

Brought to Life

A sermon based on Ephesians 2:1-10

Sunday, August 2, 2026 - Summer Series

3rd Article - Part 1 - Conversion

On June 29, 2016, Stephen Brown was doing what so many of us do on an ordinary evening, sitting in his recliner, watching TV. Within minutes, his life changed completely. He collapsed without warning. No heartbeat. No breathing. His wife, Pat, found him slumped in his chair, eyes wide open, but non-responsive. And she found herself in a nightmare. She dialed 911 and started CPR on her husband of forty years.

The first police officer arrived four minutes later. That may not seem like long but, in a cardiac arrest, it seems like eternity. Soon, firefighters and paramedics joined in. They shocked Stephen six times. He flatlined three separate times. Each time, they fought to bring him back.

At one point, a firefighter asked the question no family ever wants to hear: "Are you ready to call it?" The lead paramedic answered firmly: "Not yet." Those two words became the hinge between death and life.

Clinically, Stephen was gone. For 42 minutes, he had no sustainable pulse. In medical terms, that's cardiac death. But through continuous chest compressions, medications, and sheer persistence, his rescuers kept oxygen flowing to his brain. And eventually Pat heard the words she had been praying to hear: "We've got a pulse." Stephen was alive!

In a much more spectacular way, God has done for each of us spiritually, what the paramedics did for Stephen Brown physically. Except, God didn't bring us *back* to life since by nature we never had life to begin with. God brought the dead to life.

Today we continue our series reviewing Luther's Small Catechism, particularly the Apostle's Creed. We've reviewed the work of God the Father in creating us and preserving us. We've reviewed the work of God the Son in redeeming us and ruling all things for our good. And now we move on to the work of God the Holy Spirit, who, by his gracious working in us through the Means of Grace, has brought us to life when we were spiritually dead. Our text for consideration today is Ephesians 2:1-10, which I affectionately call "The Great Zombie Chapter."

Paul begins this section, *"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."*

We were dead. Spiritually dead. Not wounded. Not in critical condition. Not flatlined for a few minutes. Dead as a doornail. Oh, we could go about our daily business, we could interact with one another, we could play the part. But like zombies that can move around, we were the walking dead. In fact, that's literally what the Greek says, *"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to [walk around.]"* Spiritually speaking we were the walking dead. Like zombies all we cared about was ourselves, consuming with no concern with who we hurt as long as we got what we wanted. (Sinfulness and selfishness are synonymous.)

It reminds me of a scene from the movie, 6th Sense. A psychiatrist is talking to a boy who claims, "I see dead people." The doctor follows up, "In your dreams?" The boy shakes his head "no." "While you're awake?" The boy nods "yes." The doctor is struggling to understand, "Dead people like, in graves? In coffins?" And the

boy says, "Walking around like regular people. They don't see each other. They only see what they want to see. They don't know they're dead." A fitting picture of unbelief and spiritual zombies, isn't it?

And this wasn't just those people out there. *"All of us also lived among them at one time..."* We proved it by our sin...

We were dead in transgressions, or as the King James Version put it, in trespasses. I like the KJV version because that's what a transgression is: trespassing; stepping across the line that says, "DO NOT CROSS!" We do that every time we do what is contrary to God's Word and God's will.

We were dead in our sins (amartia), that's the Greek word for trying to hit the target, but missing. I remember a vivid dream I once had. I had just purchased a bow for hunting and a target for practice. And in this dream I was practicing; shooting arrows at a target in my back yard. But the soccer field for our school was right behind the parsonage yard. And in my dream, I drew back the bow, aimed at the target, and let the arrow fly. But it missed the target and hit a Kindergartener playing in the soccer field. I killed him. I woke up in a sweat. But that's what amartia is about trying to do what is pleasing to God, but missing the mark. That's what we do every time we violate any of God's commands.

We proved our zombie status by the way we lived (and too often still do...). *"All of us also lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts."*

Here I think of the children's book, the Very Hungry Caterpillar. The caterpillar only takes a bite through each piece of fruit, not caring that he ruins the rest of it for everyone else. All he cares about is himself, greedily consuming what he wants and destroying the rest.

And there was nothing we could do about it. We followed the ways of this world. We followed the ruler of the kingdom of air; satan, whose influence surrounds this fallen world as invisibly as the air we breathe. And we couldn't raise ourselves from the dead any more than Lazarus could have climbed out of the grave on his own. When my unbelieving friends suggest that "Religion is a crutch for the weak!" I tell them, "No. You're way off! Christianity is a stretcher for the dead..." *"Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath."*

That's how we were (past tense). Paul goes on to turn everything upside down in a marvelous way with these two beautiful words, "But... God..."

"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."

This is one of Scriptures greatest reversals that highlights that salvation is entirely the work of God. When we were lifeless and powerless, God didn't leave us that way! He brought us to life! And not with chest compressions, oxygen masks, or a defibrillator, but with something far more powerful—with his love, his mercy, his grace—that love he has for you and me though we deserve none of it!

And he enacted that love, mercy and grace when he sent his sinless Son to be the perfect sacrifice for us. The sinless Son of God lived a blameless life, keeping every one of God's commandments in our place. The spotless lamb of God was slaughtered on a cross to pay for our guilt. And every one of our sins was placed on him. And all of our guilt was exchanged for his holiness.

There is nothing left for us to do to be saved from death and hell. There's nothing we can do because he did it all! Even the very faith that trust in his promises was given to us as a gift—something unearned. When we were dead in sin and incapable of faith, God made us alive! *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God..."*

Or, as Luther put it in his explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed: *"I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts... and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens... the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."*

We were once spiritually dead and bound to die forever in hell where, like the living dead, we could never fully die, but would keep on living in suffering and regret. But God acted. And we've been brought to life by the grace of God.

And this new life makes us different. After the very hungry caterpillar left his trail of destruction behind him chewing through most of the book, he entered his tomb of sorts (his chrysalis). And a few days later he was resurrected from that tomb as something new; a beautiful butterfly.

Likewise, we've been buried with Christ through faith in him. But we've been brought to life as our Spirit-given faith connects us to Jesus' resurrection and gives us a brand new, beautiful life; one that is lived for him in thanksgiving. As a result of having been saved by God's grace we are new people. *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

The word "handiwork" is "poiema" in the Greek. It's the word from which we get our English word "poem." We are God's masterpieces, finely crafted to do those works that bring him glory as he puts us on display.

So good works are necessary for the Christian. Now please don't mishear me. Good works are not necessary for salvation. Salvation has already been won. But those who trust in God's gracious promises can't help but respond with good works. You've heard the saying: "Faith alone saves, but saving faith is never alone." A living and active faith will, of necessity, produce good works.

Martin Luther put it this way: *"You don't have to teach a pear tree how to make pears. If it's a pear tree, that's just what it does."* Similarly a Christian with a sincere faith will produce the fruit of faith. That's just what he or she does. Good works don't earn God's favor. They express gratitude for the favor that is already ours in Christ.

And while those works may look ordinary: changing diapers, caring for aging parents, doing honest work, forgiving a spouse, encouraging a discouraged friend, serving faithfully in one's congregation, showing patience with difficult coworkers... these are all beautiful ways to serve God when they're done out of gratitude for the way he first served us: creating us and preserving us, redeeming us and ruling all things for our good, and bringing us to faith and sustaining that faith.

For Stephen Brown surviving a triple flatline wasn't just about returning to life as usual. It was about coming back with a new outlook on life. In his book, "Are You Ready to Call It?" Brown talks about how he changed after surviving. Survival reshaped his priorities. He focused more on what mattered most. He was filled with more gratitude for "ordinary" days. He didn't take his relationships with family and friends for granted. He stopped putting off meaningful conversations. In other words, flatline survival didn't just return his heartbeat. It rewrote the way he looked at every day.

In a similar way, when we remember that we weren't just flatlining spiritually, we were dead and lifeless, bound to face God's wrath for an eternity of death in hell... Until God stepped in and brought us to life, not by our efforts or our decision, but by his grace, through the work of the Holy Spirit... It changes the way we look at life every day! Each day is a gift of God, filled with opportunities to express our gratitude, to do good works pleasing to our Father in heaven, to help and serve our neighbor.

For we have been brought to life! Now let's get busy living! In Jesus' name, amen.