

His Workmanship

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[0 : 00] In just a minute, we're going to be looking at the second reading, Ephesians 2, 1 and 10. As we remain standing, I'm going to pray a prayer which is based on some of the words of Paul in chapter 1 of Ephesians.

Let's pray. Lord, I pray that through your word, you would open the eyes of our hearts so that we might know what is the hope you have called us to.

And what is the immeasurable riches of your power towards us who believe. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I'm going to invite you to turn in your Bibles, I think it's page 976 in the Pew Bibles, to Ephesians 2.

Yes, that means that you're not going to be doing 2 Samuel 7, which should have been your topic, I understand. For today. But I believe David will be picking things up on your series next week.

So come prepared. If you were already prepared for today, as if it was 2 Samuel 7, well done. But keep on working and you'll be ready for next week. I think today of that old hymn, tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

[1 : 29] And that's my intention and my desire. I want to say what a delight it is today to be at St. John's. I love St. John's. I love you. I feel honored to be in your midst.

All of us across Canada consider St. John's to be our flagship, whether you know that or not. Some churches are pretty small and in places like Sturgeon Falls and Sioux Lookout and names that you probably never heard of otherwise.

And yet we look to St. John's and we were so proud of you and grateful for the stand which you and three other churches legally took.

We believe that was right and needed to happen. We grieved with you, the outcome of those, but before God felt good about things, knew that you were in a situation where you needed a place which would be big enough for this company of people to meet week by week.

And we're absolutely amazed and delighted. Why would we be amazed? I don't know. Because we serve an amazing God, don't we? But thrilled to hear of this place and the hospitality of this church and to see how you found a home week by week to hear about that event.

[2 : 46] Was it last September when you started in your previous site? And of course, I know St. John's has never been about a building, but it was a wonderful home and a place that was a focus of your ministry.

And you climbed in your cars and you headed here and you concluded your service. And I remember Dan telling us about that service at a meeting we were having in the East. And definitely there was, you know, we're a hardened bunch clergy, but moist eyes and lumps in throats as we heard of that and we took courage by your example.

So bless you. Thank you for letting me be. Thank you, David and Dan and leadership for allowing me to be with you on this weekend. And I want to talk about Ephesians 2, 1 to 10.

Let me say that where we're heading is verse 10. It sort of works that way, I know. But that's the text which I believe we're supposed to be heading towards.

It's not to say that most of the sermon is on verse 10, but hang in there. That's where we're heading, okay? Verse 10 says this. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[4 : 01] Now, walk is a pretty big word in Ephesians, so let's look for that word walk. Now, let me tell you about a problem which my marriage has before we get into this passage.

We have a problem in my family. There's only two of us in our home now, myself and my wife, and it's about a television show, which I loathe and she thinks is pretty good. It's extreme home makeover.

I don't know if you've heard of it. But I find this love. I mean, I am a hardened guy. And when they say, move the bus, if you know the show, and there's this amazing thing that has happened, I think, oh, man.

And when everybody's crying and so on, I'm ready to turn it off. Now, the reason I tell you about this, and my wife has a much more tender heart, as you would hope for, and she does.

But I have a bone to pick with this passage, and I think it's based on Ephesians 2, 1 to 10. Both speak about a people who are in desperate need.

[5 : 05] If you know the show, it starts with a family who are literally in desperate need, living in certainly inadequate, more than inadequate dwelling. And, you know, it's just a desperate situation.

Somehow they're identified to the show. So, the, and you get to know them, you know all the children and their likes and dislikes, their hobbies, and what they would like to have been able to do if they had a little bit better facilities, etc.

But the thing that I have a problem with is that the formula is, these people are worthy. They're folk who you'd like to give a break to. They're already giving, quote, back to the community in some way and are laboring, even although anybody else in that situation would not even think about the community.

But they have a generous spirit in general, and they're the kind of folk that if you're going to do a nice thing, you'd like to do it for them. And so, when the situation is identified, the construction crew along with the whole community gathers around, and they make this amazing dwelling.

And then the show ends with this massive bus, which separates the family who are about to see their new home. And then they shout, move the bus, and they move the bus, and then, you know, they see this incredible thing.

[6 : 25] Well, it's true, as we look to Ephesians 2, 1-10, that the inheritance which we are given in Christ is so incredible, so beyond our imaginations.

And it's not for a time, it's for eternity. And so that's what we're going to focus on. But it would be a big mistake, Ephesians 2, 1-3 will tell you, and we're going to start there.

It would be a big mistake if you felt that the candidates who got to be in on this inheritance were those who are the kind of folk who should get this kind of break.

Now, who are these individuals who are in such need? Well, look around. Look around here. Look at yourself. We're talking about the whole world.

So let's start with verse 1. And you, now, I guess I should say here that, in fact, these three verses are either your past situation, if you are now in Christ, or they're your present reality, if you are yet to come to faith in Christ.

[7 : 39] There's only two options for this. And everybody here, though I don't know everybody here, I can know with confidence, based on the Word of God itself, that either these three verses represent your past because you're now in Christ, or they represent your reality right now.

But the good news is, folks, and we're going to get there, is there will be an invitation to you, if you're not yet in Christ, to let today, March 18th, Lent 4, be the day of salvation for you.

And certainly it's my joy as a bishop. I am so grateful for Dan's teaching on what a bishop's supposed to do. I feel, that's the best explanation I've ever heard.

I heard it before at 9 as well. But before then, I was groping for what to do. But now, this is very helpful. But certainly one of the things which is my joy is to call people to faith in Christ.

I would go a long ways in lots of situations. And I know that I'm speaking to the vast majority of people who could preach this sermon better than me.

[8 : 50] But I happen to be the guy. And so I hope that this will bring encouragement and breathe faith and life into your faith, such that you'll be charging out of these doors into a world that needs to hear this message.

Let's look at verse 1. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

We're talking here about a universal condition. And the fact that I could give two subsets of that is only because of what follows. But if there wasn't that verse 4 and on, it would be the universal plight of all people.

And so it is, we need to look at that. Three things that it tells us. First of all, that we are followers, following the course of the world.

We tend to think that the good life is something that we identify and in the sort of enlightenment of our minds choose.

[10 : 18] Charting out a course which is for our enjoyment. In reality, the Bible nails that as being the course of this world. It's the pattern.

It's the way of thinking. It's the world's agenda as we know it. Nobody has to teach you it. You intuitively understand it from a very young age. And the issue is, it's not something that you choose, but it's something that you follow.

That's number one, following the agenda of the world. Secondly, following the prince of the power of air, who is Satan himself. Jesus in John 8 makes it clear that in fact those who sin follow their father, who is the father of lies, Satan himself.

And so it is that though you may not be aware of the dynamics or the realities of a real Satan and his demonic realm, make no mistake, Jesus knew their reality, spoke in no uncertain terms, and Satan is and his demonic realm.

And if you are outside of Christ, you are dead, first of all, in following the world's agenda, and secondly, dead, by virtue of the fact that you're following Satan himself, whether you know it or not.

[11 : 36] And finally, and in many ways, the most disappointing of all is that deadness that we have in our trespasses and sins is something which causes us to be sitting ducks for our appetites.

I hate that. I find that so disappointing to think that I'm just a chemical reaction. Put the stimuli before me and I have no opportunity to do anything but that.

Ring the bell and I start salivating. That being the summary of the life of the human being outside of an intervention of God. These are three characteristics of what it means to be truly dead.

That's our reality outside of Christ. And by nature, he sums it off by saying we're by nature children of wrath. Jesus, in John 3, speaks of the fact that things hinge on what we do with him and we're going to get there in a minute.

But he says if you haven't believed on him, you are judged already. It's a done deal. It's not a sort of looming thing out there, a possibility. It is the reality.

[12 : 50] And if you are outside of Christ, it's your reality right now. Just to underline that, I want to tell you a story about a pet that my family had.

His name was Winston. He was Beagle Basset Cross or Mix. And Beagle was much, Winston was much loved in our family. But he, as my dad said, didn't actually obey.

He sometimes agreed with you. And that was helpful when that happened. But it was relatively rare. One time, he did something which was far beyond the pale.

And being a preacher, I knew that I had to engage him. I needed to deal with this situation. I needed to discipline him. I needed to speak stern words which would create the right impression.

And being as a person who is often at a loss for words, I resorted wisely to the prayer book. And I explained to him that you've not done those things that you ought to have done.

[13 : 59] And you have done those things which you ought not to have done. Which is just what he'd done. And my son, who was eight at the time and was really into this discipline thing, said, and there's no health in you.

Well, that is the realities of Ephesians 2, 1, and 3. And so, we find ourselves amazed that you can have these three verses and then you can hear about, but you are his workmanship, but we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.

What in the world happened between that indictment which is final and that situation which speaks so positively of our life and our contribution in the world?

Well, I was at a talk recently where there was a presentation and the title of the talk was not a delicate one at all.

It was, Do you have a big but? And in fact, it was about excuses. Excuses for so, I apologize for embarrassing anyone. But anyway, that was, but in this situation we have a very big but which is actually the whole thing hinges.

[15 : 12] The intervention of God comes through on this verse, verse 4, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, looking back to verse 1 which speaks right at the beginning, you're dead in your trespasses, even when we were dead in our trespasses, God being rich in mercy has done something.

Well, once again, there are three things that it talks about. First of all, verse 5 says this, even when we were dead in our trespasses, has made us alive together with Christ.

You were dead, but now alive together with Christ. How did that happen? What motivated that? What made that possible? A God who is rich in mercy and full of grace.

See, what Paul doesn't spell out here, but all the pages of the New Testament speak in no uncertain terms, is that all of this he's saying is in Christ Jesus because of who Jesus is and because of what he did.

The Bible speaks of, for instance, 2 Corinthians 5 says, he who knew no sin, that's Jesus, became sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God.

[16 : 39] It's all by virtue of the cross and resurrection. Or Romans 5, speaking about this worthiness thing, and you know, you might die for a worthy person, you'd sure not die for someone who was not, but God commended his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

1 Peter talks about the fact that Jesus, the righteous died for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. The picture being here of us riding on the coattails by virtue of who Jesus is and by virtue of what he did on the cross and resurrection.

And so it is that Isaiah 53 says, all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He substituted himself in our place so that in real terms, our sin, our unworthiness, our deadness, our judgment, our condemnation was dealt with once and for all.

That's what Hebrews is all about. Glory. What glorious thing. The God who's rich in mercy in Jesus did something so that we can be raised to life and made us alive, raised us up with him.

[17 : 57] Verse 5b, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved. Verse 6, and raised us up with him, which speaks of the fact that we who are dead are made alive spiritually by the Holy Spirit.

Not only sprinkled clean, but God himself indwells us such that we become alive. Communion with God is a reality. Sinful me is now absolutely clean and able to be in real relationship with God, made alive.

And not only that, but there's a resurrection body that lies there so that I'll be raised with him who has been raised physically. And thirdly, it says, seated with him, raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ.

Riding on his coattails, we find ourselves in this place where heaven becomes our real home. And the ability to run into God's presence is ours by virtue of his sacrifice.

You know, he's not someone who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, Hebrews 4 said, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. And then he invites us, let us come boldly under the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[19 : 15] We are seated there with the one who intercedes for us all the time. And we find ourselves in that position, that glorious position with Jesus himself.

It's done. It's complete. Nothing to add. We share in the victory. Do you know that great Easter hymn, The Strife Is O'er, The Battle Done?

Now is the victor's triumph won. Now let the song of praise begun. Hallelujah. That's the theme song of the person who knows not only the reality of God who's rich in mercy, but that he has acted in Jesus in such a way that we who are unworthy can have a very different reality and a very different future.

Why did he do this? Well, we know the motivation, but it was unto a purpose. It was unto something in our lives. So let's look at verse 7. So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

One of the great themes of the Bible and certainly of Ephesians is a demonstration of who God is. If you make your way through Ezekiel you will find peppered, punctuated like a litany that you may know that I am the Lord.

[20 : 47] That's God speaking. That you may know, that they may know that I am the Lord. And in fact, God has this commitment and this desire and this heart to make himself known and to demonstrate who he is.

And so it is that we find out that in the purposes of God his intention is to create in the church and in you who are a believer a demonstration, exhibit A, of who he is.

And not only this but to be the receptacle through which his goodness and kindness and mercy is poured and for all to see for all eternity.

I'd sign up for that. I'd sign up for that job. Count me in. I'd like to be that kind of exhibit. I'd like to be that kind of witness. That one through which it's seen. And this is the church.

The bride of Christ. That, you know, often disappointing body. But the one to which Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

[21 : 53] That one that he will prepare without spot and blemish and one day welcome. A people prepared for him. And they are to be that demonstration whereby they are seen to be receiving God's goodness and kindness forever.

It's incredible. Way better than extreme home makeover, I would suggest. But now we get to verses 8 and 9. For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing.

It is the gift of God. And of course, in all of this, the initiative, the whole, not just the burden, but in reality, it all is done by him.

Be conceived, motivated, and enacted, and completed. It's all not by you, it's by him. Not, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Again, Jeremiah talks about, if you're going to boast, boast in the Lord. And this is what, again, in this demonstration, Paul does not want us to go even two sentences down the way, even a few seconds, without being brought back to the reality of who has created this, who has enacted this.

[23 : 09] The burden is on whom. He doesn't want you to think or to have even an inkling of some sense of satisfaction as if you participated in any way for this to happen.

He said, it's a gift, and not even a gift which is dutifully given because it's the appropriate thing to do in that situation. It's a gift which is totally unexpected and could never be hoped for, and yet it's given.

And how is it received? It's received by simple, childlike trust. It's by saying, here I am, take me. It's opening a door and saying, welcome Lord.

That's what we're talking about here. It's all about Him. And so finally, we come to the verse that we said we were heading towards. But we, plural, all of us, are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

He's talking about the church. He's talking about this amazing thing which He conceived of even before the fall ever happened, even before the foundations of the world.

[24 : 25] He had this notion and He knew in Genesis 3.15 that He was going to do this thing through the one who would crush the serpent's head and He would make real a people who otherwise were the problem.

and now are welcomed with the beloved. We are His workmanship, speaking of the church, this artist, crafting this amazing thing and seeing and saying it is good just as He did in the first creation after the six days and each day along the way.

We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. So that we find out good works are not a bad thing. It's not that the Bible's down on good works and saying don't you do anything.

You know, as if, don't move, you know, just stay where we are and hang on. That might be what you would understand because it's all about gift. It is all about gift but it's unto something where God does a miracle.

I don't know if you are a Bill Gaither fan or if you know about Bill Gaither but one of his simple songs is Something Beautiful, Something Good. All my confusion he understood.

[25 : 46] All I had to offer him was brokenness and strife but he's made something beautiful of my life. That's what he's talking about here. He's talking about taking the most unlikely lump of despicable clay and fashioning something beautiful and for good works to emanate.

He said you did not choose me. I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain. We have been created unto good works. And so it is that as we think about the direction the Holy Spirit is going which is heaven and we read for instance in Revelation 21 about a vision of the new heaven and the new earth.

The church sees that as their home in the same way that we see holiness to being made like Jesus as our inheritance. Beloved, see what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God and such we are.

We don't know what we shall be like but we know that when we see him we'll be like him because we'll see him as he is. And you might think well I guess I just hang on and hope I don't do anything too bad until he makes me like himself.

But in fact what John goes on and says therefore everyone who has his hope fixed on him purifies himself even as he is pure. You see that's why the nonsense of Romans 6 of sinning that grace may abound no when you are in Christ you see the destination and you want to orient your life and participate by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[27 : 22] So it is in terms of good works. We see where God is taking things we see a world in which there is not suffering. We see no pain we see tears and death and all those things and we know that people need to be in Christ for that so we want to witness.

And we see the medical profession alleviating pain as significant. The church has always been about these things and education and every imaginable way of serving the world which God loves.

It is because it's meant to be the mandate of those who are in Christ. We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works that we should walk in them. So dear friends first of all if there be even one who knows verses 1 to 3 are their present reality that they're standing on the sidelines wondering about this incredible God of rich and mercy wondering about this being made alive and raised and seated and having the gift of God which is his salvation.

Today is a very good day to in simple terms say Lord Jesus I need you I welcome you and he'll do the rest. He'll make you know as you turn from that sin which is truly your condition outside of Christ.

Secondly I suspect the vast majority here consider what I've spoken of is a rehearsal of something you know all too well but hopefully it's been of encouragement to you and has strengthened your weary arms and has encouraged you the reality of the God in whom you love who's made himself real in Jesus.

[29 : 01] So praise him love him witness to him and then watch and pray for opportunities to serve the world that he loves in all manner of ways which are consistent with his desire in this world.

Would you stand with me? Dear Lord Jesus I thank you that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to anyone and everyone who believes and though the three verses that began our passage are clearly our condition outside of Christ you have made available an absolutely wonderful inheritance in Jesus and so Lord I pray for any who are outside of that reality that right now you would hear their invitation come Lord Jesus I welcome you into my life.

and Lord for the many who have known you and known this truth for a long time I pray that you would encourage and bless and fill with an ever grating love of you because truly Lord you are amazing and we thank you that you have called us to be fruitful in our lives for good works to be born even out of us and you thought of them before the foundations of the world Lord we stand amazed that we are your workmanship the church and so we ask you to work in us and through us according to your will and to the glory of your name we pray in Jesus name Amen please kneel in prayer Father we're in awe and we wonder at your majesty and might at your creativity at ingenuity we wonder at your love your love for us which stretches our imaginations to their limits because it's so undeserved and yet as we've heard this morning our salvation is the point where perfect love and most imperfect uncreated love meet and the fulcrum where we who were dead in trespasses and sins live

Father we thank you for that life that life in you Lord in your mercy Lord Jesus we thank you for not giving up we cannot imagine why you allowed yourself to be wearied hungry tempted scorned scorned scourged buffeted spat upon and crucified there's no other answer but love perfect love your love for us and so this morning we kneel before you in utter adoration and utter gratitude Lord in your mercy we pray especially this morning for our partners in the gospel well some of them we pray for the parishes of Living

Hope Christian Church in Scarborough and St Aidan's in Windsor both in Ontario we pray for Catherine Gannett the North American Indigenous Missionaries in Campbell River the Sharon Thompson of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and Brian McConachy of Ratanac Father you know their needs better than we do and we trust that you will meet them and shower your blessings upon them and we ask the same for our most dearly loved parishioners Derek Mel Merv Rowena Jean Edie there are others we'd like to pray for this morning those you've put on our hearts some may not know you others are sick and or depressed and so we take this moment for individual prayer for those people

[34 : 01] Lord in your mercy Father heaven and earth declare your glory and so do we we ask that the way we live would be a similar declaration may our lives proclaim your glory as the mighty mountains do may we never be a blank spot in life may we through your love serve others so that they find their love to their way to you may we be so in love with you that we'll say to all we meet hey I'm journeying on towards my Lord's given place come along you'll find all the good that life offers more than you can think of everything will make sense there's joy that never stops and love that never ends father in a world that doesn't want to hear give us the courage to proclaim your gospel may we never be ashamed of

Jesus or of his words may we never be deterred from fulfilling a known duty through fear or discouraged from attempting it through weakness or from our perception that it's not going anywhere may we never undervalue or neglect any part of your will for our lives God almighty three in one we give our hearts our souls our minds to you we thank you again for our salvation help us to love you better to serve you better and may our walk magnify your glory Lord in your mercy you you you