

Series: Bound for Glory
Title: Made Alive!
Text: Ephesians 2:1-10
Key Word: Responses
Proposition: Everyone can be made alive by responding to God's grace with these responses.

C.S. Lewis wrote a series of Children's books called the Chronicles of Narnia about the adventures of four children in a mysterious land called Narnia. In the book entitled, Prince Caspian, we read the story of how good Prince Caspian and his army of talking beasts conquer the Telmarines. Talking mice were among his allies. In addition, the land of Narnia was under the rule of a strong, dangerous, but good Lion called Aslan. After a fierce, but victorious battle with the Telmarines, Lewis describes the following.

For at the moment a curious little procession was approaching—eleven Mice, six of whom carried between them something on a litter made of branches, but the litter was no bigger than a large atlas. No one has ever seen mice more woebegone than these. They were plastered with mud—some with blood too—and their ears were down and their whiskers drooped and their tails dragged in the grass, and their leader piped on his slender pipe a melancholy tune. On the litter lay what seemed little better than a damp heap of fur; all that was left of Reepicheep (Ree-pe-keep.) He was still breathing, but more dead than alive, gashed with innumerable wounds, one paw crushed, and where his tail had been, a bandaged stump.

“Now, Lucy,” said Aslan.

Lucy had her diamond bottle out in a moment. Though only a drop was needed on each of Reepicheep's (Ree-pe-keeps) wounds, they were so many that there was a long and anxious silence before she had finished and the Master Mouse sprang from the litter. His hand went at once to his sword handle, with the other he twirled his whiskers. He bowed.

"Hail Aslan!"

Yes, our path to glory is a dangerous path, with many battles. We have all been wounded along the way. We have all been wearied, feeling beaten, worn out, feeling dead but alive. And I strongly suspect that we will be wounded again while on the way to glory. The battle though is not just something that goes on around us. The battle may be within.

There is this part of us that wants to do something and another part of us that doesn't. Part of us wants to go, while the other part wants to remain. We're familiar with the feeling of being pulled in two different directions. Part of me loves preaching and honestly I look forward to it. But, not all of me. I have my moments when I am scared to death. I am afraid that I will fail, that I will not be liked, that the preaching would not be as good as another preacher. I am though drawn by the Spirit to preach. Uncertainty haunts me, not just with preaching but with most other things. I enjoy friendships, yet I am afraid of the risks in becoming a friend. I wonder who else feels so torn inside.

We have our fears. Heights, public speaking, intimacy. All the self-discipline in the world couldn't get you to bungee jump, or tell your deepest thoughts in a small group or give a testimony during worship. What about those odd habits...long work hours. What about being afraid to leave home without make-up when other women feel comfortable going to the grocery store in sweat pants, tennis shoes, and a hooded sweat shirt. Why do you freeze when you hear your dad call out your name? What is that about? You must have organization and tidiness or else you go crazy. Where is that perfection coming from?

We're all too familiar with the power of the flesh. We know that God wants us to love our neighbor, but that is hard to do when he cuts us off in traffic. We know that God delights in our prayers, but NCAA Basketball or American Idol is on TV. We realize that love is patient or suffers long, but the kids may have a hard time seeing the value of keeping their rooms clean. Yes, this is the part of us that needs a daily death, so that new life can come out of the tomb. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, *"I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me."* (Romans 7:22, 23) Yes, we know the battle. We're all brokenhearted. When something precious is broken it is like something inside of us dies. We become a dead-man walking. Hurt, anger, deep grief, guilt makes our heart ache. Sometimes things happen to us; sometimes things we do; sometimes things we fail to do, shatter our heart and then something inside of us dies. God says,

“I see that your heart is broken. I see that something is dead in you. I want to heal your heart. I want to bring you back to life.”

So how can our hearts be healed? How can we come alive? The Psalmist wrote, “*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*” (Psalm 147:3) Isaiah promised that the Lord will send His anointed One to bind up the brokenhearted. (Isaiah 61:1) Again the Psalmist wrote, “*He leads me beside the quiet waters, he restores my soul.*” (Psalm 23:3) The prophet Jeremiah prayed, “*Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.*” (Jeremiah 17:14) Luke, one of the Gospel writers wrote, “*He welcomed them and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God and healed those who needed healing.*” (Luke 9:11) Jesus said, “*I tell you the truth a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.*” (John 5:25) “*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*” (John 10:10) John, one of Jesus’ followers wrote, “*He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*” (1 John 5:11-12). Christ Jesus comes to heal restoring life within. It is not just for the body, but also for the soul. He offers Life.

I suspect that for some pride keeps them from admitting their brokenness. I’ve done that, and I probably still do. Some are afraid of getting their hopes shattered. Some are afraid of admitting weakness and failures. Friends, the cross offers healing as well as salvation. Christ not only came to forgive us, but also to heal us, to give us Life. Jesus can and wants to heal our heart. He wants to bind up our wounds. He

wants to give us Life. What is this stirring in you? Is faith quickening? Or Is doubt creeping in like the morning fog? Has anger made your heart a heart of stone? Or is hope coming to life within you? Will you let it pass by? Maybe your wondering how can you respond to what is rousing in you?

Paul explains this life as a gift to be received rather than a wage to be earned. We can not earn this life that is offered. We do not pay for the healing. Christ Jesus has done that for us. Paul explains that we've been made alive by grace.

So how are we to respond to this offer of new life received through the Son? Let me offer a few responses. **First, respond with humility.** *“You were dead in your transgressions and sins.... (Eph. 2:1)* Paul makes it clear that we're all sinners saved by grace.

One of the most decisive moments in our lives is when we admit our need. That admission is what it took to turn Tracey Bailey around. Bailey writes in Guidepost that in 1993 he stood in the White House Rose Garden in the presence of the President of the United States to receive the National Teacher of the Year award. He had come a long way. Some fifteen years earlier he had stood as a teenager in the presence of a county judge in an Indiana courtroom to be sentenced to jail. Bailey had gone on a drunken rampage with friends, vandalizing a high school, had been caught and found guilty. Nevertheless, Bailey stood before the judge with his head held high, the words of his high school wrestling coach ringing in his ears: “Don't you ever hang your head. Don't admit defeat.”

The judge looked at the proud teenager and stunned the courtroom with Bailey's sentence: five years in a youth prison.

Tracey Bailey went to jail with his head held high, but it took only a few months for reality to set in. One day as he sat in solitary confinement in a cell with nothing more than a metal cot, a sink, and a toilet, he realized what a mistake he had made. He began to weep. His heart was broken. In his internal tomb, he began to pray to God. "God, I need help, I am defeated without you."

That was the turning point for Tracey Bailey. He joined a prison Bible study and began taking college correspondence courses. After fourteen months in jail he was released on probation, and after further college courses he became a science teacher in Florida. With these words he summarizes the lesson he had learned in life: "I bowed my head and tasted victory."

The knowledge of God's unmerited, unrestrained love for broken, shattered dead humanity is the invitation to respond with humility. Conscious of our own shortcomings, failures, and brokenness, we open the floodgates of God's healing and life-giving mercy by admitting that we are not what we ought to be.

Second, respond with change. Paul wrote, "*But because of his great love for us, God...made us alive with Christ...God raised us up...and seated us with Christ...*" (Eph. 2:4-6) Paul reveals that God's grace is greater than our sin. God values us as a priceless treasure.

Television's "The Antique Road Show" reveals folks coming to an antique show to have their antiques appraised. Some may have paid a few dollars for their item at a garage sale. Many times they are surprised to learn that their item is worth several thousand dollars. When I see that happen, I think of how God goes about taking people who are not seen as very valuable by the world or even in their own eyes and places a very high value on them. How do we know that? We see it in the life of Jesus over and over again. The broken of society seemed to be his specialty. The sinful and sick, the poor and weak were the people he pulled out of the trash and transforms into a treasure.

The questions is will we let him turn our tragedies into treasures? Will we give him permission to change our lives? We might be surprised that Jesus asks our permission to come in and heal and transform. However, the resurrected Jesus said, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock.*" (Rev. 3:20) He doesn't force his way in, and the principle remains true after we have given Christ the initial access to our hearts that we call salvation. There are rooms we have kept locked up, places he has not had access to by our own will, and in order to experience this healing, this transforming power, we must give him permission to come in. Once inside His compassionate love always cleanses, always transforms, into goodness. The hymn writer wrote, "*He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free.*"

Third, respond with good works. "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" (Eph.

2:10) There is a story of an old Negro engineer who operated a river ferry boat. His boat was old and he did not worry over much about it: the engines were dirty and not cared for. This engineer though discovered the compassion and mercy of Jesus Christ and was soundly changed. The first thing he did was to go back to his ferry boat and polish his engines until every part of the machinery shone like a mirror. One of the regular passengers commented on the change. "What have you been up to?" He asked the engineer. "What set you cleaning and polishing these old engines of yours?" "Sir," he said, "I've got the glory." That is what Jesus Christ does for anyone, for any church. He gives that person the glory and they bear fruits of a changed life. So that person responds with good works for the glory of God.

How will you respond to the mercy and compassion of Jesus? With humility? With a changed life? With good works? Your response will heal your heart, restore your life and take you further down the path to glory.