

Union With Christ

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

What God Did: Resurrected Us Into Royalty

Ephesians 2:4 – 10

Introduction: From Rebellion to Royalty

It was an Easter Sunday morning. A tall soldier, with black hair and dark eyes, had just entered the enclosure surrounding the Garden Tomb in East Jerusalem, just north of the Damascus Gate. The soldier walked toward the tomb, paused a moment to look at that blackened hole in the limestone wall, then plunged in. He sat there, alone in the darkness.

Who was this soldier? He was a man I knew. He was a very angry man. He had been born into a happy home, treated well as a small boy, until the terrible day when his father left the family. Living for a while with his mother and other relatives, he finally landed in an orphanage on a farm in Pennsylvania. There he learned to fight his way to the position of power, dominating others by force of strength and personality. His life was a hard one: he was raped three times by homosexual men; he was shone a rigid brand of Catholicism that crushed his spirit under loads of guilt; he fostered a deep hatred for his father who threw him to the wolves. He entered the Air Force as a means of escape. After basic training, he was deployed to a base in Morocco. In Morocco, God began to pierce his gloom. On a trip to Jerusalem to see the holy sites, he found himself on Easter Sunday morning, sitting all alone in the darkness of the Garden Tomb. He was a spiritually dead man, sitting where another dead man may have once been entombed. But while he sat there, the words carved on a simple wooden sign began to work into his heart: HE IS NOT HERE...FOR HE HAS RISEN. Sitting in that tomb, the soldier opened his heart to Jesus Christ, offering his own heart and body to be Jesus' living home. Then, the dead man who had entered the tomb walked out with new life, with the resurrected Christ living in him by his Spirit. It was a moment of true resurrection.

Context:

After focusing so much on who we were apart from Christ, we're going to zoom in on who we are with Jesus Christ. There is a very deep transformation that happens in human beings when they come to Jesus. So we're going to take Ephesians 2:4-10 to explore that.

God's Rich Mercy and Love: v.4

Two things we need to know about God. First, God is rich in mercy. Right here, Paul is referring to the incredible compassion God has on those who are suffering in the deadness of sin. Mercy is a feeling that is called forth from the depth of God's heart when He sees us. Sometimes we don't see God's mercy in the Scriptures because we somehow *want* to see a God of judgment only. God does judge, but it is always a slow judgment that has mercy as its end goal.

For example, God's mercy poured out towards Adam and Eve after they fell, in that God judged *Satan* and cursed the things that Adam and Eve would be tempted to find their identity in apart from God. But God in His mercy did not curse Adam and Eve themselves; He drew them back to Himself. When the whole earth was filled with humanity's violence, God in His mercy rescued a man of peace, Noah, and his family, before it was too late, and began humanity again with them. When the whole earth was falling under the totalitarian rule of Nimrod at the Tower of Babel, God in His mercy scattered that project and began a new nation of His own, Israel, that would live under just and good laws. Every time human beings suffer, God's mercy leaps up in His heart.

Furthermore, God loves us. Paul continues, "because of the great love with which He loved us." If mercy is God's ability to see not just a person's fault, but the need behind it, then love is God responding by meeting that person's fundamental *need*.

I'm sure that some of you who are parents understand this. When you see your child sick, with a runny nose and a nasty fever and a bad temper, you know that that child isn't feeling her or his best. So it's understandable when that child fights with a sibling or screams or cries. And maybe you get tough with your child nonetheless, but the misery of that child calls forth pity in you. That's mercy. You understand how that child is feeling terrible. And you love that child, so you do something like wipe that little nose, lay that little child in bed, and read a story. Mercy and

love go beyond justice. God has mercy and love towards us. He sees, not just our fault, but our need. So what does He do? He unites us with Jesus.

The Change God Wrought--Alive With Christ: v.5

Paul speaks about that in v.5-6. God causes a huge change in us to happen. The most important thing to notice is the clear parallel between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of us who believe in Jesus. Something mysterious happens when a person comes to faith in Jesus. That person, man or woman or child, comes to be identified with Jesus. Paul puts it this way: "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] 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."

That definitely sounds strange to us. We were, at one time, dead in our transgressions. We studied what that means last time. To summarize: The most significant part of being dead is that you feel cut off from God. And deep down inside, you know that. You feel cut off from a source of life and there is no pulling yourself up by your moral bootstraps, no matter how hard you try. No amount of charity, fasting, and pilgrimages can correct that relationship. Nor can those things make you feel any better, fundamentally. No amount of work you do can hold off at bay the sinking feeling that you don't know God at all. No amount of judging other people and saying, "I'm a better person because I'm better than her, or him," can make yourself feel better by comparison. That doesn't work at all. You face the sinking realization that you're not innocent. You have things to hide from God and others. Painful, private things. Because you feel dead, you feel worthless, unwanted, as if no one has any personal hopes for you. You might feel low and unhappy. And worst of all, you might feel stuck, like you can't get out of a tomb. And because God feels far away from you, you feel like there is no one there to help you. You're imprisoned in yourself, and you don't like it.

But God made us alive. How did He do that? He put us "with Christ," as Paul says three times. God made us alive together with Christ, raised us up with him, and seated us with him. How did that happen? I can't tell you for sure. But when we put our faith in Jesus, we became identified with him. That means, first of all, that we were identified with his death. If you've ever seen the painting *Descent from the Cross*, you'd know what that looked like. Jesus' body was limp and lifeless. Rigor mortis had set in. The mouth was open, the teeth stuck out, the eyes were glazed. It was unmistakable: Jesus was dead. Grotesque as it sounds, we were joined to Jesus during that death. Or rather, Jesus was joined to us when he died. He joined us in our death. But that wasn't the end of the story. On the third day, God the Father poured new life into Jesus' dead body and Jesus rose from the dead.

That is the exact parallel of what happened with us. In fact, when God raised Jesus, He did three things to us. He made us alive together with Christ. I don't know what you felt when you first put your trust in Jesus. Maybe you felt a small sense of relief and peace. Maybe a smattering of joy. Or maybe not much at all. But what Paul is saying here is that the ultimate infusion of life has been poured into you.

If we had a corpse here right before us, and that person had been dead for quite some time, we would be really surprised if God raised that person from the dead. The gray skin color would give way to a healthy pink. The decaying atmosphere would go away and there would be a freshness in the air again. That is what Paul is saying has happened to us, spiritually. We are no longer dead. We are alive. A life has been infused into us, Jesus' life. Just as Jesus was given a new life with new possibilities and new freedoms, so we have a new life that is filled with new possibilities and new freedoms. Just as Jesus' dead body was flooded with God's life, so our dead spirits are flooded with God's life. This is an entirely new way to live. It's the ultimate experience, because there is no greater power than the power of God's ability to bring life out of death.

Raised Up With Christ: v.6a

Second, God raised us up with Christ. Again, that sounds strange and mysterious. But think about it. We're no longer imprisoned by our tombs, by what makes us feel dead. We can walk out of them! Just like Jesus walked out of his! He left that tomb and he reentered the world with an entirely new power, on an entirely new basis. He was, in some ways, an entirely different person. The same is true for us. God reaches out to us, takes our hand with His hand, and raises us from the dead.

I think we can learn about being raised with Jesus from the story of a man named John. John's mother died when he was six years old, so his father, who was the skipper of a ship, raised him to be a sailor. John went to sea when he

was eleven years old. Like most all sailors, he learned to curse and swear and make roaring boasts about himself. He sailed the high seas for eighteen years. Eventually John got into becoming a slave trader, profiteering from capturing human beings and taking them from Africa to England and North America. Once John himself was stranded on the coast of Africa, but was invited to be a navigator on the ship *Greyhound*. On board the ship, John's foul language made the hardest sailor on board shake his head. Several days later, a fearsome storm ravaged the ship, tearing its sails. For seven days after the storm, the ship was dead in the water. The food dwindled down to a handful of salted codfish. One man died. The captain called the crew together and said, "Men, ye know we picked this man up on the African coast, and since then we've had nothing but trouble, trouble, trouble. He says he's a freethinker. I know his father never taught him this way. His blasphemies are enough to make the sea cough up her dead. Like Jonah in the Bible, I think he's a curse on us." The other sailors agreed. John tensed, and got ready to stand his ground against them. Then the captain said, "We'll wait. But John Newton, ye'd better join us in prayer if ye value your hide." John balked, going back to his post. But a verse he knew from childhood came back to him: "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall you heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" John prayed, "God, if You're true, You'll make good Your word. Cleanse Thou my vile heart." Four weeks later, the *Greyhound* lurched into an Irish port, and John Newton went right away to a church to profess his salvation. He dropped his slave trade immediately, he gave up his fast and loose lifestyle, and he even stopped swearing in favor of writing hymns that praised God. One of these hymns went like this:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!
The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures
Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home
When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun
We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun

And so John Newton wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace* and over three hundred others. He became a minister at the age of 39 and began a wonderful ministry. Just before he died in 1807 at the age of 82, he wrote his own epitaph, which describes how alive he was in life: "John Newton, Clerk. Once an infidel and libertarian, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy, near sixteen years at Onley in Bucks and 28 years in this church."

That story is encouraging to me because John Newton went from being dead in sin to raised up into new life. It's also encouraging to me because how often do we feel like we're imprisoned by patterns in our lives that are rotten? Maybe you're locked into a lifestyle of swearing, because the anger inside you seems uncontrollable. Who can reign it in? Maybe you're locked into a lifestyle of loose sex, which promises much but delivers little. But are we stuck there? NO WAY!! Nothing is beyond God's transforming power. We're not stuck there! God has the power to transform us, to raise us out of that death into a life that is entirely new.

For me, one of the ways in which I was raised out of deadness into a new life by letting God deal with my jealousy. That sounds like such a minor thing, but jealousy's effects can be huge. I went to a high school full of rich kids. I mean really rich kids. In our parking lot, there were a lot new Honda's, a lot of BMW's, a few Mercedes, and even a Porsche. Meanwhile all of my friends were tinting their car windows, installing super stereo systems into their cars, dressing in really nice clothes, and wearing really nice watches. I compared myself to them a lot, and at times, I was unbearably jealous. I didn't have a lot of those things. It created a certain amount of resentment towards my family. I was raised the older of two kids in a single income home. My dad didn't make a whole lot working for TRW. At different points in my childhood, when I really wanted something, my parents said things like, "Would that be fair to your sister?" I remember walking with my mom in a mall, and wanting a jacket, but not getting it. So my reaction to that was to plead all the rationalizations I could think of. "Well, I went to Japanese school longer than her. Is that fair? It doesn't mean she needs a jacket right now, but when she's my age four years from now." And the list goes on. Finally, when my mom offered to buy me a suit, I went for one of the most expensive suits around. That suit really cost my mom a lot. And when I got a good job working for a financial consultant after I graduated from high school, I bought all kinds of ties, and started making plans to get me a Rolex watch! Talk

about materialistic! All the while, I was thinking about what other people had that I didn't. Jealousy, especially the materialistic flavor, was pumping through my veins. And yet when I started to yield more to Jesus, I found that he raised me up from that state. I can say with gladness that I have no desire for nice clothes, nice cars, nice watches, or a nice house. Somehow, God has raised me up from that because He would not let jealousy be my tomb.

I point that out to you because jealousy especially is a form of death. God said in no uncertain terms, "Do not covet." And yet jealousy, especially materialistic jealousy, so often keeps us locked in deadness that cuts us off from God and from other people, that colors the way we see life, that makes us envious a lot of the time, that makes us hold grudges, that makes us bitter people to be around, and that influences the kind of person we are. This is absolutely clear when we envy Bill Gates, or when we think constantly about how someone else's stocks are doing. Or maybe you get jealous of another family because of where they live? Maybe if you're a woman with a husband who is the primary breadwinner, you get jealous of other women who have more well-paid husbands and you let that color the way you treat your own husband who you promised to love for richer or for poorer. Or maybe you are a parent who really wants your kids to make a lot of money, so you put an inordinate amount of pressure on them, trying to make them soar like Icarus even though chances are they'll come crashing down. I'm willing to bet that the deadness in your heart is spreading outward to people around you. You may even be holding out a stiff arm of anger and using the language of justice to justify your revenge. And deep down inside, you're probably feeling the lack of God because you know He doesn't bless that.

"Well," some of you may be saying, "That's pretty strong. But okay, I'm willing to go with that. Where is this power to change? I don't feel it!" Here is God's mystery: All of the power is right here. It's already been given to us. All we need to do is act on it. Now, considering the full range of issues and hurts that we may have, there may be some important counseling that needs to happen. If you've been abused or really victimized in other ways, God will probably want you to work through those things with Him. But that makes it all the more important that we understand the power from God that is now IN US. We are not trapped in a tomb. We have been raised with Christ.

Seated With Christ: v.6b

Finally, God seats us with Christ. Paul says in the latter half of v.6, "And seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." That is the third "with him" statement Paul's makes. This is kind of exciting, wouldn't you say? In the latter half of Ephesians chapter 1, we learned that Jesus is seated at the throne of the universe. No angel has ever been seated so high, as the letter to the Hebrews says, "But to which angel has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet'?" (Heb.1:13) So if we had just stopped there, we would feel like Jesus was at an infinitely high distance away from us. He'd be unreachable, unattainable. We wouldn't feel like we could relate to him at all. But instead, God seated us with Christ in the heavenlies. That distance zooms to nothing as we're placed in that highest heaven, too.

But what does sitting symbolize here? For Jesus, sitting means that he is resting from his own work, and letting God "put all things in subjection to him." (1:22) In other words, Jesus is letting God work on his behalf. The same is true for us. When we are seated in Christ, it means we are at rest from ourselves. If you were cooking dinner in your kitchen, and I came along and said, "Take a rest, I'll do the work," I'd expect you to have a seat. I wouldn't expect you to keep on laboring away and getting in my way! Sitting and resting go together. That's important, because in chapters 4-5, Paul focuses on walking and speaking, and then in chapter 6, he focuses on standing. The Christian life is an active one, too. But before any of that activity can be healthy or good, we have to be seated. We've got to understand that God puts us in a high position with him, and He will do the work through us by His Spirit while we rest from ourselves. When I was a kid, I had to rest from myself a lot. I would usually get tired and cranky when my parents went walking places, like at the park or in the mall. So my dad would pick me up and rest me on his shoulders. And I'd love that, because I always wanted to be tall, and also because I could rest while my dad did the walking. That's the main image that's given here.

As Christians, we sit in Christ in heaven. Where do you think heaven is? Heaven doesn't mean some remote corner of the universe. It is the invisible realm of reality that coexists with the tangible realm. They overlap. For us, heaven impacts most strongly our inner life, in our hearts where we feel tension and pressure and anxiety. If the basic answer to life's problems is my identity, as many psychologists say, then God has given me a powerful affirmation of my identity here. Can I be seated any higher in the heavenly realm? No way! This is higher than the top of a rollercoaster or the top of Mount Everest! This is as high as God's Fatherly arms can lift me!! This has got to be "the me I never knew." This is me?? I never knew that I was seated so high!!

The Scottish storyteller and preacher George MacDonald illustrated this in the introduction to his story *The Princess and the Goblin*.

The Princess and the Goblin
Chapter One
Why the Princess Has a Story About Her

There was once a little princess who---

But, Mr. Author, why do you always write about princesses?

Because every little girl is a princess.

You will make them vain if you tell them that.

Not if they understand what I mean.

Then what do you mean?

What do you mean by a princess?

They daughter of a king

Very well, then, then every little girl is a princess and there would be no need to say anything about it, except that she is always in danger of forgetting her rank, and behaving as if she had grown out of the mud. I have seen little princesses behave like the children of thieves and lying beggars, and that is why they need to be told they are princesses. And that is why, when I tell a story of this king, I like to tell it about a princess. Then I can say better what I mean, because I can then give her every beautiful thing I want her to have.

Please go on.

Illus: I've seen God make this real in the woman I love, Ming. When she was in junior high and high school, Ming struggled with anorexia and bulimia. She built her sense of self around doing well in school and on the debate team, but it was a thin outer shell that hid the fact that she didn't know who she was. When she went to college, the outer shell got thicker. Ming got a little tougher by taking up some feminist anger, which made her hard to get to know and hard to love. Her boyfriend at the time didn't feel appreciated because she had such strong defenses. At the same time, her inner pains became more serious. She went through periods of deep depression when she felt like she had no sense of self. It made her tired to relate to people because she didn't feel a *self* that she could connect with. But after getting some good counsel and coming to know Jesus more over time, she understood her sense of self comes from Jesus. She is more comfortable with herself as a woman, such that she can trust me, a fallible man, to be her husband! She's been a more vulnerable person now that doesn't need to put up strong defenses to make herself something, so that others feel *very* appreciated by her. All because she knows she was dead, but is now seated on a heavenly throne in Jesus.

Contrast that with Gloria Vanderbilt, the mistress of etiquette in America. During an interview at age 74, in 1996, here was her statement of her identity: "I am a phoenix, rising from the ashes." But her life story in the interview was nothing *but* ashes. She was embroiled in nasty legal litigation with her former lawyer and former psychiatrist, to whom she sold her old business. She had to sell her gorgeous townhouse to pay back-taxes. Her handsome 24 year old son threw himself off a balcony of a high rise apartment building, killing himself just after cussing her out. His last words were expletives hurled at the mother he apparently hated. Her life was a total, undiluted disaster story. How can you rise from the ashes of sin and misery if you don't know the One who rose from the dead?

Let me caution you about something. Most of you are quite used to thinking about Jesus as being high above you (Jesus above), looking down at you and barking orders at you. The feeling of distance you feel from Jesus is overwhelming. But that's not true, because you are seated **WITH HIM** on the highest throne in heaven. Some of you are used to thinking about Jesus as below you (Jesus below), as if **YOU** were the king or queen on the throne, and Jesus is your advisor, standing below the pedestal you've put yourself on. That's not true, because it's Jesus who is first on the throne of the universe, and it is us who are in him. Some of you are used to thinking about Jesus as two steps in front of you, constantly leading you places, constantly stretching out his hand calling you to follow him (Jesus just beyond). The feeling you feel is tiredness. You feel that Jesus is always just beyond you, and you're constantly responding to him with your own strength. If the truth were told, you really don't know what it means to rest in your identity in him, and to let him live his life out through you. But that is also not true.

The truth of Christianity is that we are resurrected with Christ, we have his own life inside us, and we are positioned in him (Jesus within). We are **IN HIM**. In this section alone, Paul highlights that truth three times, in v.6, v.7, and

v.10. We are seated in Christ. We are given grace in Christ. We were created in Christ. In other words, OUR IDENTITY is inextricably linked to his, and it is out of that identity that we are a new force to be reckoned with.

Any attempt to define Christianity apart from the explicit understanding of being made alive in Christ, raised with new power, and put back into our relationships as a person through whom Jesus can pour his life out through us is not real Christianity. If you've been listening to teachers who do not teach this, then they are not giving you the full picture. THERE MUST BE THIS RECOGNITION THAT WE ARE IN THE RESURRECTION LIFE OF JESUS HIMSELF. Otherwise, there is nothing extraordinary about Jesus at all. You'd be trying to have "godliness" without God, "Christianity" without Christ, and "spirituality" without the Spirit. And it will never accomplish anything but burn people out and turn them away, disillusioned. What Paul has described for us here is true Christianity. Everything else is wrong.

I think it is possible for you to have an incomplete understanding of what a relationship with God is. Mainly, you might stop at the Cross and not follow through to the Resurrection. What I mean by that is you know that the Cross is where God the Judge executed His wrath on Jesus the Son and thereby satisfied His own anger. The Reformation left us with that very legal, judicial emphasis. That is well and good, but somehow you stop there. So when you sin as a Christian, as everyone does, the only comfort you have for yourself is, "Well, I guess all my sin was paid for on the Cross..." And that's pretty much all you can say. You repeat that to yourself over and over. Your Christian life seems to go in circles around that one theme because that seems to be the furthest you go. I've sinned, I've been forgiven. I've sinned, I've been forgiven. But is that truly satisfying? Where is the power to change??? Where is the power to be personally made new??? THE ANSWER IS THIS: YOU'VE GOT TO KNOW THE CHANGE IN YOUR IDENTITY. GOD KILLED THE OLD YOU IN JESUS ON THE CROSS. YOU DIED WITH HIM AND THEN YOU WERE RAISED WITH HIM. THEN GOD SEATED YOU WITH HIM. THAT IS YOUR NEW SELF, **YOUR NEW YOU**, PERFECTLY MADE FOR THE LIFE OF ADVENTURE AND INTIMACY GOD HAS IN STORE FOR YOU!!

God's Grace and Our Identity: v.7-10

You might ask, "Why has God seated us here?" Paul explains that in v.7-9: "in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." So somehow there are ages of time yet to come where our position in Christ will be more and more wondrous.

Twice Paul uses that word "grace" which has sadly become so commonplace today. Grace is unmerited favor. It's the joyful generosity that issues forth in a "gift," which is given freely, without being earned. It is just like being a cranky little child with a runny nose. God, in His mercy and love, cleans us up and transforms us with love. That action demonstrates grace. A child doesn't do anything to earn or merit favor. That child just cries out for help. That's why Paul says it's "not as a result of works, that no one should boast." To boast in ourselves and say that there was something we did that made God return to us a favor for a favor IS RIDICULOUS. BANISH THE THOUGHT! We are not equals to God, and that is to belittle God's gift to us. If you've studied comparative religions, you know that this is the big difference between Christianity and every other religion: Islam proposes that doing the Five Pillars of Islam will save people; Buddhism, Eightfold Path; Hinduism, self-improvement into a higher reincarnated form. But can we boast in our own moral abilities??

Our response and responsibility is to have faith in Christ. (Verse 8 has been interpreted by some as "Even faith does not come from yourselves, faith is the gift of God." However, the phrase, "that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" does not modify *faith*. It modifies *you have been saved*. So we should read v.8 as, "salvation is not of yourselves, salvation is the gift of God." Faith is never referred to in the Bible as given from God; instead, faith is our response to God. We are responsible for making our choice.)

One of the big temptations in our lives is to boast in what we can do, thinking we can earn this position before God, which is the opposite of having a humble faith. If you're not a Christian, you can see it in the ways that we try to boast in our control of our image, our situations, and the people around us. If you're a Christian already, you can, sadly enough, see this because many people think that *to make yourself closer to God*, you've got to do things like: your quiet times, praying, going to meetings, evangelizing, anything! But that's all backwards. Everything starts with recognizing that God has come close to me, in fact, *come into me by His Spirit*, and activity proceeds out of that

basis. That's a subtle shift, but it's extremely important. If Christianity has any shred of truth, then everything must start with the recognition that God must come in to us, He must raise us up, He must stay in us, and He must pour His life through us. We cannot boast in ourselves. That is why John Newton wrote:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

When we receive God's grace by faith, what happens to us? In v.10, Paul gets back to our identity. "We are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (That is a most mystifying statement. Let's deal with the question that pops into everyone's heads first, and then I'm going to step back and reflect on the essence of the verse. How could God prepare our very decisions and actions beforehand? In some ways, that is a mind-boggling statement. God has planned out our lives from before the world began. But that leads to the next common question: Does that mean that if we miss a step, that we are permanently off track? If I blow it, then is there a getting back on? Many people, immediately after reading that verse, get really excited and try to go off and figure out what those "good works" are. I think that's not the real way to understand this.)

The emphasis in v.10 lies on the two identity statements Paul makes. We are God's masterpiece. We are created in Christ Jesus. Those are the identity statements. When Paul says, "You are God's masterpiece," (poema) he uses the plural you, which means that all of God's people together is God's masterpiece, a singular noun. Together, we are God's royal family, the church, His highest creation.

When my mom and I were in New York once visiting my sister, we went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We saw many of the paintings of the great artists: the impressionists Manet and Monet, Degas, and the Dutch realist Rembrandt. Since my sister majored in Renaissance literature, she knew some of the art that came from that time period, too. I used to oil paint when I was young, and I dabble in watercolors now, so I was really impressed with the paintings. There were some, especially by Rembrandt, that were stunning in their use of light and darkness. But while I enjoyed the individual paintings, the overall museum was amazing. That's how the church family is. Each of us is a brilliant painting painstakingly and thoughtfully crafted by God, but together we are God's masterpiece. And He wants to put us on display together in the ages to come.

And, we are created in Christ Jesus. Here Paul uses creation language from Genesis. Jesus himself is the realm of God's new creation, and everything that is in him also is a new creation. We are not just created "by" Christ Jesus, but "in" him. That's a completely different starting point for the Christian life. We belong to a whole other realm. But the intersection point between the old creation and the new creation came in the life of Jesus. It's as if, when he walked on earth, Jesus had us "in him." So now, the "good works" planned beforehand are simply the things Jesus did while he was here, reproduced in us. Our "good works" are going to be Jesus' good works done through us! Just as we live in him, he lives in us and through us.

Conclusion

Let me make some concluding observations. This identity and link to the resurrected Jesus is true for every true Christian. We are joined to him. It's not something you try to make more true -- it is already true. It is not something which is going to happen when you are further advanced and have another great experience with God, when you prophecy, speak in tongues, or something like that. They are already true. Now you might discover or unravel more of this truth throughout your life, but there is nothing more to be added, either by God or by you. This is not something that needs to be augmented.

Now, this may not be your experience yet, because of a few factors: First, you didn't know. You might not have begun to experience this because you didn't know this. Most of us don't have much understanding of it. We don't approach our problems this way. So we need to know more about it. Second possibility: you're afraid. You might want to stay in your tomb because you feel comfortable there. You can complain and there's something comfortable about complaining. You have friends in the tomb who are also afraid and that's a comfortable feeling. But you don't know the life God has for you. Third, it may not be true in your experience because you want to sin. For you, there may be something fun about sinning, to live for just yourselves, in the flesh, in the tomb where you think no

one's watching you, in the old way -- the self-effort, the self-pleasing, self-indulgent life. We love that. So we choose it sometimes. But provided that you are truly a Christian, you can always return to your true identity. You are sealed in Jesus' resurrection life (Eph.1:13-14). And when we acknowledge how stubborn we sometimes are to the ways of God, then we can return to this relationship. It is God who is rich. We're not rich. We don't have the resources.

But we do (as Peninsula Bible Church pastor Ray Stedman has said) discover that this resurrection power, this "with Christ, in Christ" relationship, becomes observable and actualized by faith, in other words, by actually living and acting on this basis, by trusting these facts as true and acting accordingly. That is faith. It means that we must employ these facts in the actual conditions of life. This may not be easy. We are called on to obey these facts when the flesh within us is screaming for revenge, or when you're feeling faint with discouragement and despair and ready to give up, or when the temptation to be lustful or bitter or sarcastic sweeps over us in waves and we can only claim this relationship for moments at a time and must renew it again and again until at last the storm passes, and stability comes. Do we know who we are? Where we're seated? What kind of life we've been given? My prayer is that all of us, you and I, would grow in understanding our new identity.