

Galatians 1:11-24

The **longer** we live in this world, the more **familiar** we become with **life** and **death**. As we look at the world around us we can easily tell the difference between **living** plants and **dead** ones. Living plants are **green** and **healthy**, while dead plants are **brown** and **shriveled**. It's also pretty easy to tell when **animals** are dead or alive. Anyone who has owned a pet **goldfish** knows the difference between a **living** fish - the one **swimming** in the water, and a **dead** fish - the one floating **belly up** on top of the water. We've seen life and death in our fellow **human beings** too. But this morning, we're going to look at a different **kind** of life and death - the kind that **isn't** always easily **seen** or **recognized** from the outside - and that's **spiritual** life and death. As we take a look today at the Apostle **Paul's** journey **From Spiritual Death To Life**, we are also reminded of the new life that **we have** in Christ.

The words of our text come from the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians. With these opening words, Paul wants to assure the Galatians of the **authority** he has to **write** the words which he has written to them. He **does** this by telling the Galatians about his amazing **conversion** experience. I don't think there is anyone else on the pages of Scripture who displays such a dramatic **turnaround** in life, as the Apostle **Paul** does. As we hear his story, we can easily see the difference between spiritual **death** and spiritual **life**. Throughout the **early** and **middle** years of his life, Paul was a **dead** man. **Outwardly**, he was **physically** alive and breathing, learning and growing, but on the **inside** he was spiritually **dead**. The Jewish religion which he followed was a **hollow** one. Paul tells us about those days as he writes, "*I was **advancing** in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely **zealous** for the traditions of my fathers.*" At that time, Paul didn't **lack** religious **zeal**, but unfortunately, his zeal was completely **misdirected**. The religious beliefs he followed were based only on the **traditions** of men, and they didn't point him to the hope of **salvation** in **Jesus**. So for that reason, his misdirected **faith** left him **spiritually dead** in his sins.

That spiritual **death** also brought about spiritually dead **actions** in Paul's life. Instead of eagerly **embracing** the teachings of Jesus and His followers, he severely **persecuted** them. Paul himself writes, "*You have heard of my previous way of life in **Judaism**, how intensely I **persecuted** the church of God and tried to **destroy** it.*" Immediately we think about Paul looking on with **approval**, as Stephen, one of the seven Christian **deacons** in Jerusalem, was brutally **stoned** to death. It's hard for us to even **comprehend** just how **cruel** and **vicious** Paul was in those **early** days. Not only did he want to **persecute** the Christian Church, but he

actually wanted to completely **destroy** it. To the **Christians**, Paul must have looked like a **monster** - very similar to the way many religious **fanatics** look to us today - people who seem to have no problem viciously **murdering** and **terrorizing** others in the name of their god.

But just **remember**, as **bad** as Paul and those religious fanatics **look** to us, you and I were born into this world in the very **same** condition - alive on the **outside**, and **spiritually dead** on the inside. At the time of our **birth**, we were “*dead in our transgressions and sins.*” But by the grace of God, this **spiritually dead** condition only lasted a **short** time for most of us, because through **baptism**, God poured out His Holy Spirit and made us “*alive with Christ.*”

That amazing **grace** of **God** comes **shining through** more than anything else in the verses we have before us today. Just **think** for a moment about the Apostle Paul. What **was** there about him, which led God to **choose him** to be His **servant** - to be this great **apostle** who would lead so many others to follow the LORD? After all, when God looked down from heaven at Paul, He saw a man who was **blaspheming** His name and **persecuting** His people. And yet God **loved** him in **spite** of those godless actions, and God did **not** turn **away** from him. Listen once again to Paul’s testimony about God’s undeserved love. He said, “*God set me apart from **birth**, called me by his **grace**, and **revealed** his Son in me.*” Even while Paul was still in the **womb**, God already had a **plan** for his life. And God **carried out** that plan in a miraculous way, as Paul was heading to Damascus to **expand** his horrible **persecution** of Christians. On that road, the Lord Jesus Himself **appeared** to him, **confronted** him, and completely **changed** his life **forever**. In fact, that was the first time that Paul actually knew what life **meant**. On the way to Damascus Paul clearly saw that the **Jesus**, whose followers he had been trying to **destroy**, was actually the **Savior** who had died to pay for Paul’s sins. In Jesus, he could find a **new** life - a life that was headed for **heaven** instead of doomed to **destruction** in **hell**.

As **miraculous** as that conversion was, **our** conversion is **no less** miraculous. God **choose** us before the creation of the universe, to be **His** very own people. Through no power of our own, God took us and made us members of His **family** - His own dear **children**. No, He didn’t appear to us in a brilliantly shining light on the roadside as He did with Paul, but rather, He came to **us** in the **water** and **Word** of Holy **Baptism**. And just as it did for **Paul**, God’s **grace** shines through in **our** conversion. He brought us out of our spiritual **death** and gave us spiritual **life**. Our eyes have been opened to see **Jesus** as the one and only **Savior** from sin, death, and the devil. And so, we **trust** in His **love** and **forgiveness**. We

know that He will **be** there **every** day of our lives, and that **one** day He will take us to be with Him in heaven. That's what **new life** in Christ is all about. It's the **peace** and **joy** that come from knowing **Jesus**.

The **new life** that Paul experienced affected **everything** in his life. Following his conversion Paul tells us, "*I did not consult any **man**, nor did I go up to **Jerusalem** to see those who were apostles **before** I was, but I went immediately into **Arabia** and later returned to **Damascus**.*" It's interesting that Paul didn't immediately seek the counsel of other **Christians** - not even the other **apostles**. But rather, we're told that he withdrew to **Arabia**. Now, while that seems a bit **strange**, nevertheless, there had to be a **reason**. Perhaps Jesus **commanded** him to go there, or perhaps Paul headed to this solitary place so he could **fully concentrate** on the things God had revealed to him about the **Messiah** in His **Word** - so he could clearly see how they connected to **Jesus**. Paul knew the Old Testament very well, but by the grace of God **now** he was able to read those words in a completely **new light** - in the light of **Jesus**. The Holy Spirit used this opportunity to open up the Scriptures to Paul in an exciting way - enabling Paul to see **all** of the promises of the coming Messiah **fulfilled** in Jesus Christ. And that was knowledge which Paul was anxious to **share**. In the book of Acts, Luke wrote about **this** time in Paul's life in this way, "*Saul grew more and more **powerful** and **baffled** the Jews living in Damascus by **proving** that Jesus is the Christ.*"

Paul had started out his life as a **persecutor** of **Jesus** and His **followers**, but God gave him a **second chance** - a **new life**. So Paul **used** that second chance to **tell** the message of Jesus to **anyone** and **everyone** who would listen to him, and it didn't take long for the news to **spread**. The report went out to Christians far and wide, "*The man who formerly **persecuted** us is now **preaching** the faith he tried to **destroy**.*" What a **wonderful** development. Paul now had a **new mission** in life - and it was all possible only because of God's **grace**.

That new mission in life which God gave to **Paul**, He has also given to **us** - the mission of **sharing** the Good News about **Jesus**. We know how far we have come - **From Spiritual Death To Life**. And we know that we could never have **achieved** that new life through our own efforts. So, let's make sure that we **thank God** for His gracious gift to us, and let's do our best to **show others** what our new life in Christ is all about. Let's **talk openly** to others about what our Savior means to us, even if it isn't the **popular** or **politically correct** thing to do. And let's show the world the **joy** we have because Jesus is our Savior from sin - wearing a **smile** on our face - willingly **helping** others whenever it's possible - and in general, living a vibrant, God-pleasing life of **faith**.

Oh, I know, we won't **always** be smiling, because as Christians we also have times of **sorrow** in our lives. God tells us that the Christian life is not **trouble-free**. But the Christian life on **earth** is focused on the Christian life which is **to come**, and the Apostle Paul tells us, "*I consider that our present **sufferings** are not worth **comparing** with the **glory** that will be revealed in us.*" As good as this life can **be**, **heaven** is so much **better**, and we want **everyone** to be able to experience that **eternal, better** existence together **with us**.

There are lots of ways we can show others the **new life** in Christ which God has given to us. We can spend some extra time in **private** Bible study and prayer, or in **group** Bible study at church. We can make **phone calls** or **personal visits** to friends and neighbors, inviting them to come and **worship God** with us. We can show our Savior's love to our **families** by spending more time in God's Word with them at **home**. The opportunities are **out** there, so let's make **use** of them. It will bring glory to **God**, it will benefit **us** and our fellow **believers**, and it will lead **others** to the Savior as well. May we continue to say **thank you** to God by sharing the Savior with **others**, because Jesus has graciously brought us **From Spiritual Death To Life**. Amen.