

The Greatest "Word" in History

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Preacher: BK Smith

- [0 : 00] Please turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2. We are continuing our study on in the book of Ephesians.
- One other announcement that I want to bring to your attention, that's the bulletin. It is found right above the are you missing anything announcement.
- On the 15th, our 16th of March, we're going to be connecting our young adults together for a time of social food, some games, and some appropriate teaching, right?
- Go to bed early, study hard, that kind of thing. So we just want to let you know you feel free to invite some of your friends just to engage. I know it's something that my son is excited about.
- So we just thought as a small group, our small group is going to be leading the charge. We don't know how regular that is going to be. So if you know any of them that are interested, this is the time to bring them out.
- [1 : 07] If two people show up, I don't know if it will go so well in April. All right. I did a study this past week.
- I would not consider it a scientific study by any stretch of the imagination. But I wanted to know if there were certain words that are more liked than other words.
- So I actually found some website that talked about what words certain people like and what words certain people don't like. And it doesn't always have to do with the definition. It has to do with sometimes how they sound.
- Sometimes it has what they mean, but there's a little bit more. So I thought I would share some of these words with you. Probably one of the most liked words, did you know, is the word purple.
- Purple. People like to say the word purple. A word that people do not like is the word riddle. I did not know that.
- [2 : 10] We do not associate good feelings with riddles. Another positive word would be soliloquy. Soliloquy. We like to say soliloquy.
- Word we don't like is phlegm. Phlegm. A good word would be epiphany. A not so good word would be crust.
- Another good word is fudge. Right? We have positive associations with fudge. Negative word. I lie not.
- Tofu. Tofu. So there's a few other words like cinnamon. Serendipity turned out to be the number one word that we like.
- Serendipity. However, there is a word, and it's usually depending on its point of reference that some people like or dislike, but more people fear this word above all else.
- [3 : 15] It is the word, but. Son, you played a really good game today. But. Honey, you look so beautiful.
- But. But. Dear, I'm so proud of you. But. Right? I like your car. But. Yes, sweetie, you were really helpful.

But. And of course, the word, the sentence that we hate it the most, yes, I love you. But. Right? I think it's safe to say we've all felt butt pain.

Right? Right? We cringe. We despair. We're so excited at the beautiful words of commendation someone might be telling us, and all of a sudden this word, but, comes in there.

We don't even want to hear anything after. We just close down. I'm sure many of us can talk about dreams that were crushed, defeated, and dashed, all because of one word, but.

[4 : 32] But, or however, but can be used as a glorifying word. As for us who believe, what follows but in our text is an amazing truth that brings us closer to worship, thankfulness, and praise.

Please read along with me here. Ephesians 2. We're going to be reading from 1 to 10. The context is essentially Paul is talking to this church at Ephesus.

The first part of, or chapter 1, was God's vision overlooking of salvation, informing what happened, that God elect us, predestined us.

He calls us, and then the Holy Spirit, or Jesus Christ dies on the cross for us, and the Holy Spirit then comes in and works that truth into our lives.

So now he kind of changes this focus. And the beginning focus isn't all that great. Starting with me in verse 1.

[5 : 44] And you were dead in your trespasses and sin. 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 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. Kind. This is where we let off last week.

And now we get to the important word. 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. Made us alive together with Christ.

[6 : 42] By grace you have been saved. And raised up with him. And seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of the grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. For this is not of your own doing. It is the gift of God. Not a result of work so that no man can boast.

For we are his workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus for good works. Which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

This is an incredible passage. He lays out for the saints at this church who they were before God. He explains to them what God so richly has done for them.

And he also lays out their purpose. This passage is deep. Exciting. And it's freeing for us.

[7 : 52] As I stated in my last sermon. It contains foundational truths for the Christian life. That are so very important for our walk of faith.

Now some people ask, why does he start with a description of who we once were? Is Paul purposely trying to depress us?

Is he trying to make us feel condemned? What I really believe he's doing is sometimes we don't appreciate something unless it's contrasted.

Right? Did you guys know that I'm actually 5 foot 10 and a half? Anybody know that? No, right? Do you know that I am actually half an inch taller than the average man in North America?

I'm not exactly a towering presence. A couple years ago, no offense to my Filipino friends, I spent some time in Manila. I was a giant.

[8 : 54] I could see over the crowds quite plainly. Right? Just in contrast to them, I felt tall. Did I mention to you before when I spent time in LA, my friends got me courtside seats to the Los Angeles Clippers.

Which means we weren't really best friends. Because best friends would have gotten me Laker tickets. But the so-so friends got me Clipper tickets right there on the game court.

In fact, I felt like a child against these men that were 6 foot 8 to 7.2. And they're not that small.

6 foot. They're massive giants. I just remember sitting there feeling so small and insignificant to them. Sometimes we need to be compared to something.

I'm going to tell you, I actually go in. I had to go visit my doctor. I always go in with the expectation that the doctor is, believe me or not, this is what I expect.

[9 : 59] I believe him to be so overwhelmed with my prime fitness that he's going to submit my resorts to the medical board because I am a miracle of science. It's right? A 51-year-old man who's as fit as a 22-year-old Olympian.

It has never happened yet. As much as I try and I lose my weight and I get my cholesterol levels down, it doesn't happen. But some of us have this thought that when we go before God, he's going to give us a perfect checkup.

That he's going to tell us we're great, we're superb. We're cut above. But that's not what the Bible says.

People actually supposed to believe that we're told that we have great potential. We will say to this, God, look at all the great things that we've done.

Do you not know who my parents are? But yet Paul reminds these people, yeah, you're dead. You're dead. You're actually like a walking corpse.

[11 : 11] In fact, you're so dead that you're unable to respond to God or anything of God. In fact, if the gospel were clearly given to you, you actually have no ability to respond to it.

Why? You're dead. My friend who's an evangelist talks about, he goes, I wish people would quit using that idea about sharing Christ is like giving them the life preserver.

You can't give them the life preserver because their body's dead at the bottom of the ocean. They don't even have the ability to reach for the life preserver.

They're dead. That's how the Bible describes people who are outside of Jesus Christ. They're simply dead lying in a hopeless position.

We learned last week that we are actually enslaved to sin. Because we are dead to God, we are alive to the world, right? Talks about the prince of the air and the powers that be.

[12 : 14] That's who we live by. A lot of people try to argue about the whole idea of free will, that we have free will. We do have a will, but it's never as free as we think.

In fact, the free will that an unbeliever has is actually the freedom to choose his sin. Because that's the only thing they want to choose.

They don't want to choose God because God would be absolutely the opposite of everything they want. Even those good actions they're doing, and I say good by our perspective, would be self-glorifying.

They love to sit on the seat of their throne. And our world tells us that's a good thing. And then he reminded us last week that we are under God's sentence for our sin, for our transgressions.

In fact, he calls us children of wrath. Willingly or unwillingly, intentional or not, we're doomed.

[13 : 27] So something outside of ourselves has to happen. And this is where it begins in verse 4.

But God. The sad reality is there is no shortages of wrong beliefs about God.

I'm going to share two ideas of wrong ideas about God that are quite prevalent in our evangelical churches today.

One, that God is good. He is a benevolent God. He is a really nice and loving God. God. But he can't really do too much.

The reason is God doesn't want to impugn on your will or on your freedom. He wants you to be totally free. And he just wants to sit back. I'm just going to be a loving, good God.

[14 : 27] And I hope these people really see me and accept me and love me and come over to me. He respects us so much that he would never want to affect us.

He'd really like to help you. But he's limited by your will and your decisions. The other view of God that exists in the world in the church today, and sadly this is the view of God that I held when I was a younger man, is that God is indeed powerful.

He is indeed mighty. But he is strict and cold. God may be loving towards others, but he's not always that loving towards me.

Many people who accept this view as, hey, I'm just a soldier in God's army, right? He's the great general. I'm just the private. He gives me my marching orders.

I do it. The problem with this type of love, A, it's wrong, but it's cold-hearted obedience.

[15 : 36] We do not follow him out of a sense of love or a depth that he really knows us. We sometimes just simply think, I don't pray to God that much because he's got bigger things to deal with, right?

There was just a tsunami in the Far East. Why would God care for my prayers on finding a wife? Why would God care about what school I go to?

I'm just not going to waste much of his time. All I need to do is fight the good fight, live as morally as I can, and maybe someday, somehow, I will experience his love.

I'm proud to say that these ideas about God are entirely wrong. We're going to learn exactly what they are. But there's three truths about God that we need to understand.

One, God is sovereign. If God were not sovereign, he were not God. God rules creation. God made it. God manages it. Amen? He's the only one with the only say over it.

[16 : 50] Nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, happens without his permission. Everything that comes to pass has been perfectly ordained by him.

God not only controls the past and present, but the future as well. God placed Jesus above all things, and all things are subject to Jesus as well.

The future is all certain because God is all powerful. The second thing we need to understand that God is holy.

God is holy. God is a moral God. God is not indifferent to sin issues. God cares for what is right and what is wrong.

God cares for justice and injustice. God cares for things that are righteous. God is so opposed to sin, Satan, in this world system, that he actually devised a plan and executed a plan called salvation.

[17 : 55] This was no accident. This was planned from the beginning of time. In it, sin will be punished. Righteousness will be exalted.

And the third thing we need to understand about God before we get into verse 4 is God has wrath against sin.

This is a natural flow from his holiness. This is a point of all working of everything that he is opposed to. That is why if you are an unbeliever and you are children of wrath, your standing is both great and perilous and frightful.

It is not a matter that God says, hey, you want your sin? You just go live in the corner. It's okay. Right? I respect you. You're making your choice. Go on.

Go do that. I'm just going to hang out here with the people that love me and follow me. No. Because God is holy, he can't do that.

[19 : 05] God is God. God created all. We fouled it up. God is opposed to sin. And the fact of the matter is, he will stamp it out.

This is simply the God of the Bible. So here we go back to verse 4. But God.

But God. But God does something. As we were dead in our sins, as we were enslaved to our sins, even though we thought or desired to do better, we couldn't.

But God. But God. But God. Let me reread this passage. And I'm going to reread it in such a way that I hope that brings clarity.

But first, we're going to begin with, but God. What is his motivation? Being rich in mercy. The word mercy can mean great kindness, and it can mean great compassion.

[20 : 10] There's one story the Jew understands that Jesus taught, which is a well-known story about compassion. Do you remember the great Samaritan?

The good Samaritan, right? This was an example. Jesus teaching to religious rulers of the day, trying to point out what is the ideal. Verse 33, he reads, this is from Luke, but a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was.

This is a man beaten, bruised, left for dead on the side of the road. A priest went by, left him there, a Pharisee went by, and left him there. But a Samaritan, a sworn enemy of the Jew, comes by, sees this broken man, saw him, and had compassion.

The Samaritan went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day, he took out two denarii, and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.

Jesus asked this question to the Pharisee, who had asked, who is my neighbor that I should love? It says, which of these three do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man, who had fallen among the robbers?

[21 : 37] The Pharisee, the priest, or the Samaritan? The Pharisee is forced to ask, the one who showed him mercy. I'm going to let you a secret in, on the good Samaritan.

Do you know who the good Samaritan is? It's Jesus Christ. It's Jesus Christ. That's the Samaritan.

That's the message he was teaching the Jews, from the very beginning. Sworn enemy of the Jew. What were we?

Children of wrath, enslaved to sin, giving our lives, and minds, to the powers that be. mercy. But God, like the Samaritan, rich in mercy, great in compassion, bounds our wounds.

[22 : 46] He makes us better. He took care of us. He gives us his riches, both money and time. Now take a look at the rest, so he's rich in mercy.

Now because of the great love, which he loved us. Remember a couple months ago, we talked about that word great, that word mega, from which it comes from?

Because of the mega love, which God loved us. I want us to understand what he's not saying here. He doesn't say the great love, because we were so lovable.

He doesn't say the great love, because we had so much potential. He doesn't tell us the great love, because we were so good, because we weren't even that bad.

He doesn't even talk about, he loved us because of the great capacity for love and good that we have. You ever watch those sci-fi movies?

[23 : 52] I always laugh at this one, Transformers, right? I had a Transformer as a kid. Remember the Transformers, Cars Turn. Anyhow, there's a whole series of show, and unless you've been under a rock, you don't know what I'm talking about.

Okay? But they have this one line in all the movies that makes me kind of laugh. We love you, people. We're here to protect you, because of the great capacity of love that you have.

And all through the show, you don't see anything but hatred towards people, right? They're all fighting each other. There is no capacity to love and goodness. We're horrible people. There's still salvation.

It still freaks my mind out that there's some parts of the world is no fresh water to drink. It's because people want to make a buck off someone else. That's who we are. But despite all this, because of the great love which God loved us, he does something.

Now look at this passage, and the way it's written, I'm going to kind of rewrite verses four to seven, and I think it's okay, and I won't be struck by lightning, but I'm going to rewrite it a little bit for you to bring some emphasis, okay?

[25 : 10] But God, being rich in mercy, because the great love which he loved us made us alive to Christ. But God, being rich in mercy, because the great which he loved us raised us up in him, Christ.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love he loved us, seated us with him in the heavenly places of Christ Jesus.

When? Even when we were dead in our trespasses. By grace, you have been saved.

This is the God who we come here to worship collectively all of God's people all around the world on this Sunday. You know that?

But God, in his great love, all around the world, he's the God who made us alive. He's the God who made us alive in Christ, who raises us up in Christ, and seated us with his heavenly places.

[26 : 26] Is there any other God that deserves even an iota of worship or attention? No.

We'd be fools to think otherwise. Notice it says, by grace, you have been saved.

Grace reminds us that there is no cause in us why God should have acted in that way. Do you get that? No, there's nothing.

There's zero in me that makes me lovable to God. But yet, because of his great love for us, does this for me.

The fact of the matter is, we don't get grace. We don't, and by it, I mean we don't understand it. Technically, we know it means unmerited favor.

[27 : 33] But it's so much more than that. Often when I talk about this passage, just in the discussion this week, someone says, God, doesn't God owe everyone at least a chance?

It's not fair. My response is, you don't get grace. Because it's not fair is right. Because I'm utterly undeserving of it.

If we got what we deserved as children of wrath, we would be doomed for eternity.

Now notice the three words here, three phrases. One, he made us alive in Christ. Two, he raised us up with Christ.

And three, who seated us with him in the heavenly places. And I'm going to cover that, what that means. First, made alive in Christ. What that means is, we are now able to respond to the gospel call.

[28 : 45] We can now respond to God we can grow in sanctification or personal, practical righteousness. This is salvation.

There's this interesting passage in the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel 37. Anyone who's a theologian knows, oh, that's the passage of the valley of the dry bones.

I'm going to read you some of the verses. Then God said to me, Ezekiel, prophet God, prophesy over these bones and say to them, oh, dry bones, hear the words of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord to these bones, behold, I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live.

And I will lay sinews upon you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you and you shall live and you shall know that I am God.

[29 : 53] So I prophesied as I was commanded and as I prophesied, there was a sound and behold, a rattling and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

And I looked and behold, there was sinews on them and flesh had come upon them and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to him, prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, thus says the Lord God, come from the four winds, oh breath, and breathe on these slain that you may live.

So I prophesied as he commanded me and the breath came into them and they lived and stood on their feet in an excitingly great army.

That is what God did to us. He breathed life into us. We were bone on bone in this world, dead, lost, and now we are brought to life.

And now we are raised with Christ. Romans 6, 3, Romans 6, 3 and 11 says, do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

[31 : 13] We were buried therefore with him by baptism and death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we had been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we could no longer be enslaved to sin.

For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also be alive with him.

Amen? We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Verse 11, So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

[32 : 35] So not only did he breathe life into us, brought us, we are now united in him, the death that we had, and we now rise as new people.

And all that stuff of the world that attached itself to us no longer has a hold. We are now dead to sin. Amen?

We are dead to sin. Why? Because we are now united in Christ. We are given a new life, a new disposition.

We now have a new environment. Our union with Christ through faith and expressed in baptism entails a solidarity with Jesus Christ and his death, which renders us free from our slavery, from sin.

This, my friend, is what gives us hope. And the power we have, it is union with Christ Jesus. We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

[33 : 58] So he breathed in this new life to us. And now he's raised us. Now Paul says, we seated us with him in the heavenly places.

What's interesting is the verb tells us we have already been made to sit with God in Christ. It's not talking about you are eventually going to.

The action is it's already happened. That is our position is seated in Christ, but we now live in the reality of here.

And what does that tell us? Live like you're seated at the foot with Christ. What does that mean? There's two lines of debate.

One of them means that we reign with Christ. We are a part of Christ wherever we are. I don't know if you've known this. I don't know how, where in your salvation timeline.

[35 : 00] I was thinking about this the other day. And I remember I was in my study group. And one of the things, my study group when I was in university, kind of knew I was a Christian, but one of the things that they quit doing and I never asked them is they stopped swearing.

They just, they quit swearing. It's not like I asked them to quit swearing. I know they enjoy using colorful metaphors, right? So, when I'd go into that situation, they just stopped.

Some of them, it's guilt. Some will either like it or be repelled by it. Remember, Jesus Christ said, they will reject you, not because of you, but because of me.

We are now in union with him. Many of those things that they rejected Christ. So, there's almost an extension of his presence in authority in this world as we go.

The whole idea speaks of victory, security, privilege, rejoicing, and accomplishment. There's another side. It means a place of intimacy that only those one with Christ can experience.

[36 : 12] I personally believe it's both. I believe because we sit at the right hand with God in heaven in his glory, we can enjoy an intimate relationship.

That's why we read our Bible. That's why we come to him in prayer. That's why we're able to pour out our hearts and our lives. And why does all this happen?

Simply because of God's great pleasure. Right now, I have a friend who's really struggling with the idea that God loves him.

He understands it. But he's a young man and he's starting to understand his own heart. And he simply tells people, you know, if you knew the thoughts that I have, you wouldn't want to be friends with me.

How selfish I am at times. How could God love me? He says, you know, I act good and I act nice so people will like me.

[37 : 26] But he's like, I'm really not that nice. The fact is, yeah, God knows it. And guess what? He still loves you.

Why? Because he's got this great love of love and that is why he loves you and it has nothing to do with you. That is called grace.

If we really are honest with ourselves, we do see that ugliness. If we're not willing to cover it up, but the fact is, God isn't looking for perfection.

God is looking for surrender. Amen? It's God who brings out the perfection and I got bad news for you. Well, good news, bad news. One, you are going to be made perfect.

Two, it's not going to be here on earth. Right? It's when you're glorified do we experience that full perfection. But right here, right now, God gives us every opportunity to grow in mercy, love, and grace, thereby extending the reach of his kingdom by being his representatives in this world.

[38 : 40] That's why Paul will usually, or Peter will usually, he will use that word ambassadors for Christ. The good news for those that are in Jesus Christ is that heaven has no grounds to punish him, to punish us, because we stand with Jesus.

So what must I do with this information? One, we are saved by God's grace and God's grace alone. Once we are saved, we want to serve the one who loves us.

If you are still unsaved, if so, my prayer is that you would let this utterly unmerited love of God in Christ Jesus move you and woo you to him.

That you want to know this God who loves you with a great love. Paul would later write in Romans 5, 8, but God shows his love for us in that we were still sinners.

Christ died for us. If you are already a believer, if so, let this great love, this mega love, move you to live a life fully honoring to him.

[40 : 11] Verse 8, for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It is a gift of God, not a result of work so that no one would boast for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We do good works because we're of God. We don't do good works because it brings us closer to God. Do you get that? We do it because of who we are and who owns us.

Let me read you this final quote by John Calvin. He writes, and therefore as often as we feel any regrets to turn aside from the grace of God and cite us before his judgment seat, let us have no other refuge than the sacrifice by which our Lord Jesus Christ has made atonement between God and us.

And whenever we are weak, let us desire him to remedy it by his Holy Spirit, which is the means that he is ordained to make us partakers in his gracious gift.

And let us so continue in the same way that we may be an example to others and labor to draw them with us to the faith and unity in the doctrine and by our life in good conversation show that we have not in vain gone to do so good a school as that as the son of God.

[42 : 01] Let it be Jesus Christ who motivates us for good works. Let me pray.