

Pastor Kyle Mercer
We Are Saved

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Series: The Church and the Home
Ephesians 2:1-10

BIG IDEA – DON'T FORGET WHERE YOU CAME FROM & WHAT GOD DID

We love Brian and Sheri King. We love the Kings for many reasons, but, really, they see themselves as servants. One of the things that wasn't in the video and you wouldn't know if you don't know them is that a lot of their service isn't at church; it's at home with their granddaughter who has special needs. They are servant-hearted in every way.

Here's our desire here, guys. You might ask, "Why do we serve?" and that's a great question to ask. Is this some kind of strategy of servant leadership? Do you ever see at the bookstore all of these books on servant leadership? It's not about that. It's just about being a servant because Jesus Christ first served us. Many of you know that verse where Jesus says, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

So, part of what it means, as a Christian, is I see myself as a servant, but here's the other thing: if you serve, you get to see things no one else gets to see. That's really cool. So, think about it *that* way. You can think of it *this* way: serving is both an identity (it's who I am...I'm a servant) and also an opportunity.

In fact, who sees more of what God is doing in kids' lives in our church than those who serve in the kids' ministry? Who gets to see God answer the prayers that are being prayed more than the people on our prayer team? Who gets to meet more first-time guests and all of the new people who are coming around than those who are greeters and work at our welcome tent?

So listen. The main way you serve God is by serving people. That's it. How do you serve the invisible God? You serve the invisible God who you cannot see by serving people who you can see. So, if you're just coming around, we really would love to get

you on a serving team and in a Community Group, and you do that by going through the Weekender.

You hear me talk about this a lot. June 2 and 3 is going to be our first Weekender of the summer. I just want you to know that at a church of our size, the main place and point of connection is going to be on a serving team or in a Community Group. That's how we think. We think in terms of teams and of groups.

Some of you are extroverts like me, and you think, "Community Group? That sounds awesome. Let me sit in a circle with a bunch of people I don't know and talk." You're excited about that. Introverts are like, "Who came up with this terrible idea of Community Groups?" You will love them if you are an introvert, but you will often feel closer or more connected to people through a serving team. "Here's a role. Here's a tee shirt. Here's a responsibility. Here's a lanyard. Here are other people who are doing the same thing."

Let me take a moment and pray for us. Let me also say, "Thank you" for the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of you who serve. I also just want to pray for people to take their first step and next step to get in a group and on a team. Let's do that, and then we're going to dive into the most famous passage in all of Ephesians. Let's pray.

Lord, we are grateful to be servants. We're humbled that you call us more than servants; you call us friends, but you do call us to serve, and it's an identity. We have been served, so we want to serve other people. It has been said that forgiven people forgive people and served people serve people. Lord, I pray that you would allow each person in our church to find the unique place where they can best use their gifts, their skills, their passions, and their desires to serve our church and to serve our city. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Okay. What's wrong with the world? Have you ever asked that question? Everybody asks that question. It's involuntarily asked. It's not even a Christian question. I mean, Christians ask it, but anybody asks that question. We asked it when 9/11 happened. We ask it when terrible and tragic events happen. We ask it when there are school shootings. We ask it when there's illness and injury. We ask it when our kids do something crazy or our friend or spouse betrays us.

We ask this question. Maybe it's not super articulated. "What's wrong with the world?" If we articulate it a little bit more, it sounds like this: "What's wrong with people?" If we're bold enough, we may say, "What's wrong with them?" If we're more bold, we might say, "What's wrong with us?" If we're really bold, we might say, "What's wrong with me?"

Well, if you'll turn to Ephesians 2, Paul is going to tell us what's wrong with you and what's wrong with me. In Ephesians 2, Paul tells us what's wrong with you. That's the whole idea. It's interesting, because we've been trying to answer the question of what's wrong with us for a long time.

Is the problem that we need more education? That's what some people say. But what happens if you educate a sinner? What do you get? A smart sinner. If you look at who did the worst things in the twentieth century, they were some of the smartest people. So, some people say, "Okay, okay. It's not education. The problem is we don't have the technology. If we could just have more prosperity and technology..."

But what happens when you give sinners a bunch of technology? You give them two things. First, you make them more tempted. That's what the Internet has done. A lot of good things, but technology has created a lot more and a lot easier and a lot more accessible temptation. Also, what happens when you give technology to a sinner? What do you make that person? A dangerous sinner. What's the big danger with nuclear weapons? Not the nuclear weapon; the sinful heart behind the nuclear weapon.

Some people say, "Okay, fine. It's not technology. It's not education. Maybe it's money." People think that. People do all kinds of things because they don't have money. Life is hard if you don't have money. Sometimes people say, "The reason people act the way they do is they don't have enough money, so they do foolish and sinful and stupid things." What happens if you give a sinner a lot of money? What do they become? A rich sinner.

So, maybe the answer is religion. That's what some people say. I'm not talking about Christianity; I'm just talking about the general wooden idea of religion. What happens when you give people religion? They become self-righteous sinners. They become morally superior. They create a "Who's on the inside? Who's on the outside? We're better than those who are not here."

So, what *is* our problem? Well, Paul is going to tell us, and it's complex. I want to talk about this for a moment. I'm going to give us three words to start with to kind of describe the human condition. You and I are the most complex things on earth. Here are three words to start us out with: *dignity*, *dominion*, and *depravity*. Those are three words that describe the comprehensive and complex nature of who you are.

Dignity is the fun thing to talk about. It's like, "God made you in his image. Actually, he knit you together in your mother's womb. Actually, when he made Adam and Eve, he got involved, and he put his hands in, and he made them. God breathed his Spirit in." We love all that. Who doesn't love that? That's how valuable you are. You're made in God's image. Amazing.

That's a third of who you are. The other third comes right after. Right after God says, "You're made in my image," what's the next thing he says? "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion." If you go, "How did we go from a garden in Genesis 1 to a city in Revelation 22?" it's that we were having dominion.

Why do we (especially guys, but all of us) feel like things need to be bigger and better and faster and stronger, and you're always working on your home, and you're always working on your car? How did we get civilization? How did we get the flushing toilets and air conditioning and indoor heating and indoor plumbing and planes taking us across the country in five hours? The answer is *dominion*.

So, that's fun to talk about. I wish that was our whole story. That would be heaven. We have dignity and dominion, and everything is going well. But everything *doesn't* go well. It's because of *depravity*. *Depravity* does not mean you are as bad as you could be. We all know that's not true. *Depravity* means every part of you has been corrupted and infected and affected by sin...your mind, your will, and your emotions.

So, Paul is going to give us a spiritual diagnosis. Let me take you there. Turn with me to verse 1. We're going to cover all 10 verses, but I want you to see the first two words. Look at how he starts. "**And you...**" We're going to get to, in verse 4, "**But God...**" There are two phrases: "*And you...*" and then we're going to get to "*But God...*"

I want you to see that with the words "*And you...*" Paul talks about your favorite subject: *you*. If I said to you right now, "Hey, guys, I have a picture of your Community Group," and I put it on the screen, who would you look for? You. Right? If I said, "I have a picture of you and all of your coworkers" or "You and your whole family," and I put those up there, who would you look for? You'd look for you.

Have you ever gotten back from vacation, and there's some shared album... Your aunt shares it. "Here are all of the pictures I took." You're like, "These pictures are boring that don't have me in them." Right? Is it just me? Am I the only one who feels that way? So, Paul gives us a spiritual diagnosis. If you want a financial diagnosis, you go to a financial adviser. "When can I retire? Can I pay for my kids' college?" All that.

If you're wanting to know what's wrong with a house... That's kind of a funny thing, right? We will hire a home inspector when we buy a home. It's like, "Tell me everything that's wrong with this home." It's a little overwhelming as a first-time home buyer. You're like, "I don't want to buy this house."

If you want to know what's wrong with your soul, you have to go to the apostle Paul. He is going to give us... This is a hard diagnosis. This is like going to the doctor and hearing the worst news possible in verses 1-3. I'm going to read it to you in a minute. Here's what I want you to see. In verses 1-3, Paul summarizes Romans 1-3.

If you know your Bible, it's like he takes chapters 1-3 in Romans and compacts them and compresses them into three verses. So, we're going to spend the majority of our time in these three verses. We have to look at bad news before we can look at good news. So, let's look at it together. I'll read it. Here's what he says.

Verse 1: "**And you were dead...**" He doesn't use the word we sometimes use. "Oh, they're lost." He uses something worse. He doesn't use the therapeutic language we like to use. We like to use therapeutic language, not theological language. We like to tell people, "You're unfulfilled without Christ." People *are* unfulfilled without Christ, ultimately, but that's not what he says. He says you're dead.

He says, "**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...**" We'll talk about those. "**...in which you once walked...**" So, you're dead, but you're still alive. We'll talk about that. That's interesting. In fact, the way you know you're spiritually dead is you're alive to the world.

"...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..." That's our first title we're given: *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...**"

Here's the second title. Paul gives us two nice titles. First is *sons of disobedience*. We thought *that* was bad. Here it is: "**...and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.**" So, let's talk about it. I'm going to give you our pre-Christian condition. If you're not a Christian, this is your current condition. If you are a Christian, this is your pre-Christian condition.

The first thing we need to know is that we're *dead*. I mean, I'm not making this up. It's right in the text. It says we're dead. Now, we have to be honest. When you read the Bible... A good Bible reader is always a confused Bible reader, because you have to read the Bible and go, "Okay. Come on. Non-Christians don't look dead. They don't feel dead."

Like, is Taylor Swift spiritually dead? Yes. But she just did a concert in Nashville. She seems youthful and energetic and vibrant. Right? We know our non-Christian friends, and they have personality. They're smart, and they have relationships. They take vacations, and they do CrossFit, and they're healthy. It's saying that you can be physically alive and spiritually dead.

I'm not a doctor (I hope that's self-evident), but I'll give you an illustration. People talk about people being brain dead, but they're still physically alive. Part of you can

be dead while part of you is alive. The Bible teaches that you can be physically alive and spiritually dead.

Now, what does it mean to be *physically* dead? Let's talk about that. You know what that means. Not to be disrespectful to corpses or to funerals or to a dead body, but if you walked up to a dead body in a funeral home and it was in the casket... You wouldn't do this because it wouldn't be appropriate, but if you yelled at the dead body, screamed at it, nothing would happen. If you poked the body, it wouldn't move or respond, because to be dead... It means many things, but in this context it means I no longer respond to the physical world.

So, what does it mean to be *spiritually* dead? I do not respond to the spiritual world. This is a very serious thing. This is so serious. I heard of a seminary professor. He was a preaching professor, and what he would do to his preaching class is... One of their final assignments was to go out with the whole class, and they would go to a graveyard, and he would have them preach the sermon to the graveyard.

He said, "This is the natural condition of man apart from the grace of God." Physically alive and spiritually dead. This is what breaks our hearts. All of us, I hope, have non-Christian friends in our lives. Some of us have spouses. Some of you have parents, some of you have kids, and it breaks your heart, but this does describe what they're experiencing. They don't care at all about the spiritual world.

It amazes me now that I am a believer, but I wasn't a believer for the first 16 years of my life. I'm like, "How do people never...?" I mean, think about this. They never think about their own death. It's definitely going to happen. They never think about it. How do people never think about heaven and hell? How do people, knowing they're guilty... The Bible clearly says their own conscience condemns them. They never think about the final judgment.

How could people walk around in a world that has so much beauty and so much unity and so much diversity and clearly points to creation...? How could they never think about it? The answer is they're spiritually dead. If you've not seen the movie *The Sixth Sense*, I'm about to ruin it for you. You had 20 years. It's over, guys, if you haven't seen it. I'm sorry.

Here's what happens in *The Sixth Sense*. Bruce Willis, main character in the movie, about a quarter of the way into the movie meets this young kid, and the kid says those famous words that show up in the trailer, the most famous scene in the movie, where he looks at Bruce Willis and says, "I see dead people."

It's the beginning of this movie where now Bruce Willis watches this kid, and he actually notices, "Man, this kid sees dead people. He interacts with these dead

people." The movie ends in one of the most dramatic endings I've ever seen in a movie where Bruce Willis realizes at the very end of the movie *he's* dead.

What's so interesting is, as the movie is ending, it's showing you all of the scenes from the movie. He's looking back on his life and realizing, "I was dead." You can never watch that movie the same again, because when you rewatch it you go, "Oh my goodness! It's so obvious he's dead." When you become a Christian, you look back on your life and go, "I cannot believe it, but, yes, I was spiritually dead. I cared nothing about the Bible. I repented of no sin. I cared nothing for Jesus."

The first thing we're told is that we are spiritually dead. The second thing we're told is that we're *disobedient*. It says this. 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..."***

It's very interesting that we are called *sons* (we could say by extension "and daughters") *of disobedience*. Why would he say that? "You are sons of disobedience." He basically means, before you're a Christian, disobedience so categorizes your life it's as if disobedience is your dad.

You know the effect a dad has. Every once in a while, I look in the mirror and I'm like, "When did Bill Mercer get here?" I look like him. I talk like him. I say things to my kids. We end up looking like our parents. He's saying that disobedience is such a part of your life before you're a Christian it might as well be your parent.

He gives us two words. We've seen these words before, but it's good to look at them. He says *sins* and *trespasses*. Now, *sin* means to miss the mark. I think when we think about missing the mark, it should give us compassion on people. It's actually an archery term. You know, you can think about how many sports today are about getting some ball or puck to hit some target.

What's soccer? Get the soccer ball in that net. What's basketball about? Get this ball in that hoop. What's football about? Get this football to the wide receiver in the end zone. What's hockey about? Get this puck in that goal. Well, back then, they had these games where they would shoot or throw things through hoops, and then you'd move farther away. When you missed the hoop, they made you sit out, and you were called a *sinner* because you missed the mark.

It gives us compassion on people, because when you realize, "Okay. Sin is missing the mark," you realize, "Okay. That's what people are doing with the American dream. Wrong mark." They think life is about retiring early. They think life is about the accumulation of wealth. They think life is about their next vacation. They think life is

about themselves. It gives us compassion because we're like, "Sometimes we think that."

Trespass is a more serious word that shows us our dire and desperate condition. *Trespass* means to leave the path or to cross the line. It's an intentional crossing of the line. This is what happens when 2-year-old Timmy is holding the fork out, and you say, "Do not drop that fork," and he makes complete eye contact with you, knows what you said, and goes like *this*. It's innate.

Kids learn to lie, they say, somewhere around age 3. This is from a psychological standpoint. They actually worry about the kid if they don't learn to lie by that age, because they look at it as a stage of development, because you have to be pretty smart to lie. You have to create another world that doesn't exist and talk about that world. That's why when your kids lie to you, at first you're like, "I'm angry and kind of impressed, but this was wrong. Don't do that."

I have a friend right now, and recently, his daughter told my family that her grandparents live in the Dominican Republic. That's a complete lie. It's cute and funny at one level, from our perspective, when we see a kid do it, but when you're a teenager and you have that moment where you realize, "I've been waiting for my parents to go out of town for three weeks to engage in some sinful activity..."

When you start planning on Monday what evil things you're going to do on Friday or Saturday; when you wait for your spouse to leave the house to do something; when you know something is wrong and you do it anyway, even as your own conscience condemns you, that's when you start to go, "What is wrong with me?" Our disobedience shows us our death.

The third thing is that we're *deceived*. We are dead, we are disobedient, and what keeps us in our disobedience is a constant deception. I'll show you this. It starts in verse 2. "**...in which you once walked...**" Literally, that word means meander. It means to walk with no purpose. It's the way I walk through Costco. "Let's go down *this* aisle. We need 50 bags of Cheez-Its." That kind of stuff.

"**...in which you once walked...**" Then it picks it up. "**...following...**" That's like now I'm headed on a path. "**...following the course of this world...**" That's the first word you might want to underline. "**...following the prince of the power of the air...**" That's the second thing to underline.

"**...the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh...**" The third thing to underline. "**...carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.**"

Here we're introduced to something we're introduced to many places in Scripture, and it's always worth our time to talk about it. We're introduced to what some theologians call the *evil trinity*: the *world*, the *flesh*, and the *Devil*. It is what deceives and defines our lives before Christ. Let's talk about each of these.

First of all, there's the *world*. We have to ask, "What is the world?" John 3:16 says God loved the world, but then the same author, in 1 John 2, says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world." Well, John, I'm confused. Do I love the world or do I not love the world? The answer is we love the people of the world, but we are not to love the value system of the world. Secretly, Christians do the exact opposite.

We secretly do not like the people of the world. We don't like how they live. We get angry at them. We get bitter and resentful toward them, and we secretly love the value system of the world in our hearts. You have to ask the question, "What's worldliness?" because that's what he's warning of. He says we were worldly. We were walking in the ways of the world. There was worldliness.

Now, the church has tried for a long time to define *worldliness*. Back in the 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s, they used to say things like, "Don't smoke, drink, or chew or hang with those who do." They viewed those things as worldly. There was a time (it may be hard for us to believe) where just playing cards was seen as worldly. It's like, we can have a conversation about gambling, but just playing cards?

There was a time when going to the theater was considered worldly. We can have a question about the content we watch, but just going to the theater is worldly? You know, Baptists, for a long time, thought it was worldly to dance. In fact, they say about Baptists they didn't want you to have sex because they were afraid it might lead to dancing. That's what they say.

Okay, that's not worldliness. My favorite definition of *worldliness* is from David Wells. He's a professor. He says *worldliness* is anything that makes sin look normal and righteousness look strange. Isn't that what we live in right now? I mean, I've talked about this at length. I won't go into great detail now. We live in a time where there is, more than ever in the history of our nation, the normalization of sin.

It's not just the normalization; it's the celebration of sin. What does worldliness feel like? It feels like peer pressure. Think about it as organized corporate peer pressure. This is why we feel like we have to believe certain things, because there are these plausibility structures our culture has. We feel like we have to behave in certain ways.

The first thing he says is, before you're a Christian, you just go in the ways of the world. Your value system doesn't come from Scripture or from God; it comes from

your culture and the ways of the world. The second thing is the *Devil*. It says, "**...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...**"

This does not mean non-Christians worship the Devil. I would say, in all of human history, the number of people who have worshiped the Devil, I would imagine, would have to be a very small number of people. If I'm at the Charlotte airport, and I meet a Devil worshiper, I'm asking one question: "Arrivals or departures? Because I am not getting on a plane with you. I hope you just got here, because I do not want to get on a plane with you."

Here's what it means. It says, "The prince of the power of the air." The word *air* there really means more fog and cloud. Where the Devil is in charge nothing is clear. He doesn't care if you believe in God; he just doesn't want you to believe in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wants you to have a fuzzy, far-off, cloudy, not-clear view of God.

The Devil wants to confuse us about the most basic things, and it's somehow working right now. There's a cloud and confusion about the most basic things in the world, like manhood and womanhood, male and female. Is there anything like objective truth? This is all of that spirit of the air.

Then it says, "The spirit that is now at work in us." It's like, okay, does the non-Christian have a demonic spirit? Not actually the spirit of Satan in them. *Spirit* can mean pattern of being. It's saying, basically, before you're a Christian, you have the same spirit (think mindset) Satan had that led him to fall. It's the prideful, self-exalting spirit that wants to be god and wants nothing to do with God. That is what defines the non-Christian.

So, he says we were in the ways of the world, we were in step with the demonic spirit, and thirdly, we were captive to the cravings of our *flesh*. This describes the average person in America, and it describes all of us before we knew Christ. Now, what is the *flesh*? The flesh is not your epidermis. The flesh is not your skin. The flesh is not your body. Christianity has a uniquely positive view of the body, and God is going to redeem it.

The best way to think about your flesh is your flesh is good bodily desires gone wrong or too far. So, sleep and rest and leisure are natural bodily desires, but sloth and laziness are the desires of the flesh that come out of that. Sex is a natural desire; lust is it gone wrong, turned into the flesh. I don't know who first discovered this. We have a play circuit in our brains. We want to play, but the obsession with and idolization of hobbies is the desires gone too far.

So, this is our condition. It gets one level worse. First we're dead, then we're disobedient, then we're deceived. Finally, and maybe most harshly (I only say this because it arises out of Scripture), we're *damned* apart from Christ. Let's look really quickly at this. I want you to see this. This is verse 3.

"...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." The question is...*How bad is our condition?* You don't have to answer this out loud, but how bad are you? I know you do good things. I know. We all do good things. I know you're a mixed bag, because you do good things and bad things.

It was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn... He was in the gulags, which were basically the concentration camps of the Soviet Union. It's interesting. In school, everybody learns about Nazis and the concentration camps, and no one learns about the Soviet Union and the gulags. Anyway, he was in the gulags, and he had a lot of people to blame for his life. He was pretty upset. Stalin and Hitler would be top of that list. He got cancer while he was in prison.

Anyway, he writes this book you may never have read or heard of. It's called *The Gulag Archipelago*. It's one of the things that brought down Communism. Anyway, in the book he very famously said he kind of got to a place where he said, "I'm just going to..." He had seen a lot, and he said, "I'm going to watch the prisoners, and I'm going to watch the prison guards, and I'm going to see what the difference is between them."

What he thought was all prison guards are bad and all prisoners are good. The most famous thing he said is the line of good and evil does not go between prison guard and prisoner. It doesn't go between political parties. It doesn't go between states. The dividing line between good and evil goes right through the center of every human heart.

Nietzsche, who you've heard of... I think Nietzsche is considered the greatest critic of Christianity in the last 200 years, but he agreed on what Christianity taught about our depravity. He said something I've been thinking about for about three years.

Nietzsche said most men are not good; they're just afraid to be bad.

He said most men are moral cowards, but they ease their own conscience by telling themselves they're a good person when the truth is they're just afraid to be bad. They'd like to be bad. They fantasize about being bad. They're just afraid of the consequences of what would happen if they lived it out, but they're not a good person because they're a good person.

Plato said the same thing. He said if you had a ring and you could put it on and it made you invisible, you'd see your real heart. If you had a ring and it could make you invisible, like Frodo's ring, what would you do? Would you go down and serve the poor so they didn't know it was you? There's a 0 percent chance you'd probably do that.

If you want to see what you would probably do, there's a movie called *Hollow Man*. In that movie, Kevin Bacon is a scientist who learns how to be invisible. He's a very nice guy, he appears, until he learns how to be invisible. You can watch his true self emerge when no one can see him.

Or you might ask, "Why do you good things?" I know. People do good things out of a good heart for good reasons because they love people. I know all that. But it's interesting. I think we have a very low-resolution, shallow view of ourselves. Sometimes people do good things for bad reasons.

A famous example is George Orwell, who wrote *1984*, and all that... Back in his time (it's kind of happening again), there were all of these people who wanted to do Marxism and socialism and communism, and he got to know a lot of them. His observation (he was very astute) was most people who said they cared about communism did not love poor people; they hated rich people. That's worth thinking about.

Oh, so you could do things that ostensibly, on the outside, look a certain way when, really, your heart on the inside is vengeance or something completely different. So, that's why it says we are children of wrath. Now, this is something we don't talk about. I mean, we try to talk about it here as much as it comes up. We believe in hell. We believe in eternal, conscious, irreversible torment.

This is not a secondary issue; this is a historic Christian teaching, but every time I teach about it, every time I'm even preparing during the week to talk about it, I'm like, "This just feels ancient. This feels out of touch with everybody's experience." Here's why I think that is. Most of American Christianity... I would consider good old (if you even know what this word means) evangelical, Bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christianity.

Most American Christianity is only concerned with the benefits of Christianity in this life. I can feel it when I'm teaching, and I can feel the temptation to make it all about that. I can feel the temptation to go, "If you come to Christ, if you'll give your life to Christ, your marriage could be deeper," and everyone leans in, like, "I need a deeper marriage. Help me with that."

Or "If your family would commit to Christ, I bet your family would be stronger together and more solidified," and everyone leans in. "Oh, that would be great. Our family isn't where it could be." "If you would just trust Christ with your finances, then there could be stewardship, and there could be generosity, and you could learn to give, save, and live." I can feel everyone go, "Yeah, that would be helpful. My finances could be in better order than they are."

The temptation is to say, "You know what? If you want purpose, and you want a mission, and you want fulfillment, and you want something in this life that's worth living for, let me give you Christ." I love all that, and I believe all that's true. We just don't talk about how the main benefit of Christianity is that we escape the wrath of God forever. That's it. That's where everything is headed, and that is way more valuable and way more important than anything else.

That is why we're going to go to verse 4 now, which goes from "And you..." to "But God..." Let me show you this. Verse 4: "**But God...**" That's amazing. Nothing has changed about us. We get to verse 4, and it says, "But God..." and it's going to be good news in a second here. But it doesn't say we prayed and God answered. It doesn't say we ugly cried, so God felt bad for us.

It doesn't say we did a bunch of good deeds, and God said, "Well, you're trying. Let me meet you halfway." Our current condition is we are dead, we are deceived, we are disobedient, and we are damned. It says, "But God..." Here it is. This is the gospel. "**But God, being rich...**" We're going to be told twice that God is rich. "**...being rich in mercy, because of the great love...**" So, there's love, and then there's *great* love. "**...with which he loved us...**"

Something happens. I don't know. It's hard to describe. I only have the text. Something happens in the mind and heart of God that it says he decided to love us and have mercy on us even while we were completely hopeless and helpless. He set his love on us. *Love* is just a commitment to another person's good. *Mercy* means different things, but it basically means to feel pity and to feel sorry for.

So, God looked at us in the state we were in verses 1-3, and he felt pity. So look at what he does. This is verses 5-7. "**...even when we were dead in our trespasses...**" He mentions again that we're dead. "**...made us alive...**" That's the main verb. That's actually one word. *Made us alive* is one word in the Greek, and it's what everything flows from.

"**...made us alive together with Christ...**" That's the whole "in Christ" idea we talked about in week one. Paul can't help it. He has to talk about it. He goes, "**...by grace you have been saved—and raised us 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 his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

There are many reasons God saved us, but we got one of the *so thats*. Every once in a while, the Bible gives us a *so that*. It's like, "Okay. Why did you make us alive, and why did you raise us up, and why did you give us grace?" The answer in verse 7 is, basically...

If someone ever asks you (we're going to talk in a minute about what it means to be saved), "Why did God save you?" the answer is "God wanted to show off how unbelievably gracious he is, and he wanted to show me his grace forevermore." Guys, the longer we're in heaven, the more indebted to God's grace we're going to be.

Then we get one of the clearest verses in the Bible about how salvation is not by works. Look at this. ***"For by grace you have been saved..."*** That's the second time he uses the word *saved*. He uses it in verse 5 and again 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 a result of works, so that no one may boast."***

We need to talk about what it means to be saved. If you're new and you're not a Christian...you're not from a Christian background...this word may be strange to you. It was strange to me. I remember the first time I heard it. I didn't grow up in a Christian home, so the first time I heard it was when some guy in eighth grade asked me if I was saved. I didn't know what he meant. I was like, "Are *you* saved?" He goes, "Yeah." I'm like, "Saved from what? You live in the suburbs. What do you have to be saved from?"

The answer to what we're saved from is comprehensive. At one level, the Bible says we're saved from our sins. Well, that's great. In another place, the Bible says we're saved from this present evil age. That's great. Another place, the Bible says we're saved from Satan. Oh, that's great. Ultimately, we're saved *from* God *by* God in some mysterious and miraculous way.

We are saved from God's wrath by God's grace. This is why we love God's grace. This is why Christians name their kid Grace. We don't name our kids Wrath; we name our kids Grace. Salvation should humble us and make us grateful. I heard a very tragic story recently. This was from years ago. It's hard for me to talk about because I have two boys myself.

I heard a story of two young boys. This was out in Missouri. They were playing near a construction site. It's one of those where a bunch of terrible things happen at one time. This environment began... It was basically like quicksand. Both of the boys are sinking in the quicksand, and by the time somebody gets to them and finds them, one

boy is standing there with his head barely above the sand. The man says, "Where is your brother?" and he says, "I'm standing on his shoulders."

Somebody else did something so we could be saved. We should have even a more emotional and volitional response to Jesus Christ went under the quicksand and held us up so we could be saved, and it was all grace. Our only response is faith. What is faith? We have talked a lot about that in the past, but faith is the part of you that loves grace. Faith is the part of you that accepts the gift. If something is going to be given to you, you have to receive the gift of God.

The amazing part of this story is we go from all of the things we talked about...dead, disobedient, deceived, and damned (it's just a bad news story)...to delivered by God's grace. In fact, we're saved by grace. Sometimes we say we're saved by faith. Technically, we're saved by grace through faith. That's what the verse says. Faith is the hose; grace is the water. Faith is that which connects us to God, but it's God's grace that saves us and transforms us and changes us.

That leads to the last thing we have to talk about. Verse 10. Very important. What are we saved *for*? We're designed for good works. So, delivered by grace but designed for good works. Let me just show you this with the little bit of time we have left. It says, ***"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."***

A question Christians normally ask at some point is, "Why am I still here? If my sins are forgiven and I have the Holy Spirit and I'm headed to heaven and I have a relationship with God... I know people would miss me, but why didn't God just... Why when I accepted Christ didn't I just...however it works...teleport to heaven? Why am I still here?" The answer is God has good works for you.

It's very interesting, because it says we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. First, it says we're his workmanship. That word... You saw this if you were here for the first week we launched the video. That word in the Greek (that's the original language) is *poiema*. You can hear the word in there: *poem*.

Maybe there are a couple of you, but when was the last time you wrote a poem? For me, it was a haiku in seventh grade, and that was it. We don't write poems. Now, some of you are creative and you write your poems, but the reason we don't write poems a lot... It takes an enormous amount of effort. It takes a lot of thought. We have to pour a lot of ourselves into it.

This is why, by the way, we're amazed by powerful poetry. God is saying, "I have made you, and you are unique. I've written your life out a certain way. You are my poem." Here's what I'm trying to tell you. I'm trying to tell you you're special without

telling you you're a snowflake. You've been told your whole life you're a snowflake. I don't want to say that. I want to say that you are uniquely special.

When you come to Christ... The Bible talks about that as being born again or... Do you see this? You're created in Christ. This means you get a completely new nature. See, here's what we tend to think. We tend to think, "What am I by nature and nurture?" So much of our development is we're just trying to figure out...

We're like, "Okay. This is my genetics, and this is my personality." We think of all the nature stuff, and then we think of all the nurture stuff. "This is the school I went to, and these are the experiences I had." We don't think of the third thing that God talks about all the time: grace. You are what you are by nature, nurture, and grace.

God wants to do something not just *for* you (that was the cross), not just *in* you (that was sanctification), but God wants to do something *through* you...good works. We don't talk about this enough as Christians. Your life should be defined by good works. Years ago, I was reading this book, and I recommend it. It's a short little book. It's called *Do More Better*. It's written by Tim Challies. He's a Christian.

I remember reading the book. It's really short. It's on productivity and being efficient. I remember opening it up, and the first... It was either the intro or chapter 1 or the preface or one of those. It said in there, "Why would a Christian write a book on being efficient and productive?" The answer was (which I thought was profound at the time), "I want to help you be more efficient and more productive so you can do more good works." That's why we care about that.

Do you understand that he's saying there are these good works he prepared you for? So, he prepares you. In other words, you were born and live in the twenty-first century for a reason, not an accident. You have the parents you have on purpose. You have the personality you have... If you want to get really deep into it, you've gone through the suffering you've gone through for a purpose.

Everything in your life is going to work together. So, you have that. He says then, on the other end of this, God prepares these works. So, it's like, you just keep walking places and going, "Oh my goodness! I am the person to meet that need." Here's what I want you to hear if maybe you hear nothing else: there are good works that only you can do. That's it.

I mean, this is it, guys. If you do not do the good works you need to do, you leave a hole. You leave a hole in your family. You leave a hole in our church. I mean, I hope it's immediately obvious that, obviously, when it says "Good works," it doesn't say the pastors do all the good works or the staff do all the good works or just an elite crew...

The key volunteers do all the good works. No, what God wants to do he wants to do through all of his people.

If you could just see every relationship and every environment you're in as an opportunity to do good works... How often do you think about your marriage that way? You should. Husbands, there are good works only you can do. You're in the covenant of marriage. You have a unique relationship. There are good works that only you can do for your wife, and if you don't do them, you leave a hole.

Wives, there are good works only you can do for your husband, and if you don't do them, you leave a hole. There are good works only you can do for your kids. Let me give you a quick theology of good works. God doesn't need your good works. That's 2:1-9. God doesn't need your good works. They're not what saves you.

Guess who needs your good works...everybody else. Your neighbor needs your good works. Your classmates need your good works. Your coworkers need your good works. So, I could not think of anything more exciting. You think, "Okay, God. This was my condition in 1-3. I was dead. I was disobedient. I was deceived. I was damned.

I did nothing. Grace came to me. I responded in faith. I was saved by Jesus Christ, my great older brother, whose shoulders I stood on by grace. Now I'm a new creation. I have new desires, I have new vision, and all I want to do with my life is I want to walk in every environment and say, 'How can I bring good works here?'" Let's pray, and let's do that together.

Lord, that's our prayer right now. We want to be a church full and filled with good works. We want to look at our neighbor and say, "I would be thrilled to do good works for you. In fact, I believe God put me as your neighbor to do those good works, and I believe I'm going to no longer walk in the ways of the world; I'm going to walk in good works."

Lord, I pray for anyone in here who is spiritually dead, who is defined by verses 1-3. I pray that you would make them alive. I pray that they would experience the grace of God and respond in faith, Lord. I pray for all of us, that as we head to our cars and head home or we head to lunch or head to work on Monday, we would be eager and excited to do good works there. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.