

## BUT GOD...

FEBRUARY 26, 2023 | EPHESIANS | EPHESIANS 2:1-10 | PASTOR SCOTT TURANSKY

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have given us the privilege to use this building for your kingdom. We've got a lot of plans and things scheduled in our year. We ask that you bless those activities. But we do that trusting you, knowing that anything could change this week. Anything could change today. Lord, we don't know what today might bring. But we do know you and we can trust in you. We ask that you would provide the strength and the guidance that we need. We thank you for the privilege of studying your word. We ask, Lord, that you would teach us from your word today. In Jesus' name, amen.

It's time for me to share with you an overview of Ephesians. I know we've started and we're a couple of weeks in, but now I want you to know where we're going. Because Ephesians (the book) is divided into two sections. The first section, chapters 1-3, focus on our identity in Christ, who we are in Christ. Chapters 4-6 are a very practical section of scripture. They're the practical section that talks about how your life is different once you do have this identity in Christ. So it's important for us to understand where we're going.

I did some work this week to look at chapters 4-6 and ask the question, what are the lessons we're going to learn in chapters 4-6 that are going to help us know how important it is to study our identity today? So I listed thirteen different things that are going to be in chapters 4-6. These are the importance of a strong identity, strong self-concept, strong self-esteem, strong self-worth, whatever words you want to use to describe these things that we find in Christ. This is what we're going to see in chapters 4-6. Paul is essentially saying that once you have this strong identity, we're going to go into these areas and talk about them. To live with purpose, to have stronger relationships, to use your gifts to grow personally.

I want to suggest these are the things that some people go to therapy for. To grow in those things, let's just study Ephesians. I'm not saying therapy is bad. I'm just saying, let's make sure we're studying Ephesians, because that's where we're going to find our roots and where we're going. We're going to learn how to have gracious speech. We're going to learn how to deal with anger. We're going to learn how to forgive. That's where we're going in this book. We're going to learn how to be more loving. We're going to learn how to influence others. We're going to learn how to rely on the Spirit, understand submission and engage spiritual battles, and have a stronger prayer life. That's where we're going.

I want to share that with you because I think it's motivating. It's certainly motivating to me. If I know that's where I'm going, then I really want to know what chapters 1-3 have to say. So that I can get those into my heart, I'm ready for chapters 4-6.

Here's another fun thing that I did was I turned these upside-down and I looked at the negative things. In other words, if you turn these backwards and you look at the problems that Paul's going to address in chapters 4-6. So I just took the same thirteen things and talked about the problems. Notice what it says. These are the things we're going to see. If you have a problem with life without direction, you're going to want to be here for those sermons in chapters 4-6, or just read the passage and study it yourself. Shallow relationships, under-utilization of gifts, stagnant growth, harsh speech, difficulties with anger, inability to forgive. I'm telling you, this is therapy material. That's where we're going. Lack of compassion, inability to influence, self-focused, rejecting submission, losing spiritual battles, neglecting prayer life. Wow. I look at that, and I go, I can hardly wait to look at what God's going to say today in Ephesians 2. I know you're excited now to anticipate where we're going.

So why don't you stand up with me. Let me read Ephesians 2:1-10. We're going to see another dimension of our identity that's going to help us know where we're headed.

*It says in Ephesians 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— 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.*

At this point, if you've been talking about identity or self-concept, you're probably not feeling too good about yourself. That's why we need 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—by grace you have been saved (in a parenthesis there because we're going to talk about it in a minute, right in the middle of a sentence, so I'm going to go back there. He made us alive together with Christ (that's number one) and raised us up with him (number two) and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ (that's three), so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Oh and by the way, the parenthesis now is repeated. 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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

You may be seated.

There are four spiritual truths that we need in our lives if we're going to have a strong sense of identity, if we're going to have a self-concept that is rooted in strength, not just in things that go here and there. These four truths are very important for us to grasp. They're all in this passage. So we're going to look at them today. They are these:

- 1) God is big.
- 2) We are small.
- 3) God cares about us, personally as individuals.
- 4) God has given us purpose in life.

If you grasp those four ideas, they're going to strengthen your self-concept. You're going to be more confident. You're going to be more resilient when you face challenges. You're going to be able to make better decisions. You're going to be able to face the challenges of life more effectively when you understand those four things. But you have to understand, the world turns them upside down. The world says, "You are big and God is small." The world says, "If you want love, you have to earn it somehow." The world says, "If you want purpose and meaning then you've got to do certain things or rise to a certain status in your life." See, the world has us in a completely different place.

We're going to look at those four truths found in this passage today. I actually want to start with the last one here in verse 10. Because I want you to see where we're going. I just think it's motivating. When we see where we're going, then it's motivating to see where we are now. So where we're going is this place of purpose. Because God created us on purpose for a purpose.

In fact, I want you to see in the last line there, this word *walk*. That word *walk* there (you can circle it), that's the Greek term that's used there, *peripateo*. It means to physically walk. It's the word used about Jesus walking near the Sea of Galilee. Or, actually, it's the word used about Him walking *on* the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus talked to the paralytic, He said, "Take up your mat and walk." It's physical walking in all of those cases. But Jesus also used it metaphorically. He said, "Walk in the light." In that way, He's using it metaphorically or spiritually. It has to do with our conduct in life. That's how Paul is using it here. He's describing the way we live, how we act, the choices that we make. Our walk, we call it.

So he's going to talk about this walk, this purpose that we have. We walk purposefully. As we put one foot in front of the other every day, we have this purposeful walk that we have in Christ. It's part of who we are. We can be more confident in this walk because of this identity situation.

Now I want to take you back to Ephesians 2:1 where the same word *walk* is used. But here, it's used in a context of being lost, kind of meandering around. I want to use the picture today of wandering around in a dark forest, a creepy forest, which I think is what happens in people's lives when they don't know Christ. They're walking around. There's a lot of activity in their lives, but it's dark. They might not even know it's dark, because they live in a forest. They've been living in a forest all their lives. We're going to talk about that dimension. But they're walking. There's a contrast between the walking that we had before we were saved and the walking that we have now that we've become Christians and we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

So we're going to start with the first principle that we are small. When I say we are small, it's pretty clear in the first line what is being said. It says that we're *dead*. That's pretty small. We're dead. *Nekros* is the word there. You're dead, and you're *dead in trespasses and sins*.

Now the word *sins* is a Greek word *hamartia*, which has the idea of missing the mark. You've heard that. You just can't get to where you want to be. It's like being lost because you can't find the direction or you haven't been able to get to the light. You're lost. That's this *hamartia* – these actions that exist, either by commission or omission. You're lost. You can't get to the place. You can't reach the mark.

The word *trespass* is a different word. It's deliberate sin. It's like you're in that forest and you know, "Oh, there's a line. I shouldn't cross that line," but you deliberately trespass onto someone else's property. When we're talking about the Lord here, we trespass onto the Lord's property, we trespass against His commandments, His rules, His guidelines for our lives.

There are trespasses and sins that contribute to our deadness. So we are dead. We don't just need a class to learn how to be good. We need salvation. We don't just need a self-help book to be stronger, because we're dead. We need salvation. We're dead in trespasses and sin.

He goes on to say – *which you want to walk, following the course of this world*. So there's this course. Imagine the dark, gloomy, creepy forest, I'm going to call it, and you've got all of these paths that are choices that we make. Every day we're making choices. If you're walking within the forest, this world system that exists there, then you're walking on the course of this world. You're making this choice or that choice. The world has this overall plan of destruction. So you keep walking in this dark space into this area. It's not just a detour. It's not just a dead end. There's an explosion at the end. So you end up doing things in your life that you regret, or you realize that are foolish. Or you find yourself in darkness and bad things happen. This is what happens when you're meandering or walking along the course of this world.

The course is not just a single course, the course is a lot of choices. You think, "Oh, I'm going to make this choice," but that choice ends up in a bad place. This is why Jesus said there's a broad road and many people are on it. That's why it's broad. But the end is destruction.

I say to young people, "Most of the people you know are going to end up divorced, addicted, angry, upset, or unfulfilled in their lives. Why? Because they're on a broad road." You want to be on the narrow road, Jesus says. There's not very many people on it. It's narrow because there's not a lot of people on it, but it leads to life. There's a course in this world and it has a map.

Look at the next words there. It says – *Following the prince of the power of the air*. He's the Satan who's designing and empowering the world system. He's given a map. So you're going to hear in the world here's how you find self-concept. Here's how you find identity. Here's how you can feel good about yourself – when you do these things, you reach this status, or you carry this particular credit card that makes you look special. There are things in the world that are there that say, "Do this." Those things are leading to paths that are bad that are led by this map on this course.

What's fueling us to take the steps in this creek before us? He goes on to explain this to us so that we know. He says – *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*.

What's driving us? It's our passions. It's our desires. What do I want? If I want something, then that's what I'm going to get. What are our passions?

The problem with desires and passions is they can lead us in a good way, but also they can lead us in a bad way. People who are not Christians can do good things. They can have good desires, they can help the poor, they can raise money for certain things. They can do kind things and

encourage people. But the desires and passions if they become the motivation of life, they drive us in places that are not good and bad. You find yourself even doing good things, but going around in circles in this creepy forest as you're walking around.

That's a pretty sad story. That's the first three verses. But we have to remember we are small. We have to start there.

And then we come to verse 4, a very important part of the passage. It says in verse 4 – *But God*. Oh, I love these words. These words are found over and over in scripture. I didn't check it myself, but I heard one person say 45 times we have the words *but God* in the scriptures.

Joseph's brothers were regretting the fact that they had sold their brother into slavery. Years later now, they're in Egypt with their brother and they're lamenting this. Their brother says, "You meant it for evil, *but God* meant it for good." God is the God who helps us deal with the regrets that we have. *But God* deals with regrets.

When Jesus was talking to His disciples, they were saying, "This is really hard." Jesus says – "*With men this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.*" That's the *but God*. The God of hope that we enjoy.

In 1 Samuel 23:14, it says that *Saul was seeking to kill David every day, but God would not allow it*. That's the *but God* of protection.

The *but God* in our lives is so important. You can look at your life and you can see the challenges, *but God* is there. We need to see how big God is.

In Romans 5 it says – *But God demonstrated his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*. That's salvation. That's the *but God* for salvation.

Now we take it into this passage where it says that God is big. Notice the words used to describe Him. He's *rich in mercy, because of the great love*. These are adjectives used to describe how big God is. In verse 6, it's going to say *the immeasurable riches of his grace*. Big words to describe how big God is.

Because we have to understand that it's God's mercy and His grace both talked about here that allow us to experience life in a new dimension. We don't have to be in the creepy forest, wandering around and crashing here and there. There's a beautiful meadow with sunshine that God wants us to enjoy. He offers that to us because He is God and His mercy is so great. So in the mercy of God, He does not allow us to experience our pain and just live there. God doesn't say, "You made your bed, you lie in it." God doesn't do that. God is merciful. So that even while we make decisions that are wrong decisions in the creepy forest and staying there doing bad things, God is rich in mercy, great in love. God is big. That's our second truth that we must understand how big God is.

The third truth that we understand is how much God cares for us. *His great love which with he loved us*. He's going to describe this love for us now. As he goes through, he says – *Even when*

*we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ.* That is such a beautiful statement that God cares for us so much that He makes us alive together with Christ. That's one of three things.

Now Paul includes this parenthesis here. He's eager to talk about this *grace you have been saved*, but then he's eager to get back to his sentence. So we'll postpone the comments about *by grace you have been saved* till we get to verse 8 when he elaborates on it some more.

But he's saying three things that are going to take place because of His love. One is that He *made us alive*. Secondly, He *raised us up with him*. Thirdly, He *seats us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*. You go from being dead and wandering around in a creepy forest to having a special seat that God provides for us. Wow, that's really special.

In our family, as our children were growing up, we had a special plate. "You are special," it said on it. When a particular child had a birthday or something, we put that plate out for them. It was the special seat that they could sit in. Sometimes we put a child in the middle of the room, we would gather our family around, we would say nice things. We would dote on them and say the things that we enjoy about that person. We poured out our love on that person. Oh they would be feeling so good because they were in the special seat.

God wants you to experience a special seat. He's designed it for you. He's raised you up and seated you in this special seat. Wow. That's one of those things that contributes to this sense of identity that God has given to us. He wants to move us from this place of wandering around in this dark forest to the special seat that He gives to us.

*So that in the coming age he might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

You might be asking your question (I think it a logical question that we ask) at this point. Okay, I'm wandering around in this forest. I've got to say, there are some Christians who wander around in the forest. They go back to worldliness and they find themselves making decisions that are not good. Young people who are believers find themselves wandering around in the world system where the world is telling them what to do, how to live, follow the map, and they're going the wrong direction. There's a way to get from that creepy forest to this beautiful meadow or the special seat that God wants us to have. So Paul is going to stop now. He's going to make it clear to us how this takes place. He's going to elaborate on this so we understand it.

He's going to say these words. Let me just underline them so we know where we are here. *For by grace you've been saved*. Not through education, not through lineage, not through money. You've been saved by grace through faith. It's not your own doing. He's going to elaborate on this. Because there are some people who think that they're doing good things in the dark forest and therefore they are qualified to experience salvation. They're not. The Bible is making it very clear here and describing for us what it means that this salvation comes to us. He makes it clear by saying it's not your own doing, it's not your own works that you do; *it is the gift of God*. He's going to say it again. It's *not a result of work, so that no one can boast*. So we don't want to confuse ourselves in thinking that just because we have desires that are good, or we do kind

things, or we love people in certain ways that we can feel good about ourselves because we do those things. No. We don't. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. It is the gift of God that gives us this salvation, this grace that God provides.

God loves us. God is big. We are small. God cares for us. Lastly, we come to this idea of purpose. These four things, when we understand them, contribute to a solid self-concept, a solid sense of identity that can drive us forward as we're making the daily decisions of life and how we're going to handle that.

He says – *For we are his workmanship*. This is the word *poiema*. You think of poem right away, but the word isn't translated poem. The word is handiwork or craftsmanship. Some of you are good at your trade. You're a craftsman. You know what good craftsmanship looks like, what good handiwork looks like.

You might use the illustration that Jeremiah uses in his book to describe how God is like the potter and we are like the pottery that He's creating. I like the image of a painting, that God is creating a masterpiece. He has a portfolio already. The portfolio of creation, the portfolio of His actions, where He draws events together in amazing ways. But He also puts you in the portfolio. You are His workmanship. You are His masterpiece. You might not feel like a masterpiece because God is continuing to grow you and change you. You're saying, "Wow, if I'm a painting, there's a lot of dark paint on my masterpiece." But every brushstroke takes a part of your life and turns it into the masterpiece. Every time God takes the palette of life, the situations that take place in our lives are forming us to be something that maybe we didn't expect in life. But God is creating this masterpiece, this workmanship.

*We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works*. When you have this masterpiece of a painting, where are you going to put it? You don't hide it in the closet. It gets put into a museum. But God doesn't put His masterpieces in museums. God puts His masterpieces out in the public arena for them to do good works. He puts His masterpieces into families. He puts His masterpieces into workstations. He puts His families into school classrooms. He puts us into neighborhoods. He puts us into marriages where that masterpiece can practice being a masterpiece.

Good works are very important. So there's a balance here. We must understand that good works do not save us, but they are the result of our salvation. You can't experience significance in your life because of what you've done. It's the works that you do that come out of your significance. It's this masterpiece that God has created for us that's just beautiful and amazing.

I like the picture of a man walking around in the forest. It's dark, it's gloomy, it's creepy. He realizes he can see over there that there is a meadow that's beautiful with a sun shining. He wants to go there. So the question is, how do we get from the creepy forest to the beautiful meadow that has the sunshine?

I'm going to take you back to verse 8 because it helps us understand that. He says – *For by grace you have been saved through faith*. That is your one action that you do. To experience this grace, this gift of salvation is the faith that God provides for us.

God gives us the faith, but we make this decision to say, "I'm going to trust God." This is the faith that has to do with feeling. This isn't the faith that has to do with just belief in our head. This is the faith that has trust that I'm going to put my whole life into this. I'm going to fall into the arms of Jesus. I'm going to allow Him to guide my decisions. So now with that tool, with that understanding that faith brings us into this salvation experience because of God's grace, the gift of God, I now can walk outside of this forest into this meadow with the sunshine. It is so great and so beautiful.

I come to this person here who needs some encouragement, maybe in my family, and I can encourage that person. Here's another person that's suffering in some way, maybe at work, and I can pray for that person. Here's another person that I meet who needs some care, and I can help them in a certain way. Because our good works come out of the fact that we are now saved. We are now walking in this beautiful meadow that God has designed for us. He wants to experience that in all of its beauty and all of its power.

There's a story about Michelangelo, who was asked about him chipping on the rock. "Why are you chipping on that rock?" He says, "I'm not chipping on a rock. I'm releasing an angel from this stone."

That's what God does for us. He releases the angel from the stone. We are trapped in our sin. We're trapped, wandering around in the darkness. Sometimes Christians go back into the forest for whatever reason because they think it's a good idea or they get sucked in by the world system. I just have to say, we have to move into this other place. It's by the faith that we have in the Lord. It's by His grace. He gives us salvation, because then we're going to walk in that newness of life. That's why we end here. Our conduct changes. We walk in a different way.

If you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want to invite you to do that today. It's an opportunity for you to enter out of darkness into light. Your darkness may be described in different ways, but it all goes back to the idea of sin. We have a sin nature. That sin nature drives us in a way that is self-defeating and it also just leads us around in circles that's difficult. But God has a better way. You want to come to the Lord and say, "Lord, I know I'm a sinner and I want to ask you to save me. I want to accept your gift of salvation that you provided for me, and I want to walk in that newness of life." If that's a prayer you want to pray, pray it today. Talk to us. We want to help you extend your walk, to know how to implement that salvation and to grow in it and to experience all that God has for you in your life.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we just have to say thank you. We just fall at your feet and we're so grateful for the salvation you provide for us. We're so honored by all of the actions that took place by Christ and the whole experience on the cross for us. Lord, thank you for that. We just appreciate the gift so much. We want to walk in that gift this week. We want to be confident. We want to enjoy life and we want to experience the fullness of life that you offer. Lord, give us the ability to do that through faith this week. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.