

A Christian's Origin Story?

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Good morning. If you'd like to open your Bibles back to Ephesians chapter 2. What is your origin story?

What is your origin story? What is that? Well, it's a story of how you came to be who you are today. We're kind of obsessed with them.

We love them. They're in superhero movies. It starts with Peter Parker. He's just him. And then it's this amazing story of how he becomes the amazing Spider-Man.

It's all over Netflix. You know, all these documentaries, how I became Mr. T. You know, it's when we ask people what they do. We're kind of asking for their origin story.

When we meet people, what's your story? Where have you come from? We love them. And we love really exciting ones. And here's the ones that we love the most as Christians.

[1:21] We love Christian origin stories. Do you know this guy, Nicky Cruz? Amazing story.

Tough upbringing. Lived on the streets. Became a gang leader. But then he heard the gospel message. And he turned his life around. And now he's touring the world, telling his story about how he came out of the gang life to the Jesus life.

Praise God for that. And we can't quite live up to that sort of origin story. But there are kind of more normal, exciting ones that we love.

You know, I had a vision. I had a dream. I heard God speak to me. I was slain in the spirit. I was an alcoholic.

I was a slave to addiction. And then now I'm a Christian. Or even more normal, but still exciting. I started Christian. But then I had this really crazy teen years and university years.

[2:23] And then I came back home. And they're all amazing. But that's not most of us, I'd want to bet.

That's not most of us. I grew up in a Christian home. Parents taught me the gospel. And then I believed it.

Probably when I was about five or something. Maybe that's yours. Someone invited me to a Christianity Explored course. And I thought I needed Jesus.

And now I'm sort of here at church. Serving on rotas and stuff. Heard someone preach a sermon. And I sort of liked it.

And now I'm a Christian. And I believe in Jesus. Look, of course there's a moment. But becoming a Christian, being a Christian, doesn't always feel that impressive.

[3:26] Like you've really come from anywhere. In fact, it's quite underwhelming. We're in the book of Ephesians this term, seeing God's view of us.

And like the Ephesians, we're pretty much like them actually. Because we feel underwhelmed. We feel disappointed about what being a Christian is.

Maybe not as powerful as that other religion over there. Or that Christian denomination over there. And let's be honest, it feels really quite bare.

Quite thin being a Christian, doesn't it? There's not loads of miracles all the time. Not all these smells and bells everywhere. No rituals.

It's just kind of praying and reading your Bible. And loving Jesus. And going to bed. And then waking up and doing that all again. Isn't it? And the mundane of life.

[4:28] Trying to please Jesus at the office. Trying to be a good mum. Whatever it is. And maybe it doesn't feel quite worth it.

Like it's that good. Is this it? This is all it is. But here's my prayer.

This is what I've been praying this week. That we would have God's view. Of who we are and what we have in Christ. And to really see that.

The Holy Spirit today. Thinks that we need to know just where we have come from. Not just a little step from here to here.

Or even. Or even. If you were here a couple of weeks ago. Last week. Seeing all the blessings we have. From here to here. We've come. From here. To here.

[5:28] And that is how we see how amazing it is. To be a Christian. When we see. Our origin story. Because once upon a time. You. You.

Were. Dead. You were dead. That's how far back it goes. Look at Ephesians chapter 2. Starting in verse 1.

As for you. You were dead. In your transgressions and sins. In which you used to live. When you followed the ways of this world. And the ruler of the kingdom of the air. The spirit who's now at work. And those who are disobedient. All of us. Also lived among them at one time. Gratifying the cravings of our flesh. Following it's eyes and it's thoughts. Like the rest of.

Like the rest. We were by nature deserving. Of wrath. You might want to turn back. If you're in the church Bibles. I heard it flick over there. What a picture.

[6:30] You. Were. Dead. Dead. Not basically okay. Not basically redeemable. Not kind of halfway to being Christian.

Because you've already got half of the morals there anyway. Not even. Stuck in the gang life. And then. Converted. It's way worse. It's way more dire. Buried in a coffin.

Dead. What do you mean James? I've kind of always been alive. I haven't been dead. What do you mean? Well this is the whole point.

We need to know. God's true. View. Of us. His true view of us. Verse one. As for you. You were dead in. In regard to.

In the realm of. Your transgressions and sins. Spiritually dead. Alive to sin. Because you were walking in it.

[7:26] You were living in it. It says. Do you know what that means then? By definition. If you are alive to sin. You are dead. To God.

That's why you're dead. You were dead. The passage unpacks it. Look at the. Unholy trinity. Of being dead in sin. And alive to the world. The flesh. The devil.

Have a look at verse two. In which you used to. Live. When you followed the ways. This firstly. The world. Not thinking God's. Thoughts. Caught up. In the ways of the world.

Instead. The way. The world thinks. Whether that is secularism. Or just. The pursuit of the.

Farnham good life. Just. Live. Your. Life your way.

For your lovely retirement. Not for God. I think we all kind of think we're. Individual. And that's just not true.

[8:22] Is it? You think about a school. You know you have the. The cool kids who are. Sort of. You know they were the ones. Who weren't individuals. And then you had. The true individuals. But actually.

Well back in. In my day. They were. You know. All the individuals. Looked exactly the same. All the emotes. They all dressed. They looked exactly the same. Actually. No one's really individual. We're all following.

Something. And the Bible says. We follow the ways of the world. Secondly. The flesh. Verse three. Gratifying the cravings of our flesh.

And following its desires and thoughts. Now the flesh. Is the whole human condition. Hostile.

To God. The whole human condition. Wired. Hostile. To God. And maybe you think. You know. I wasn't hostile. Was I? I wasn't that bad.

[9:18] Well we weren't 100% kind of bad as we could be. But 100% of us. Cravings. Desires. And thoughts. Leaned away from God.

Radically corrupted. Our will. Not God's will. He's not the king. And lastly of that trio. The world. The flesh. And the devil.

Verse two. You follow the ways of this world. And the ruler. Of the kingdom of the air. And we weren't following King Jesus. We were following. King devil. Think about that.

That's probably the hardest one. To swallow isn't it? But every. If every part of us wants. Our way. And not God's ways. Then that kind of is.

The devil's ways. He is in opposition. To everything. God loves. The world. The flesh. And the devil. Dead. In sin. Now this spiritual death.

[10 : 22] Is definitely a kind of spiritual. Helplessness. We're a slave. To those things. The world. The flesh. And the devil. The flesh.

You can't change. In that situation. Now go to a morgue. And you can see that those dead people. Can't do anything about that situation. But it's not just can't.

It's won't. We followed our cravings. Our desires. That we have a free will. But it's freely doing. What we love to do.

Not our ways. God's ways. And that made us deserving. Of judgment. Verse 3. Just destined. For God's wrath. You'll see there.

Now you know how you put on. Those. You see people put on these special glasses. Like infrared glasses. Where they can see. Like a different bit of the light spectrum. Because they've got those glasses on. Right. This passage sort of does that for us.

[11 : 27] It puts gospel goggles on. Where now we can see the whole of humanity. Locked in a prison. On a conveyor belt.

Rolling slowly. Unknowingly in this point. Towards God's wrath. But at the same time. Sort of glad to be there.

Glad to be living. Their own way. But it gets worse. When you didn't think it would get worse. It gets worse. Spiritual death is not mostly a metaphor.

It's saying we were actually dead. We were really dead. Recently I got asked about what happens to those who reject Jesus. And there is a sobering.

Very sad reality. Of eternal death. Judgment. That is in verse 3 there. But with this passage in mind. I said. Well those who reject Jesus.

[12 : 27] They are already experiencing death. They are already experiencing death. When you walk away from God.

The source of all life. And goodness. What do you get? I mean just think about it. What do you get by definition when you walk away from life?

You get death. By definition. We were actually dead. And I think it does.

Explain a lot of things. About what we see. And what we experience in this world. Doesn't it? But when we try to tell people the gospel.

The good news. How good it is. Why don't people always respond? I think this passage has an answer doesn't it? Do you know what?

[13 : 32] It's so easy to look at the world. And see people. Look so put together. And so full of life in them. But you put those infrared gospel goggles on.

What do you see? A graveyard. Lifeless bodies cut off. From the loving eternal life of God.

It's quite a stark reality. This is what Ephesians says is true. This is what the Holy Spirit says is true. People's deepest need is not mostly.

To have some great theistic argument. Or love bombing. Or good solid rational thinking. To come to Jesus. People's deepest need is not mostly.

To be fed or clothed. Even though that is a need. And all those other things I just mentioned. Are good great things. The world outside of Christ.

[14 : 39] Is dead. Your neighbour. Your friend. Your colleague. Needs something to solve that problem. The gospel. But actually I think those are only sort of secondary implications.

Because it's very easy to sort of apply this passage to people out there. And not really think about us. Because really this whole passage.

This whole section of Ephesians. Is to talk about what we have. And right here. What we absolutely didn't have. In Jesus.

Because being dead. That was our backdrop. That was our origin story. Not just that you grew up in a Christian home. And you heard a preacher. And you liked it.

And then you became a Christian. Or any of those things. Every single one of us. Us. Was dead. And with that backdrop in place.

[15 : 47] We can see just how. Spectacular it is. That we are Christians here. Today. Because God.

Had to make you. If you are trusting Jesus now. He had to make you alive. Alive. He had to make you alive. A resurrection. Verse 4.

Look down at verse 4. But because of his great love for us. God. Who is rich in mercy. Made us alive. With Christ. Even when we were dead.

In transgressions. You know. From our perspective. It is true. We felt. Lost at sea. And we grabbed onto that rope of the gospel. That was dangling down from a helicopter. That is true from our perspective. But in the truest sense.

We were. At the bottom of the ocean. Dead. What really happened was. God reached down. Into those depths. And he hauled us up.

[16:50] And he looked at us. Our lifeless body. And said. Let there be life. And our stony hearts. They started pumping. And we were filled with God's spirit. And we opened our eyes.

Verse 5. God. Made us. Alive. That is what happened. And in that act. We were lovingly saved. Raised. To the highest place. End of verse 5. It is by grace. You have been saved. And God. Raised us up. With Christ. And seated us with him.

In the heavenly realms. In Christ Jesus. In order that. In the coming ages. He might show. The incomparable riches. Of his grace. Expressed in his kindness. To us in Christ Jesus. Christ died. And was raised. And was seated. At the throne. Of the universe. With all his enemies. Under his feet. In total. Victory. But we were his enemies.

[17:50] Destined for his judgment. But now. We are raised with him. In his resurrection. And seated with him now. Believe this. Bethel.

Believe this. You. Are seated. Right now. You are seated. Right now. On the throne. Of the universe. Do you believe that? Experiencing his kindness.

From now. Into eternity. That's what verse 7 says. Forever. And ever. And therefore then. Experiencing true life. We said that we were dead. Actually dead.

But now we are actually alive. Because we are connected. To the source of all life. We are united. To the Lord Jesus. Our great and gracious. And loving saviour. Who loves us so much.

From the depths. To the highest place. Raised with him. How good is that? And the point is.

[18:51] It just doesn't feel like that. It doesn't feel like that. It doesn't feel like you have. The resurrection power of Jesus. Surging through you. Does it? Life is mundane.

It's so normal. You're not doing miracles. You're struggling with sin. Just like me. And we're all getting old. And the bodies are getting old and stuff.

Maybe a bit less. But whatever. But even. Maybe you don't even feel like a real Christian today. Because you haven't had that powerful moment.

moment. That you were supposed to have. That someone said you were supposed to have. It's a slight side point. But I. You know. I know there's more than a handful of people here today.

Actually give that as a reason. For why they don't want to be baptised yet. Because they don't quite feel ready. They haven't had that proper moment yet. Where it's really powerful. And oh. Whoa. Whoa. If you've simply trusted in Jesus.

[19:55] You don't need a certain experience. Or to get in the right frame of mind. For. For worship. Or whatever. Or do a certain prayer technique. Or have. Some kind of. Expected power of God.

In your. Manifest in your life. That someone's told you. Once upon a time. The Lord Jesus saw you in a tomb. And he effectively called you. By the spirit. And said. Come out. Come out. Raised a new life.

You have experienced the power of the Lord Jesus. The resurrection power of the Lord Jesus.

Because you've been raised with him. You are connected to him. True life. And true life.

In him. Isn't that wonderful? That's where you stand today. And it was nothing to do with you.

[21:00] Nothing to do with you. I'm going to put the emphasis differently on this. But God. Raised you. God. Made you alive. By grace.

Verse 8. It's all over the passage. But have a look at verse 8. For it is by grace you have been saved. Through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is a gift of God. Not by works.

So that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork. Created in Christ Jesus. To do good works. Which God prepared in advance for us to do. Now isn't our world.

So light. On grace. Nothing comes for free. Does it? The way of the world. Work hard.

Get the reward. Get the better salary. Because you've had a great performance review. And you've earned it. Deserved. That's the way of the world.

[22:00] But that's not the way of Jesus. He's full of grace. And it is so freeing to know. That you don't have to reach a certain bar. You don't have to be a certain kind of person.

You don't have to be intelligent enough. You don't have to fit a mould. You don't have to have a certain upbringing. You don't have to follow a 12 step programme perfectly. You don't have to not make some of those mistakes. Mistakes that some people say you shouldn't make. Or you're out. Not by works.

Not by works. We need to keep hearing this. Because we live like this. Not by works. It's not us. So that no one can boast. Salvation is all of God. A free gift. Look, if you are mainly coming to Jesus today.

[23:07] Or if you come to Jesus to mainly clean up your life. And be good enough. Use flash. You can't be good enough. We fall so far short.

Oh and by the way, you were dead. So nothing can really work anyway. In Christ. It's free. It's free. It's free. And we don't even need the right kind of strong enough faith. It's a gift.

Verse 8. By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of yourselves. It is a gift of God. The whole thing. This. The whole thing. Grace. Salvation. And faith.

It's one package. Okay. It's a gift. Of God. Including faith. And before you think that makes. That would make you passive.

[24:06] In coming to Jesus. I can't do this. I can't believe. The call. Is always to believe. And to trust. And we know that we have the gift of faith. When we believe.

It's as simple as that. I don't know about you. But I'm so grateful. It doesn't rest on me. My faith isn't always strong enough.

It's not always good enough. I was dead. I needed a resurrection. I needed grace. That's what I needed. And I needed the Lord Jesus for me. I needed the Lord Jesus.

To live that perfect life. To work for me. We are saved by works. But his good works. Not our works. I needed him. To die.

I needed him to be raised. So that I could be raised. And that's what you need. Every day. What a saviour.

[25:07] Here's a question that I've been pondering a lot. It's a funny thing with this passage. I think I've probably preached this passage about four times. In different churches and stuff. And I don't really ever feel like I've quite cracked it.

I don't think I've cracked it this time either. To be honest. But I've always wondered. Why is he talking about grace? Because you can talk about grace for lots of different reasons. For different parts of the Bible. And it sure is humbling, isn't it?

It sure is humbling. That we've been shown grace. It makes us rely on God more. Depend on him. He makes us love and praise our amazing God.

And I think that's going to be really important a bit later in Ephesians. Wow. You are amazing God. You're so kind. And loving. But that humble praise.

I think in the context of Ephesians. Makes us see how amazing it is then. To be in the position that we are in. I think that's perhaps the purpose here.

[26:08] Things that are owed to us are just normal. It's spent in life. They're normal and expected. And it doesn't feel that kind of great to be, to work for it really. It might be a bit of satisfaction in yourself perhaps.

But if you get a promotion, you worked hard, you deserved it. It feels normal and expected. And fine. Okay. That's just me. Being given a position that you didn't work for just feels that one little bit more amazing, doesn't it?

It feels so good to be in that position. And we were dead. We were saved. We were made alive for free. And how good then does that feel? To be a Christian.

To be who you are today. We praise our amazing God for what he's done for us. In Christ. There's nothing better than our Lord Jesus. There's nothing better than being a Christian and being in him. Made alive by grace. What is your origin story? What do you think it is? Like the Ephesians, you might not think you've really got much of life.

[27:16] Maybe you can't even pinpoint a date. You just heard a message at some point. No miracles. Nothing radical in your life particularly. Nothing Nicky Cruz-ish. Furthest thing from miracle perhaps.

But we need to know our true origin story, don't we? Because the story that we own, the story we own, shapes how we see our Christian life now. Because we said this before.

Picture yourself tomorrow morning just doing the most normal mundane thing. Filling in spreadsheets. Pairing some milk bottles for your newborn or whatever it is. Cleaning the house. Sitting in the waiting room. Whatever it is. Does it feel enormously better to be a Christian compared to someone who's not? Or when you're exhausted. Or when you are serving someone. And you're battling someone. Does it feel worth it? It can feel so thin.

[28:22] Neither here nor there. We can then lose heart. Or at least take our foot off the accelerator in the Christian life. I wonder if that's your issue to coast.

It doesn't feel that great to be a Christian. I'm not really going to live it out. I don't really know who I am particularly. My prayer is that we will see just how amazing a miracle it is to be a Christian. How richly privileged we are in Christ. And able to own that amazing origin story of who we are. If you're a Christian today.

Your testimony is not naff. Okay. I want to promise you that. It is not rubbish. If you wanted to. You could get up here with the most boring story. Right. But proclaiming really what Jesus has done for you.

What happened to me was a miracle. I was dead. I didn't want God. I was helpless. Happy living my own way. Destined for wrath. But the resurrection power of Jesus is surging through me.

[29:31] And I experienced the resurrection. I am victorious in Christ. All God's enemies are under my feet. In Jesus. And by grace and his love I am not his enemy but a child forever.

And it was all him. I'm a new creation. There's not a better story than that. That is the greatest testimony. Isn't it? And that origin story defines you today if you believe in Jesus.

Something worth living for. Or even better, something worth living out. We'll come on to see in future weeks. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we need to know and we need to feel it.

That we were dead. That we were hopeless. We had nothing. But we thank you so much for where you've taken us from.

[30:37] Thank you that you've made us alive. You've done nothing less than a resurrection in all of us who trusted you. And we thank you so much. There's nothing to do with us. It's all you. And we praise you.

We praise you so much for your amazing grace to us. And what it took the Lord Jesus to save us.

Thank you, Lord, for the position that we stand in.

New creations in Christ. In his name. Amen.