

But God...
Ephesians 2:1-10

By Dave Urbanski

As we ventured this past Sunday into chapter 2 of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Pastor Scott prefaced things by giving us a preview of what will be coming up in chapters 4 through 6.

He explained that chapters 4 through 6 give us a picture of what our lives might look like, inside and out, as a result of our identities in Christ. In fact, Pastor Scott offered us 13 results of a Jesus-centered self-identity that he found through his studies.

And what are those results? Living with purpose, having stronger relationships, using our gifts, growing personally, speaking graciously, dealing with anger, learning to forgive, being more loving, influencing others, relying on the spirit, understanding submission, engaging in spiritual battles, and having stronger prayer lives.

All that to say, Pastor Scott emphasized that if we can know where we're headed in the chapters 4 through 6 of Ephesians — how we ought to be operating (the results) as people whose identities are rooted in Christ — we should *greatly* desire to dig into what chapters 1 through 3 have to say in a foundational sense regarding our identities in Christ.

With that, Pastor Scott turned the tables in a way that stopped me in my tracks.

He flipped upside-down those 13 above results of possessing a Jesus-centered self-identity, and the result was a stark picture of what life might look like if we're caught up in living life *without* Christ at the helm.

And what are those results? Life without direction, shallow relationships, underutilization of gifts, stagnant growth, difficulties with anger, inability to forgive, lack of compassion, inability to influence, self-focus, rejecting submission, losing spiritual battles, and neglecting our prayer lives.

The big question for me, and for all of us: *Do you recognize any of these upside-down results in your own life?* If you do, don't despair. That's an important realization. And

what's even better — way, WAY better — is that the perfect antidote awaits us in the first 10 verses of Ephesians chapter 2!

Let's have a look again at this crucial, life-changing passage:

"**1** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** 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—**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. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Pastor Scott then shared with us four truths he mined from this passage: God is big ... we are small ... God cares about us ... and God has given us purpose in our lives. Interestingly, he also turned these truths upside-down to show us the contrast the world sells us on a daily basis: *You are big ... God is small ... you have to earn love ... and to have any kind of purpose, you need status.* That's some difference, isn't it?

Jumping ahead to verse 10, Pastor Scott helped us see where we're going in terms of purpose: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Indeed, God created us *on purpose* and *for a purpose* ... and one of the key words here is "walk" ... which means our conduct in life, how we act, and the choices we make.

He then brought us back to the idea of "walk" from the sentence that forms verses 1 and 2: "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." The word "walked" here conveys the idea of being lost and meandering around; Pastor Scott compared it to being in a dark, creepy forest — which is what it can feel like when we don't walk with Christ.

As for Pastor Scott's first principle — we are small — verse 1 starts to spell it out: *we were once dead in our trespasses and sins*. It's the idea of "missing the mark" and being unable to find direction. Trespasses, in fact, point to deliberate sin — knowing something is wrong but doing it anyway, which greatly contributes to our deadness. Verse 2 continues: "... in which you once walked following the course of this world." Pastor Scott explained that the word "course" can be equated with life paths, the choices we make every day — and if we're "following the course of this world," that can't be good. The world's course and direction leads to destruction.

Here Pastor Scott noted the biblical concepts of the broad and narrow roads — and that remaining on Christ's narrow road can be difficult as so few are on it while the vast majority of people are on the broad road where things can appear cool, fun, popular, and alluring. It's the way for those who are, as verse 2 adds, "following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." Verse 3 continues this theme: "... 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."

Pastor Scott reminded us that the "passions of our flesh" and the "desires of the body and the mind" mean wanting what we want when we want it. And if we live day to day by such a principle, the result will not be good.

Depressed yet? Well, if so, it's time for that to end! Because here's where things turn around.

Pastor Scott then brought up the second truth of this passage ... God is BIG! After all of that bad we've been through, here's what verses 4 and 5 have to say: "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."

That's right. Despite being dead in our DELIBERATE sin — our "trespasses," not just our ingrained sin nature — God brought us back to life with Jesus. Talk about amazing grace! Indeed, Paul adds the all-important truth here, "by grace you have been saved."

Verses 6 and 7 are where the third principle comes in: God cares about us! "... 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." Remember that creepy forest Pastor Scott told us

about? Well, these verses tell us that we don't have to walk in that darkness anymore; in fact, Pastor Scott said it's as though there's a beautiful meadow we can instead walk in!

If you're wondering what it takes to exit the creepy forest and enter the beautiful meadow, Paul provides the answer of all answers in the famous 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, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Our money doesn't save us. Our education doesn't save us. Our lineage doesn't save us. Our status doesn't save us. Rather, God's grace saves us. All we have to do is have the faith to receive it. It's not unlike someone standing in front of you and holding out a gift for you. That person isn't going to force you to receive the gift; that would be kind of awkward, to say the least. Instead, you reach out your hands and receive the gift. That's it.

I fondly recall attending a Christian retreat in which the main speaker talked about the joy of playing a bongo drum as a child, but somewhere along the way he stopped playing the drum, and it disappeared or was forgotten about. He went on to explain that it's an illustration for all of us to not lose our joy, our first love in Christ. Amazingly, at the end of the retreat, the speaker's adult son — in front of all of us — gave his dad a gift-wrapped box. The speaker obviously wasn't used to receiving gifts, because he hesitated, seemingly unsure what to do next, almost as if he was thinking, "This isn't part of the script; this isn't how things happen for me; I'm used to low expectations ... not surprise gifts. This does not compute!"

After several moments that seemed to hang heavy in the air, the speaker's son blurted out, "Open it!"

With that, the speaker began to tear at the wrapping paper and then finally opened the box.

Can you guess what was inside? Yep — a bongo drum.

What a poignant moment! But that's what the Lord is saying to all of us as he holds out his gift of saving grace: "Open it!"

Rounding out the Ephesians 2 passage is the equally important tenth verse, which can get overlooked a bit after the famous two verses preceding it: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

For me, Pastor Scott's commentary on verse 10 was the best part of his message. He first told us that the word "workmanship" in the Greek is "poemia," which signifies craftsmanship and even artwork. In fact, Pastor Scott said, each of us are the Lord's "masterpiece" creation! Sure, you may not feel like that a lot of the time, but how we feel and our far-from-perfect perceptions don't matter. Even amid our missteps in life, God is able to use them as he continues to create as an artist working on a painting for years ... yes, even decades ... until it culminates in a masterpiece that we could never have envisioned.

Even better, Pastor Scott shared that while masterpieces like the Mona Lisa are placed in museums, each of us as God's masterpieces are placed in the public arena — in schools, in offices, in marriages, in families ... where we put into practice "being a masterpiece."

That's where "good works" come in. Unlike the world's view of good works — that they are the key to "getting into heaven" — the Bible here says they're instead the outgrowth, the result of our salvation ... NOT the means of our salvation. What's more, God always had specific "good works" in mind for us that flow out of our salvation. It's so important to get that distinction straight.

So, let us thank the Lord that he has loved us enough to provide to us his free gift of salvation. All we have to do is "open it!" And then we can live in assurance in regard to life's most important question — where will we spend eternity? — and allow God to work through us in the lives of others so they also may receive his grace.