

FROM RAGS TO RICHES EPHESIANS 2:1-7

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Guy Laliberte' began his circus career on the streets of Quebec. He lived off the handouts of bystanders. He played the accordion, walked on stilts, even swallowed fire. He eventually gathered a troupe of performers.

In 1987 he and his friends risked the little money they had to perform in the Los Angeles Arts Festival.

Laliberte' bought a one-way ticket to LA. There was no going back... *But he never needed the return ticket.* His troupe was a hit, and they moved to Las Vegas.

Today, they're known as Cirque Du Soleil. Guy is the CEO. And it's estimated his net-worth is \$2.5 billion.

Ursula Burns was born to a single mom, and lived in a New York City housing project. Her mother ran a daycare center out of her home, and ironed shirts, to make enough money to send Ursula to private school.

Eventually she graduated from NYU, and was hired as an intern at Xerox. Today, Ursula Burns is the CEO of that same company. She's the first African-American woman to be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

Leonardo Del Vecchio was one of five kids that his widowed mother couldn't support. He was sent to live in an orphanage. Del Vecchio went to work in a factory making molds for auto parts and eyeglass frames.

He even lost the tip of his index finger in an accident. At age 23, Del Vecchio opened his own molding shop.

Today, that shop has become the world's largest maker of prescription eye-wear and sunglasses. Ray-Bans and Oakleys are made by the former orphan.

Del Vecchio's net worth is around \$10 billion.

Don't you love a rags to riches story!

The shoe shine kid works hard, saves his money, capitalizes on a big break - ends up a huge success.

But with all due respect to Guy Laliberte', and Ursula Burns, and Leonardo Del Vecchio - the greatest rags to riches story is YOURS! Spiritually speaking you've gone from rags to riches! You started out a pauper - an orphan - on the streets - *and look at you now...* you're a child of the King - you sit in heavenly places in Christ!

This is what we find in Chapter 2 - *your story, my story, every Christian's story*. It's a rags to riches story!

Paul compares *what we were on our own* with *what we've become in Christ*. And the contrast is far more dramatic than any of the stories I told you earlier...

Look at Paul's words in verse 1, "**And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...**" Rather than just *rags to riches* - our story is *death to life!*

Paul begins chapter 2 with a flashback. He describes our lifestyle before we gave our lives to Jesus. He talks about our "**B.C. Days**" - the life we lived "**before Christ.**"

And he does so not to condemn us, but to illustrate just how far we've come now that we're in Christ!

Realize there are two ways to measure a Christian's spiritual progress... First, you can compare where I am now - with where I need to be... (*that can be downright depressing*). But you also can compare where I am now - with where I once was... (*and that's far more encouraging than you might've first thought*). For with us, God splashed His light onto a very dark canvas...

Using the words of a popular song, Paul could've prefaced verse 1, "**Yeah, yeah, oh yeah, I just dropped in to see what condition my condition was in...**"

And Paul's condition - in fact, every man and woman's condition - is dire, it's grim. We weren't just ignorant, or maladjusted, or immature, or even sick...

We were dead! Verse 1 informs us, "**And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...**"

Not physically of course, but spiritually speaking we were *dead!* Even in inflationary times, the wages of sin remain the same - it's always death. Sin causes death.

When God created the first man, Adam, He did so with three components: **body**, **mind**, and **spirit**.

With **his body** Adam related to the world around him.

With **his mind** he had the ability to relate to himself.

But with **his spirit** he could relate to God.

Yet when Adam sinned the Bible says he died.

His body didn't die - he still had a pulse, his lungs pumped, his brainwaves still registered. The part of Adam that died was his spirit. He became dead to God.

In the 1960s radical atheists trumpeted the notion, "**God is dead.**" And it might've seemed that way to them. But God isn't dead, man is the one who's dead.

The spiritual part of our personhood is dead to God.

In essence, death is **separation**. When our body dies our spirit departs - or separates from our body.

James 2:26 provides an interesting definition for death, "**The body without the spirit is dead...**" This may not be a clinical definition. There's no device where you can connect leads to a body and detect the departure of the spirit. But this is a very accurate definition.

And just as the human body without the human spirit is dead - likewise, the spirit without God is also dead.

Listen to Isaiah 59:2, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear...”

Sin causes spiritual death, and spiritual death is separation from God... The spirit of a person apart from God can be swayed by temptation. It can be motivated by evil and demons. Unlike a dead body, a dead spirit remains impressionable. It can be influenced by all kinds of persuasion - *except God*.

Think of our culture’s current fascination with zombies. Sixteen million Americans tune in each week to catch the latest episode of “[The Walking Dead](#).” *The top-rated cable series of all time features zombies.*

But all you have to do to find zombie-like creatures is go to a school, or the office, or a market. A zombie is an animated corpse. It functions, but it’s dead inside.

That’s a fitting description of a person without Christ.

Folks lost in their sin are walking, talking corpses - *zombie-like*. 1 Timothy 5:6 speaks of a lady “(who’s) dead while she lives.” She exists, but she’s dead.

She responds to external stimulus, but inwardly she’s unaware of her higher calling, and moral duty.

Most people have even seared their conscience, and silenced the image of God embedded in them.

A person without God is not all he or she is suppose to be. They're certainly not all God made them to be.

A person "*dead in trespasses and sins*" is like a car with a fouled-out spark plug. They're not running on all cylinders. They consist of *body* and *soul*, but their *spirit* is dead. They're two-thirds of the human God created.

No wonder life is such a struggle. "*Lost*" is a fitting description. It was said of Christopher Columbus, "*He didn't know where he was going when he started. When he got there he didn't know where he was, and when he got back he didn't know where he had been.*" And this is true of the person separated from God.

Life without God is full of never ending frustration.

Robert Orben puts it, "*Do you ever get the feeling that life is a violin solo and you're wearing mittens?*"

You put your hands on the frets, but can't distinguish what notes to play. Life is confusing and chaotic.

This is the person "*dead in trespasses and sins.*"

Keep in mind the difference between **decay** and **death**. *There are no degrees to death*. You're either dead or alive - there's no middle ground. It's like being pregnant. You're not half-pregnant, or almost-pregnant. You're pregnant or not. The same is truth with death.

Some dead people are not more dead than other dead people. If you're dead, you're fully, 100% dead.

Whereas, **decay** is progressive and incremental. All dead folks are dead, but they *decay* at different rates.

And as a result folks emit different odors. All sinners are spiritually dead, but some are bigger stinkers.

It reminds me of a famous musical composer. It was said that after he died he spent his time *de-composing*.

Some sinners keep up a cordial, sweet, respectable facade - whereas others dive headfirst into perversion.

The sophisticated socialite might not stoop to the same evil acts as *the demented deviant* - but both the *sweetheart* and the *hard-heart* are every bit as dead.

The world we live in is a giant graveyard of walking, breathing spiritual stiffs. And this leaves people vulnerable to spiritual manipulation. Verse 2 tells us, “**In which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience..**”

Notice the two scavengers that take a bite out of the spiritually dead - “*the course of this world*” and “*the prince of the power of the air*” or Satan himself.

According to Paul, Satan controls the airwaves. His domain is the atmosphere. I believe he uses the media to manipulate our values, and indoctrinate us with evil.

The world and the devil swoop in like vultures on a roadside carcass, and consume the people separated from God. Folks who are dead have no defense.

“*The course of this world*” are ungodly values. It’s a false perspective that permeates *all cultures in all ages*. We’re so inoculated to “*this world*” most people are blind to its influence before we come to Christ.

As one man confessed, “My sin was all the more incurable since I didn’t think of myself as a sinner.”

According to 1John 2:16 three attitudes make up “*the course of this world.*” “All that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.” *Worldliness* is an ungodly way to **feel great - look great - be great.**

As John says it’s a lifestyle “*not of the Father.*”

“The lust of the flesh” is the belief that **feeling great** is found in *physical pleasures* rather than *spiritual joys*.

“The lust of the eyes” measures **looking great** solely by outward beauty - *appearance* rather than *character*.

And “the pride of life” assumes **being great** is making a splash in *this world*, rather than living for *eternity*.

Sadly, this is what makes the world-go-round - **physical pleasure, outward beauty, immediate fame.**

In contrast godliness is all about **spiritual joy**, and **inward beauty**, and **eternal impact**. The world and devil suck us into a false way of evaluating and living life.

People who are **separated from God**, are easily **seduced by the world** and **snared by Satan**. Paul refers to the devil as *“the spirit who... works in the sons of disobedience...”* Satan knows how to play us.

Satan uses the ways of this world to draw us into a superficial lifestyle. A life that's all pop and fizzle - and very little substance. He creates hollow people.

Folks lack integrity and dignity - they're unable to keep a commitment. Like the Tin Man they lack heart.

Haggai 1:6 depicts the life we once lived without God, *“You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourself, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.”* People live to satisfy physical pleasures - *food, drink, clothes* - but it's never enough.

Haggai says it's like going shopping with a bottomless shopping bag. You stuff the bag, and stuff the bag - but at the end of the day - after you've checked out - you come to realize you threw away your resources, and have nothing to show for your efforts.

I'll never forget the Time Magazine article that summed up the decade of the 90s. *“Anything goes, but nothing lasts.”* This is still the life Satan engineers. He sends people on a wild goose chase, *without a goose*.

We were **separated** from God by sin. We were **seduced** by the world and **snared** by Satan. *But it gets worse... **sin stained us at the core of who we were.***

Verse 3 adds to our demise, “Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others...”

The Greek work translated “*sins*” in verse 1 is “*harmatia*” or “to miss the mark.” Think of missing a kick... “wide right” - or turning the ball over on downs.

“*Harmatia*” is to fall short of God’s standards - to end up less than what God intended us to be. It’s a term related to archery. It means to miss the bull’s eye.

But that’s only part of our problem. We’re also “*by nature children of wrath.*” Our sin - our tendency to err isn’t an occasional miss. It’s more serious - *our aim is off*. Sin warps us. We can’t even shoot straight.

Our modern world believes that man is good. At times we slip up and do evil, but we’re good at heart.

Yet the Bible teaches just the opposite. On occasion we slip up and do good, but our basic nature is evil.

Our tendency, our natural inclination, is to be selfish, proud, rebellious. “Your sin doesn’t make you a sinner. You’re a sinner, so you sin.” It’s man’s nature to sin.

Once a preacher advertised his sermon title, “Why your dog does what he does.” His premise was simple.

A dog acts like a dog, because he’s a dog. It’s his nature. And this is why we sinned. It’s what we were.

We shouldn’t be shocked when we hear about an increase in violence or some new perversity among folks without Christ. They’re only being what they are.

I heard of a pastor who mentioned in his sermon there are 726 specific sins. Afterwards, he was besieged with requests from people who wanted a copy of his list. It's our nature that draws us toward sin.

So let me sum it up. Here's what we were before we came to Jesus... How about zombie-like creatures, trying to *feel and look and be great* by stuffing stuff in a shopping bag that has a hole in the bottom. And as foolishly as we were acting, we couldn't do any better, since we were only being true to what we really were.

We were **separated** from God - and **seduced** by the world - and **snared** by Satan - and **stained** by sin...

We were trapped in a life of futility and failure.

I've heard it said, "The most deceptive trait about the chains of sin is that they're too light to be felt, until they're too strong to be broken." Before we came to Christ we had no idea sin had such a vice-grip on us.

Ultimately, the person who is *ruled by sin*, will be the person who is *ruined by sin*. And this was our plight...

By the end of verse 3 all hope seems lost.

That's why Ephesians 2:4 is perhaps the most beautiful verse in all the Bible. It begins, "**But God...**"

Here're the two most stunning words in all the Bible.

Think of a the wagon train pinned down, under attack by Comanches on the war-path - when suddenly you hear a bugle, and the cavalry comes over the hill.

Or think of the bases loaded with a one-run lead, and you're starting pitcher is out of steam. But there he is - the un-hittable reliever jogging in from the bullpen.

Help is on its way!

This is the tone of verse 4, “**but God**” - turn it around to get the better sense - “**God butted in.**” We were partying on a sinking ship - without the first thought of God - but He loved us enough to crash our party.

“**But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...**” It's been said, “**Justice is getting what we deserve. Grace is getting what we don't deserve. But mercy is not getting what we do deserve.**” And God is lavish in giving out of mercy.

God is rich in multiple ways. The Bible says He owns cattle on a thousand hills. He has such an abundance of gold he uses it as asphalt to pave heaven's streets.

But we should be glad God is rich in what we need most - “**mercy!**” He's “**the God of the second chance!**”

I've heard it said, “**God's throne is not made of marble, but mercy!**” This is why He calls it “**the mercy seat.**” Sinners bow at God's feet only to find mercy!

An old man was on his deathbed. His family had gathered around him one last time. Someone commented, “**Dad, is going to heaven to receive his reward.**” The old man heard it, and perked up. He shouted, “**No I'm not. I'm going to receive mercy!**”

Only a fool wants what's coming to him - what he deserves. Hey, I want mercy - / *need* lots of mercy!

Even though we did nothing to warrant it - or initiate it - God stepped in. God didn't stand back until he saw potential in us - until it looked as if we might finally come around to love and worship and serve Him.

To the contrary, God took the risk of being rejected.

He reached out to us at our lowest point and most desperate hour. While we were "*dead in trespasses and sins*" - while we were *separated*, and *seduced*, and *snared*, and *stained*, God stepped in to show us mercy.

Long before you ever thought of cleaning up your act, Jesus paid the price to forgive you of your sins.

Why is it humans have such a difficult time initiating love? As kids we developed a crush on one another, and wrote notes to our potential sweetheart, "*Do you love me? Check Yes, No, Maybe.*" I don't want to reveal my love, until I'm sure the other person loves me. It's the fear of rejection - of my love being spurned.

Yet God has no such fear. Jesus hung on the cross.

He held nothing back. In naked love Jesus hung there. In essence He was saying, "*I love you enough to die for you, whether you ever return my love or not.*"

In short, this kind of *strong love* is called "*mercy.*"

Verse 5 continues to roll out the richness of God's mercy, "*Even when we were dead in trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have*

been saved)...” When God butted in He performed an operation. Rather than mess around and treat the symptoms of sin, Doctor God went straight for the cure.

He signed you up for a Divine transplant. He placed *His Holy Spirit within your hollow spirit*. He made alive what was dead. A spiritual resurrection occurred in you.

Here’s where I prefer the OKJ word, “quicken.”

God sparked new life in you. He put the paddles of the Holy Spirit on your chest, and jolted you to life. You who were dead in trespasses, He made alive in Christ.

Because of sin the spirit of man is separated from God... Imagine your house in a power outage. It’s been 24 hours. The house is dark, cold - eery, dreary.

Then frumph! Somewhere down the line a repairman hits the switch, and power comes surging back into the cold wires - *the furnace roars back to life - your house lights up like a Christmas tree - the appliances all chirp*. Everyone cheers! Power has been restored!

This is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

When God formed the first man, Adam, from the dust of the ground the Bible tells us God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life... In the same way, after His resurrection, Jesus breathed on His followers, saying “Receive the Holy Spirit.” He imparted *spiritual* life.

Picture this limp, lifeless glove - then suddenly, you slip your hand into that glove - it takes shape, and becomes alive, and has the power now to do your will.

This is what God does in a believer. He slips His Spirit into our spirit, and takes over the living in us.

Ever known someone who snapped out of a comma? Mentally, they were unconscious. Physically, their body was wilting away. Then suddenly their faculties returned. They were aware. They could talk.

Well, it's even more exciting to see someone snap out of it spiritually. They become alive to God and aware of His blessings. A new world opens up to them.

One man writes, "Fear not that your life shall come to an end, but rather that it shall never have a beginning."

In Christ we become fully alive by the Spirit of God.

And that's not all! According to verse 6 another marvelous thing happens to people who put their faith in Christ. He has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus..."

Not only are we made alive, we're elevated. "*Raised up... with Christ.*" We're lifted up and seated in Christ.

Whenever my grandkids come to my house, I always lift them up and sit them on top of the refrigerator.

I don't know why, but I do. My dad did it with my kids, and I'm doing it with my grandkids. *And don't laugh...*

Have you ever been lifted and sat on top of a refrigerator? It really is a special feeling. You've got all you need to eat underneath you... It's a tremendous view... You spend your whole life being looked down on, now everyone in the family is looking up to you...

And this is exactly what happened to us when we gave our lives to Jesus. *God sat us on the refrigerator.*

Earlier in Ephesians we mentioned that as Christians we live in two locations - *physically we're in Atlanta, but spiritually we live in Christ.* And this isn't just religious verbiage, or Christian-eze. It's truly our spiritual reality!

In a sense a part of you has daily, constant access to heaven. In the spiritual realm (*there's this virtual reality for us*) - in which we're actually seated with Christ.

Paul conveys the same truth to the Colossians. In 3:3, he writes, "*your life is hidden with Christ in God.*"

I'm not sure how this works. Its mechanics are truly a mystery. I just know it's true for those who have faith.

Read the biographies of Christians who made a difference in this world, and you'll find in every case they had a spiritual awareness that transcended difficult circumstances. There was a spiritual place in the land of faith where they could retreat to *find rest and renew their strength...* **A seat in heavenly places.**

Lately, I've been on a lot of airplanes, and I've noticed whenever the pilot encounters the least little bit of turbulence, he doesn't hesitate - **he turns on the fasten your seat belt light...** He orders his passengers to return to their seats and buckle their seat belts.

And this is a good habit for us. Whenever life starts to get rough we should return to our seats! Remember you're elevated in Christ. You're seated in Christ. You have access to the help and treasures of heaven.

Return to your seat, and buckle your seat belt. *Life always looks better sitting on top of the refrigerator!*

This is so vital for us to learn. Before we do anything else in the Christian life we first need to be able to sit!

A lot of new Christians blow out of the starting gate. They're so excited. They want to run - fight battles - stand against the enemy - tackle life's challenges...

But how would a toddler fare if he or she tried to crawl and walk and run without first learning to sit? There's a balance - an equilibrium - a steadiness - that first has to be mastered before we can navigate life.

And the same is true spiritually. Before we get thrown into combat, and our world gets rocked, we need to know where our seat is located and how to buckle the seat belt! It's in Christ we weather the storm, and regain our balance, and renew our strength.

In verse 7 this rags to riches story reaches a crescendo... **“that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”** Ever watch the end of a film before you see the whole movie? It spoils the story.

But not so in life. Paul wants us to know the end of our faith from the point of its beginning. It's helpful to know how it culminates. Here he tells us what we'll do when the trials are over, and we're at home in heaven.

Have you ever wondered what you'll be doing for all eternity? Heaven lasts for eternity. And forever is a very long time... I can think of a lot of pleasures and pastimes I'd like to do for **a while**... *but for eternity?*

I love chocolate ice cream, but if I ate chocolate ice cream every day forever and ever... *I'm not so sure.*

As a kid I had the notion that we'd be spending forever in heaven sitting on a bank of clouds, strumming a harp, and being bored out of our minds.

This is why I never got too excited about heaven.

Author Susan Ertz makes an interesting comment, "[Millions long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon.](#)"

We want to live forever, *but nobody thinks about what we'd want to do?* Well, in verse 7 Paul tells us how we'll spend eternity... "[That in the ages to come \(God\) might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.](#)" It'll take all eternity for God to reveal His infinite mercy toward us.

Here's the first entry in your heavenly day-timer.

Just pen it in... for the first thousand ages and aeons to come we'll spend all day, every day comprehending, and stretching our brains, to grasp "[the exceeding riches of His grace,](#)" and kindness, and mercy to us!

We'll spend forever plunging the depths of His love.

Imagine, going from one "ooh and aah" to the next forever and ever... There'll never be a boring moment.

A new discovery - a new surprise - a new joy - will await us around every corner. Heaven is a love fest!

One year when the kids were small we took them to a nursing home at Christmas time. We shared with the residents, and brightened their day. On the ride home I explained that God will reward us for our good deeds.

My son Zach, always the theologian, piped in, "But Dad, if we're going to have everything when we get to heaven what will be left for God to use as a reward?"

He had a good question. And Pastor Sandy was stumbling for an answer. But it was Natalie, my 6 year old princess, who bailed me out. She jumped in and said, "Zach, God will reward us with hugs and kisses."

And won't that be enough?... That'll be all we want! Other rewards will pale in comparison to His affections.

It's the best explanation of heaven I've ever heard! *God will reward us with hugs and kisses... Indeed!*

Well, what better way to end our rags to riches story.

From enemies of God to recipients of God's hugs and kisses - this is your story, if you know Jesus!

And if you don't know Him. If you've come in today thinking there's no hope, realize the Holy Spirit wants to write you into this script and make this story yours.

Recall those two really big words, ***“But God...”***

No matter who you are or what you've done - you're not beyond God's reach. He is ***“rich in mercy!”***

He has more than enough mercy to cover your sins and *quicken* you from death to life. Let God crash your party, and you be quick to join His. You - even you - can go *from rags to riches* in Christ Jesus! **Amen!**