

The Good News - Free But Never Cheap!

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- [0 : 0 0] As for you, how do you feel when you hear that? Well, as for you, that's how this starts. Well, in fact, the Greek literally just says, and you, but it starts a sentence with that. So you can see how that translation, in order to convey it, is there, as for you. See, the thing is, is when you hear, as for you, you sit up and pay attention. Usually, it's a sign that good news is not forthcoming, that you're in trouble. I kind of think of, as for you, you're fired. But it might not be. It could be something else. It could be something really positive. And in fact, it is something really positive here. But the point is, in order to understand the context of what, as for you, is about, you've got to know what it is that comes immediately beforehand that you is being contrasted with.
- [1 : 0 8] So in order to make sense of that, we're going to go back to the words at the end of the preceding chapter of Ephesians 1, and ask, well, who or what is Paul talking about? Before he says, but as for you, this is what he says. He talks about Christ. Throughout that whole chapter, Paul builds this picture of the majesty, the power of Christ, what Christ has done for you and me. And then, as for you. In other words, everything that Paul says is following the implications of everything that Jesus has done. He's saying that that's to be the link. As we try and navigate our way through our lives, it needs to come back to everything that Jesus has done. That amazing gift that he has given to us, it's completely free. But it's not cheap. But we need to remember that the reason it's so important, the reason it matters, is because of Jesus.
- [2 : 3 5] As for you, it's a pointing back to the one to whom we are connected. So, in verse, perhaps I have the first slide here. Here we go. As for you, what's the first thing that he says here in chapter 2? Well, he says, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. You were dead. years ago, it became quite commonplace to talk about death as a taboo. You don't talk about it. I'm not sure that that's actually the case anymore, but it was, it kind of had its roots in some writing in the 1950s. Somebody called Jeffrey Gora wrote a book called The Pornography of Death. And his basic idea was that by the 1950s, in Britain at least, that you could see a radical contrast between the way in which people would talk about death or not talk about it in contrast with the theme of sex.
- [3 : 4 6] And he said that for, in Victorian culture, the whole theme of sex was repressed. But they did public mourning very openly.

You know, when somebody died, people would, would, would, would dress in black and there was all these kind of cultural norms of, of public mourning. And he said that by the sort of middle of the 20th century, that had reversed.

And, and actually people talk quite openly about sex. It was really, you know, it was sort of emerging, it was very much in your face. But, but death was something that was tabooed. We don't go there. About 20 years later in the 1970s, and as Becker wrote a book called *The Denial of Death*.

And it pretty much became accepted that, that that's kind of, you know, a hallmark of Western, certainly British culture, that death is something that is taboo, that we deny it, we don't want to talk about it, we sort of, we try and keep it out of, of, of, of everyday life.

It's marginalised. But you know, I don't think that's true. If it was true then, I don't think it is true now, that over the last 50 years, that has changed enormously. It was as long ago as 2007 that one particular study spoke so much about the amount of death that is presented in the media that, that by the age of 18, the average child would have seen no fewer than 40,000 deaths on the screen.

[5 : 16] Now that was back in 2007, and I don't think that it has actually got any less, if anything, it's got much more. And that was, when talking about the screen, that was a reference to television.

Well, actually, we don't watch it, most of our media these days isn't through terrestrial TV, it's, it's online, and I don't think there is any less by way of images of, of violence and death now.

But also, when we look at wider society, we can see how things have changed. Rewind back to 1997 and think of the, the, the, the cultural phenomenon after the death of Princess Diana and the way in which, as a nation, we went into a time of mourning.

And think of the Queen's funeral the other year. And all of those people sort of, queuing up for, for days to file past the Queen's coffin.

think of it. Think how today there, the, the public expressions of grief and mourning has become very commonplace every time there is a, a big scale tragic event.

[6 : 32] Think of the amount of roadside memorials and benches, for example, that we see now where grief is very openly expressed.

so I'm not convinced that it's quite accurate even though people will still talk about death as the last debut, I'm not convinced that that's actually the case. What is the case is, is, is how we handle the theme of death.

And I would suggest that for many there is a sense of denial in so far as that it will be pushed to one side because it's something that we would actually rather, rather not really think too long and hard about because it perhaps seems morbid, perhaps it just feels that, well, what is there to say?

But the point here, Paul, is that saying that, yeah, death is something that must be faced but here's the point, it's not something that lies ahead of you.

It is a reality but it's in the past tense. As for you, he says, he doesn't say you're going to die or that we're dying or always be ready for when you die.

[7 : 46] No, he says, as for you, you were dead. That is to be the mindset of the Christian believer. If you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus who has been through death already.

He is alive and with his own death so you have died and raised with him. death is to be seen as a reality that we need to be deeply, deeply aware of but as a past reality.

It's gone. That's how you walk when you follow Jesus. Death is relegated not to the front but to the back. It's behind you. It is in the past.

And so he goes on. Paul says as it carries on. Next slide, please. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

You see, this is where it becomes identity. The reason why when you put death behind you rather than ahead of you, that becomes your identity.

[9 : 02] identity, you are in Christ. We live in a culture that has just gone mad over identity politics where all sorts of different things can identify who you are.

But you know, I think it is a truism that very often we would try, we would end up defining ourselves almost by the things that we do. I mean, how do you define who you are?

So I have to talk about who are you as a person. I'm guessing instinctively our thoughts immediately go to the things that we've done or the things that we do. We might think of our achievements, we might think of our non-achievements.

It's a dangerous thing though when we think that way. It could be so misleading. This is why when suddenly we can't do those things that we once could, maybe through ill health or whatever it may be, then our identity can feel like it's going.

The good news is that as a Christian your identity does not lie in what you do. There was an artist called Paul Gustav Dor.

[10 : 16] He lived from 1832 to 1883. He was travelling Europe and he was at a border and wanted to cross and he couldn't find his passport as documentation that he needed to prove who he was.

So the officer standing at the border control told him who he was and he recognised the name as this famous artist. He said, I can't let you through if you haven't got anything to prove who you claim to be.

You're telling me that you're Paul Gustav Dor. Here you go. He pulled out a piece of paper and a pencil and he said, if you go over there and draw a picture of those people standing over there and bring it back.

He came back a few minutes later with this extraordinary picture and the story goes, and I assume it's true, but the story goes that at border control they took that picture and took it as evidence that this clearly was this guy and they let him through.

So identity was proved by what he could do. But Paul says here that our identity is not to be proved by what you do, but by what God does.

[11 : 32] Your identity, look here, God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Now right now you might not think that your life is one of sitting in the heavenly realms.

realms. But Paul says it is. One day that will be a reality that we will all actually see, lay hold of and understand as the kingdom comes in all its fullness.

But right now you are to know that you are in Christ who is in the heavenly realms and that you are held in him and that your identity therefore lies in him.

I've used this illustration before and it doesn't come from me, it comes from somebody else, but you know, got a piece of paper and imagine the piece of paper is you and this Bible is Christ.

When you follow Jesus you are in Christ, the piece of paper goes into that book. Wherever that book goes, you go. You are held in him.

[12 : 39] We still have to face all the sorts of realities every day of our lives that probably make us feel well, I don't exactly feel like I'm sat in the heavenly realms right now, but that's when we need to remember these words that Paul urges us to remember.

Your identity now is different. Death is not in front of you, it's behind you. You are in Christ who is in the heavenly realms who one day will return. This means that your identity is defined by nothing else and by nobody else except that you are in Christ.

Seated with him. in the heavenly realms. In Christ Jesus, as for you, that's who you are. Remember it.

the thing is, is that everything, everything, Paul says, is to be worked out from that sense of identity.

As for you, it's all to do with what God has done for you in Christ. Not with what you do, but what God has done for you.

[13 : 47] you see, he goes on to say that it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it's not, it's the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

Imagine that you walk into a car showroom and it's full of very, very nice, brand new, shiny, expensive cars. You see one that you really like the look of, it's got a price tag of £80,000 on it.

Somebody you've never met before walks up to you, has got a smile on their face, and they say, you'd really like this, wouldn't you? You laugh at them. They say, tell you what, I'll help you to buy it.

You laugh at them. They say, seriously, how much have you got on you? You reach into your back pocket, you've got fiver. You say, it's alright, you pop that down on the table, I'll make up the rest.

So you put in a fiver, and they've put in the, what did I say, 79,995 quid. Paperwork's dealt with, and they said, would you mind just giving me a lift home?

[15 : 02] It's quite an expensive lift, isn't it? You're hardly going to say no, are you? So you get in the car, and you go for a spin. And you happen to pull up at some traffic lights in this brand new car that you've just put a fiver towards.

And you see somebody, and you're waiting on the lights, they come over, they tap on, they say, nice, nice car. And you say, thank you, and you're pointing to your new friend, we bought this together.

Now any analogy breaks down eventually, of course it does. But when God calls you, and you're in him, and you're given that gift of grace, yeah, it's free, but it's not cheap.

we are called to respond. We're called to accept that gift. We're called to live that out.

But it's the gift from God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

[16 : 17] As for you, death is behind you. as for you, your identity is now held in Christ, who's in the heavenly realms.

That's who you are. You might not think much of yourself, but God thinks otherwise. As for you, you're the receiver of this extraordinary gift. As for you.

So where do we go with it? Well, let's move on to the last, towards the end of those verses. Paul says, for we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good work, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

See, as for you, God's got something for you that no one else can do except for you. God prepared it in advance for you. Even before you were born, God knew ways in which you could serve him that nobody else can.

And that's true right now. And that's quite an awesome thought. That as free as this gift of God is, he's got stuff for us to do with that gift.

[17 : 19] that's an awesome thought. That's an awesome thought that nobody can do what God wants you to do except for you. And every single one on this room, every single person in this room this applies to, as for you, there are ways in which the kingdom can come through you that it can't come through anybody else.

works. Because only you are you. And that's not just some naff piece of rhetoric. Only you actually will have the combination of skills, experiences through life and network of friends and relations that nobody else will have because they will be unique to you.

That's for you. God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works. So what are you going to do? I just want you to imagine as we bring this to a close, I just want you to think for a moment and ask yourself the question, who in your own experience played a particularly key role in leading you to Christ?

Now my guess is, as I ask you that question, you could probably think of quite a lot of different people. I'm just asking you to highlight one person, acknowledging that there are probably several.

people. It might be a family member, it might have been a parent or a grandparent, an uncle, it might have been a friend, maybe it was a preacher who preached a message one day that you heard, maybe at a big festival, Christian festival, you heard the gospel preach and that was the turning point for you.

[19 : 05] Maybe it was someone that wrote a Christian book that you picked up once and it made you think. As I say, my guess is you can think of lots of different people but just hold one person in your mind right now who played a key role in leading you to Jesus Christ through their words, through their actions, through the way they lived their life.

Now I want you to imagine that you go to that person and you ask the same question that I just put to you just then, to name one person that was particularly instrumental in leading them to Christ. And you were to go to them.

And imagine, you can see where this is going, you go back along the chain and you go back and ask them the same, that person the same question, and then the person that they name you go to the same question, and then the person that they name you go to the same question.

and so you go back through the generations. There is a link through history between Christ and his apostles and you.

You have a spiritual pedigree that goes back some 2,000 years. Now I want to put this question to you now. Who might it be 20 years from now, 10 years from now, 5 years from now, who hypothetically might be asked the same question, and the person that they name is you.

[20 : 33] As for you, let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you for this gift of your grace, the gift of good news, the gift that we are set free from death for all eternity.

Thank you that that is a free gift that you give us, that death is behind us, that our identity is now in you, that is a free gift that you give us, that we cannot earn, but you freely give to each of us.

Thank you. Lord, help us in our everyday lives, not to keep that gift to ourselves, but through our words and through our actions, to pass that on, to share that others may have it too.

Thank you that you call each and every one of us to be part of this amazing movement. Thank you that you call each and every one of us to know that our identity is not in what we do, but in you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.