Opening Words

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins."

Can it be any bleaker? Can Paul express it with any greater clarity? We were not just sick, we were dead in our trespasses and sins.

122 Eph The Four Faces of Death

It is so important that we never forget what we were like before we found Christ. If we do, we will find ourselves vulnerable to many traps. Great people of biblical times warned us never to forget. The apostle Peter warned us in 2 Peter 1:9 about the danger of becoming blind, shortsighted, and how God has cleansed us. If we do not remember, at least to some degree, where we came from and how awful our sins were, and the bondage they put us in, we will tend to slip back into them. The deception of sin is that it appears to offer a good time, but, in fact, sin enslaves people. Peter exhorted us to grow in faith and to keep adding moral excellence and Christian character so we would not slip backwards.

The prophet Moses did the same. The nation of Israel was on the border of the land of promise and Moses exhorted this second generation of people who came out of Egypt to remember and never forget.

What were they to remember?

- They were slaves – six times Moses told them to remember that they were slaves in the land of Egypt. 5:15; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:18, 22 – "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt."
- God redeemed them – It was not through politics or war but through the mighty power of God that Israel walked out of Egypt. 7:18 – "You shall not be afraid of them; you shall well **remember** what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt."
- God entered a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. 4:10 – "Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children."
- God led them in the wilderness. 8:2; 9:7 – "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

Moses told the people to remember the Lord (8:18) and to remember the days of old (32:7). And this remembrance was because of the great challenges ahead! They were going into war against mighty nations and God said, "You shall not be afraid of them; you shall well remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt." Remembering the past was to enable them to go forward into the future.

We have been in the book of Ephesians and have been studying the wonders of the spiritual world. Paul has listed great spiritual blessings that are ours in heavenly places in Christ, and he has led the people in a great prayer to know the power of God. Then, he gives a sobering reminder which we find in ch 2 and verse 1.

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins."

Can it be any bleaker? Can Paul express it with any greater clarity? We were not just sick, we were dead. We were not just straying, we were dead. We were not just dying with some hope of recovery. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. Such was our position before God.

When God created Adam and Eve, he told them not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because in the day that they ate from it they would die. And we know the sad outcome of the story – both the woman and the man ate from the tree, but they didn't die, at least right away. Something else happened, their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked before God and each other and they immediately felt the need to cover themselves. This signaled the end of their innocence and the introduction of shame – something God never intended for them. Then, when they heard the familiar sound of the Lord walking towards them, a sound that must have brought delight to them as they would have face to face fellowship with him and learn from him, they ran from him and hid.

Of course, we know that we can run, but we can't hide from God. He'll eventually catch up to us. And when God caught up with Adam and Eve and started asking penetrating questions, the man started blaming his wife for what happened and when the Lord started talking with Eve, she blamed the serpent for what happened.

God expelled them from the garden. He guarded the entrance to it with seraphim who have flaming swords. Adam and Eve bore children, one son killed another and is banished. He and his wife left the family and started an ungodly line that resulted in a wicked world that had to be judged through a great flood.

This summary of the first chapters of Genesis illustrates something profound – when Adam sinned, death entered the world and death had four faces to it.

The Face of Death Number 1 – We died in our relationship with God. This means that we became guilty before a holy God because of our sin. Notice that Paul says, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins." Paul uses two words to describe sin. The first word is trespass and comes from a Greek word that has the idea of taking a false step, crossing a boundary, or deviating from a path. The second word is the familiar word that has the idea of missing the mark, like an archer who shoots an arrow at a target but the arrow falls far short. Paul used this word in Romans 3:23 when he said that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

We have all experienced them both. We have crossed over boundary lines. We have had clear commands, "don't do this. Don't go over here. Don't enter this area." And we have done it. We have trespassed earthly boundaries, and like Adam and Eve who ate from the tree, we have done it with

God. The result is that we have fallen far short of the glory of God. We are not what we should be, even at our best and because of this we are naked, sinful, and full of shame before a holy God.

Paul would go to great lengths in Romans 5 to explain this. He tells us that death entered the world through this one man's sin and the result of his sin is that humanity stood condemned before God. In addition to our guilt before God, we make false images of God. We distort the character of God. We depict him in wrong ways as we think of the idolatry of the world. And if we do not do this with physical images, we have wrong images of him in our minds. We think of him as a mean, harsh, capricious God who doesn't love us.

This is the first face of death. We are separated from God and we don't know him. We are dead in our trespasses and sins.

The Face of Death Number 2 – We died in our relationships with one another. It's so interesting to read Chapter 3 of Genesis and see the immediate aftermath of the sin. Suddenly there is an explosion of marital problems! The man blames the woman! He said, "The woman you gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Maybe Adam is just relating a fact without any emotion, but I can't help but think that Adam, when confronted by God and as guilty as can be, rather than face the fact that he sinned before God, instead talks about his wife! The first two words out of his mouth, when God asks if he ate from the tree were, "The woman…" Why didn't he just say, "Yes, Lord, I ate from the tree. I disobeyed you."

Such is the nature of sin. It works on our minds and hearts so that it damages our relationships with one another. Death reigns in relationships.

The third face of death is that we died in our relationship with God's creation. God put creation under a curse. God said, "Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you will eat bread till you return to the ground." Nature is fallen and it now experiences death. Rather than the world being a cultivated garden where everything works together in harmony, the earth is a place of sweat, pain, frustration, and death.

The fourth face of death is that we died in relationship to ourselves. By this I mean that sin has come into our minds and hearts and warped us. Again, look at Genesis 3. Immediately after they ate the fruit they experienced shame. Then they felt fear. Then they ran and hid. Does that sound like some experiences you have had in your life – shame, fear, running, hiding. All of this is the result of the first sin and is a slow working of death in us.

Death with God, death with others, death with creation, death within ourselves. This experience of death on earth leads to inevitable physical death and it leads to the second death of the great judgment where we will be consumed by the fire and judgment of God.

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But my friends, here is the good news, there is a Savior. There is a name by which we can be saved. His name is Jesus and he is stronger than death. In the coming broadcasts, we are going to unpack this dense passage of Scripture and let Paul show how desperate we are without Christ, but how in Christ we can find mercy, grace, and full restoration of what God wants for us.