

But God

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back to the chapter we had, Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2. We're looking roughly at verses 1 down to verse 10 of the chapter.

Ephesians 2, verses 1 down to verse 10. And for the sake of a text, we could take verses 4 and verse 5. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love of which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved. And so on down to the end of verse 10. The last time I came home from holiday, we were clearing out some of the boxes in the loft and we found our first digital camera.

And in that camera was the memory card still inside it. So we took the card out, plugged in the computer, and we saw some incredible photos.

It was amazing. The camera was about, going on, nine years old, almost. Not quite that, almost nine years old. And just to see how much our house had changed, the village had changed, to see people who are now gone.

[1 : 28] Life can pass so quickly before our eyes without us even realizing it. How much our lives can change.

It's not until we take the time, perhaps, to look back and to see, and to look at the old photos and to see how quickly and how different life was even a few short years ago.

In this section here of the letter in Ephesians, Paul is showing this church something of the past. He has wanted them to recall their past days and to think back about who they once were. The church in Ephesus was a church made up mostly of Gentiles, of people from non-Jewish background.

They were a mixture of people. We see that elsewhere in Scripture. Many of them, if we're Gentiles, they had no previous instruction in the Old Testament.

[2 : 33] They had no previous idea of any of these things, come from perhaps pagan backgrounds. We see in Acts that Ephesus is a city where Paul did much work, much good gospel work.

It was a place he knew, a congregation he knew well. Like we said, here he is writing them this letter. In this section of the letter here in chapter 2, he is asking them to think back, to go back and to imagine what they once were.

We join Paul in this section here. As you read these verses from verse 1 down to verse 10, I want us this evening, just like Paul leads the Ephesians through, I want us to be led through and to think about, firstly, what we once were, now what we are, and then the future.

Quite simple, past, present, and future. Paul is here speaking to Christians, and to the Christians here tonight, I want us to see what we once were, what we are now, and what the future holds for us.

If you are here this evening, and as of yet, you are not a Christian, then I want you to think about these things, and to see what you are now, what you could be, and also what the future may hold for you, or could hold for you.

[3 : 59] We will see that later on. As we look at these verses, listen, listen carefully. Listen carefully, as Paul uses quite challenging words, quite direct descriptions.

As we hear this and read this, we might be tempted to switch off and to think, well, I don't want to hear this, but my honest, genuine plea is, please listen to the word of God as it speaks to us this evening.

So firstly, roughly verses 1 down to verse 3, Paul addresses what they once were, what these Ephesian believers, what these Christians in Ephesus, what they once were, and Paul gets straight to the point.

There's no time for messing around with Paul. He's straight to the point, and you were dead. You were dead from the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. There's no room here for uncertainty.

Paul was clear to these Christians in Ephesus. Before you were saved, you were dead, you were gone. There's no sitting in the fence here with Paul.

[5 : 07] He makes clear that because we're born with sin, as it were, because of Adam, because of our parents, our first parents, we're born with sin as our default position, as it were.

We're born rebelling against God. We're born hating God. We're born wanting to do everything we should not be doing towards him. Some people question perhaps the reality of original sin.

Did the sin of Adam and Eve, did it pass down to us? And that's a whole other sermon. But supposing we're wrong about that. Supposing I'm wrong. Supposing there is no original sin.

It makes very little difference, really, because the second you commit your first sin, which you will do anyway, the same punishment awaits you. But the reality is we are born in sin.

It's in our genes. It's part of who we are. We are born hating our Creator. We cannot escape the curse of sin. It leaves us dead and in need of a great Savior.

[6 : 16] And we see that in verse 2. In verse 2, Paul makes clear. In verse 1, he says, You were once dead. Before you were Christians, you were dead. In verse 2, we see you just followed the course of the world.

You just did what you wanted. Again, in verse 3, we see even, he digs even deeper into this.

You were by nature children of wrath. By nature, you were born this way. We're all born this way.

We're all born in desperate need of saving. By nature, children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

We often hear the illustration that before we're saved, it's like someone struggling in water in a bog and the gospel throws my lifeline and pulls them up.

That's not the image or reality of the gospel. Before we're saved, we're not just struggling for breath. We're dead. We're at the bottom of a sea, at the bottom of a bog.

[7 : 23] A lifeline does nothing for us. We don't need rescuing. We need reviving. We need new life. We need a new life giver. In these first few verses, Paul was clear.

You were dead. You followed the course of the world. By nature, you followed the sinful ways without hope. No real care for God.

Doing everything we can to rebel against him and to ignore him. Following the course of this world, we were so taken in by all the fancy, shiny things the world offered us.

So taken in by the failing and fleeting promises of the world. You'll be happy if you do this. You'll be happy if you do this other thing. If you get this thing, you'll be happy.

If you do this and do that, you'll get happiness somehow. And the reality is, we believed it all before we're Christians.

[8 : 30] We believed it all, searching for bigger things, for better things. All the time, continually trying to drown out that niggling thought, surely there is more to my life than this.

As long as we follow the course of the world as the Ephesians once did, as every Christian here once did, as long as we follow the course of the world, we will struggle to find any real meaning in life.

I wake up in the morning, get dressed, go to work, go home, watch some telly, next day, same thing, next day, same thing. Loving family, yes, great. Great job, great.

Reality is, 50 years, 100 years, I'll be gone, I'll be forgotten. 200 years, we'll all be gone and forgotten completely probably.

What's the point of it all? What's the point of any of this? Before we were saved, surely that thought was in our mind somewhere, why am I here?

[9 : 37] And those here this evening who are not yet Christians, you know, fine, well, I'm not being dramatic. You also have that thought, what's the point? Really, why am I here?

Surely there's more to life than this. The question is, why? Why, before we were saved, did we never find any satisfaction, any real meaning in life?

Well, the reality is, the reality is, we're made to worship. We're made to worship. God made us to know him and to worship him.

Again, I said this morning, I don't know many here, but I will call you friends, and I say this genuinely. If any friends here who as of yet have not bowed down to worship God and to praise him as your God, I know you try and live a good life.

You try your best, you work hard. Everything else, you try hard, of course you do. But the reality is, without God, we exist on a planet hurtling through space forever, in a cold, uncaring universe.

[10:58] We live, we die, we're a rock in space, no one cares. No one cares. Then compare that to the gospel reality, that we're made with and for a purpose, by a caring and personal creator.

See, as long as we follow the course of the world, as long as we follow our own way of thinking and do our own thing, we'll never understand that. Our cataclysm, thankfully, sums it up for us so well.

What is the chief end of man? What's man's top priority? What's man's top purpose, top goal in life? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. We're made to worship. And until we do that, we will not find any real understanding in our lives.

We're made to enjoy God and to worship God. And until we do that, we will never be right. See, people think they are free without God.

[12:08] people think they're free. They look at us silly Christians, what are they doing? Look at them praying to the God in the sky they believe in.

Look at them worshipping and singing silly songs together. What are they doing? What are they doing? Wasting their nice day off in the sun. People think that they are free without God, that we are tethered to Him somehow.

But the reality is we all have our masters. We all have our masters and we see that in verse 2. But if we're not following God, if God is not our master, then who is our master?

Well, we see that in verse 2. to those who are still in the world, to those who are not yet Christians, who is your master? You are still following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work and the slender disobedience.

And who is that? It's Satan, the enemy of God. The biblical reality is you either have God as your master or Satan as your master.

[13:23] We don't say this just for the fun of it. It's a serious, serious reality. There's no pleasure in reading these summaries, especially if we identify ourselves as being part of this.

My plea is if any of this has struck a chord with you, if you have any desire to know more about Jesus as Saviour, any desire to know more about the Gospel, then that's not coming from you.

Naturally, you have no desire even close to that. Act on that desire. Talk to a friend who's a Christian. Talk to one of the elders. Talk to somebody. Ask them your worries.

Share your concerns. They'll be more than glad to talk with you. They really will. So that's the state these Ephesians were once in.

That's the state every Christian here was once in. We were dead, helpless, hopeless, living in darkness, following the prince of the air, following Satan, following the course of the world, looking for meaning, but never finding it.

[14:33] Carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. Completely lost, completely gone. Amen. Amen. Amen. The question is, what has taken place in the lives of the Christians here?

What took place in the lives of the Christians in Ephesus back in Paul's day to take them from that to something different? We see that in a wonderful phrase in verse 4.

But God. But God. these two simple words are just beautiful. All we've just seen.

All that misery, all that death and darkness and confusion, all that being lost with no hope and no saviour, all that circling round and round and round and then we get to verse 4 and it stops.

But God. Now by all means, it could well read after that. But God, because he is merciful, because he is righteous, but God, because he cares for his holiness, decided that Donald McLeod deserves to live no longer.

[16:01] Because of his sin, Donald McLeod should be cast off the face of the earth. But God, because he is holy, decided humanity did not deserve to be saved. But God, because of his perfect righteousness, because of his perfect justice, decided that that was it.

But what does this verse actually say? But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love of which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved, and so on.

God intervened. When we come to look at the love of God, we are just paddling around in the shore of an ocean we will never understand.

Never, ever, on this side of eternity or the next. In verse four, we have to stop for a second and see the love of God in action.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love of which he loved us. Now, I have to stop there and say, what's the one thing we find out about God's love in this verse?

[17 : 29] It's our love. When did God first love you? When did God first love any of his people? Did God love us when we decided to turn back to him and say, Lord, you're my Lord, I want to serve you?

Did God love us the moment we were saved? When did God first love us? When did God first love any of his people? We had the answer for us in the previous chapter.

If you could turn back to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 1. We'll read from verses 3 downwards for a few verses.

Ephesians chapter 1. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved, and so on.

[18 : 45] When did God first love us? When did God first love any of his people? Before you were born, before this island existed, before a universe existed, before time itself existed, before creation even happened, God knew his people and God has set his love on us.

Now that's a huge truth. This is not just some dry theology, this is great comfort to the Christian. We feel far from God, we said this morning, but we worry, does God actually love me?

Well, God has loved you if you love him, if you serve him, if you believe in Jesus your saviour, God has known you and loved you from before creation itself. And these verses in Ephesians 1 is just one example of hundreds we could look at all through scripture.

Ephesians 2 in verse 4, we see the love of God that goes back. And the sense which it goes back, that past tense, it does, even in the grammar of the Greek, it gives a sense of something going back and back and back.

Not qualified, not earned, nothing. God loved you before you even existed. God loved his people before they even knew anything about him.

[20 : 17] Before the first day had dawned on creation, God had set his people apart and showed his eternal love to them.

That blows our minds, yes. That stops us in our tracks, yes. But also to stop us and praise him. If we love our Savior here this evening, then his love for us goes back before we even understand. All that we have, all that we know, it's a gift from our God. So God takes us from this life. He intervenes in our situation and he makes us something new.

He gives us grace. He shows us his love, his mercy. He gives us a new life. All a work of his free grace.

In verse 8, for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not result of works so that no man may boast.

[21 : 26] It's the power of God and the power of God alone that changes us from death to life. Every Christian here this evening will testify to the fact that God alone has saved them.

God alone took them from what they once were, lost and dead, to what they now are. His people, with hope, purpose, with understanding of the God who made them, the God who loves them. It's the power of God, his power alone, that changes us. We take nothing to God apart from the prayer that he would change us, the prayer that he would forgive us, the prayer that he would save us.

Christians in Ephesus were once dead and hopeless. Christians here tonight were once dead and hopeless.

I was once dead and hopeless. What has taken place in our lives, God has broken in. He has entered in and he has saved us.

[22 : 34] And who is that for? Who is this gospel for? Who does God save?

Does he save those who try really hard? I've gone to church all my life, I've been in the same queue all my life, I've read the Bible all my life, I know my cat gives them off by heart, I know the sounds off by heart, my parents and granny were Christians and they all came to church, I've been to church every Sunday since I was born.

Good, great, but ultimately meaningless for your salvation, unless you can say that you know Jesus as your personal saviour. That's the end of the story for that.

Who is this life transforming good news for? power, it's for all who will come and cry out for salvation. There's no more qualifiers than that.

How many excuses do you have left? How many years have you sat in these pews and heard the same thing again and again and still you've done nothing about it? My words, take them and leave them.

[23 : 55] God's word you cannot take or leave. God's power transforms those who are dead and those who hate him and that power is more than enough to transform you this evening.

Do you have an excuse you have? It is meaningless in the light of nature, in the light of eternity. It's meaningless in the light of your future. God's life.

Once we were dead and God intervened in the life of his people, the life of Ephesians, in our Christian lives here tonight and he has saved us.

And all of those here tonight who know him, this wonderful eternal work has taken place in our lives. That leads us finally to asking what are we now?

See that roughly in verses 5 down to the end. Quite simply the state of a Christian can be put so simply. A Christian is someone who has been taken from death to life.

[25 : 07] Who has been taken from being enemies of God, hating him and fighting against him to now being called friends of God. Serving him and loving him.

This is no small change change. A Christian is not made perfect in terms of our current situation. We still sin and sin and sin again and we're all very much aware of that.

The steady work of sanctification, that work where we're made more and more like our Saviour has begun and will carry on until we pass away, until we go into glory.

But the reality is although we don't act in perfection when God views us as his people, how does God see you and me? How does God see his people?

He sees us as clothed, washed by the blood of the Saviour, clothed in his righteousness. When God sees us, he sees his Son.

[26 : 13] that's the reality of the Christian. The Christian just now appears before God as cleansed and perfect.

This verse reveals even more to us. We see in verse 6 something strange. God raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Thinking, well, what's that talking about? We're not in heavenly places. We're here. The Ephesians weren't in heaven.

They were quite clearly in Ephesus reading this letter. Our place is secure. When we read the verse, our mind should perhaps go back to the words of Jesus, the promise of our Saviour, that he was going to do what?

Going to prepare a place for us. Going to prepare a place for his people with him in eternity. So in one sense, of course, we are still living and working here.

[27 : 28] We exist in this world. We do our duty. We serve our Saviour. We serve our brothers and sisters. But in another sense, verse 6, is also true. As it were, with respect, our place has been saved for us in heaven.

Never to be removed or revoked. Never to be kicked out or changed. Verse 6 is true. And verse 6 flows into verse 7.

So that, in the coming ages, when all of this is done, in the new heavens and new earth, God might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

It's not just that he saves us, it's a small thing. There's more. We're saved. We're given the promise of eternity. Then we see in verse 7, even in eternity, there's more to come we can't even begin to understand.

This is not just the vague, vain hope of some poor souls here on earth. This is God's word to us. Our future is certain, our future is set.

[28 : 42] We've been given by God as a guaranteed place in eternity. That guaranteed hope of immeasurable riches of grace in the coming ages, that will be shown to every one of his people.

simple question that we have to ask is where are you in this?

If you're here tonight as a Christian, then no matter how you may be feeling this day or this week or this year even, it doesn't change the reality of who you now are. That verse 4 has applied to you, that God has intervened in your life and shown you his rich mercy, shown you the reality of his great love which he's had for you from before time itself.

That he has saved you from death and given you life. That reality for you is true now and forever. For those here who are as of yet not Christians, you're still stuck in verses 1 to verse 3. You're still stuck in that cycle of looking for meaning and purpose and finding none and looking for more and finding none. Ignoring all the time the God who made you, the God who knows you, and the God you are accountable to.

[30 : 17] And our heartfelt prayer is that you would come to know the God of verse 4. Come to cry out to him and to see him intervene in your life and to transform you.

It requires nothing from you but a desire to be saved. A realization of your position in verses 1 to 3 and a realization that you must be saved from that.

Because those who are still stuck in verses 1 to verse 3, where is their end? Their end is with their master and his end is a lost eternity in hell. There is nothing keeping you in verses 1 to verse 3 apart from your own stubborn heart.

Again, this is not being said for fun. Trust me, there is no pleasure whatsoever in saying any of this. But the reality is it has to be said, it has to be heard.

As long as you're in verses 1 to 3, as long as you're still dead and lost in this world, then the rest of verses 4 to the end mean nothing for you. But the wonderful reality is the gospel opportunity is open to you right now.

[31 : 42] You are here and you are hearing this with life still in you. Don't waste another second for you turn to Jesus. He requires nothing from you but that prayer.

Understand that he has done all the work for you. You have no need to understand everything about Christianity. Who does? There's plenty of questions we all have.

All you have to know is your need for him. Work anything else out afterwards as much as you want. We all are. But at this moment if as of yet you still do not know what it is to have Jesus as your personal saviour that has to be a priority.

For the Christians here let's take joy this evening as we reflect on these verses as we see the wonder of what God has done for us. Out of his own love for us, out of his own mercy, out of his grace he has intervened in our rebellion towards him, intervened in our hatred towards him and he has saved us and transformed us and given us a sure hope of a fellowship with him now and perfect eternity with him.

That's the hope of a Christian here this evening. No matter what we're going through, no matter what we may face even this new week, these truths have to be real for us.

[33 : 13] We have to lay hold of them. But this coming reality is through, this coming hope of a new age is through. But right now we are with him.

But right now he walks alongside us and that one day he will call us home. And all, not of our doing, all of it a gift of God.

Let's bow our heads now, a word of prayer.