

From Death Valley to the Heights of Heavenly Grace (Ephesians 2:5-6)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on March 27, 2011

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If you were to get to highway 395 and drive several hours south you'll come to Death Valley, in southeastern California, the lowest spot in North America at nearly 300 feet below sea level and the driest and hottest place in the country. Over one 3-year period once it got only a half inch of rain total over 40 months. One summer, the daytime air temperature Death Valley was a record 134 degrees in the shade, highest reliably reported temperature in the western hemisphere in the 20th century, just shy of the world record! The ground temperature has been recorded at over 200 degrees on the valley floor, and the official National Parks website calls it the "harshest desert...hottest driest place...extreme." Summer nights do drop the air temperature to the 90-100 range (as my Arizona friends and family say, "but it's a dry heat"?!). Death Valley day temps have been recorded over 120 for over 6 weeks straight! It is no wonder this lifeless barren bottom of US is called Death Valley.

Just 80 miles NW from that lowest spot in North America is the highest spot in the continental US, Mt Whitney (about 15,000 feet elevation, nearly 3 miles high). Kent Hughes, pastor of College Church in IL once hiked with a youth group to the top of Mount Whitney, and he shared how it's possible to actually go from Death Valley to the top of Mt Whitney in the same day, as some have. He writes of his mountain-top experience in an Ephesians commentary

'We exulted over the wonderful panorama of the Sierra Nevadas and the Mojave Desert. What a spot, with its rarified, crystal-clear air, its indigo and turquoise lakes – vista giving way to vista as far as one could see ... What a contrast! One place is the top of the world, the other the bottom. One place is perpetually cool, the other relentlessly hot. From Mt. Whitney you look down on all of life. From Death Valley [there's not much life to look at down there and] you can only look up to the rest of the world.

In Ephesians 2 Paul takes us down to the Death Valley of the Soul (vv. 1-3) and then up to the "heavenly realms in Jesus Christ" (vv. 4-7). His method is contrast: from death to life, from Hell to Heaven, from bondage to freedom, from pessimism to optimism. The journey's contrast will enhance our appreciation for what we have in Christ and will influence the way we live.

Paul begins at the very bottom of Death Valley: [Eph. 2:1] "*And you were dead in your transgressions and sins*" ...

... *all humanity*, from top to bottom. All people are dead apart from Christ [spiritually dead, as we saw before, no response, or no positive movement to God, to quote Romans 3 again, "*no one does good ... no one seeks God*"] ... in the area that matters most, the soul, they have no life. They are blind to the reality, demands, and glory of Christ – and they do not love him. They are as deaf to the Holy Spirit as a corpse [in fact, the Greek word in Eph. 2:1 we saw a couple weeks back is also translated "corpse" in other passages. Spiritually Hughes says] without Christ [all] are in Death Valley ... Everyone without Christ is dead. Most people do not want to hear this today, and many pulpits are silent about this doctrine. But it is a crucial truth ... A view of the Death Valley of the Soul is necessary for a proper view of the heavenlies [He resurrects us to]¹

The prophet Ezekiel was given a view of such a valley (Ezek. 37): *the Spirit of the LORD set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.* ² *He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.*

³ *He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."* ⁴ *Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!'* ⁵ *This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life (NIV)*

The same Sovereign LORD in this God-breathed living Word that we read today, the same Sovereign LORD whose very breath created the heavens out of nothing (Ps 33:6), created light and life where there was none, created Adam from dry dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and Adam came to life physically and spiritually, the same Sovereign LORD who uses the same language for His people Israel though dead spiritually as a result of Adam's sin, *but God* will make them alive – the same Sovereign LORD in His God-breathed Word in Eph 2 says all of His redeemed, Jew or Gentile, were lifeless, spiritually dead in our sins, *but God* made us alive with our resurrected Sovereign LORD.

Title: From Death Valley to the Heights of Heavenly Grace

2:5 *even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ...*

1. Our Resurrection by Christ (v. 5-6a)

If you are in Christ, God brought you from spiritual Death Valley to the highest heights spiritually, all in one day. From the deepest darkest valley of death to brightest highest glory, from the lowest place to the highest place in the universe, far beyond Mt. Whitney to the peak of the presence of an exalted Christ, from deepest sin to the heights of grace! From earth to heaven, from the tomb to God's throne, from the grave to the sky, Lord we lift your name on high!

Context is always important, and we need to remember there were no chapter breaks when Paul wrote this letter to this church, and we need to also remember v. 5-6 are part of 1 sentence that began in v. 1 which is part of an earlier context. 2:1: *And you were dead*

The first word of v. 1 isn't *but* (contrast to what Paul has just said at the end of chapter 1). It's *and* (a continuation of his argument):

1:20 *which he brought about in Christ when He **raised Him from the dead** and **seated Him** at His right hand in the **heavenly places***

2:1 *And you were dead...*[obviously not physically, but spiritually]

⁵ ***when we were dead** in our transgressions, [God] **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved)⁶ and **raised us up with him** and **seated us with him** in the heavenly places*

...

Do you see the perfect parallel with 1:20, physically to spiritually?

- In 1:20, Christ was dead; 2:1 says *And you were dead* (spiritually).
- In 1:20, God raised up Christ; in 2:6 God *raised us up with him*. Same resurrection power!
- In 1:20, God seated Jesus in heavenly places; in 2:6 it says God *seated us with him in the heavenly places*

Same Grk phrases, same power, same actions God did for Christ physically when He was in the grave, He did for us spiritually in our spiritual death. We were just as much in need of being raised. It was no small thing for us to become believers, it took the mighty miraculous resurrecting power of Almighty God to make us alive. If you've never seen that before, Paul would pray you see it today:

1:18 *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be **enlightened so that you will know** what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ **and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.***

See, we didn't become believers by great power or ability in us, it was God's great power *to us*. This is not something every believer sees so Paul prays the eyes of our heart would be opened to see the greatness of God's power toward us. In v. 20 Paul goes on to give the first, foremost example of the immeasurable infinite invincible power of God to believers. He talks about *resurrection power* in v. 20 and Paul comes back to that very same language in chapter 2. The very same power that raised the Lord Jesus from a state of very real death, 3 days in the tomb, that very same power was manifested *toward us* raising us who were equally dead spiritually and not just for 3 days but a lifetime of being spiritually entombed.

Paul prays that we would have eyes opened to see the greatness of God's power necessary to overcome the greatness of our deadness, our spiritual lifelessness. We had no power, *but God* had the power to awaken us from what the Bible calls the sleep of death, to raise us to life, to resurrect us to the light of the gospel from Christ on us

Ephesians 5:14 '... it says, "**Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.**" [or NKJV "give you light"]

How can you call dead people to rise from the dead? Corpses don't hear. Cadavers don't see or sit up or get up. This isn't preaching to the choir, this is preaching to the crypt! It's not teaching seminary, it's preaching to the cemetery! This isn't like mom calling kids on *the playground* because they've got an 'owee' and they need to get a band-aid, the gospel is the call *of God to a burial ground to those who are dead but God* can awaken and resurrect them to life! See, I wasn't just *in a mess* spiritually; I was *in a morgue* spiritually!

In Matthew 19 the disciples asked Jesus "*who can be saved?*" The answer: "*with man, this is impossible ... but not with God.*" With God all things are possible, including salvation, making dead alive.

The gospel calls sinners to rise from the dead, and it is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation, when accompanied by the Holy Spirit's quickening/awakening, the outward call of the gospel becomes an *inward* call or *effectual* call, regenerating/resurrecting.

The Lord has power to create what He commands (like Gen. 1): 2 Cor. 4:6 (NKJV) *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Rom 4:17 says Abraham was saved by faith in God "*who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.*"

Believer, do you understand the power of God in bringing you to salvation? The same power that commanded in Genesis "*let there be light*" was needed for the light of Christ to reach our dark heart. The same power that creates out of nothing gave life to our soul.

Turn to Luke 7, and let's look at real-life examples in the gospels of this power on display, the power of the Lord to command and cause or create what He commands. God in human flesh, Jesus, displayed His power in many ways in so many different miracles:

- creating or restoring flesh of men with withered limbs that couldn't move, healing them so they could instantly move
- taking paralyzed men who had never walked and making them instantly able to walk and to even jump up for joy
- causing those who had never seen, to see Jesus instantly
- causing those who had never heard, to suddenly hear Him
- causing those who could not speak, to then speak to Jesus
- completely immediately healing all inabilities / disabilities

His most powerful physical miracle of all, though is resurrection. I don't know if you ever thought of it in these terms, but resurrection is really a culmination and combination of all the other miracles at the same time: not only giving life and breath, but giving sight to eyes that would never see otherwise, making deaf ears able to hear Jesus, causing mute mouths to now speak to Jesus, giving power to withered and dead flesh, giving strength to dead hands, limbs and legs so the whole body immediately completely is alive and well!

Lk 7:12 *as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.* ¹³*When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep."* ¹⁴*And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!"* ¹⁵*The dead man sat up and began to speak.*

That command "arise" is the same Greek word in Eph. 5:14. The boy didn't know what happened to him and as far as we know had never seen Jesus before, but when the Lord gives an effectual call (effectual = causing or creating at same time what is commanded) the coffin opens up and the boy sits up and starts talking with Jesus who he couldn't see before, speak to before, now he can and does!

8:49 While He was still speaking, someone came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, “Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore.” [But in v. 54 Jesus goes in to her]

... ⁵⁴He, however, took her by the hand and **called**, saying, “**Child, arise!**” ⁵⁵And her spirit returned, and **she got up immediately**; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat. In both of those passages, that command “rise/arise” is the same Greek word in Eph. 5:14: “awake...arise from the dead.” The same term *dead* from Eph. 2, God’s same resurrecting power in 2:5-6.

John 11:35 *Jesus wept.* ³⁶So the Jews were saying, “See how He loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “**Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?**” ³⁸So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, “**Remove the stone.**” Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.” ... [I like the old KJV here “he stinketh”!]

⁴³When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “**Lazarus, come forth.**” ⁴⁴The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “**Unbind him, and let him go.**”

What a powerful picture of the Lord’s resurrection power! When Lazarus was in the tomb, total darkness, sealed by a stone, bound like a mummy, dead for 4 days, behold how he stinketh! *But God* when Lazarus was dead made Lazarus alive! Eph. 2 says “*and you were dead ... but God ... even when we were dead made us alive*”!

We sang a couple weeks ago Wesley’s hymn “And Can it Be?”

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
Amazing love, how can it be! ...

John 5:21 “*For just as the Father **raises the dead and gives them life**, even so the Son also **gives life to whom He wishes**.* [all those Grk terms are used in Eph. 2:5-6: *dead, raises, gives life/quicken*s]

Notice it’s to whoever the Son wishes to give life. He didn’t give life to everyone. He didn’t open every coffin or casket in Israel or go to every tomb in Palestine, but He did raise a few physically, and He raises *many* spiritually to life as He wishes. Why did God give me life? I don’t know. I do know I wasn’t less dead and didn’t stink less than others, I probably stunk more, *but God* had mercy?!

²⁵“**Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is** [this is not the final resurrection at end of time, Jesus says “now”], **when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.** [this isn’t physical resurrection, look back at v. 24]

... ²⁴ “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has **eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but *has passed out of death into life.*** [and then the next verse explains now is the time when the dead who hear come alive]

Eternal life does not begin after we die physically, it begins in this life. It never ends! Jesus says believers “*have eternal life*” (present tense) and “*have passed from death to life*” (now, not will in the future). When the Son gives life spiritually, it’s permanent. When the Lord speaks so the spiritually dead hear, they not only pass from death to life at that moment, this life is eternal, unending!

11:23 *Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”*²⁴ *Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”*²⁵ *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,*²⁶ *and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”*²⁷ *She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed ...”*

The bigger point of chapter 11 is spiritual life not physical life. Let me ask, have you believed? Do you believe this Jesus? Have you passed from death to life? If you don’t have His life in you, if you are still dead to spiritual things, deaf to God’s call to holiness, blind to the glory and beauty of Jesus, bound by your sins, now is the time to hear His voice, today is the day of salvation. *Rise from the dead*, Eph. 5:14 says. Jesus says *arise, come forth, Lazarus!*

Believe you’re as dead and hopeless as Eph 2 says, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the way, truth, and life eternally. Believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from physical death, and you can be raised from spiritual death to spiritual life the same day you confess Jesus as Lord. That title “Lord” means you’re His slave; He owns you, He bought you, you’re not your own, He’s in charge, so when He commands “*Repent, follow me,*” it’s not a suggestion. He’s not an accessory you add to your life, He is your life now. If and when you truly believe who He truly is, you truly have eternal life and have passed from death valley to life with Christ forever.

George Whitefield, in an evangelistic sermon to unsaved:

‘Come, ye dead, Christless, unconverted sinners, come and see the place where they laid the body of the deceased Lazarus; behold him laid out, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, locked up and stinking in a dark cave, with a great stone placed on the top of it!

View him again and again; go nearer to him; be not afraid; smell him, ah! How he stinketh. Stop there now, pause a while; and whilst thou art gazing upon the corpse of Lazarus, give me leave to tell thee with great plainness, but greater love, that this dead, bound, entombed, stinking carcass, is but a faint representation of thy poor soul in its natural state: for, whether thou believest it or not, thy spirit which thou bearest about with thee, sepulchered in flesh and blood, is as literally dead to God, and as truly dead in trespasses and sins, as the body of Lazarus was in the cave. Was he bound hand and foot with grave-clothes? So art thou bound hand and foot with thy corruptions: and as a stone was laid on the sepulcher, so is there a stone of unbelief upon thy stupid heart.

Perhaps thou hast lain in this state, not only 4 days, but many years, stinking in God’s nostrils. And; what is still more affecting, thou art as unable to raise thyself out of this loathsome, dead state, to a life of righteousness and true holiness, as ever Lazarus was to raise himself from the cave in which he lay so long. Thou mayest try the power of thy own boasted free-will, and the force and energy of moral persuasion and rational arguments (which, without all doubt, have their proper place in religion); but all thy efforts, exerted with never so much vigor, will prove quite fruitless and abortive, till that same Jesus, who said, “Take away the

stone,” and cried, “Lazarus, come forth,” comes by his mighty power, removes the stone of unbelief, speaks life to thy dead soul, looses thee from the [bonds] of thy sins and corruptions, and by the influences of his blessed Spirit, enables thee to arise, and to walk in the way of his holy commandments. And O that he would now rend the heavens, and come down amongst you! O that there may be a stirring among the dry bones this day! O that whilst I am speaking, and saying, “Dead sinners, come forth,” a power, an almighty power might accompany the word, and cause you to emerge into new life!’²

How do we know if we have new life? We respond to the Lord. In each of those resurrections, the person responded. The boy speaks to the Lord, the girl eats with Him, Lazarus wants to be with Him: **12:2** *So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.*

Now turn back to Eph 2. Lazarus was dead, but the Lord made him alive, raised him up, and seated him with Him in close fellowship.

Ephesians 2:5 *even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together **with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up **with Him**, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ...*

#1. Our Resurrection by Christ, to #2. Our Position with Christ

Did you notice the phrase “*with Him*” in John 12 and here 3x? Lazarus was *with Him* in a special way after the Lord raised him up, he got to speak to Him, eat with Him, be with Him, he wanted the seat next to Him, to recline with Him (and John the writer of this gospel knew that special position, John sat closest to Jesus at the last supper, reclining against the chest of Jesus, near His heart). We get to enjoy that same fellowship in the spiritual realm as well! Not physically, but spiritually and positionally, we’re with Christ.

This is one of the most amazing statements in the Bible: God has seated us *with Christ* where Christ is now. This isn’t not yet, this is now in a real sense. God resurrected His Son Jesus from the dead and raised Jesus up to heaven and seated Jesus in the heavenlies. He also made us alive when we were dead, raised us up, and also seated us with His beloved Son in the heavenlies with Him, sharing the same intimacy and inheritance with His adopted sons/daughters

At the end of chapter 5, Paul will explain we are not only *part of Christ*, or *members of His body*, but it says we are “*one*” *with Him* in an even deeper way than a husband and wife can become one flesh, Paul says this is a profound mystery: Christ and His church. I am inseparably eternally linked to the bridegroom, I am counted *in Him* from God’s perspective, “my life is hid *with Christ* on high.”

Because I’m united *with Christ*, though it’s somewhat mysterious, I can say with Paul in Romans 6 I was “*crucified with Him ... dead with Him ... buried with Him ... united with Him...in the likeness of His resurrection ... raised with Him ... baptized with Him ... we shall also live with Him...*” (you can study that later in Rom 6:4-8)

In Eph. 2:5-6, *with Him / Christ*’ is used 3x (Grk prefix *sun/syn* for *together*). We’re made alive together with Him, raised together with Him, and seated together with Him, in vital union *with Christ* by grace as God counts us united with/to/in Him. We weren’t *with Him* like a tour guide showing us a few neat things along the trail.

No, we were in Death Valley, after taking our own trail, but God picked us up off the valley floor *when we were dead, made us alive*. Christ carried us with Him on His shoulders, that’s how we came to be “*with Him*,” Lk 15 explains, with same terms dead and alive, saying we were lost and then found, from valley depths to the heights of heaven and a great celebration, Jesus said there

I was once an enemy, now seated at His table like Mephibosheth.

I was once a son of disobedience, like the end of v. 2 says.

I was once a child of wrath, like the end of v. 3 says ... *But God* has made me His child, *but God* adopted me into His family, *but God* seated me at His table and treats me like a son of the King!

In a book that just came out this month, *Reclaiming Adoption*, by John Piper, Rick Phillips, Dan Cruver, etc., one chapter begins: ‘Of all the magnificent riches of the gospel, none is more to be treasured and pondered than our adoption in Christ. When the Father lavished his love upon us and made us his children, we weren’t just street-wandering orphans looking for a good meal and a warm bed. We were self-absorbed slaves to sin...we weren’t in the orphanage of loneliness; we were in the morgue of hopelessness ...[but God raised and adopted us and seats us in the same privilege position with Christ as] beloved children of God. We begin the journey standing at the base of the Swiss Alps of the gospel, with a tiny spoon and a little sand bucket, trying to take it all in ... It will take the second coming of Jesus for us to finally and fully “get” the utter wonder of our adoption. But until then, the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work in our hearts to increase our understanding and deepen our experience of the privileges ...

Our objective status as adopted children should lead us to ... experiential wonder, as we saturate ourselves and marinate in these great truths of how much God loves us. Our legal rights are intended to become personal delights. Adoption is not just a great doctrine to be intellectually understood ... It’s meant to rock our world, to move us to “palm up” adoration and worship of such a God who would love such a people like you and me. The objective reality of our adoption should generate within us an unspeakable joy – one that brings much glory to God ... as we come alive to the radical implications of our adoption, we begin to live a whole new life. Such lavish love propels us into godly living. The indicatives of our adoption lead to the imperatives of transformation [Eph. 1-3, 4-6]. Only the gospel gives us the motivation and power to please God from the heart – to offer our Father the obedience of faith and love [that’s why Eph. 2:8-9 is followed by Eph. 2:10. The gospel is to empower everyday obedience as we walk the Christian life]. Only gospel astonishment will lead to gospel transformation ... we must continually preach the gospel to our hearts and to one another. Only in the assurance of God’s love for us as Abba will we surrender all the chaos, weariness, brokenness, and longings of our hearts to him.’³

I was in death valley *without Him*, but now *with Him*, Ps 23 says, as I walk through the valley of death, I fear not for I’m *with Him*. He raises me up from that valley *with Him*, lifts me up, brings me from there up to a plateau where He prepares a table for me and He seats me *with Him* as v. 6 says, with cup-running-over grace, and the fellowship begun now never ends, in the house of Lord forever!

Like Rev. 3:20 fellowship “*I will dine **with Him** and He with Me.*”

I said last week my favorite 2 words in the Bible were “*But God.*” I changed my mind. My new favorite 2 words: “*with Him/Christ*”

Rom 8:17 say we’re “*heirs **with Christ** ... glorified **with Him.***”
v. 32b “*how will He not also **with Him** freely give us all things?*”

Revelation 17:14 promises “*the Lamb will overcome ... and those who are **with Him** are the called and chosen and faithful.*”

2 Tim 2:12 “*If we endure with Him, we will also reign **with Him***”

Paul explains in Phil. 3:20 that we’re citizens of heaven even now. There is a now and not yet. The heavenly should affect the earthly. This is our position in Christ, we need to live like it, think like it!

Colossians 3:1 *Therefore **if you have been raised up with Christ**, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* ² **Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.** ³ *For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

Steven Curtis Chapman put these truths to song this way:

You have saved me, **You have raised me from the grave**
And I am speechless in Your presence now I'm astounded as I consider how
You have shown us A love that leaves us speechless
We stand in awe of Your love We stand in awe of Your mercy
Oh, how great is the love The Father has lavished upon us
That we should be called The sons and the daughters of God

¹ Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*, p. 65.

² George Whitefield, “The Resurrection of Lazarus,” <http://www.biblebb.com/files/whitefield/GW039.htm>

³ Scotty Smith, *Reclaiming Adoption* (Cruciform Press, 2011), p. 69-80.