

From Trashed to Treasured

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A long time ago in my sophomore year of college, I lived on the second floor of one of the men's dormitories on campus. One day when throwing out some trash from my room in the central floor garbage room, I noticed an unusual sight. There was a white dinner plate with a light blue fringe of roses and stars lying on the floor next to the garbage bin. With it was a stainless steel fork with ornately engraved flowers on its handle.

Genesis 2:16-17 says,

“The LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’”

Adam and Eve perished the day they disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit. While their physical bodies lived on for more than 900 years before they wore out and died, their spirits that once were alive and connected with God perished because of Adam's sin. Consequently, humanity became separated from God because all people are descendants from Adam. The sinful nature Adam acquired through his disobedience was passed down to all of us. Because of this inherited sin nature everyone sins, placing us under God's condemnation (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22).

This does not mean that we are as bad as we can be, but it

does mean that sin has extended to every aspect of our being. This is the cause of a lot of the suffering we see in the world.

Many try to end the separation between themselves and God by their own efforts. They live "a good life", or are religious, or adhere to a particular ethical philosophy. But these attempts at reaching God are futile and fall infinitely short. They are all tainted with sin and still lying in the garbage heap for destruction.

All are sinners and we cannot do anything to save ourselves. It makes us blind and deaf to the message of the gospel. It makes us totally unable and unwilling to accept salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

"For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:6-8).

"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Spiritual death brings an insensitivity to the things of God. It is a spiritual slavery, the prisoners of which are helplessly, hopelessly dead. It is like a life preserver thrown from a boat to a drowned man whose body is lying lifeless at the ocean floor.

It pleased me to rescue both the plate and fork from being thrown out with the garbage, and so I took them to my room. I rinsed them off with soapy water then soaked them for a day in bleach to disinfect them. After that, I thoroughly rinsed them with water and let them air dry.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The word for “perish”, “apollumi”, has the meaning of being lost, destroyed, or ruined. This includes the idea of something that no longer fulfills the purpose for which it was designed. For example, food that is properly prepared has the purpose of providing nourishment to the body. When it spoils and can no longer fulfill that purpose, it is said to have perished.

In Adam, we are born into this world in a perished state, dead in our sins. We are totally ruined and unable to remedy this dire situation. We are unable to fulfill the purpose for which we were designed. That is, to give God the glory due to Him and to enjoy fellowship with Him forever. (Psalms 16:5-11, 86:9, 144:15; Isaiah 12:2, 60:21; Luke 2:10; Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 6:20, 10:31; Philippians 4:4; Revelation 4:11, 21:3-4).

However, those who trust solely in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins He rescues, sets apart and makes clean. He saves completely and forever since He adopts them into His family. This truth is presented in Romans 8:9-17:

“However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all

who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the believers in ancient Rome, adoption had a powerful meaning. Parents had the option of disowning their own biological children for a variety of reasons, so this relationship was not necessarily permanent. However, if a child was adopted this meant that child was wanted and freely chosen by the parents. The adopted child became a permanent part of the family and could never be disowned.

An adopted child received a new identity. The old life with its previous commitments and responsibilities was replaced with a new life with its own rights and responsibilities. The adoptee became an heir to the father, joint sharers in all his possessions and fully united to him.

Likewise, when we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus alone, we are adopted into God's family and receive new life. Our spirits, once dead, are made alive. We become heirs to all the good things the Father has and offers, including eternal life (Titus 3:3-7; Hebrews 2:9-11).

This plate and fork went on to be used regularly whenever I ate in my room. They became my favorite plate and fork, and traveled with me to all the places I lived subsequently. They are used on weekends and special occasions to this very day.

Recall the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9. He was the grandson of King Saul, a relative of a potential rival of King David. In ancient times it was a common practice for rulers

consolidating their power to eliminate any potential rivals, even if they were distant relatives of the previous ruler, their children, or associates. Mephibosheth, lame in his feet as he was, according to the common custom of “no loose ends” would have been sent to the garbage heap of death.

But he was shown mercy on account of someone else. King David showed him mercy and honor because of his friendship with Mephibosheth’s father, Jonathan. And he ate always at the King’s table. He was grateful to King David for his mercy and grace, and he enjoyed his fellowship the rest of his days.

When we were condemned to destruction, God showed us mercy on account of Someone else. Because of God’s love for us through His one and only Son Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to Him. We are taken from the garbage dump and seated at the King’s table (Matthew 8:5-13). We are rescued from darkness, granted the disposition of all our sin debt, and given an honored place in His eternal kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13-14; Ephesians 2:1-10).

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