

From War in a Dead Kingdom to Life in a Multi-ethnic Family

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Esau McCaulley

[0 : 00] our teacher. I introduced him last night, but just I'll briefly do that again for those of you who weren't here. The Reverend Dr. Esau McCauley, he and I go back to seminary back at Gordon-Conwell, and since seminary, Esau has gone on and studied and gotten a PhD in New Testament under N.T. Wright.

He has begun to develop as a writer, working on a couple of books. He is doing a lot of work in the ACNA in terms of leadership development, which we're very excited about for lots of reasons. He's just joined the faculty at Wheaton as an assistant professor of New Testament there, so very excited about that transition for Esau, and most excited that he gets to be here, most excited that we get to sit under his teaching. So welcome Reverend Dr. Esau McCauley.

Do you want me to hit this button here? Thank you, Tommy, for that introduction. I have just started working at Wheaton, I think, maybe a month ago, and I think I arrived in late June, and one of the things I'm realizing is that there's a Wheaton grad at every evangelical church in America. Even here, I think I've run into two Wheaton. How many Wheaton grads are in here? It's amazing. This is Illinois. Okay. So welcome.

If I say anything bad, please don't email my boss. They get enough emails about me already. I'm already on the list. So just like, this is recorded, but just like, I'm going to review it. All right.

I have a low filter when I'm tired. Okay. So Tommy said that I could speak about what I wanted to speak about, and then he said, actually talk about Ephesus and Ephesians. And so I'm going to do that.

[1 : 46] I said, can I talk about black people? He said, later, Ephesus. Okay. You know, this is my time, Tommy. This is my time. You're not the pastor right now. Just sit there. Okay. A little bit, a little bit about Ephesus, because I'm actually going to focus is on, I'm going to focus mostly on chapter two, hopefully in chapter three, but just to kind of set the stage. I think you did a sermon series on this a few years ago. Oh, like, no. Okay. So those of you who are here, this is a review, but for those of you who weren't here 10 years ago, this might be new information.

Ephesus is actually particularly relevant to people in DC, or at least my imagination of DC as someone who's never lived there. Ephesus was a port city in the ancient world. And anyone who knows about port cities recognizes that port cities tend to draw an international population because of trade, right? And that most of the time when you want to get out of your life in the countryside, where do you go? You go to the city. And so Ephesus was a center of commerce, a center of trade. And because of that, it prided itself on being cutting edge and cosmopolitan.

One of the other things that's interesting about Ephesus as it relates to DC is that the governor of the province lived in Ephesus. So it was a center of politics in the area. I think you guys have politics, right? That's accurate. Okay. I'm learning a little bit about you all.

They worshiped in Ephesus. There was this temple to Rome and the divine Julius. And so different cities in the empire received the right to put a temple up to the ruler. And so you showed your faithfulness to the government, the Roman empire, by the offerings that you did in this temple. And not every city got one of these. So you'd kind of apply to say, can we put up a temple to worship the god of politics? And so in Ephesus, there was this huge temple devoted to the empire. The god, the divine Julius was there and the divine Rome. And so there was this real sense in which part of being a good citizen meant paying proper deference to the empire. The other god who was there was the god Artemis, also known as Diana. There was a temple to Diana there. And if anyone's read the book of Acts, you know, there's kind of a riot that breaks out around Diana. And the Diana was known as the goddess who controlled fertility. And so anyone who had problems with children or who wanted to understand kind of the female person, this is the person, this is the god who you went to. So you prayed to Diana and she took care of your fertility. And so they were gods devoted to sex and politics and a cosmopolitan city devoted to worshipping the empire. I don't, I'm not going to say that's DC. I don't live there.

But as I throw rocks from abroad, this is what I say, from Alabama, this is what it seems like. But we know, we know that Paul spends two years in Ephesus lecturing about Christianity and debating with the different philosophies of that he spends two years there. And if you ever want to read Paul's, Paul's final, final kind of charge to the church in Ephesus, you turn to Acts chapter 20.

[5 : 13] And in Acts chapter 20, and I can't read it because I only got 45 minutes and I've already used five of them, but he, he entreats the, the elders in Ephesus to guard the faith because he knows that because of the hostility towards Christian faith and the culture, they're going to be subject to consistent and perpetual slander. And he said, I have done everything that I can for you. I've laid out to you all as clearly as I can, the counsel of God. And he said, when I leave, things are going to go sideways.

And so he writes, he sees Ephesus as a church that is under consistent pressure to compromise. And we don't, we don't, once again, I'll say one more thing about this, the story in Acts.

One of the things you see in Acts as it describes Ephesus, and then we'll get into the chapter. In Acts, there is this tendency towards syncretism. And so the people came and saw that the ministry was pretty popular. And then they said, oh, this is, this seems to be working in the city.

So I'm going to come and I'm going to say, I'm going to cast out a demon in the name of Paul and the God that he worships. And so there's this tendency in Ephesus that if you see something that works, rather than adopt it, this kind of added into what you do. And so that's just like Christianity as an addendum to an already existing ideology that seems to help you get what you want.

And so this is the reason that Paul wants to make sure that they're clear about what the gospel is, because he knows that it's possible that in a culture like Ephesus, they will make a series of small compromises and they will look up and the faith that he delivered to them will no longer be the same, which is the reason why he says, if I have in any way left out something in the gospel, let me know. So now to the letter of Ephesus itself, and I'm going to have to try to summarize chapter one again really quickly and then jump into chapter two in a little bit more detail.

[7 : 16] Paul opens the letter to the church in Ephesus in chapter one with a statement about blessing. And one of the blessings he talks about, which is going to become a theme throughout the entirety of the letter, is the blessing of being adopted into God's family. One of the things that happens when I think about adoption, I think about, in my mind, the missionary videos that they have when people kind of come and they want to give you money, they want to give you money to the church, you know, and so they have usually African babies. And so here's the video and there's like Stephen Curtis Chapman, because this is the 90s. So Stephen Curtis Chapman is playing in the background and then they say, well, here, give some money to these little African babies because they're in an orphanage and then we'll raise them and things will be great, right? And so this is my image of adoption.

African babies, you know, what's it? Is it Summers is her name? The video? Sally, whatever her name is. The white lady who held babies. Okay. Yeah. So you think of adoption as picking up this little kid and bringing them into your family. Some of us probably here have adopted or have gone through the adoption process. But in the Greco-Roman world, and this is important, babies weren't adopted.

Adults were adopted. And adults were adopted based upon what the adult could do for the children. So what the adult child could do for the older parents. So you're getting ready to die and you don't want your name to perish. And so you say, this looks like a promising young citizen. I will adopt you into my family so that when I die, my name goes forward. This is actually how all the emperors were chosen. So it wasn't a biological, this is my son, therefore he gets to be the next emperor.

You saw someone who was promising. You adopted him, made him your son, and then he kind of received the inheritance. So when Paul talks about us being adopted into God's family, the thing that makes this so radical in Ephesus is that we had no CVs that made us worthy applicants for adoption, right?

So we weren't the cute baby who had all of the things going for us. These people were adults who had no prospects, who nobody wanted, who were broken and sinful. And he says, God has adopted you into his family and given you an inheritance. Now we as Christians, according to Paul, despite the fact that we weren't nearly as impressive to God as other people might be to the person who adopted them, God has brought them into their family. And we now share, stand to inherit that which belongs to God.

[9 : 37] And the question becomes then, what belongs to God? You guys should have to answer this when I ask you but I'm a teacher. What is it that belongs to God? Everything. Everything. So he says, now you have this inheritance in God. And how do you have it? And this is the last thing he says in chapter one, and then I'll actually nine minutes in begin my actual passage. How does God bring us into his family?

According to Paul in chapter one, God brings us into his family through the power, the same power, that raised Christ from the dead. So like how much strength was exercised in bringing you from where you were into God's family? The same power that God the Father used when he said to Jesus, come forth from the dead. So that means our status as adopted children is as secure as the resurrection.

After that, Paul then moves into the subject of our time today, which is Ephesians chapter two, verses one down to 22. And I'm going to have to read it because I believe that like reading the Bible is important. So I'll read a little bit, talk a little bit, read a little bit. Since we're recording, I was going to have some of you all read it, but I'll read it so it's captured in the mic.

So we'll just read Ephesians two, one to three. Is that fair? Okay. Okay. You were dead. This is a great way to start the evangelistic process. You were dead.

This is not an encouraging message. You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the rulers of the power of the air and the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived amongst them and the passions of their flesh, following the desires of the flesh and the senses. We were by nature children of wrath like everyone else. So Tommy told you that we both went to Gordon and Conway together.

[11 : 43] I came in as a Baptist right about to become an Anglican and Tommy was in the PCA. And I think that the influence of the PCA probably still exists in Tommy's system. So, and it's not a bad thing because I'm not about to come for the PCA. But when I remember being at Gordon and Conway, my PCA friends loved Ephesians chapter two, verse one. I mean, this is like a life verse. He's nodding it.

They love this part because they get to talk about the sovereignty of God. Because this is what it says. This is what they say. They love this part. Though you were dead in your trespasses and sins. They say, like, these heathen Arminians who think they can save themselves, you're dead, right? A dead person can't do anything. But God, in his sovereign power from all eternity, made you alive, right? And so it's this great opportunity to talk about God's sovereign call of us from death to life. How many of you heard this interpretation of Ephesians? Now, I'm not here to yell at that. It is true. It is accurate. It is a wonderful thing to say about God's sovereignty. But, and when I was at Gordon and Conway, I was like super impressed by this. And then I did this strange thing. We're never going to get all the way through this chapter. I did this strange thing. I read the second half of verse one.

And I love, I love my Reformed friends. They're like, buddy, let's do some contextual interpretation here. Okay. You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once, what does it say?

Lived. Wait a minute. Wait, you see it? You see it? And if you actually look in the Greek, it's the language of walked. Which, you know, like you actually walked around as dead. And so I'm not actually denying the statement about divine sovereignty calling dead things into life. I'm talking about the complicated description of human existence that occurs in verse one. Because he said that you're, in some sense, living while dead. That is a description of the habits of life that you actually engage in that are ultimately meaningless. And so if you kind of, it's almost like, you talk about the zombies.

I don't know if this is a walking dead congregation, but like, you know, you remember this TV show? And so the walking dead, when you see these zombies, they're like dead, but they're alive. And, but the zombies are stupid, right? And so if the zombie hears noise, anyone seen walking dead? I'll use two saved for that. Okay. Thank you. You heathens like me who are like barely saved. Okay. So in a zombie movie, for those of you who are watching like VeggieTales, even though you're grown, okay, I'm gonna tell you what happened. In the, in, in the zombie movies, when the zombie hears noise, he just runs to it and feeds. And so the zombie is easily manipulated because it's completely driven by its passion and desires. It has a few small things working in its brain. It needs to eat, and it wants to survive.

[14 : 56] And so it's a system which is living, but it's also dead. And so what Paul is arguing, and he's going to get to like what Christ does, but Paul is giving an analysis of their life before they became Christian. And one of the things that, that, and we'll get to this later, they don't know this at the time. They think they're just living. Then he says this, and this is once again, talking about, talking about their experiences, you're following the course of this world. So he is saying that the world has a particular culture that is ultimately fruitless, rooted in death, that you as a human being followed. He then goes on to talk about the ruler of the power of the air.

So you then have like, and you guys, you baptize people here, right? Okay. So when you're baptized, when you're baptized, when you're baptized, it's just good. I don't know what y'all do. I've not been here in a while. So when you baptize someone, there's these threefold negations that you, that you reject. One of them is the world, right? The other one is the flesh, and then the devil.

So this is Ephesians, right here. Look, you are following the course of this world, following the ruler of the air. In verse three, all of us once lived amongst them in the passions of our flesh. The world, the flesh, and the devil. So the world here, or this age, refers to the world in rebellion against Christ. When I was, before I was a Christian, or when I was like barely a Christian, I used to have this idea that we were, that we were free agents. So in a sense that like, I was, there was a time when I wasn't a Christian, but I was just kind of doing my own thing. And I, and I like left free agency and like signed up for Jesus's team. So I went from being an independent, you know, contractor to long-term contract with Jesus. But Paul makes the argument that there are no independent contractors. Like none of us are free. Paul fundamentally rejects the idea that there's the autonomous individual. He says, you're either being influenced by the world, the flesh, and the devil, or you're being influenced by Jesus. And so then the question becomes, if we look at the world, are there, so this is like the analysis of Paul's argument. If we look at the culture, has the culture set things up for us to follow? Are we given instructions by the culture that we unconsciously follow? One of the things, one of the reasons why I became an Anglican, we're never going to give you this verse. One reason I became an Anglican is I love the liturgical pattern of the seasons, right? I love Advent and Christmas and Epiphany and Lent and Easter, and even in a sense ordinary time. Because you have the saints who kind of pop up every now and then and say, pay attention to this, pay attention to that. And it wasn't until I actually became an Anglican and I began to think through the seasons liturgically that I actually began to notice the liturgical seasons existed in American culture. That we have our own secular liturgical calendar that tells you what to wear on certain days, what to celebrate, and what to buy.

And these events on the calendar are also often tied to our gods. Now, please, do not men or women use this as an apology to like abandon Valentine's Day. So this argument is not going to work if you didn't apply it as I'm applying it now. So you can't say Valentine's Day is devoted to part of the secular calendar, devoted to the God of love, therefore I'm not getting you any candy. Like, that's a bad move. But if we had time, which we don't, we would start with kind of maybe the fake Christmas that replaced the actual celebration of Christmas, the secular Christmas, and the ideals that are folded to that that has its own goods and customs and events attached to it. We go through and we look at something like New Year's Eve, and they tell you exactly what to do and what to worship on New Year's Eve. And then we go from New Year's Eve into Valentine's Day and on and on and on. And we would talk about the clothes that we wear, the things that we buy, and the gods that we worship.

We're being shaped every day with certain types of people. And if we're not conscious of that, we will begin to use that to become the basis for how we function in the world. And one of the things that the Anglican Liturgical Calendar does, and Christianity does more broadly, is to give you an alternative accounting of time. And that alternative accounting of time is rooted in the worship of a different God.

[19:56] So the last thing I want to say about this section is two. One is, I know, you all are at, you're in D.C., so I'm just going to assume you're sophisticated. Maybe that's wrong.

But when we talk about the spirit of the forces of the air, that strikes the modern intellectual as being a little bit too much, right? I don't believe in demonic forces and spiritual powers.

It feels like that's, you know, like, I like the resurrection, but like, boogeyman, that's like two, you know, we've all passed that. But I want to say this, like, when we look, and I can't remember which author said this, when we look at the sum total of evil in the world, the actual evil that we do surpasses that. So if you kind of say, you get your standard level of human depravity, and you think of the kinds of things that should occur, every now and then it's something that kind of goes beyond it. And you see it in the media, right? When someone comes into a school and starts shooting at children, we know that there's something fundamentally, and I'm not, this mental illness, all of this stuff exists, right? But what I'm saying is that we in our society, sometimes even as secular as we are, come face to face with things that we can only describe as demonic.

And it's not simply individual acts, it is a corporate evil that sometimes invades culture. And if you don't think that we're in a spiritual moment with the racial divisions, and if you don't feel this, it's more than, not less than, but more than a series of individual prejudices, right? Something's happening, and we feel the change in the culture. And Paul talks about this as the spirits of the air, because that's where they thought that the spiritual creatures inhabited, right? So we live here in the flesh, and in the Greco-Roman world, the spirits are in the air.

So what I want to say to you is that if, as a Christian, your spirituality does not include the reality that we're engaging in a spiritual battle, then you fundamentally misunderstood the gospel. And whether that plays itself out, and this is not actually for the seeds, I say this all of the time. When we look at politics in the United States, we simply think that if we just change the person, then our lives are going to get better. Because it's all us, we're all in control of it.

[22 : 16] So if we vote for the right person, then we are going to change society, and culture will be better. Elections matter, trust me, right? I'm not going to doubt that. But what I am saying is that as Christians, we can get so caught up in what we see as the battle in front of us, that we don't recognize the reality of the spiritual oppression that exists in the world. The last thing I want to say just about these first three verses is that he refers to those who are in rebellion as the sons of disobedience. He uses familial language that we, before we were with Jesus, were actually a part of a dysfunctional family. And I will say that I think here, once again, Paul is accurate because whenever I wanted to do, I had like two sets of friends growing up. I don't know if you, once again, I'm not talking, this is my life. You can take what you want to from it. But I was raised in the church, and I had like two sets of friends. When I was trying to live right, I had like my Christian friends where I went, but when I wanted to do something stupid, I knew exactly who to call.

I had like my stupid friends, like I had this bad idea, and they go, let's do it. Or I could tell by the phone call, in those days it was actually a page, but you know, that's way too far.

When I got the page on my beeper, and I looked at it, I said, okay, this is my crazy friend. Because there are separate communities, right? I'm not saying when you become a Christian, you separate yourselves from the people who are not Christians. What I'm saying is, Paul talks about a family of people who exist in rebellion against God. But the family that exists in rebellion against God is a different kind of family, in that it is inherently unstable.

Because the source of our relationship is our association with our Father, who himself is the Father of lies, who doesn't actually care about our flourishing. And so in this community, there's a lot of dysfunction and brokenness, because there's no common vision. We're all united by our desire for something that's ultimately destructive. And so I had tons of friends who I kind of liked, where every now and then we look at one another and go, what is the basis for this relationship?

So what Paul has done in verses one to three is give a comprehensive analysis of the human condition apart from Christ, in which he makes claims about the world that demand an answer.

[24 : 50] Are we, or were we, indeed the living dead? Did we ultimately follow the course of this world, that we were driven by our passions, right? The world and spiritual forces. Is this an accurate description of the human condition? And did he say that this human broken family, that is all in the likeness of his Father, is ultimately consuming itself. And so when I take a step back and I look at the culture against, that exists kind of apart from Christ, this is what I see. Because, and I'm not saying the church doesn't have this function. What I am saying is, the only argument that the culture actually is able to make, like amongst itself, apart from Jesus, is we're right, you do it my way, and things will be better. And the people who disagree with me are ultimately evil, therefore I need to find something that allows me to hate them and dismiss them. Right? There is no, like we have lived, we've existed long enough to know that the culture is actually unable to create the community that it describes. Now the church may ultimately fail in places, but what we're going to get to is what is the vision for the church's unity? But what we need to do is get to the place we can actually say, this is what the church says the human person is, and this is the basis upon which we build community. We need to contrast that with what we are told. Because what we are told, and now I'm going to go back into passages, what we're told is this, this is what we're told. This is the basis for kind of secular human community. I don't know why I'm into this now, but I am. We all have our desires. These are the things that we want.

And no one should be able to tell us that we can't have or do what we want. And so we protect our right to want what we want, even if it's destructive. That's what we do. And so we create a bubble around one another that, in which we affirm all of the things that we want, the person wants to do as long as it doesn't harm someone else. So you can engage in destructive behavior as long as it's not destructive for someone else. And anyone who says, hey, that might not be the best idea, you then become a hypocrite.

So I think you have this culture created of like, suppose a universal affirmation, you have all of the marketing that exists is based upon ideals of beauty and desire that few of us can attain.

So they say we will affirm you no matter who you are and what you do, but we use an entirely different image to sell you all the things that you need. So we're actually telling you to be this. I was listening to, I was coming here, I think it was Delta. Delta had a commercial where it says, you know, we have 300 cities. It could not be Delta, some airline. We have 300 cities across the United States. And we take people from all of these places. We don't just, we're not just an airline that flies you from place to place. We are an airline that shows you when you go from place to place, we're all not so different.

And we're all one real family. And I go, that's a lie. You actually just fly planes to make money. Right? Right? Delta, Delta literally does not care if America is together, right? And they don't care.

[28 : 12] Like if we all hated one another and we just flew to different places all the time to escape one another, and they thought they could make money by telling you that, fly Delta. We will help you escape.

They will do it. One of the things, sorry, I know now I'm on a rant time. This is, okay. I'm on a rant. I knew this was going to happen. So this is the last discussion about Delta. Okay.

I don't know. I'm going to use some discipline. So use some discipline. We'll go on. We'll go on. Okay. Delta. They want you to escape, but they don't, they don't care about you.

I will say that this is the thing that I've noticed because I'm, I am, I don't know if you noticed, I'm African-American and, and I've seen so much, and this is like, we're being lied to. This is the whole point. Like we're, the point of this is actually rooted in Ephesians. Ephesians talks about the deceptive stuff of the world. And these are the ways that we're being lied to. We don't even notice it. I've noticed the shift in the justice discussion in media as they sell stuff. Right? Now media is like, every company is progressive and they have all of these things and they're using it to sell whatever they want. But do you really believe that these companies all of a sudden believe that justice is the way that they're willing to go and it was in a sacrifice, the bottom line to have a more just society like Coca-Cola cares about black people. They do not. When, when it was good to be racist, they had like the, the, the, the nuclear white family that was blonde and blue eyed because that made money. And when it became financially profitable to have black people in the commercial, they put black people in the commercial. After the culture changed, it was not rooted in an actual idea about what it means to be human. The media is following this, the course of this world. And we're just marching along with it. Then Paul says, now I can go to verse, like verse four of 21, then I'm going to finish in 15 more minutes. But God, but God, I'm just going to read down to verse 10. But God, who is rich in mercy out of the love with which he loved us, even when we were dead and our trespasses made us alive together with Christ by grace, you have been saved and raised up with him. And he seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ

Jesus so that in the ages to come, he might show the immeasurable riches of his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not the results of works, so that no one may boast. For all his workmanship, which he prepared beforehand to be our way of life." I have my like NRSV Bible and I'm already annoyed at it, sorry. It has the apocrypha in it. And so whenever I'm reading from it, I sometimes, but I have, you know, when you have like a different version of the Bible translated in your head and you're reading it again, I just have that cognitive dissonance. Okay, here we go. First, I think the the amazing thing about the gospel is its conjunctions. And so you can have in verse 1 to 3 this glorious kind of denouncing of culture and this glorification of human brokenness. And that can kind of become the tenor of what it means to be a Christian, to exist in perpetual opposition to the culture.

[31 : 30] And have nothing but critique. But that's not actually the point. Paul just puts these things down so that then he can get to his point. Because part of what the conversion process looks like is moving from the truth about who we are, and that's the hard part that we have to hear, to the gospel. So he goes, but God, and this is one of these, these, these, these Christian-y statements that we don't, we just lose the power of them. But God, who is rich in his mercy. So what does it mean to be rich in his mercy?

Let me give you, let me give you an analogy. So my kids, my kids come to me all the time, and they, and they will ask for stuff. And they will know there's like a certain like level of reasonableness that I will agree to. So, hey dad, can I have, you know, an Xbox? No. Why? Because we can't afford it, right? So there's, they know there's a budget. And so they kind of save their big ask for these, these hinge point seasons, right? So dad, I've been good for weeks. I haven't asked you for anything. Today, can we have pizza, right? So they know, like, okay, I didn't ask for cookies every single day. Here's the pizza buying time. And I go, okay, I do the financial analysis. Do we have \$20? Yes, we do. Here's your pizza.

And I think actually we, we can tend to think about God in a similar circumstance. Okay, okay, God, I haven't prayed to you in a very long time. I don't ask you for much, but I really need this job, right? Because you're thinking like, I'm saving this for the one big ask, right? Because like, I don't want to waste all of God's doing stuff for me on minor things, right? So the kids, forget them.

But this job, God, I really need this. But Paul says that God is wealthy in mercy. He doesn't run out of it. There isn't like this limited supply that we can say, I've asked God for too much.

We are made alive from his mercy. And one of the things that happens is that, at least in our house, there's four of them. And like, so we have four children. So like, they're perpetual hunger games. In the sense of like, they're all fighting. They'd like to be the one survivor. Because they want to know like, well, which one of us do you love the most? Maybe this is my dysfunctional family, but I'm going to share it. And so they're always competing for our attention.

[33 : 59] And you know, if I come, you come to one baseball game, you got to go to all the baseball games, the softball games, or you don't love them enough. But what Paul is saying is, God's mercy upon you does not exhaust his mercy for other people.

So God's wealth then kind of has two aspects. One, he has sufficient mercy to save all of us. And he has sufficient mercy for us to return to him over and over and over again.

But God, who is wealth, sorry, this is Exodus 34. Do you remember this? Remember this? Moses is in trouble. He's like, no, I don't remember it. It's okay. Moses is in trouble.

Israel has sinned dramatically. And he asked God to show him his nature. And he tells Moses to go on the cleft of the rock. And I'll pass by you. And I will say my name before you. And it says, God passes by Moses, he speaks the name of the Lord to him. The Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast mercy. So God revealed his character to Moses there as the one who, despite Israel's sinfulness, abounds in mercy. And where does this mercy come from? And what I want you to contrast this with is a picture of what it means to be in community. He's talked about what verses one to three looks like as the basis for their community. This is what, this is what forms you. Now he's over here. But God, who's rich in his mercy, but where does the mercy come from?

Right? Why does God tend to be merciful to us? Out of his love. So it like gets better. What's the basis for us being alive with Christ? Because he loves us.

[35 : 50] Once again, we are in the world of kind of Christian truisms, the wealth of his mercy and his love.

One of the things that they talk about, um, uh, Christian music, and especially our praise songs, is you feel like the only things that we can say, right? God is love, love, love. And you just kind of say love over and over again. And like, you've worshiped. I remember when I, I come from the black church. And I remember when I first, when I first started like coming around, like contemporary worship, I was like, like, why, why do they say the same thing? And it feels so detached.

So what I'm saying is, it's one thing to talk about God's love. And this is, this is between like, actually the African-American gospel tradition and like the, the, the worship tradition. It's one of the things that talk about love as an abstract thing. God loves me. But in the black gospel tradition, it's like, God loved me when he came and did this particular thing, right? The love becomes personal and it involves us and our narrative. And if you've ever been to a black church, which you haven't done, you should. Tommy, they'll still tie. It'll be fine. Okay.

You'll sometimes see the woman or the man who is singing the song. And every now and then, if they're singing the song, you can tell that that song has ceased to be written by someone else, but they're now telling their story through the music. And you'll see her and she would like get caught up and she'll like stop singing. And then the other people will come in and they will hug her or they'll hug him. And there's this real sense in which the love described in the music speaks to their lived experience, which then manifests itself in worship because they're bringing their narrative into it. I had no ability to pay my bills, but God stepped in and with the great love out of which he loved me when my family abandoned me. So like, this is how black gospel music stands. Like there's this, there's this song by Kirk Franklin and the opening chorus is like, this would never happen in the evangelical context. He goes, the first line is the government keeps lying to me, telling me that it's going to set the people free. I need a strong, actually it opens up with Mayday, Mayday. That's the opening. The government keeps lying to me, telling me that they can set the people free. I need a strong God who's going to save me. You see the difference? So when Paul talks about love here, it is not love as an attribute of God, as the detached thing. It is a love that reaches into our lives when we were dead in our trespasses and our sins and brings us to a new place.

And that to me feels like a much stronger basis of community to simply following the sons of disobedience. So we were, we were dead through our trespasses and sins, but because he loved us, because he loved us, he saw what the culture was doing to us and he came and he dragged us out.

[38 : 50] I'm going to just actually, I'm going to just go to verse 10 today. Is that okay? Cause I got like seven minutes left. I'm going to stop there. I'm going to say a couple of things about this. So now I can take my time, which I was doing anyway. I did have in my notes, like it's only like two pages. I'm on like, just like note four. So I, this is just, and I hate this, this headphone thing.

Yes. Thank you. Yes. Sorry. I told you I don't like these things. Okay, here we go. He says that he, through the, through, we were dead through our trespasses and sins.

He made us alive together with Christ. And it's by grace you've been saved and you've been raised up with him and seated in the heavenly places in Christ. So one of the things that marks out Anglicanism as particularly unique amongst Protestants is our liturgical calendar in which we celebrate things like the Feast of the Ascension. And so sometimes we treat the Feast of the Ascension like the means by which Jesus exits the stage, right? He was stuck here. He need to get out of here because he, you know, he's not supposed to be here. So he kind of zooms into heaven, right? And so now he's gone. We wait for him to come back. But the consistent tradition, the consistent assertion of the New Testament is that the Ascension of Christ carries us with him. So Paul often talks about, and we talk about this a lot, especially once again, in churches that rightfully focus on the atoning work of Christ, right? You died with Christ. And so this idea of the justification by faith is in part affected by Christ died for our sins. So that when we are baptized into Christ, we experience his death, and then we're kind of raised in a new life. So we get the death and resurrection through union, right? This is a standard piece of Christian theology. But here, Paul is not talking about the death and resurrection of Jesus, right? You died with Christ, and now you live with him in chapters, like in Romans chapter 6. He talks about you be ascended into heaven with Christ. This is like part three.

So you're not just dead to sin, and now you're living in a new life. You're actually ascended into the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Why does any of this matter? Why does it matter that you are now ascended into heaven? Because now the heavenly perspective from which Christ reigns becomes your perception of reality. So before that, you're stuck down here, and you're responding to and reacting to all of the things that you see. And so the basis for your hope are the ever-shifting currents of society. So sometimes we look at the world and go, man, it looks like things are hopeless, or things are going well. Me and Tommy were talking about this. When we were in seminary, the culture felt different. This is 2002 to 2005. It felt a little bit different. And so we're like, oh, you know, ministry is going to be great. We'll just go and start churches, and people will love us, and Christianity is wonderful. But now it feels like something has changed. And that change can sometimes affect our sense of hope.

But if we are actually ascended into the heavenly realms with Christ, we are united to the ruler of all things. And so that means things are never, ever falling apart. They're never falling apart.

[42 : 18] Even when it seems like in our personal lives, things are falling. You see the difference? We're saying, no matter what is happening in front of me, I am sick. I am dying. I am sick. I am dying.

Right? We have friends who get sick and who actually die. And there's two perspectives on this. This is the great tragedy that this person who we love is now gone forever. And all that fills me is despair. Or this is someone who I love, I am not someone who I love deeply, whom I will miss when they die. But I will see them as the transformation of all things. And so the struggle then for the Christian is to actually consistently see the world from the perspective of Christ. People ask me all of the time how I function in the ACNA, which is, you may not have noticed, there's a lot of white people in ACNA.

And I sometimes talk about multi-ethnicity in the ACNA. Or even multi-ethnicity period. Like, I mean, we in college. And like, why or how is this possible? Like, do you have any hope that this thing can actually be accomplished? And the thing, I say a couple of things. I say, first of all, the resurrection changes our plausibility structures. Right? It's like, once a dead person gets out of the ground, like, the things are impossible. Like, there's nothing. Right? So it's plausible. It's possible.

The God who can raise dead people can make churches diverse. You know, like this. If you're telling me, which one is harder? The second one, the second reason, though, the second reason is eschatology. When I get to the end of the Bible, I see Jesus Christ as King. It tells me what's going to happen. The people from every tribe and nation are going to come together and we're going to worship around the throne. And that Jesus is currently reigning over that community. And if the Bible tells me this is true, this is what Jesus sees. When he looks at creation, then I am justified in saying, I want to see it too. I get it that it's only a foretaste, but I want a foretaste of it.

So to be seated with Jesus is to allow Jesus to determine what is plausible. Now, what I don't want that, I don't want you to like, Jesus may see your resurrected body as like someone who can play in the NBA, but that might not be for you. Right? So it doesn't mean that you can just make bad decisions and say like, Jesus sees me as, you know, completely confident in everything.

[44 : 47] Well, no, like we all have our limitations. And so the resurrection of Jesus isn't this, this in kind of a plausibility structure, isn't an excuse not to properly plan and discern.

Instead, it is a call for the Christian to not allow their particular circumstances to determine what we think is possible. And trust me, as someone who has waded through our culture in the last three years, this section has become particularly pertinent.

Now, what is the purpose of all of this? This is in verse seven. Why is Christ taking us out of this world of disobedience, bringing us into this new community through his love and placing us with him in the heavenly realms? What is the purpose of it?

And here I get the sound. This is why, this is why our reformed brothers love this. Here we go, Tommy. This is it. For his glory. So that in the ages to come, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us. So that people will see God's gracious goodness. So our transformed lives are witnesses to the coming ages of what God has done in Christ Jesus.

So the transformed character of the church is a testimony to the watching world. Now, there's two ways to interpret this, and I'm going to interpret it both ways. I like both interpretations. And so you guys can go and look in your commentaries if you really care to see which one is right.

[46 : 37] The first one is, Paul is talking about the two ages. So you live in the present age where, you know, things are dominated by sin. So then in the coming age, right, when Christ comes in his glory, the church will be a manifestation to the coming age of what God has done, right? So when the new age comes, the testimony of the church has been towards God's goodness all along. So that we are, in a sense, like a testimony to the eschatological world of what God can do in the present, which is great. If that is the interpretation, then it means that our transformed lives are a record that would exist forever. So that in the new creation, when we share our testimony of what God has done, like the testimony of the church of the advent in DC in the year of our Lord, 2019, is a particular manifestation of God's glory. That's interpretation A. Interpretation B is that Paul is actually talking about, and less likely, the various generations that come. So that like one particular church becomes a testimony to like the future age. So like now the church in Ephesus is gone, but the testimony of the church in Ephesus remains, right? So that when we look back, and we talk about this a lot, one of the things I do is African-American interpretation. And sometimes you kind of wade through like people Bible reading in like the 1800s. Let me tell you, it was rough in spots, right?

And so you see this testimony of kind of the distortion of the church's witness, and you're like prone to despair. But then you say, oh no, there was a Christian here who looked in the scriptures and said within those scriptures, we can see clearly that God wants his people to be free.

And so that testimony remains. In either case, in either case, the point of it is all of this stuff matters. What we do as a church on a particular Sunday or Monday or Tuesday on a small group, in the grand scheme of things, may seem like something insignificant. But we really are, a testimony to God's character. And if we actually had time, and we were actually vulnerable, I'm not telling you all should put all your business in the street because everybody can't process it, right? It's true. You don't tell everybody everything. This is, my mama will tell me.

You're not getting a whole testimony. You're getting a testimony that you can handle. But if we actually said, let's talk about God's graciousness towards us, and we shared it, and we all listened to it with sensitive hearts, we'll be overcome by God's goodness, strictly from the testimonies in this room. And we will come to a better understanding of who God's character is because of these stories. And so he concludes all of this then, right? So age will come, for by grace you have been saved through faith. So all the things that you now are, are not a result of you. So the end of all of this is not that you are boasting in your transformed life, like I am this wonderful Christian. But what you boast in is the fact that Jesus Christ has done these things in us. And then the new life, and this is the last verse that I'm going to do, the new life. For what we are, he has made us. That's an amazing account of the human person.

Versus we are told that we create our own meaning and our own identity. No, no, no. What you are, he has made you. And he has made you in Christ Jesus for good works. So what is the purpose of all of this? The purpose of all of this is that God, God's grace in dragging us from death to life creates a new perspective on the world. This new perspective on the world leads to transformed lives in those particularly transformed lives are a manifestation of his glory. This is what it means to be a part of the Christian family. Thank you.