

God's handiwork

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 July 2018

Preacher: Jon Bickley

[0:00] Paul describing us as being dead, all dead in sin and trespasses. We've all missed the mark, we've willfully done things against God's law.

! And this applies to the whole world. The world is dead, there's no spiritual life. There would be no spiritual life there, no true relationship with him.

So when I was thinking about this, it reminded me of some of the old zombie films where you see these hordes of dead people, and they're all slowly walking together, and there's a horde of them, they all have this insatiable desire for something, but they're dead, they're rotted, they're corrupted, they're controlled by this desire, but there's nothing good in them.

They're all walking together, but they all are completely focused on their own individual need. And there's no real purpose to what they're doing.

They are just reanimated. And ultimately they're doomed. There is no hope for them. And this is really what Paul is describing. There's the whole of humanity, and in our natural state there is no hope.

[1:18] Paul says in verse 2, which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

So I just wanted to think about this ruler of the kingdom of the air. So everybody, humanity is under his influence, and he's a ruler.

In other versions he describes him as the prince of the power of the air. So we have this ruler or prince. There is some authority that he has, but he's not a king.

He has some power. There is a kingdom, but it isn't sovereign power, and it isn't the whole of creation. So this ruler of the kingdom of the air is inferior to our God.

We can see that from the very beginning, that our God is sovereign over all things, and he's the king. But here we have this ruler. He's limited to the air. This could either be the literal air atmosphere that we have or a spiritual realm that he has power in.

[2:35] But what can he do? He can only do what God allows. We can see that sin is restrained all the time in the lives of sinners everywhere.

And by God's grace, humanity isn't as bad as it could be. But we also see that restraint is being loosed with addiction, hatred for each other, self-obsession, all these things.

By God's grace, sin is restrained in the world. And if it wasn't, I think civilization would have been undone a long time ago. It's by God's grace that the world continues, that people still do good to each other and seek to live in peace to some extent in some places.

But the power this ruler has in the life of the Christian, I just wanted to think about that. And again, it's only what God allows. The difference being that we don't belong to him like humanity is described in these verses, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient.

So those who don't know Christ, these people described as being disobedient, are under his influence. But those of us who have come to know Christ, who have been forgiven, we are no longer under that same influence.

[4:07] But there is still satanic temptation. We know this, for example, Paul said he had a thorn in the flesh. And he said, I was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan.

So we know where it comes from. We know that there is a power behind it. But it's limited. It's only what God allows to happen.

And he says that it was to stop him from being conceited. So there was some good in it for him. And we can see a similar thing in the way that Job was afflicted.

In the way that we know that God and Satan spoke and discussed Job. And Job was tempted. And he was afflicted.

But he didn't curse God. And he was shown to be a righteous man because of that. So nothing is out of God's control. If it was, then how would anyone be saved?

[5:10] If Satan had full authority and full power over people in this world, then he would never let any of them go. But we know that God is truly sovereign over all things.

So for the believer, this is great comfort. God wouldn't allow anything to attack us without having control on it. And spiritual attack isn't a small thing.

It's very, very significant. It has significant effect on our life. But we know that all things are to work for our good. And it says here in verse 7 that we've been saved by grace so that in the coming ages we might know the immeasurable riches of his grace.

That's an amazing thought that the God who saves us has real blessing ahead of us in our future. So there is this ruler of the kingdom of the air and he has sway and he has authority over these people. But he's not limitless authority.

[6:17] He's not limitless power. And in verse 3 it says, we're carrying out the desires of our body. And this is what we did before knowing Christ. All we can do without him is carry out the desires of our body.

We can still feel this affecting us if we are following Jesus now. We can still feel the effects of our old man. The flesh, the temptations.

And this is something that we battle with daily and will battle with until we go to be with Jesus in glory. This is an everyday thing that we fight.

In verse 3 it says we're disobedient. So the end of verse 2 it says those who are disobedient. And then verse 3 it says, at the end of verse 3 like the rest we are by nature objects of wrath.

So I just want to think about these two descriptions of humanity. Disobedient and deserving of wrath. Very damning statement. Except for Christ we're all deserving of wrath.

[7:29] We all live lives dedicated to disobedience outside of Christ. We're all deserving of wrath. There's a couple of passages I want to read which just describe the human state without God.

Galatians 5 19 to 21 says the acts of the flesh are obvious sexual immorality impurity and debauchery idolatry witchcraft hatred discord jealousy fits of rage selfish ambition dissensions factions and envy drunkenness orgies and the like I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

And then in Romans 1 28 it says furthermore just as you did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God so God gave them over to a depraved mind so that they do what ought not to be done they have become filled with every kind of wickedness evil greed and depravity they're full of envy murder strife deceit and malice they are gossips slanderers god haters insolent arrogant boastful they invent ways of doing evil they disobey their parents they have no understanding no fidelity no love no mercy although they knew God's righteous decrees decree that those who do such things deserve death they not only continue to do these things but approve of those who practice them these are the people that Paul is describing here and it says like the rest of mankind at the end of verse 3 like the rest of mankind like the rest we were objects of wrath so the world is united in this common plight regardless of nationality religion philosophy the world loves sin and they're united in that but what about good people who we see around us people who hate murder people who do good things for charity people who live moral lives according to human standards and these are good things there's nothing wrong with doing these things even for unbelievers they're good things to do but it says in 1 corinthians 10 31 whatever you do eat or drink so whatever you do sorry start again so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do do all to the glory of god and then romans 14 23 for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin so anything done which isn't done for the glory of god anything which is not done in faith the bible says that this is this is sin we've been created for a purpose to love and to worship and to joyfully serve god this is what we've been created for and the world does not know any of that people have good intentions and they do good actions a lot of the time it's for the wrong reasons and so it's sin sinful people can do morally good actions for each other and bring about good social good social benefits but if the glory isn't given to god if it's given to men and women then it's tainted with sin and this is what paul is saying we don't need to go around pointing out all the charitable works we see and saying that they're

sinful because god is clear that we as christians we judge the church and god judges the world it's not that we need to go and point out that all these things people are doing are wrong but we need to point people to christ psalm 7 says god is a righteous judge a god who displays his wrath every day if he does not relent he will sharpen his sword he will bend and string his bow he has prepared his deadly weapons he makes ready his flaming arrows so to just summarize on this point people are more sinful than we realize god hates sin god is angry at sin and he will judge sinners in his anger god didn't make us this way we are sinners because we have fallen in adam and if we are christians we should often be thinking of the hope that we have the home being prepared for us in heaven to be with god in eternity it's a wonderful thought but we

should also remember that there's a place being prepared for sinners to spend eternity away from god an eternity of pain of suffering of loneliness! and this is how much god hates sin this is a serious thing god hates sin nobody will be swept aside and forgotten about at the end of time god doesn't forget about people if god forgot about people it would suggest that he wasn't that interested things that we ignore suggest that we don't care about but this is something that god hates and this is humanity this great crowd of people walking gladly but blindly into judgment it's a very very sad thing to think of a very sad thing which is described during jesus' ministry when he was preaching in the towns and the villages he said it says when jesus saw the crowds he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd it's in matthew 9 this is the same god the same god who hates sin who judges sin is the same god who has compassion on these people he's harassed helpless people people without a shepherd people who are dead spiritually dead this is the same god the god that judges is the god that saves so we move on into verse 4 god is rich in mercy he says 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 so god is rich in mercy there's enough mercy for the worst of sinners because of this great love love which he's had for us a great love in showing us that through the death of his son through the death of

Jesus on the cross that we can have a restored relationship with him in the third hymn that we'll sing at the end and can it be it says amazing love how can it be that thou my God should die for me and it is amazing I wanted to read a we have now been justified by his blood how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him for if when we were God's enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of his son how much more having been reconciled shall we now be saved through his life not only is this so but we also rejoice in

[15:16] God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have that he has made a way for us to have this relationship with him to raise us to spiritual life while we were still dead while we were in the state that we just looked at in those verses that was us God chose to have mercy on us and can you imagine choosing to love something which is dead but God in heaven who is holy he is perfect he chose to love a people who were dead in their sin in disobedience and deserving of wrath and it doesn't make sense the whole time we think about the worth of the one who was receiving the mercy if we think about these the way it's described these people people the way like we were we were sinners we were disobedient and God chose to love us and it wasn't because we were nice people it he wanted to extend his mercy to us but he also wanted to show it to the whole of humanity it says in verse 7 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 this is what God wants to show us he wants to show us his grace if we look at the worthlessness of the one receiving mercy we can only say it's not deserved if we look at myself before I was a Christian I was a sinner and I didn't deserve Christ but it's by his mercy that he saved me and it's to show his mercy to the world that he saved me he's made us alive together in Christ and raised us up with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus why such mercy why would this lavish undeserved mercy have been shown to a people deserving of wrath so that in the coming ages he might show incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus so this is in the ages to come not right now we get a taste of God's grace now but then in eternity we'll begin to see the immeasurable riches of his grace and they're immeasurable they're infinite they can't be measured they can't be truly comprehended and I

think it's probably like trying to look at the universe you can look at one part of the universe a very small part and then you can look at another very small part and you could spend a thousand lifetimes looking at very small parts of the universe but you would never be able to see the whole thing because it's too it's immeasurable and this is the riches of God's grace they are immeasurable and this is what we will spend eternity looking into and then he goes on to say by grace we've been saved through faith we've been saved through faith in Jesus it's not of our own doing the faith has been given to us so that we can't boast in our own effort if we had found our own way of salvation then we could say yes

I've done this I've gained salvation because of what I've done but it's only through faith given to us it's a gift having looked at the first three verses I hope that it's easy for us to see that we couldn't have done anything to bring about our own salvation we were dead dead people can't bring themselves back from the dead we didn't deserve life we didn't earn life it was a gift of God's grace God gave us faith to believe because he chose to love us despite our sinfulness despite our disobedience he chose to love us and it was a gift it wasn't of works what could we possibly have done to add to our salvation I think one of the lies that Satan tries to tempt us with is to believe that we need to work to earn salvation or more subtly that we have to work to keep our salvation but both of these are lies that steal the glory from God if we had to work to add to something to it or to keep our salvation we would just be diminishing his mercy diminishing his love and diminishing our own sinfulness but it's all of grace for by grace you've been saved through faith it's not from yourself it's a gift of God not by works so that no one can boast and then towards the end verse 9 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 so we are created for good works sometimes people think about doing good deeds for the day and almost as if they are maintaining their faith in some way maintaining their relationship with God doing their good deeds for the day almost as if they're just maintaining a car you put your oil and your petrol in it and you run the engine and the car will just be okay and people think if I do a few good things every now and then I will maintain a good standing before God and other people people will see what I'm doing but I think it's a very dangerous way to think God saved us from spiritual death spiritual death we've been saved from and raised to life with him and it's his will for us to live a new life a changed life with changed affections and by God's grace we fight sin we fight spiritual oppression spiritual opposition in our ministries and we serve the

[21:30] Lord until he comes or until we die and all thoughts of our good deeds should be forgotten as we live in a true saving grace in a transformed life and I was thinking no one will get to heaven and say that they've done too much for the kingdom no one will go to heaven and say that they've had too much joy or peace no one will go to heaven and say they've been too kind no one will say they've been too faithful or too patient with people no one will say they've been too gentle too self-controlled no one will say that they've prayed too much no one would say that they've sang too much or sacrificed too much for the name of Christ these things won't ever be said we're created for good works we're his workmanship we're not our own workmanship works prepared beforehand by God God has prepared the work and he's prepared the worker we're not created to do stupid things to waste time just to be entertained and to pass our days without passing on the grace that God's given to us there's so much things in this world that take up our time and I'm as guilty as anyone trying to fight these things off but TV the internet mobile phones all these kind of things not necessarily bad things but things which take our time they distract us but we were created for more than this we're created to know

God and know the riches of his grace and it's an amazing thing so if you have been born again if you've been raised to a new life in Christ you know Jesus is your savior then we should be encouraged that in eternity we get to explore the immeasurable riches of God's grace and we know now that we have tasted the riches of your grace and we know that they're good and if asked would we like to know more would we like to experience more of this then we say yes of course of course I would and we get to spend eternity experiencing and knowing more and more of that so we should

give thanks to God for his mercy in showing grace to us and if you don't know Jesus Christ you're still living as these dead people described spiritually dead verses 1 to 3 then I'd urge you to look for salvation today there's more mercy and more grace with God than you could ever need and to truly see the contrast of how bad sin is how good

God is I think we just need to look at the cross Jesus died on the cross Jesus the son of God was killed he didn't deserve to die he'd never sinned but he took the deserved wrath our deserved wrath he took it so mercy the mercy of God and the justice of God meet together sin is paid for grace has been purchased and our salvation has been won and heaven is now open to us who believe by faith it's an amazing thing and I would just encourage anybody who is doubting or not sure to really really seek this there is amazing mercy amazing grace with God so I would like to close there Amen