

EVANGEL

The Good News of Jesus Christ



Raised up

In the latest issue of *Evangel*, I wrote about how you as a Christian are raised up with Christ. However, the story of the Christian life found in Ephesians 2 does not stop with being raised up with Christ. The story continues because the Christian is raised up with a purpose! What is the purpose of being a Christian?

To answer that question you need to back up one step and ask who is responsible for your becoming a Christian. If it is you, then you can determine your own purpose. But it is not you – it is God! Since he has saved you and raised you up with Christ, he will be the one who determines what your purpose is as a Christian. Read how Paul connects the one who created you a Christian to your purpose as a Christian:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10, NIV).

Saved and raised by grace

These verses are perhaps the clearest passage in the Bible concerning salvation. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith.* Salvation, which Paul defines elsewhere as being made alive and raised up with Christ to sit in the heavenly places, is by grace.

Grace is God’s undeserved favor to those under his just judgment. Paul, therefore, rightly adds a little later that *it is the gift of God.*

The gift of God, his grace, rejects any contribution that you might want to make to your salvation. You have been saved *by grace.* Negatively this means, *and this is not from yourselves.* It is *not by works, so that no one can boast.* Moreover, thank the Lord that it is not your doing, and that salvation is not by works. For the only works that the dead can do are dead works. The only works that the dead do are works of sin and trespass because they are walking in the ways of sin and Satan.

Saved and raised through faith

You still must do something. You must believe the promises of God to make you alive together with Christ and to raise you up. For it is by grace you have been saved, *through faith.* What does this mean? Does this mean that faith saves you? If so, then is not salvation because of the work of faith and does not Paul here contradict himself? If it is by the work of faith that you are saved then will you not determine the purpose of your own life as a Christian?

These are important questions for you. The right answers are even more important. They can save you a lot of heartache in your life and they can prevent a lot of confusion in the church of Christ. Paul to this point has been very clear. God’s work in you is because of his mercy, grace and love. It is undeserved since you were dead in sin. He made you alive. The ground of your being made alive, of your salvation

is Christ Jesus! It is not your faith or any other work you might want to offer. There is no ground for boasting. Look at verse 10 *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.”* God has created you in Christ.

What then is the role of faith? In this context I am not the first to draw the analogy to a gift. God’s salvation work in Christ is a gift. It is his gift to you. When you receive a gift from someone, it usually has your name on it. But you must still do something. You must extend your hands, take the gift, and open it. That is faith. Faith is extending your hands and taking hold of the promises of God. Faith is not the ground for salvation; faith is the instrument by which that salvation grounded in Christ is received.

You must claim the promises for yourself. Paul in Scripture never lets the gospel remain some objective fact. To be a Christian is not to say, *“Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”* No, to be a Christian is to say, *Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.* (1 Timothy 1:15) To be a Christian is to say, *“Jesus died to save me!”* The church cannot believe for you. Your family cannot believe for you. You must believe! You must have faith! Paul in Galatians 2:20 writes, *“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* I, I, me, I, I, me, me. *For by grace you have been saved through faith.* Yes, you must claim the promises of God in Christ. You must extend the hands of faith and take the gift of God.

with a purpose!



Saved and raised with a purpose

In the beginning, God created man and woman in his image. (Genesis 1:27) He created them good. He created them without sin. He created them so that they reflected his righteousness and his holiness. He created them alive. They, and all humanity with them, threw this all away. The image of God in man was shattered, although not completely destroyed. From that moment of sin, God had a plan. A plan to recreate man in his image. That plan Paul refers to in verse 10 when he says to the Ephesians, “*we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.*”

Nevertheless, for what purpose? Are Christians pieces of art hanging in God's gallery called this world? In a way, they are. In the last article you saw that God's word said that his purpose is to show to the world, “*the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*” (Ephesians 2:7) Christians are on

display for all to see. However, the display is not still life. You are not a painting on a wall or a ceramic pot inside a glass case. You are a moving picture. You are a living testimony. You were created in Christ Jesus *for good works*. The Creator determines the purpose for his workmanship.

God's purpose for you

What has the Creator purposed for you? I obviously cannot answer that question in the particular, but I can in the more general. God's purpose for you is to do good works, and good works are those things done in your life which reflect the character and action of God himself. God's purpose is to have you look like him! In the Old Testament, the book of Leviticus underlines time and again what this means. Leviticus 11:44-45 “*I am the LORD your God... be holy, because I am holy.*” If those words look familiar to you it is because the same requirement for good works remains in the new dispensation.

1 Peter 1:14ff “*As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’*” You must pursue by the power of the Holy Spirit a life of doing God's will from the heart. You must pursue his purpose for you.

My friends, God's salvation is not just a rescue from death it is also a setting you on a path to life. A path that he has marked out with signs calling you to good works. You have been raised with a purpose! Do you know your purpose in life? If you do not please go back to the beginning of Ephesians 2 and see what you are by nature and what you can become by the grace of God in Christ. Yes, his promises are for you! If you do know your purpose in life, continue to heed the call of the apostle Peter to live as obedient children. Live as strangers in the midst of a broken world, so that God through you can show this broken world his mercy in Christ Jesus.

Doug Vandeburgt

Resting in the

Life is a journey. A journey that in many ways is a very beautiful one. For it is a journey that takes us through a beautiful world God has created. On our journey there is so much to be seen, enjoyed and done. However, in some ways our journey will not always be an easy one. Our health is not always the way we would like it to be. Sometimes, we are hindered in accomplishing what we would like to accomplish. Other times, we feel confused and do not quite know where to travel next. And that raises the questions: Who shall be our travel guide on our journey? Who shall shelter us when we are hindered in accomplishing our tasks? Who will comfort us when we are weary or sick? Who will be there to dry our tears when all we can do is cry?

There are some wonderful verses in the Bible that help in answering these questions. Two of them are the first two verses of Psalm 91. There you read, "He who dwells in the shelter of the most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'."

Dwelling in the shelter of God

When I read that word *shelter*, I think of a home. Especially, a healthy home. A home where we are comfortable and relaxed, find intimacy and have conversation, experience fellowship and enjoyment, are nurtured and educated, feel safe and secure. A home where we can come to ourselves, are refreshed and invigorated, enjoy peace and contentment.

A home like this is necessary for on our journey through life, we need a place to come home to. As well as a place to learn about our journey. A center where we are formed and shaped, find guidance and direction, receive comfort and encouragement. Otherwise, we run the risk of becoming lost and confused, growing weary and exhausted, unable to travel the way we ought to be travelling.

This is especially the case when difficulties come our way. Especially then we need to be able to turn our hearts toward home. A home that functions as a *shelter* amidst the trials and temptations that come our way.

Now according to these verses from Psalm 91, **God** is the One who is *our shelter*. The One we can dwell and feel at home, find intimacy and conversation, are nurtured and educated, feel safe and secure. God is the One where we can come to ourselves, be refreshed and invigorated, enjoy peace and contentment. The One who forms and shapes us, gives us guidance and direction, comfort and encouragement.

And God does that especially when our journey gets rough. Physically, we are formed from the dust of the earth. One day, we will return to the dust of the earth. That means that in between our birth and death we retain the characteristics of dust. We are weak and frail, bruise and tire easily, suddenly get sick and are unable to travel our journey the way we would like to travel it.

What is true for our physical constitution is also true for our spiritual constitution. Of itself, it is not very strong. Just think of how we tend to react when others hinder us from doing what we would like to do. We tend to get annoyed or angry. Perhaps, we even force those who hinder us to the side and merrily continue our journey the way we had planned. Or just think of how we tend to react when we are tempted to do things we know we ought not to be doing. How often have we not given in to temptations we

ought to have resisted.

Well, when these type of spiritual and physical difficulties come our way, we have the awesome privilege of dwelling in the shelter of the Most High. Turning our hearts home to Him and finding guidance and encouragement, intimacy and conversation, nurture and instruction with Him.

Resting in the shadow of God

And you know, when we do this, we are actually **resting** in the *shadow* of the Almighty. Just imagine travelling through a desert or living in a country with hot temperatures. What do you think a shadow would mean in place like these? Why, a person would long for this shadow! For he knows this shadow would give him rest, refresh him, enable him to come to himself and give him strength to continue his journey. Perhaps, he might even sleep for a while in this shadow. Take a nap and allow himself to be rejuvenated through the sleep received in the shade of this shadow.

Well, that's what it is like when the Most High is our shelter! When we turn our hearts home to Him and enjoy his fellowship, nurture and instruction. Then God enables us to come to ourselves, be refreshed and invigorated and receive new strength and direction to continue our journey though life.

Dwelling in the shelter of God will not come naturally to us. For we are all inclined to look for other shelters that give us different shadows to rest in. We are inclined to say to ourselves that the shelter of the Most High and the shadow of the Almighty are not sufficient for us. And so, we will be tempted to seek the relief we need in our own shelter and rest in our own shadow. Or we will try to seek the relief we need with our peers or friends and see what rest their shadows have to offer us. Perhaps, we may even try to find relief in some sort of addiction we have. A

Shadow of God

temporary shelter that offers temporary relief because its shadow is just as fleeting as the parties we attended or the nights out we enjoyed.

Made for God

You will realize, of course, that being unwilling to dwell in the shelter of God and rest in his shadow is not a very wise thing to do. For just remember again *who* God is! Is He not the Most High? The One beside whom there are no other gods, who created everything and, as such, owns it all? Is God not the Almighty? The One who rules all and daily opens his hands to provide us with what we need? Is God not the LORD? The One who is always faithful and true to Himself, who never changes, who has committed Himself to his people with unfailing love and, as such, will always be with them in a saving and liberating way? Would *this* God not be able to give us the rest we need when we are tired either physically or spiritually or both? Would his shelter and shadow not be sufficient for us? Not a fleeting shadow like the shadows this world has to offer, but an abiding shadow that is always there for our protection and refreshment.

You know, there once was a man who did not make God his home. He did not dwell in his shelter nor rest in his shadow. As a result, he went through a lot of needless pain and agony on his journey though life. One day, he sat weeping in the garden of his friend almost persuaded to turn his heart home to God and begin a new life, yet lacking the resolve to break with his old way of life. As he sat there weeping, he heard a child singing in a neighbouring house, *Tolle lege! tolle, lege!* which is Latin for *Take up and read! Take up and read!* And so, picking up a scroll which lay at his friend's side, he let his eyes rest on the words, "not in orgies and drunkenness, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires

of the sinful nature" (Romans 13:13b,14). God used these verses to draw this man to Himself and turn his heart home to Him and have him dwell in his shelter, resting in his shadow. Later this man, who was called Augustine, would write about God, "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

What this man learned to do, God wants us, all of us, to do. Remember what we said about a home and shelter. Every person needs a home and shelter. That's part of God's blueprint for life. It's the same with God. We all need God as our home, our shelter. That's the way God designed us to live. As someone without an earthly home will feel the lack of this home, so someone who does not have God as his home, his shelter will feel this as well. He will feel restless, dissatisfied, confused and worn out.

My God in whom I trust

So, let's do what the psalmist does. For after having said what he did about dwelling in the shelter of the Most High and resting in the shadow of the Almighty, he says, "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'."

The images just keep tumbling out of the psalmist's mouth. Not only is God a shelter and shadow. He is also a refuge and strength. The image of refuge calls to mind a place where you can go when you are troubled or afraid; the image of fortress a fort or bastion from which you can defend yourself.

Well, says the man of Psalm 91, this God is *my God*. I don't just believe He exists like so many other people do. I also *believe* in this God, *trust* in this God, *put my full weight* on this God. He is not just some cosmic power, but He is *my God*, my *personal* God in whom I trust. When I am tired, I dwell in his shelter and rest in his shadow. When I am troubled, He is my refuge. I pour out my heart to Him and cry on his shoulder, as it were. When I feel opposed and

harassed or hindered in making progress on my journey, He is my fortress. I hide in Him, feeling safe and secure behind the impregnable walls of his power and faithfulness.

Jesus, the visible image of this invisible God

God urges us to do the same. And should we have any doubt then God want us to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, when we look at Him, we see the visible image of my invisible God. Focus on that time when Jesus stilled the storm and said to the roaring waves, "Peace, be still!" and say to yourself, "That was the voice of the Most High, the One who created everything and owns all." Focus on that time when Jesus fed those huge multitudes of four and five thousand and say to yourself, "Those were the hands of the Almighty, opening up and providing all those people with what they needed as they were sitting there on the ground resting in his shadow." Focus on Jesus' suffering and dying on the cross and say to yourself, "There I see the faithfulness of the LORD, the One who is always true to Himself and who has promised to always be with his people in a saving and liberating way. He's the One who brought his people home again when they were unable to come home on their own so that they can dwell in the shelter of the Most High and rest in the shadow of the Almighty." It really is true, isn't it. God *is* the Most High and the Almighty. And we are allowed to dwell in his shelter and rest in his shadow!

Trust in Him. For the journey may still be quite long. The vistas may be beautiful and breathtaking, but the valleys you sometimes have to go through and the mountains you sometimes have to climb can make you short of breath. Remember those words Augustine once spoke about his God: "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

Dick Moes

Defend the Name of the Lord!

Bible Story Based on 1 Samuel 17

“David, I want you to go to the battle field. Bring these loaves of bread and this container with flour to your brothers. They will need to be well fed. Take these cheeses along, too, for the commander. Hurry up. Don’t forget to return with a token of their welfare.”

The next day David gets up very early. Normally he looks after his father’s sheep, but this morning he leaves the flock under the care of a servant. Very excitedly he rushes to the battle field. He looks forward to seeing his oldest three brothers. He is also eager to see the army of King Saul. He knows that this army fights for the God of Israel. The name of the Lord is at stake.

Full of expectation David arrives at the Valley of Elah, where the battle is fought. The beautiful valley has turned into a dreary battlefield. The Israelites have put up their camp on the one side of the valley, while across from them, on the hill at the opposite side, the enemies have pitched their tents.

As David approaches the Valley, he notices right away that a real fight is at hand. Both the Israelites and the enemies are lined up for battle. Also his brothers are ready for combat. Quickly David leaves his gifts in charge of a guard and rushes to the field. Spotting his brothers, he hastens to encourage them with the greetings of their father. But his eyes wander off to the other side of the Valley. And he does not believe what he sees. An enormous man steps forward from the ranks of the enemy. He is a giant, no doubt! And look at his armour! He carries the biggest weapons David has ever seen. This big man is invincible!

Then the giant starts to speak. With much gusto he shouts his defiant words across the Valley. Without any regard for the God of the Israelites, the giant mocks King Saul’s army. “You, Israelites! Choose a man to fight with me. If he wins, we’ll be your servants. But if I win, you will be our servants.”

The giant’s words have an enormous effect. The men of Israel run to their tents in fear. But David is not scared. Asking around, he finds out that the name of the giant is Goliath. Whoever kills Goliath, will receive a very great reward and much honour.

The young David is very indignant about the curses and threats of the giant. Not the least bit intimidated, David understands that Goliath’s words are an offense against the God of Israel. Walking through the ranks he wonders out loud, “Who does this giant think he is, that he defies the armies of the living God?”

Word is brought to King Saul that a young shepherd boy has arrived, who shows no fear for the giant. Immediately David is ordered to appear before Saul. “No one has to be afraid, King Saul,” David speaks boldly, “I will fight with this unbeliever. I will defend the Name of the Lord!”



Saul hesitates. “You are a young man,” he objects, “How can you match this champion of war?” But David is fearless and convinced. Boldly he speaks, “King, as a shepherd boy I fought with bear and lions. The Lord gave me victory then. All the more will He make me the winner of this godless giant now.”

Wanting to make sure that David is well protected, Saul offers him his own fighting gear. Willingly David tries on the heavy armour, only to find out that it is useless to him. It is too heavy. He cannot even walk in it. But he does not need it either. The Lord Himself will fight the battle for him.

Back in his shepherd clothes David walks over to the creek that runs through the valley. Carefully he selects five smooth stones and puts them in his shepherd’s bag. He is ready.

Goliath laughs when he notices how David walks up to the fighting arena. “Ha, am I a dog that you come to me with sticks? I’ll make you meat for the birds and wild beast!” Fearless David answers the giant, “You come to me with a sword, but I come in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel’s army. Today the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and the birds and wild beasts will eat you. This battle is the Lord’s!”

As Goliath comes forward, David runs to meet him. He takes a stone from his bags and puts it in his slingshot. Aiming confidently, he slings. The stone hits Goliath in the forehead. Deadly wounded, the great giant falls headlong to the ground. The army of the Lord has won! Israel can live in safety!

Great is the joy in the camp of the Israelites. The news of the Goliath’s death travels through the whole country. David has won the victory for his whole nation! One man fought the battle and all the people share in the triumph.

In the way David won the battle, he shows us how Jesus conquered sin. As David won all by himself for all God’s people, so Jesus won from the Devil all by himself. Yet, His victory is ours! When we follow Jesus, the Devil has no power over us. In the Name of Jesus we have overcome the Evil One.

Let us not be afraid to fight the Lord’s battle against sin and evil. Our victory is certain. Let us defend the Name of the Lord and do His will. And we will live safely in the place which the Lord has prepared for us.

Jane

Activity Page

GOD'S NAME

The name of the Lord is very special. The way in which we treat His name, shows how we think about Him. Some people misuse the Lord's names to show their anger. Sometime the name of the Lord is used to sound funny or indifferent. When we use the name of the Lord in that way, we do not honour Him. We must treat the name of our God with respect. We can only use it when we speak properly to Him, or respectfully about Him. Then the name of the Lord become a blessing to us.

The Bible Story told a story about David. David defended the name of the Lord. David also wrote many songs. In one of these songs, called Psalms, he says, "O LORD, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth!" If you have a Bible, you can look this up.

It is Psalm 8 verse 1.

OUR NAMES

Our names are special too. When we hear our name, we perk our ears. Many of our names are derived from Bible names, for example: Reuben, Michael, Elizabeth, John, Sarah, David, Rebecca, Paul, Anna, Mary.

Use these names to finish the following sentences.
The first letter is filled in already.

- M _____ was the mother of Jesus.
P _____ made many trips to tell people the Good News of Jesus.
S _____ was ninety years old when she gave birth to her son.
M _____ is an important angel.
D _____ killed the giant Goliath and later became king.

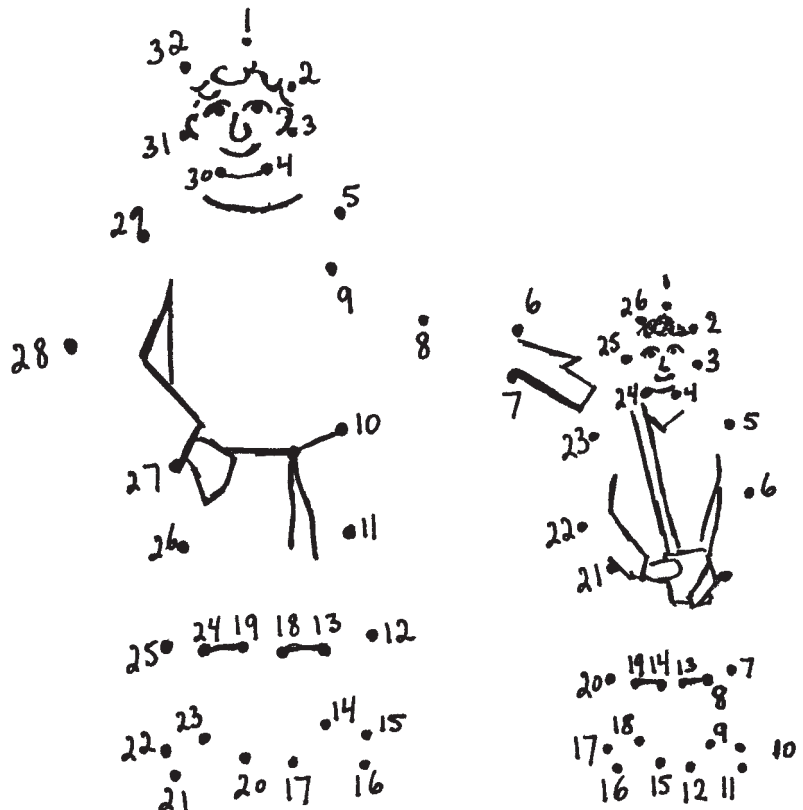
GIANTS

Goliath was a real giant. He was more than nine feet tall! Imagine how tall that is! It is the size of a traffic light pole, or of a medium sized apple tree. Such a height is very threatening! Some giants had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot.

Finish the picture on the right by connecting the dots, starting each person at number 1.

You will get some idea of a man compared to a giant.

Dawn



It's not enough to admit your wrong

“You are more righteous than I.”

1 Samuel 24:17

David had just spared Saul's life. Everyone had been urging him to kill Saul. It would have been sweet revenge for David to do it. It would have paved the way for him to be the king over Israel.

It happened when King Saul was hunting David in the region known as *The Crags of the Wild Goats*, obviously some forsaken land. Saul was closing in on David, so David and his soldiers hid in a cave. Into that very cave Saul had come, alone, not realizing that David was there.

Kill him! his soldiers urged David. But he would not. “Yahweh forbid that I should do such a thing to my master,” he said, “for he is the anointed of Yahweh.”

Saul left the cave unharmed. The only thing David had done was to secretly cut off a piece of Saul's robe while he was in the cave. After Saul had left to rejoin his soldiers to continue the search for David to kill him, David came out, held up the piece of robe and called out to Saul, “See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you.”

Shame swept over Saul as he realized that while he had been trying to kill David for no good reason, David, when given the chance to kill him, would not do it because he revered Saul's office as King of Israel.

“You are more righteous than I,” Saul confessed.

Yes indeed, David was more righteous than Saul. Saul publicly

confessed that he had been acting wickedly toward David, but David had been acting righteously toward him. His confession was offered intelligently and thoroughly.

But was it honest?

Saul returned home, to his palace, to the same people who surrounded him before, and fell back into the same pattern as before. Very soon he was falling into the same pattern of selfishness, pride and wickedness as before.

Two chapters later, in 1 Samuel 26, Saul was off again, hunting for David to have him killed.

Saul's repentance was not honest. He had been caught and exposed; he publicly acknowledged his wickedness, but he did not turn away from his sin. He kept right on in it.

When the Jews in Jerusalem heard about the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, they knew that Jesus was more righteous

than they had been, and that made them very much afraid. They cried out, “What shall we do?!” Peter answered them directly: “Repent and be baptized.”

That is what God demands: repentance. Without it, there is no salvation. We need to acknowledge not only that Jesus Christ is more righteous than we, but we need to confess how wicked we are, and then repent. To repent means to turn your life around.

When people were attracted to Jesus' message of grace, then Jesus' demand was clear and direct: Follow me. “Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me,” he said, more than once. It is never enough to say that we have sinned and that God is right. We must turn our lives around so that we stop sinning and start doing what God says. We must follow Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God.

Paul Aasman

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