, I attended a local church that was "the" evangelical church in that suburb. The text for the day was the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). The preacher began by reminding us of the context—the search of a shepherd for a valuable sheep; the search of a woman for a valuable coin. We were then told that the father in the parable, when he saw his wayward son far off, did not see someone who was selfish or a loser. Instead, through all the junk, he saw something valuable: a son. The sermon concluded with a reminder that God gives us the ability to see the treasure, the value in everyone we meet.

Now if you're agreeing with that preacher, wait for it! Galli went on:

I am one with this preacher's motives and aims. But in his desire to proclaim the magnificent love of God, he inadvertently fell into language that actually proclaims bad news—all this talk of the intrinsic value in the object of love. This preacher did not go so far as to say it, but I've heard the following in sermons and read it in books by respectable evangelicals: "You are unique and valuable. You were worth so much to God that he was willing to die to redeem you, so you could be in his family." And this: "We are worth the price God paid for us, the death of his Son." (Mark Galli, "Love Needs No Reason," Christianity Today online, March 18, 2010, Copyright © 2010 Christianity Today

"We are worth the price God paid for us, the death of his Son."

Really?!

I was arrested by these words in Galli's article because I had just read those very words a few days earlier in another publication. I'm sure that the preacher who published that thought was trying to be encouraging and affirming towards people but what he did in trying to lift people up was actually to undercut God's grace and mercy. Mark Galli points out that the prodigal son understood his

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position before his father far better than many of us understand our position before our Father in heaven. When the father wanted to lavish his love upon him, the prodigal son responded...

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” Luke 15:21

Are we worth the death of God’s Son for us? You see, if we are worth God’s love, expressed in the death of his Son for us, then God, being a good and wise God, MUST love us; he MUST show us mercy; he MUST be gracious to us. He has no choice because we deserve it! He is obligated to forgive us because we are worth it! But, is that grace? Is that mercy? Is that love? Is that what the Bible tells us? Is the good news of the Bible that God loves us because we are worthy of his love or is it that despite our unworthiness, God chooses to love us?

The Bible uses various pictures to describe God’s work in showing us mercy and grace but one of the ones to which I’m drawn most often is the picture of movement from one neighbourhood to another, from one kingdom to another. The Apostle Paul uses that picture in the Book of Colossians when he writes this:

“[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:13-14

God, by his kindness and mercy, moves us from “the dominion of darkness” into the “kingdom of love.” It’s a radical change of address. It’s a whole new neighbourhood.

In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul rolls back the tape of our lives to the days before we knew Jesus Christ to remind us of where we “used to live.” This is his description of the old neighbourhood...

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Ephesians 2:1-3

Unlike our homes or the places we come from, we don't want to be reminded of these roots. We don't relish the memory of who we were without Christ and of the life we lived without Him. But sadly there are times when going back to the "old neighbourhood" may appear attractive. Our memory of how things used to be can be selective -- when tough times hit us things "back then" can start to look appealing. We can even fall into thinking that something about that old place will be worth the trip.



Every now and then we need a reality check. Sometimes we need to revisit the old neighbourhood in our minds just to remind us of what we've got with Jesus. We need to make sure that we've cut the ties. If you're a believer in Jesus this morning, I hope Paul's words will **inspire thanksgiving** in your heart for all that God has given you in Christ. And if you're not yet a believer in Jesus, I hope to **encourage you to move** to a new neighbourhood this morning and begin a relationship with Christ.

First, let's revisit the old neighbourhood without Christ

But I'll warn you -- it won't be a pleasant trip! It's not a nice place. Paul begins by telling us **what we're saved from** – it's an awful place. Paul identifies three key aspects of our life without Christ in his "reality check" trip to **the place where we "used to live."**

First of all, he points to the pervading presence of death everywhere...

In the old neighbourhood we were spiritually DEAD

"you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked"
Ephesians 2:1-2

We were dead in sin. "**Trespasses**" are those false steps where we break God's standard of conduct – they are acts of rebellion against God. "**Sins**" are those things we do which fall short of meeting God's standard of conduct - they are acts of failure to satisfy God. In God's eyes we were both **rebels** and **failures** and we were cut-off from the life of God.

Although we moved around, held jobs, loved and raised families, thought and created, we're weren't in a living connection with God. Without a relationship with God, we had a life, but we were cut off from the real source of eternal life.

That kind of life is like the kind of life a Christmas tree has. I love the aroma of a fresh-cut fir Christmas tree. The house is full of the aroma of the fir, the green colour brings such a sense of life into the house, but its "alive" but only for a short time. It stays green and gives off wonderful aroma for a few days but soon, no matter how much water you give it, it will begin to dry up and die. Why? Because it's not connected to the roots, the real source of life.

People who aren't in relationship with God through Jesus are like Christmas trees -- cut off from their source of life. That's what the Bible means when it says that we were dead in transgressions and sins.

And religious living doesn't count for any kind of "life" either. In his Letter to the Philippians Paul describes his life before Christ. He was a deeply religious Jew,



following all the moral and spiritual obligations of the Old Testament. He could say of himself that "as for legalistic righteousness" he was "faultless." (Phil. 3:6) But, he wrote...

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Philippians 3:7-8

Paul was engaging in, what students of religion call, "biographical reconstruction." He was reinterpreting the story of his old neighbourhood. As he reflected on the life-changing encounter he had had with Jesus, his "old neighborhood" began to look pretty dead to him! Paul didn't see anything there there that was "worth" Jesus' death for him!

As you think about your life before you came to faith in Christ, how does your relationship with Jesus change the way you look at your past?

Second, Paul identifies an oppressive air in the old neighborhood...

In the old neighbourhood we were spiritually DOMINATED

“And you ... once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...” Ephesians 2:1-3

Paul refers to the three influences that shaped and dominated our lives in the old neighborhood.

- a) In the Old Neighborhood we were dominated by **the world around us**, what Paul called, "the course of this world." (v.2)

"The course of this world" are those ways of thinking that count God out of the picture. You might call it secularism or viewing life without reference to God. The only important things are the things of "this world" without God.

A few years ago I heard a "course of the world" perspective on the radio. Someone was expressing the belief that the churches were "interfering" in the question of whether our province should be involved in VLT gambling. In this person's opinion, churches shouldn't interfere in the issue. Behind that opinion is the thought that God isn't relevant to the issues we face in our day. To that way of thinking God doesn't enter into the practical affairs of life. The "ways of this world" try to teach us to think and live without reference to what God has to say.

- b) In the old neighborhood we were dominated by **spiritual powers above us**, powers that Paul refers to as "the prince of the power of the air." (v.2)



It used to be difficult to convince people of the reality of spirit powers, but that is becoming less and less a problem. Some time ago I spoke with some Olds College students who told me about the increasing practice of Wicca on the campus here in Olds. Wicca is the old "nature" religion of Northern Europe that has been gaining popularity in recent years. By invoking the powers of the air, water & earth, Wiccans cast spells. And some of them actually work, because there is a "prince of the power of the air." People are attracted to Wicca because it offers power. And it does -- but at the price of eternal domination by "the prince of the power of the air."

You might be tempted to think that our problem was the neighbourhood in which we lived. If only we could we have the home we deserved! Well, the reality is that our problem wasn't only the world around us and the devil above us. Our neighbourhood fit us to a tee because...

- c) In the old neighbourhood we were dominated by the **sinful nature within us**, what Paul calls "the passions of our flesh." (v.3)

"Flesh" in the Bible refers to our natural instinct to satisfy ourselves first. The "ways of this world" tries to define life without reference to God but the "sinful nature" tries to define life with reference only to ourselves. In other words: "What do I get out of this?" "How does this benefit me?" "I want, therefore I get." "You've got to please yourself" "What seems right to me is right for me."

The picture of the old neighbourhood just keeps going from bad to worse but **thirdly** Paul describes a foreboding sense of doom hanging over the Old Neighborhood...

In the old neighbourhood we were spiritually DOOMED

"and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Ephesians 2:23

The phrase, "children of wrath," implies that our destiny from birth, our rightful inheritance, our future expectation was nothing but the righteous anger of God against sin. For us, the future was not full of hope and opportunity -- we were doomed to destruction.

The Bible tells us what the destiny is of those who are "children of wrath." When Jesus Christ comes back to earth to end history...

"He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes...." 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (NIV)



What do you think of the old neighbourhood now? It really doesn't look so good. In fact, it's pretty grim. It's a place of death, domination and doom.

Why do we need to understand this?

If you're not a believer in Jesus, you need to know that from God's perspective, I would strongly recommend relocation! ***Get out of the neighbourhood!***

And if you are a believer, Paul's words are of extreme importance! ***Don't go back! There's nothing there that's worth the trip!***

Paul is writing this description for believers in Jesus NOT so they'll have a map for long, leisurely strolls through their old life, reminiscing about our old ways, but so that they'll NEVER GO BACK FOR VISITS! He wants us to realize that nothing in us merited God's grace, love and mercy ... the only thing we deserved was his wrath!

We often sing a hymn entitled, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." It's a wonderful song, one of my favorites. It was written by Robert Robinson, a Methodist minister in the late 18th century. He wrote the hymn at the age of 23, and v.3 was somewhat prophetic of his later life. Verse 3 reads:

**Oh, to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.**

Late in his life Robinson slid into sin and fell away from a living faith in Christ. He moved back to "the Old Neighborhood."

The story is told that Robinson was riding a stagecoach one day when he noticed a woman reading a hymn book with great interest. The lady turned to him and asked him what he thought of the hymn she was humming. Robinson burst into tears and said, "Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then." Robert Robinson would tell you this morning, if he could: Don't go back to the Old Neighborhood, even for a visit -- it's not worth the cost!

Let's explore our new neighbourhood with Christ



After warning us to stay away from the old one, Paul then describes our new neighborhood - the one we moved into when we put our faith in Christ. After describing what we're saved from he tells us **what we're saved to**. I want you to notice that the new neighbourhood is the complete reverse of the old one. Let's read Paul's description...

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:4-10

First of all, in the new neighborhood the smell of death has been replaced with the fragrance of life...

In the new neighbourhood God has made us ALIVE with Christ

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” Ephesians 2:4-5

Once we were unable to respond to God but now

We can hear him,

We can spend time with him,

We can obey him,

We can walk with him and talk with him.

Now we can grow in our relationship with Him.

Now that we have all this potential for real, new life, we need to feed our new life. It's not like putting water on a Christmas tree, it's more like digging nutrients into the soil around the base of a tree planted in the forest.

We feed our roots when we read God's Word, when we spend time talking with Him in prayer and when we engage in worship and service in the name of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, in the new neighbourhood we are no longer under domination by spiritual powers, but rather we are in the ruling position...

In the new neighbourhood God has given us AUTHORITY in Christ



**“and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places
in Christ Jesus” Ephesians 2:6**

Once we were under the dominion of the world, the flesh & the Devil but now we have been given authority over all these in Christ. When Paul says that we are “seated” what he is referring to is the throne of authority on which Christ now sits as Lord of the universe. To be “seated” with Christ means that we come under His authority as Lord over everything. We are no longer subject to any other authority, human or demonic.

Earlier in his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells us that Christ is now seated on a throne at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly realms...

**“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every
name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”
Ephesians 1:21**

Because we have been “seated with Christ” the power and authority that Jesus has over evil and demonic forces now protects and empowers us. We don’t need to allow the world, the flesh or the devil to push us around anymore -- we have authority over all of them!

How do we take authority over these old enemies? We take it by claiming the authority of the victory of Jesus over the world, the flesh & the devil that he won through His cross.

In dealing with the demonic forces and with our sinful nature, the Bible tells us that Jesus gave us victory over both these enemies through his cross.

**“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of
your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our
trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its
legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the
rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over
them in him.” Colossians 2:13-15**

In dealing with the domination of the world in our lives, the Bible tells us that it’s through the cross of Christ that we gain victory. Through the cross of Christ victory has come to us over all of the old areas in which we were dominated. The shadow that hangs over our new neighbourhood isn’t the shadow of fear and shame and powerlessness; the shadow that falls across our new neighbourhood is the shadow of a mighty cross that brings us freedom and strength and confidence.

Thirdly, in the new neighborhood the threat of destruction has been replaced by the promise of His kindness...



In the new neighbourhood God has made us His PRIZED possessions in Christ.

On the one hand, we've become a kind of "cosmic billboard" to advertise the grace and mercy of God. Once we were "objects of wrath" but now we are "trophies of grace." We were raised up and seated with Christ, Paul tells us...

“so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:7

And on the other hand, we've become a "treasured art-work" in God's gallery of grace. Paul tells us that...

**“we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works”
Ephesians 2:10**

The phrase, "his workmanship," is a translation of the Greek word, poiema. The word carries the sense of a work of art that is placed on display.

Once we were to display God's justice in his punishment of sin but now we are to display God's grace in his forgiveness of sin. In the old neighbourhood our entire lifetime would be swept away in a torrent of destruction designed to wipe sin from the universe. But in the new neighbourhood God uses us to accomplish good things that will stand forever because they've been done in Jesus' name, by the power of the Spirit, to the glory of the Father.

In the old neighbourhood without Christ we were Dead, Dominated & Doomed. But now, with Jesus, we have life, we have authority and we are loved and prized by God beyond measure!

And what made the difference? Two words: **"But God..." (2:4)**

God "made" us alive.

God "raised us up and seated us with" Christ and gave us authority.

God has made us his "workmanship."

Why did God do this?

First...

**“But God, being rich in mercy ... made us alive together with Christ”
Ephesians 2:4-5**

We are guilty before God. We deserve wrath and punishment. We have built up a huge debt with God because of sin "but God" shows us mercy and forgives our



debt. And it doesn't matter how great a sinner you have been, God's mercy is far richer than anyone can exhaust.

Second,

“But God ... because of the great love with which he loved us ... made us alive together with Christ” Ephesians 2:4-5

It's His love that motivates God to save us. God loved us so much that he wouldn't let us drift off into eternity without any hope! And so he reached in and saved us.

Third,

“But God ... made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” Ephesians 2:4-5

We need more than a blank slate that cleans up our past; we need help for the future. God gives us a gift -- the help we need to do what pleases Him -- He empowers us to obey Him by his grace.

Let me explain the difference between mercy and grace. Suppose you are traveling on Easter weekend to a family gathering. You're looking forward to all that ham and apple pie and your foot starts to get heavy as you anticipate all that awaits you at the end of your trip. Your speed creeps up and just as you notice that you're traveling 30 kms over the speed limit, you pass a speed trap and an officer pulls out to overtake you. To make matters worse, at that moment you get a flat tire.

You pull over to the side of the road. The officer pulls in behind you, walks up to your window and asks you for your keys. He goes to the back of your car, opens your trunk, takes out your spare and changes your flat tire. He comes back to your window, hands you the keys and tells you your free to go, but please drive slowly.

Mercy is the officer letting you off without a fine. You broke the law, you committed an offence and you deserved punishment. That's what God does when he shows us mercy. Although we've broken His law, he forgives our sin.

Grace is the officer changing your tire. You didn't deserve the kindness, but he did it for you just the same. That's what God does when he gives us his help and strength to live in a way that pleases him.

Why do we need to look at these two neighbourhoods this morning?



First of all, it's because you still might need to move from the old neighbourhood -- you need to be saved. The Bible says that...

Unless you have put your faith in Christ, you are still dead -- disconnected from eternal life.

Unless you have put your faith in Christ, you are still under the authority of the world, the flesh & the devil.

Unless you have put your faith in Christ, you are still "an object of wrath"

How do you move into the new neighbourhood? It's through faith in Christ. This morning, before you leave your seat in this auditorium, you can have a new spiritual address if you will turn your life over to Jesus Christ. If you'll allow him to forgive you for your sin and if you'll receive his grace so that you can live a life under his control, you'll become a member of his family today and forever.

Second, it's because you might need to stop paying visits back to your Old address -- you need to take up your authority against the world, the flesh and the devil and live a life that corresponds with your new location in Christ.

Through the cross, we have been crucified to the world. (Gal 6:15) Through the cross we are "dead to sin" but alive to Christ. (Rom. 6:11) Through the cross, we have triumphed over the enemy and all his powers. (Col. 2:16)

Finally, we need to look at our new neighbourhood because we need the encouragement of our secure position in Christ that rests completely on who God is and what he's done for us and not one iota on who we are or what we've done.

In a moment we're going to close with a song we sang earlier in the service and I want to draw you attention to why. In the song, *Unashamed*, we sang...

**I have not much to offer You
Not near what You deserve
But still I come because Your cross
Has placed in me my worth**

***"We are worth the price God paid for us, the death of his Son."* NO!**

***"God has made us worthy by the death of his Son for us."* YES!**

Two words, "But God," tell us that our security and salvation rest in the fact that God has bought us, rescued us and brought us into his kingdom. We've been moved by his mercy and grace from death, domination and destruction to life, power and purpose. It's a done deal. Through faith in Christ God has done it in our lives, end of story.



We all need a reminder of our need for God's love, mercy & grace. He is the source of our strength and hope. He is the source of our victory. We cannot stand without him.

Thank him, praise him, call on him, depend on him, trust him, serve him, worship him. Let's pray.

- ❖ Father, for those who still live in the "old neighbourhood," would you show them your grace & mercy. Move their hearts to faith in Christ and rescue them from the "dominion of darkness."
- ❖ Father, for those whose hearts are "prone to wander," I pray that your grace & mercy would draw them back to the kingdom of your beloved Son.
- ❖ And Father, for us all, fill our hearts with wonder at your grace & mercy for all that you've given us in Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song:** Unashamed
- **Benediction:**