



“DEAD MAN WALKING”

There are legal systems today that administer the death penalty for capital crimes, such as murder. I would like us to consider for a moment the person on “death row.” He has been found guilty of a capital offense and is incarcerated, waiting the appointed day of his execution. In time that fateful day will arrive and he will be taken from his cell to the place where the sentence of death will be carried out. As he is led shackled along the corridors of the prison, we hear a fearful chant from within the cells – **dead man walking**. Whatever else it may mean, there is no mistaking its reference to the imminent and inevitable physical death about to overtake him. He is still very much alive, breathing and walking – but to all intents and purposes, he is a physically dead man!

The Bad News

This tragic scene (tragic because it need not have been so), reminds us of a passage in the Bible from a letter written to Christians by Paul, with this one vital difference; the life and death referred to there is not physical, but spiritual.

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:1-6).

Two things are of particular interest to us.

1. The fallen man’s position before God – dead in trespasses and sins and under God’s wrath.
2. The redeemed man’s position before God – alive in Christ and seated in Him in heavenly places.

Paul reminded the Christians at Ephesus that they were, once “dead in trespasses and sins.” They walked as **children of disobedience**, in rebellion against God “according to the course of this world” (Eph 2:2). Their spiritual *condition* separated them from God. This was associated with their judicial *position* – condemned before God, for Paul refers to them as having been **children of wrath**. Like the condemned man above they were at one time dead men walking! They were alive physically, but spiritually dead and under God’s sure judgment. Visit the public places of work and entertainment and we will observe myriads of people going about their business and pleasure who are very much alive physically. Yet, how many among them are spiritually dead men walking? This is the natural and fallen position of man under the first man, Adam. For we have *all* sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). From the time of our physical birth we are all spiritually “dead men walking” and under the wrath of God. The Lord confirms this solemn truth. “He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (Jn 3:18). This condemnation, we hasten to add, is unto eternal judgment, an everlasting punishment. Let us not be deluded by the false idea of “annihilation,” where the unbeliever simply ceases to exist after death. The Bible is very clear concerning this. The ungodly after death are consigned to “everlasting punishment” (Matt 25:46). For punishment to be “everlasting” it must be experienced on an everlasting basis. To be an everlasting experience means that the ungodly continue to exist after death. In Revelation 20:10 we are told that Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet will inhabit the lake of fire where they shall be tormented day and night *forever and ever*. The principle and precept of existence and divine judgment after death is firmly established by the Lord’s parable of the rich man in Luke 16. “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Lk 16:23).

The Good News

The Gospel however is good news, and so we come to the second of our two points noted above – the position of the redeemed before God. The Christians in Ephesus and, indeed all who trust Christ, are wondrously “quickened,” made alive through faith in Him. This is the blessed position available to all who acknowledge their sinfulness and guilt before God and accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn 3:16). We, who have acknowledged our fallen estate before God and turned to Christ as our Saviour, are redeemed and ransomed, never to face the awful judgment of God. We are regarded no longer as children of disobedience and darkness, but as “**the**

children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26), even “**children of light**” (Eph 5:8). In this we have an immeasurable blessing in that we have been “raised up together,” and “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” It is the elevated blessing that every believer has in the ascended Christ. It has a practical bearing upon the life of the believer. It is here that we come across the believer as a “dead man walking.” He/she walks as one who is dead, as one who has died *to sin* – which is the testimony of the believer’s water baptism which Paul takes up in Romans 6. “God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom 6:2). And, having died to sin the believer is exhorted to walk in the “newness of life” (Rom 6:4). “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). It is impossible for the unbaptised believer to walk in the practical value of Romans 6. Note the order in Romans – the trespass offering in chapter 1, where the individual sins and trespasses are brought before the unsaved; the sin offering in chapter 3, for all have sinned (v 23); the peace offering in chapter 5 (v 1) when trespasses and sins are dealt with and peace is had with God. Then, in chapter 6 we have the meal offering – life in Christ, followed by the burnt offering in chapter 12. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (v 1). And so, we have the testimony of all who are saved in Christ: “Even when we were dead in sins, [He] hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph 2:5). In contrast, the unbeliever is “a dead man walking” because he/she is dead *in* trespasses and sins.

Grace

How vital is the principle of grace! Let us now return to our condemned man on death row. He stands upon the gallows, is head hooded and his hands and feet harnessed. Then, moments before he is ushered into eternity the executioner is handed a note. It reads “PARDONED.” An appeal has been made on his behalf and the governor has stayed his execution. The governor has, in *mercy*, granted the condemned man a pardon as a result of a provision for clemency laid down in the statutes of the state in *grace*.

This little illustration takes us again to Calvary. Those who are dead in trespasses and sins – the spiritually dead men walking, can be reprieved – pardoned and made alive through an appeal, not to an earthly governor, but to the only One who can grant it in mercy – the God of all grace. We have it in the publican of old. “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). According to His matchless grace, God offers salvation to each and every person who is dead in trespasses and sins. How can God do this? It is because of the work of salvation that His Son accomplished on the cross at Calvary. Christ died and shed His precious blood. That perfect death and shed blood satisfied the righteous demand of God - that the penalty of sin had to be met through death. The only Person who was able to pay that penalty and meet God’s standard of holiness in death was His only Begotten Son. The penalty of sin having been paid by His Son, God can now offer pardon full and free to all who are dead in trespasses and sins. But God’s gracious provision must be accepted for it to be of personal value. It is of faith (never our works) that it might be by grace (Rom 4:16). Faith will always have its reward; but faith of itself has no saving merit, otherwise it would be a “work” unto salvation. It is our faith, however feeble “that makes us whole,” but only because it rests on the finished work of the One who is able to make us whole. And so Paul declares, “by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9). Salvation – eternal life, is God’s gift to **all** who are dead in trespasses and sins. It is appropriated by faith – our acknowledgment of the fact that we are children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins and by our acceptance of Christ as our Saviour. The terrible alternative is to remain dead in trespasses and sins, as a child of disobedience upon whom the wrath of God abides eternally. “Because of these things [trespasses and sins] cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph 5:6).

“Years I spent in vanity and pride,
Caring not my Lord was crucified,
Knowing not it was for me He died on Calvary

Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty at Calvary.”
(Redemption Hymns)