

[Call to Worship](#)

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

The first ten verses of Ephesians chapter 2 are powerfully wonderful!

The title in the NIV is 'Made alive in Christ'. And here is why;

Ephesians 2:1-9 New International Version - UK
Made alive in Christ

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Father, it is easy to worship when we focus on words like this. Thank you for your great mercy, thank you for bringing us life. Thank you for your grace, and forgiveness. Thank you for rescuing us, for sending Jesus to achieve what we could not. Thank you for your ongoing love, and presence with us, in us. Holy Spirit, please warm our hearts as we worship together, please encourage us in our faith I pray, Amen.

[Message - Living Between](#)

God's open door of mercy and grace is offered to us to return and find forgiveness and life. This is a call to faithful consistency, maintaining God as King in our lives.

It might be a bit of a generalisation, but my observation is that the basis of faith for some people is sin and God's judgement. While for others faith is about God's grace, love, mercy, and hope for the future. Now, in reality, it might be a bit of both, and perhaps these are two extremes?

But consider the implications of these two views? It is worth pondering! What are the implications for our lives if our faith is based on sin and judgement? How do we live when we believe that God is horrified and deeply shocked with what we get up to? How do we live when our focus is on the horrors of our sin, and the fear that God can't wait to do something about it, to punish us?

I believe that this thinking gives us reason to be hard on others, to be critical of others, provides the basis for anger and hurt. And opportunity to judge others.

The other way to live, is in the shadow of God's grace. What are the implications for this? Gratefulness, extending love and grace to others, confidence in the good character of God.

It's interesting, I don't find my faith motivated by God's judgement. But I very much am by God's grace and mercy. I am in awe of that!

The second to last book of the Old Testament is the book of Zechariah. It's a book that is very rarely turned to. Yet, it is a book with a surprising beginning. The people of God have not been honouring God. They have turned from God.

So what do you think God does? Pour down fire of judgement? Or treat them with grace and mercy? Let's read chapter one, and hold onto the first six verses, for they provide flavour for the verses that follow.

Zechariah 1 (NIV - UK)

A call to return to the Lord

1 In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:

2 'The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. 3 Therefore tell the people: this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Return to me," declares the Lord Almighty, "and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty. 4 Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices." But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the Lord. 5 Where are your ancestors now? And the prophets, do they live for ever? 6 But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your ancestors?

'Then they repented and said, "The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do."

Last week, as we looked at the Israelite's journey into the desert, after leaving Egypt, was around the year 1300BC. They had 40 years in the wilderness. Then they came to the promised land, the land of milk and honey. Then there was Joshua and Jericho, and then the people wanted a king. They forgot that God was their King.

Oh, and then they didn't stay strong, and grumbled, and had a split, Israel went north with a capital Samaria, and Judah stayed south with it's capital Jerusalem. Assyria became a world power, and then Babylon. And both Israel and Judah were taken into exile, for 70 years. And then Persia became the next world power, and Cyrus, the king of Persia let the Israelites return. This was around the year 520BC. We've moved forward 800 years.

All through this time the people were warned about being faithful to God, staying faithful to God. Before exile prophets warned the people. During exile prophets warned the people. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, were the prophets that brought God's word to the people, after exile, back in their own land. They were now living between, exile, and arrival of the Messiah. Like us, living between the Messiah, and the return of Jesus.

Returning from exile, the people have a task to do, two tasks? Rebuild first the temple, and then the walls of Jerusalem. We read about this in Ezra and Nehemiah. But remember, for some reason the building stopped. What happened? What caused this stop? It wasn't a strike for wages or conditions!

It was in this time, that Zechariah brings God's word. It's a word to encourage and to motivate. Though you would never think so if you stopped at v2, 2 'The Lord was very angry with your ancestors! And rightly so. They were not faithful. They were so unfaithful they even made a deal, a treaty, with Egypt to try and keep them safe! Egypt! Did they not remember?! They cried out not to God, to Egypt! God had every right to be angry with the ancestors.

And that's why v3 is so surprising. Actually, it's unbelievable, God says, 'Return to me, and I will return to you.' It is not what I expected to read. Return to me. Not to my law, not to my way to life, but to Me (Joyce G Baldwin, 95). This should be hugely encouraging to us too! Here is evidence of God's open door. God doesn't close the door on us. It is us that closes the door on God. Here God says, return to me! What grace is this?! What undeserved favour! How long will this go on? That's a moot point. This is God, who is consistent.

This was a nation who had turned their back on God. Nations are made up of people, God is calling people back. You might be thinking of Revelation, there is that verse where God stands at the closed door and knocks (3:20), this is to the church in Laodicea. Not individual humans. Like nations, churches too can close the door on Jesus! Churches are made up of people. God says, return to me.

How does that look?

A couple of weeks ago Keep Feilding Beautiful were considering the annual Clean Up Week. It's happening in the first week of the September school holidays, 19-25th. What will be our promotion in Feilding this year? I suggested using the idea from our churches in 2019, when we walked each street of Feilding praying for the people on each street. We had a website with all the street names in red on it. When the street had been prayed for, we changed the street colour on the webpage from red to green. Over six weeks people every street in Feilding was turned green.

So something similar could be done for cleaning up rubbish.

But one of the people there asked, what did you pray for? A great question! Were we praying for people of the households we walked past to flood into our congregations the following Sunday morning? Was that it? Or were we praying that everyone would become Christians? Yes, probably.

But was that it? No! Our prayers were far more wide ranging;

We were praying for God's restoration, in relationships, in health, in work situations, drug dependency.

We were praying for light to come into dark and evil settings.

We were praying that Jesus would be known.

And we were praying for the health and wellbeing of the people in our town, spiritual health, social health, physical health, mental health.

This is how we pray isn't it?

If you analysed your prayers from the last week, doesn't this sum up how we pray?

This is the implication of these first six verses. God wants restoration. Return to Me. God is concerned about our well being and health. God brings light not darkness. So if that's what God wants, how am I praying?! How am I praying for those who have offended me? How am I praying for those who annoy me? How am I praying for those who are bringing pain to others?

Am I willing to be restored to those where our relationship has broken down? Well, if God is prepared to keep the door open to me, how is it right for me to close my door on others?

Chapter one continues, and from verse seven, we have the first of eight visions. The first vision continues with this theme of undeserved grace, that Jerusalem will be rebuilt.

14 Then the angel who was speaking to me said, 'Proclaim this word: this is what the Lord Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, 15 and I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they went too far with the punishment."

16 'Therefore this is what the Lord says: "I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem," declares the Lord Almighty.

What does it mean when God is very angry with the nations that feel secure? Another translation is that these nations are 'at ease'. For us to be secure or at ease means we're relying on our own strength and resources. To be secure in this sense is to be ignoring God. This is why God is angry.

But look at the character of God in v16, I will return with mercy. My house will be rebuilt, restored. This is the flavour of this book, this book of Zechariah. A minor prophet, but not too minor with 14 chapters. A book of hope.

So let's wrap up. In today's verses we are reminded that God's open door of mercy and grace is offered to us to return and find forgiveness and life. This is also a call to faithful consistency, maintaining God as King in our lives.

Benediction ~ written by John Birch (adapted)

A Call to Repentance

(inspired by Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4-6, Isaiah 40:3)

As streets fill with shoppers
Bright lights and tempting offers
Advertising jingles and children's laughter
You lead us along a different path
To a desert river and a Prophetic voice
A call to repentance
A call to service
A call to immerse ourselves
In living water that will never run dry
A call to prepare a way in our own lives
For the Saviour of the world to enter in
To know the touch of tender mercy
And rest in your forgiving love

For your faithful prophets
And your Living Word
We give you thanks. Amen