

## THE CHRISTIANS' EXALTED LIFE (Eph 2:4–7)

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Pray with me.... Nature can point us to amazing truths about God and how he handles the world. David looked up and proclaimed, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps 19:1), and Solomon drew lessons for sluggards from the ant (Prov 6:6). Isaiah compared God renewing our strength to mounting on wings like eagles (Isa 40:31), and Jesus gave hope to our anxious souls by pointing to the lilies and the sparrows (Matt 6:28; 10:29–31). Our passage in Ephesians 2 clarifies the impact of the unleashing of God’s immeasurable saving power on the world, and to ready us, I want you to consider the force of a volcano.

I was nearly seven on May 18, 1980, when the world was shocked by perhaps the greatest cataclysmic event of the century—the eruption of Mt. Saint Helens. A magnitude 5.1 earthquake triggered the largest landslide in recorded history that exposed the magma chamber. This led to a lateral blast of hot gas, steam, and rock debris and a massive ash plume that reached 15 miles into the sky and spread ash across most of the western United States. Powerful mudflows caused by the volcano’s explosion rapidly cut through old, hard volcanic rock, creating in just three month’s Loowit Canyon, over 100 feet deep, and Step Canyon, even larger at 600 feet deep. Imagine the force! Less than two years later, a further avalanche of mud created by the melting of a thick snowpack in the crater cut channels through debris at speeds of 40 miles per hour and carved individual canyons 140 feet deep in a single day (March 19, 1982).

Volcanoes unleash forces strong enough to overcome the greatest of earth’s obstacles, transforming everything in their wake. Yet volcanic force is measured not by internal energy but by impact. A 0 to 8 ranking on the Volcanic Explosivity Index is marked by how much ash, lava, or pumice was ejected, how high the eruption column was, and whether the outburst was gentle, explosive, or cataclysmic. Scientists rarely try to assess the actual “power” exerted because accurately calculating the total energy release is difficult to do in real-time or even retrospectively. Energy is released in various forms like heat, ground deformation, seismic activity, and kinetic energy of ejected material, and precisely quantifying each component is challenging. So, scientists classify volcanic activity according to observable effects; the greater the impact, the greater the power.

In Ephesians 1:19 Paul expresses his longing that Christians would know “what is the immeasurable greatness of [God’s] power toward us who believe.” From one perspective, the greatness of God’s power is immeasurable, yet Paul still believes that we can know this power’s greatness. What is immeasurable in

relation to its innate scope and force can be known in relation to its impact. In our passage for today, beginning in 2:4, Paul speaks of God's "great love" as the essence of what God unleashed upon the world—an unmeasurable force in the universe, yet one whose impact is so transforming and unparalleled that it testifies to the matchless nature of the power of God's love in Christ.

Paul wants "the great love with which [God] loved us" (Eph 2:4) to cut canyons into our souls, changing the topography of our lives forever and shaping new pathways for love and obedience. God's powerful love unleashed forces strong enough to destroy spiritual obstacles that no other powers could overcome. "We were dead in our trespasses" (2:5). "We were ... by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (2:3). "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us ... made us alive together with Christ" (2:4–5). In 1:19 Paul spoke of "the immeasurable greatness of God's power." Later, Paul will pray that we will "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (3:19). We will never grasp the full power of God's love for us in Christ, but we can measure its impact as it makes old creatures into new and shapes new pleasures and hates, joys and sorrows that now align with the heart of God. The mere fact that those who were dead are made alive testifies to the wealth of mercy that explodes into the world, overcoming God's wrath and reversing the course of our lives from a trajectory of eternal death to one of eternal life.

Read with me Ephesians 2:4–7.... The unleashing of God's great love has had an unparalleled impact in our existence. God's great love has powerfully given Christians exalted life in Christ. Our passage today describes this exalted life, addressing it from two sides: (1) the essence of our exalted life (2:4–6) and (2) the goal of our exalted life (2:7).

### **The Essence of Our Exalted Life (2:4–6)**

#### **The Source and Generation of Our Exalted Life (2:4–5)**

We open considering the source and generation of our exalted life. The conjunction "but" marks progression in Paul's thought. "We ... were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. *But* God ..." (2:4). With the word "but," the apostle signals movement beyond the old age and from initial creation to new. "But God" marks a shift in redemptive history—from shadow to substance, from promise to fulfillment, and from anticipation to realization.

Since the fall and exile of Adam in the beginning, every human is conceived outside the garden—spiritually dead, inhabiting darkness, and justly under God's curse. Thus, Paul recalls the pre-Christian state of the Ephesian church when he says in 2:1, "*You* were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked."

Then, in 2:3, he highlights that this truth stands for all believers: “*We ... were by nature children of wrath.*” God had told Adam, “In the day that you eat of [the fruit] you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17). And from the point of his rebellion and God’s punishment forward, the curse of death has affected and infected all humanity from generation to generation, making us sinners who sin. There isn’t one mere human who was not by nature a child of divine wrath, and this is why Paul adds at the end of 2:3: “like the rest of mankind.”

Yet the very one who willed that Paul be “an apostle of Christ Jesus” (1:1) and who “has blessed us in Christ” (1:3), indeed the very God who “in love ... predestined us for adoption as sons” (1:4–5) has erupted into our world, and nothing will ever be the same. “But God.”

We’re told “God ... made us alive together with Christ.” However, to heighten the drama and awaken praise, Paul first elaborates on the makeup of the power that changes our lives. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us ... made us alive together with Christ” (2:4). “Mercy” here contrasts with “wrath” at the end of verse 3 and expresses the overwhelming compassion or kindness God had toward us, even, as verse 5 says, “when we were dead in our trespasses.” Prior to the foundation of the world, before human rebellion and its consequence, God “in love ... predestined us for adoption” (1:4–5). And in the ages leading up to Christ’s coming, this same divine “great love” for us generated a massive reservoir of wrath-overcoming mercy that would burst upon us in the proper moment. “When the fulness of time had come, God sent forth his Son ... to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4–5). ‘The time is fulfilled,’ Jesus said, “and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). In Christ’s first coming, the love of God for sinners exploded upon the world in a wealth of molten mercy and “made us alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:5).

Look up at Ephesians 1:20: God worked the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us “in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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.” God’s love was like molten mercy, infused with catastrophic, death-destroying potential, just awaiting the right time to erupt onto the earth’s surface. And all this divine affection that was building throughout the ages finally went public when God raised Jesus from the dead and installed him as king of the universe. The explosion of love generated for Christ an exalted life, manifest in his preeminence over all created things. Thus, we read in 1:22 that through the manifestation of his power in Christ’s resurrection and session, God “put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.” You cannot

measure the amount of God's power embodied in his love (cf. 3:19), but you can consider the fact that its explosive impact placed Jesus above all created things, enjoying all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18). The implications of this are vast, especially when you recognize that this authority is, according to the end of verse 22, "to" or "for the church"—to our benefit.

But it is in 2:1–10 that Paul unpacks the explosive impact of God's powerful love for Christians. "God ... made us alive together with Christ." That "God ... made us alive *together*" highlights that the Ephesian Christians and Sovereign Joy Christians join some from every tribe and language and people and nation" as those who have been made new. That "God ... made us alive together *with Christ*" emphasizes that only in relationship to him do we experience life. As Paul says in Romans 6:4, "We were buried ... with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

To say that we are "made alive" means that what is true of us "by nature" gets changed. Whereas we were "by nature children of wrath" (2:3), we now become by nature reborn, not of the old, cursed creation but of the new creation in Christ. This new life or rebirth is also known as "regeneration," the process by which God spiritually transforms people, giving new, spiritual life to those who were previously spiritually dead and enabling them to respond in faith and love. Left to ourselves, we were dead, having no true spiritual life and thus no ability to get out of the tomb. Dead people can't move toward God; dead people can't desire what is good and what is right. They are dead, unable to get out of their tombs. "But God!" As when Jesus cried out to Lazarus, "Come forth!," God lets his volcanic love in Christ explode on us in power, effectually calling our names. "Stephanie, Megan, Lynne, Taylor, Edward, Charles, come forth!" And this effectual call by the Spirit infuses life where it was lacking. It incinerates our resistance and lets us hear God's Word, see his beauty, and request and receive his forgiveness. This powerful manifestation of love overwhelms our souls, moving us to feel remorse over our sin, embrace Jesus as Savior, surrender to his lordship, and enjoy new life and a new pattern of living. The great physician heals the sick and restores those once wounded (cf. Deut 32:39), thus making us new.

In Jesus, God made us alive, with new hearts beating for the living God and new spiritual senses oriented with new tastes and hungers, new hates and longings, aligning with the ways and delights of God. We hear that Jesus died for sinners, and our hearts awaken with hope. We see a need, and we want to see it met. We no longer live only for ourselves but recognize that we are part of God's greater story and purposes. We see beauty, goodness, and truth and savor them. We run from evil and cling to good. Christ's love changes the course of our souls, making us

look and feel and act new. The impact of his volcanic love is not yet complete; we still speak harshly, respond anxiously, react sinfully. But God has already “made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” (2:5).

Paul will give more details related to our exalted life. But he first intrudes a parenthetical comment: “by grace you are saved.” He fronts “by grace” to emphasize the amazing, undeserved kindness of God’s saving love. It is “by grace,” not by works, meaning that if God did not decisively enter the middle of history in Jesus, our state of death would have continued. *By grace* Jesus effectually called our name and made us alive when we once were dead. This is indeed a “glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (1:6).

Paul says, “By grace *you* have been saved” (2:5). The shift from “we” to “you” places focus not on believers in general but on the Ephesian Christians and all Gentile believers like them who have been recipients of this explosive manifestation of God’s love. That God’s saving love moves beyond the Jews to those of other nations only adds to the glorious nature of this amazing grace.

Finally, Paul uses a verbal construction that shows how Christians are presently enjoying a state of salvation that was secured in the past with lasting results. I would translate it “by grace you are saved” or “by grace you are in a state of salvation.” That we “are saved” gives definition to what Paul means by asserting that God “made us alive.” But from what are we saved? This question points us back to our condition before God’s love erupted into our lives.

1. 2:1: *We are saved from spiritual death in our trespasses and sins.* This death was like a prison from which no power in creation could free us. But when God’s molten mercy exploded into our lives, it destroyed the fortress of death, freeing us to new life.
2. 2:2: *We are saved from following the ruler of the authority of the air.* The ESV calls Satan the “prince of the power of the air,” but the terms are the same as those in 1:21, which declare that God’s powerful love placed Jesus higher than “all rule and authority.” Jesus’s saving work has freed us both from sin’s penalty and Satan’s power. Jesus is greater, has already disarmed and shamed the rulers and authorities of the spiritual realms, and will one day free us from their presence.
3. 2:3: *We are saved from following the passions of our flesh.* In our old state related to Adam, we “lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.” We had rebellious, sinful cravings and carried them out. But Jesus saves us from such enslavement. We no longer need to give to lust, idleness, prejudice, worry, or greed. The works of the

flesh are now combatted by the desires of the Spirit, and having been made alive in Christ, we are freed to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).

4. 2:3: *We are saved from God's wrath and condemnation.* There is no greater enemy of humanity than God himself. Hell exists because he is a good judge, not a bad one. Justice is about giving people what they deserve, and mankind's greatest injustice is not giving to God what he deserves—wholehearted, life-encompassing loyalty. Therefore, God, as a good judge, affirms our sin and counts us under his wrath. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love within which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (2:4–5). “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.... There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 5:8; 8:1). There is only one way to be saved from the eternal sentence of conscious death; the explosive love of God must forcefully cut canyons through the hardness of your heart and allow saving mercy and grace to awaken life and make you new. If you are spiritually dead today but find yourself longing for life, repent and believe the good news I am proclaiming, and you will be saved.

### **The Details of Our Exalted Life (2:6)**

God's great love has powerfully given Christians exalted life in Christ. Verses 4–6 are describing the essence of this life. So far, in verses 4–5, we have considered the source and generation of our exalted life. Verse 6 now explains its details. Paul further clarifies our gracious salvation and what it means that we were made alive. “And [God] raised us up with [Christ] and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Paul's language recalls 1:20, where he said that God's powerful love “worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.” 1:20 does not use the language that God made Christ alive; instead, it only says God raised him and seated him by his side. This suggests to me that being raised and being seated in 2:6 is detailing further what God means by having made us alive.

Jesus represents the church in both his death and resurrection. In his death he receives God's wrath in our place. Yet because he himself never sinned, death could not hold him. So, God raised Jesus from the dead and even elevated him in the ascension to God's right hand. Now, Paul says that in Jesus's being raised and seated, God raised and seated all Christians as well, placing us with Christ “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.” Notice how 1:20 says that God sat Jesus “at his right hand in the heavenly places,” but 2:6 says only that God sat us “in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Paul is likely highlighting not only

our union with Christ but also that Christ's relationship to the Father is still unique; we are seated in Christ whereas he is seated at the Father's right hand.

Often Paul speaks of the hope of our future resurrection. "He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (2 Cor 4:14; cf. Rom 6:5–8; Phil 3:11; 1 Thess 4:16–17). But here and in Colossians he also speaks of our resurrection as something that is past; already our new identity and position are real. Thus, he can say, "[You were] buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12; cf. Rev 20:5). That we are presently raised with Christ has significant implications. I will state three:

1. If we are raised and seated in the heavenly places with Christ, who has all authority over all created powers both visible and invisible, then *we can rest with confidence and trust today*, regardless of how crazy life may be. Jesus is in charge, we are with him, and he is for us. No purpose of his can be thwarted, and all that happens is under his jurisdiction; he is on the throne at God's right hand. The days may be dark and the oppression thick, the tears may flow while sleepless nights persist, but Jesus is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4), he wields his power for the church (Eph 1:22), and he will make all things right.
2. If we are raised and seated with Christ, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, then *we operate on earth as ambassadors, sanctioned with heavenly authority*. On Peter's profession of Christ's Lordship, Jesus said, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:18–19). Because we are united to Christ who has all authority, those in Christ now walk with authority to stand against evil powers (cf. Luke 10:18–19) and to declare whose lives or actions align with Christ and whose do not (Matt 18:15–20). Today Ryan and Joyce and Cael and Abby affirmed our Sovereign Joy Member Covenant. In doing so, you pledged "to submit your Christian discipleship to the service and authority of this body and its leaders, even as this church promises to oversee your discipleship." You made that commitment of mutual oversight because you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies and now bear heavenly authority and responsibility (cf. 2:19; Phil 3:20).
3. If we are raised and seated with Christ, then *we should live on earth maintaining our heavenly identity and citizenship*. Hear Paul in Colossians 3:1–2: "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above,

where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” We must remember who we are and whose we are. “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him” (2 Tim 2:4). Or as Peter says, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:11–12). May others recognize our heavenly identity as we live on earth.

### **The Goal of Our Exalted Life (2:7)**

God’s great love has powerfully given Christians exalted life in Christ. Paul described the essence of our exalted life in 2:4–6. Now he clarifies its goal. Why did God make us alive together in Christ, saving us by grace? Why did he raise us and seat us together in Christ? Verse 7: “so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” The love of God in Christ that graciously saves sinners is the greatest power our universe has ever known. This is clear because the impact of this love will last forever, redounding through the ages. God’s “great love” (2:4) manifest in a wealth of “mercy” (2:4) and an “immeasurable greatness of ... power” (1:19) will produce a lasting demonstration of “the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” In chapter 1, God “in love ... predestined us for adoption ... to the praise of his glorious grace” (1:5–6). He redeemed us through Jesus’s blood “according to the riches of his grace” (1:7), and he purposed that those hoping in Christ “might be to the praise of his glory” (1:12) and redeem possession of our inheritance “to the praise of his glory” (1:14). The climactic purpose of God’s saving work in Christ is to elevate a display of his grace for all eternity. Our gracious rescue becomes the means of his greatest renown.

And in that day, when we are not distracted by cares or ailments or relational tensions and when all our senses are transformed and our memories work perfectly—in that day our joy will be full because we will more fully and increasingly “know ... what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe” (1:18–19). We will see rightly and be completely and forever satisfied. The amazing volcanic grace of God that erupted in Christ will have finally transformed all things, and we will properly recognize that the life we enjoy in Christ with no evil, tears, friction, or pain is fully and wholly to the praise of his glorious grace. The immeasurable power of God’s great love will be fully magnified, thus completing our joy. God’s great love has powerfully given Christians exalted life in Christ. Thanks be to God. Come, Lord Jesus.