

Notes on Eph 2:4–7, Col1:9–14 ‘But God... I was made alive’ 25th Jan ‘25

Can you please stop rolling your eyes, because I’m starting once again with Thunderbirds. One of my favourite Thunderbird episodes was called ‘Sun probe’ and it has been described as the best Thunderbird 3 rescue when Thunderbird 3 flew to rescue a spaceship in danger of crashing into the sun. The twist in the tale is that when they rescued the sun probe they then themselves needed rescuing and it was Thunderbird 2, led by Vergil and Brains, who came to their rescue. But this is not the biggest or best rescue ever described; the honour for that goes to verse 4 when Paul writes ‘But God...’, and the question is, do you believe it? ‘But God...’ describes the moment when the world, and our world, was turned upside down and inside out. We were no longer dead, for in Jesus we were now alive and the amazing thing is, is that we are more alive now than perhaps we have ever realised.

How are we to understand verses 1–3? Are they literally to be taken word for word? Or are they metaphorical in inviting us into a story? This choice is like the headline given by the BBC on a story of a cargo washed ashore in East Sussex titled ‘Chip wreck’. This is the story of how thousands of bags of frozen chips were washed up on the beach at Beachy Head. There were so many chips that in places they were stacked one and half feet high. The reason why I mention this story is because I think Paul wants us to read verses 1–3 as being both literally and metaphorically true.

Oceans of ink has been spilt on these verses stressing how dead we were in our trespasses and in sin. Of the reality of our total depravity, that is that everything we did was infected by sin. Of the dangers of Pelagianism, where we think we are not quite as dead as Paul says we are and Synergism where we help to contribute to our salvation. My own hunch is, is that these and the many other variations of them are all exercises in missing the point of what verses 1–3 are actually trying to say. Firstly, I want to say that verses 1–3 are true, but I would also want to say that the focus of these verses is to emphasise what God can and will and has done. The focus surely is on describing how God’s character is one of mercy and love and it is defined by verse 5 where we encounter this chapter’s first verb which celebrates what God has done, which is to make us alive. If we focus on verses 1–3, we ironically make ourselves the focus and not God. We focus upon what we can’t do, not on what God can do. This results in our experiencing the anxiety of wondering whether we’re saved or not thus robbing us of the joy and awe and wonder of knowing that Jesus has rescued me. This first verb is a resurrection term, a Good Friday to Easter Sunday morning moment where we see God’s limitless mercy and love

being untroubled and unphased by our being dead. Here we realise that God is always far more interested in life than death and this is the heart and soul of grace. Grace is where God has lavished his undeserved favour upon us so that we may no longer be ruled by death, sin and the devil but live as those freed by Jesus.

Paul here goes at great length to tell us that our lives are now defined by grace. For we are saved by grace. We have been raised up by grace. We are seated with Jesus because of grace and we have received immeasurable riches because of grace. Because grace is grace so we will now and forever experience God's never-ending kindness to us in Jesus. It is as the song goes: 'All the time, what? God is good and God is good, when? All the time. The question is, dare you believe it? Dare you live it? Dare you demonstrate it in your lives day by day?

This is the heart of what Paul says in Colossians 1 verses 9–14. Here Paul replicates his prayer from Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3–14. In Colossians 1 Paul's prayer is for these Christians to live being truly and fully alive. Thinking about all that Simon said last week, and the challenge of a terminal illness, I would like you to imagine the impact of these verses on how you handle life's challenges. I say this not to deny the pain and the sorrow we know when these challenges become part of our daily life, but I will myself dare to think the difference would be if we allow the light of love shine to upon and within us at such times. I dare to say this because Paul himself is honest when speaking of the times when he himself has faced such challenges too. Someone said to me last week 'I almost didn't come' because of the memories that would be triggered, but she was glad she did and so am I.

This is why we must never limit how amazing grace truly is. I was asked last week how our Christmas was and my answer was that it was noisy and fun and we thanked God for the gift of Auntie Steffi and the impact of the gifts of love, mercy, grace which were lavished on us through her. I say this because all of the boys love her to bits and always prefer to play with her and be in her company than ours, which means we had glorious moments of peace and quiet!! The gift of grace is a gift which is never ending and Paul's focus which we need to remember is the word 'never'. When Paul speaks of grace, the first thing we are to think of is God's gift of life given to us even though we were dead. But God... means that now we are alive and this life is eternal as we know it now, tomorrow and forever when we are resurrected. Paul would have us take this one thing from these verses, which is to live this grace, to live being made alive by this grace and live life therefore to its fullest extent because of this grace.