

DEAD MAN WALKING
EPHESIANS 2:1-10
SERMON

Sean Penn and Susan Sarandon starred in a provocative movie made in 1995 called **Dead Man Walking**. The movie concerned a young man named Matthew Poncelet who was convicted of murdering a teenage couple in Louisiana. While Matthew Poncelet languished on death row, a Roman Catholic nun, Sister Helen Prejean visited him regularly.

Sister Prejean listened to this criminal, gave him a Bible and tried to get him to admit his crime. But, in spite of her best efforts, the convicted killer adamantly refused to admit he had done anything wrong until the day his execution drew near. Let's watch the scene in which he finally admits his crime...Sister Prejean communicated love, grace and concern for this condemned and convicted killer. Her unconditional love gave him permission to admit his crime.

Like Sister Prejean who loved this convicted killer in spite of his horrific crime, God loves us in spite of our terrible mistakes, failures and sin. The Bible says in **Romans 5:8 "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"**. This unconditional love of God provides the motivation for us to admit we have sinned against God and need his forgiveness.

God sent Jesus to die for our sin, to pay the price God the Father required to forgive our sins. The key verse in our text is **vs.4 "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"**. This verse highlights the central message of the text which is: **Jesus Christ brings life out of death!** Look in the middle part of your bulletin and you will see the point of the lesson: **Jesus Christ brings life out of death!** Join with me as we examine the first three verses of chapter 2. Look in:

Vs.1- note the word, "you" which also appears in vs.2. Paul refers to Gentile Christians who received this letter. Most of us would be classified in this category. Paul stated that they were dead in their trespasses and sins. This same condition applies to every human being. Without Christ, we are spiritually dead!

Vs.2 The word, "walked" in the original text means deliberate steps, not an aimless wandering. We lived in a condition in which we deliberately made sinful choices, thought sinful thoughts, engaged in sinful activities, etc. We followed the prince of the power of the air, also known as Satan.

Vs.3 "we all" includes Jewish believers who lived in Ephesus. Note how Paul includes himself in this category. The phrase, "living in the passions of the flesh" means gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. The word for "wrath" in the original text is the word, *orges*. I'll never forget walking down a street in San Francisco one day when I attended college. I was visiting San Francisco with a group of my college friends from Westmont. A barker on the sidewalk pleaded with us to come in and see a live orgy on stage! That's "living in the passions of the flesh".

Paul paints a bleak but true picture in these three verses. Note how neither God nor Jesus' name appears at all in these three verses. Paul's describing a life without Christ, which happens to be a

spiritually dead life! Without Christ, we experience spiritual death! We simply have no hope without Christ!

God sent Jesus to bring life out of spiritual death! Join with me as we look at the *reason* Jesus brings life out of death, the *relationship* needed or required for Jesus to bring life out of death and the *requirement* for us to experience life.

1. The reason Jesus brings life out of death: God's love!

Vs.4 In vs.1-3 Paul explains our desperate condition, that we were spiritually dead, dead in our trespasses and sins! Note the important conjunction, “**but**” here in vs.4. This word establishes a clear contrast! On the one hand we were spiritually dead, but on the other hand, God made us alive together with Christ! Paul describes God as “**being rich in mercy**” and then he provides the reason for God making us alive in Christ: note the second part of vs. 4 which happens to be a clausal clause, “**because of the great love with which he loved us**”.

So Paul states it clearly, the *reason* Jesus brings life out of death for us is the love God has for us! Jesus laid down his life for us because of his great love for us! As John Stott says in his book, *The Cross of Christ*, “**He gave everything for those who deserved nothing from him**” (pg.215)

John Blanchard stood up from the bench, straightened his Army uniform and studied the crowd of people making their way through Grand Central Station. He looked for the girl whose heart he knew but whose face he didn't, the girl with a rose. His interest in her had begun 13 months before in a Florida library. Taking a book off the shelf he found himself intrigued, not with the words of the book but with the notes penciled in the margin. The soft handwriting reflected a thoughtful soul and insightful mind. In the front of the book he discovered the previous owner's name, Miss Hollis Maynell. With time and effort, he located her address. She lived in New York City. He wrote her a letter introducing himself and inviting her to correspond. The next day he was shipped overseas for service in WW 2. During the next year the two grew to know each other through the mail. Blanchard requested a photograph but she refused. She felt that if he really cared, it wouldn't matter what she looked like. When the day finally came for him to return from Europe they scheduled their first meeting-7pm at the Grand Central in NYC. “You'll recognize me by the red rose I'll be wearing on my lapel”. Listen to his account of their meeting:

“A young woman was coming toward me, her figure lone and slim. Her blonde hair lay back in curls from her delicate ears; her eyes were blue as flowers. Her lips and chin had a gentle firmness and in her pale green suit she was like springtime come alive. Almost uncontrollably I made one step closer to her, and then I say Hollis Maynell. She was standing almost directly behind the girl. A woman well past 40 she had graying hair tucked under a worn hat. She was more than plump, her thick-ankled feet thrust into low-heeled shoes. The girl in the green suit was quickly walking away.

And there she stood. Her pale, plump face was gentle and sensible; her gray eyes had a warm and kindly twinkle. I did not hesitate. My fingers gripped the small worn blue leather copy of the book that was to identify me to her. This would not be love, but it would be something precious, something perhaps even better than love, a friendship for which I had been and must be ever grateful. I squared my shoulders and saluted and held out the book to

the woman. "I'm Lieutenant John Blanchard and you must be Miss Maynell. I am so glad you could meet me; may I take you to dinner?" The woman's face broadened into a tolerant smile. "I don't know what this is about, son, but the young lady in the green suit who just went by, she begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said if you were to ask me out to dinner I should go and tell you that she is waiting for you in the big restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of test." (from **Stories for the Heart**, Questar Publishers, 1996, pgs. 123-125)

2. The relationship needed for Jesus to give us life. Look in your Bible in vs.5-6. **"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"**. These two verses contain several phrases which emphasize Paul's theme of our union with Christ: in vs.5 **"made us alive together with Christ"**; vs.6 **"raised us up with him" and "seated us with him"**. Who made us alive together with Christ, raised us up with him and seated us with him? According to vs. 4, God's the One who does all of this! God's the main subject of all of this action!! God's the One who initiates the relationship with us. Christ shares a relationship with those who believe in him and trust him for salvation.

The Apostle Paul, the man who wrote these words to the Ephesian church, grew up as Saul of Tarsus. Tarsus is located in modern day Turkey, about 550 miles east of Ephesus. Saul grew up in a strict, Jewish home and studied under Gamliel, a leading Jewish scholar of his day. Saul became a Pharisee and started persecuting Christians. He supervised the stoning of Stephen, the very first Christian martyr. One day on a trip to Damascus, God confronted Saul with a blinding light and asked him why he persecuted him? Stunned, Saul asked God, "who are you, Lord?" God responded that He was Jesus, whom Paul had been persecuting. Saul confessed faith in Jesus and his life changed forever!

Saul's name even changed! Saul became Paul, the greatest missionary of the church. He changed because of his encounter with the living Lord on the Damascus road. He began a relationship with the Lord after that encounter with Christ. Up to that pivotal and life-changing point, religion had been a duty, an obligation for Paul. But after God revealed himself to him and challenged him on the Damascus road, Paul met Christ in a personal and powerful way!

In order for us to experience genuine, authentic life, a life with substance and meaning, we must have a relationship with Jesus! Do you have a relationship with Jesus? Or does he seem like an abstract being, far away, a spiritual idea or concept? Perhaps you believe Jesus lived in history as a real historical figure but he has not been a part of your life. In a few moments I will invite those among us who don't have a relationship with Jesus to begin one.

3. The requirement for us to experience life in Jesus: exercise faith! Look back to **Ephesians 2:8-9** **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works so that no one may boast."**

Paul clarifies that God's grace saves us through faith. God gives us grace, His unmerited favor. We respond to this gift of grace by exercising faith. Ultimately, God saves us, we don't save

ourselves! Let me say that again: we don't and can't save ourselves from the consequences of our sin!!

Exercising faith in Jesus means that being saved from the consequences of our sin is not about being good or doing good things. Please don't misunderstand; we should do good things for others and God!! But *doing* these good things or being a good person will not get us to heaven!! We simply cannot earn our way to heaven! Exercising faith in Jesus Christ gets us to heaven!! Only faith in Jesus Christ will get us to heaven!

Faith means stepping out and risking and believing in Jesus even though we don't have all the answers. Paul wrote to the Roman church, **“because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Romans 10:9)**

Many years ago a small group of us from our church climbed Mount Hood. We ascended and celebrated on the summit. We had climbed other mountains such as Mt Shasta, the Sisters, Broken Top and others. So we were prepared as we ascended Mount Hood. We took crampons, ice axes and rope. We have a picture of our ascent. That's Wes Hartman looking at me as I shot the picture. When you ascend or go up a mountain you don't spend much time looking down because you're focused on climbing *up* the mountain. Though prepared, I will never forget descending through what's called the Pearly Gates! When we decided to leave the summit and descend through the Pearly Gates my blood pressure skyrocketed! I couldn't believe how steep it was looking down that mountain! One misstep and I would have found myself at the real Pearly Gates! But I knew I had to descend, to keep going. So I prayed fervently and asked the Lord to help me get down safely. I moved on faith believing the Lord would help me. He did!

God wants us to move on faith as we meet him and acknowledge him as our Savior and Lord! Just like descending from Mt Hood, it's a risky venture! Our very lives are at stake! But to experience real life, a life with substance and meaning we must move on faith.

Have you stepped out in faith and believed in Jesus as your Savior and Lord? If you have never taken this step I'd like to give you an opportunity to do so today. Believing in Jesus is as simple as knowing the ABC's. “A” means admitting we have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. “B” stands for belief. We must believe Jesus died for our sins on the cross. “C” represents commit. We must commit our lives to Jesus as our Lord. Committing our lives to Christ involves surrender. We surrender our lives to Jesus and He takes charge, He becomes the Master or Ruler of our lives!

If you would like to take this step of faith today or recommit your life to Jesus today I invite you to pray the prayer printed on your bulletin with me..

Dear God, I need you! I have sinned and want to change the course of my life. I believe Jesus died for my sins. I commit my life to Jesus by faith, trusting him to be my Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.