

The Plight of Man

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn to our Bible reading for today, which you will find in Ephesians chapter 2, which you will find in page 976 of the Pew Bible. Ephesians chapter 2, 976.

And we will read the first 10 verses together today. Ephesians chapter 2, then, verses 1 through 10. Let us hear then the Word of God.

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 live 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.

But God, be a 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, 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 and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 2 7] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It's the gift of God, nor 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.

Now a brief prayer. Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you, Father, that your word speaks honest and true and transparent about us, but most importantly about you.

Father, we pray that as we gather here this afternoon, in this half hour or so, you would encourage us with all that we hear.

Father, the sun's shining outside, and everything looks great, but Lord, we know that your word tells us about the real condition of your world, and our own lives. And so we would pray that in this time together, you would strengthen us to go back out into this world, and to live for you, to share the gospel, in our world that so needs it.

[2 : 3 8] So be with us and speak to us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Over these next four weeks, we're going to be spending some time in one of the great chapters of the New Testament, Ephesians chapter 2.

The letter to the Ephesians is all about the church, and is the gospel of the church. And a good friend helped me to see that this letter divides into three sections.

Let me just take a few moments to outline these sections, as it will help us in our geography, and putting chapter 2 of Ephesians into its proper context.

Firstly, we have in verses, chapter 1, verse 1, to chapter 3, verse 21, a section that is entitled, The Wealth of the Church. The Wealth of the Church.

In this section, Paul unpacks the riches of God's grace that he has shivered upon his people. In Christ, they have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

[3 : 40] In this world of darkness, that is suffering under the curse of sin and the fall, God is creating a new humanity in Christ Jesus. And God has given this new humanity a name, the church.

The church consists of those who have been saved from both Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds. And they are now united as one, one in Christ.

The grace that God has shivered upon them is to shape and to master the way that they live. So that the wealth of the church is to shape the walk of the church.

Chapter 4, verse 1, to chapter 6, verse 9. The walk of the church. In this section, Paul unpacks the moral behavior that comes with being God's new humanity.

Christians have already been saved and made alive with Christ. Therefore, we are to live like it. Be what you are, says Paul. You are already God's children who have been shown immeasurable grace.

[4 : 53] So now live your life under this new identity. Every part of life. Every part of life. From public to private. From speech to your sexuality.

From life at work to life at home. Everything is to be used for God's glory and shaped by His grace. I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling.

Chapter 4, verse 1. God's new humanity is to stand united in Christ and under the Word of God. They are to live distinctly different lives from the world around about them because this is part of God's plan.

And Paul urges them to live this way because it's in the everyday relationships of church life that God's people face the attacks of the power of darkness. In the great climax of his letter, Paul describes the warfare of the church.

Chapter 6, verse 10 to the end of the letter. The warfare of the church. This great passage that's about the armor of God. The armor of God is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 02] Both applied to our belief and our behavior. We are to put on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Put on the full armor of God so that we can make our stand against the devil's schemes.

The wealth of the church. The walk of the church. And the warfare of the church. And we are very still much in that first section of the letter.

The wealth of the church. In chapter 1, Paul has outlined the spiritual privileges of the church in Christ. Chapter 1, verse 4 and 6.

The past privilege. The blessing of election in Christ. Before the foundation of the world. Before creation. Before time existed.

To when only God himself existed. God did something. He chose us in Christ. Totally undeserving as we are.

[7 : 00] He chose us that we should be holy and blameless before him. There is the present privilege of adoption. Verses 5 to 8 of chapter 1. God has adopted us as his children through Jesus Christ.

And through Jesus Christ we have been redeemed through his blood. We have been forgiven. according to the riches of his grace which God has lavished upon us.

There is also the future privilege. The future privilege of unification. Verses 9 and 10. God has made known to us the mystery of his will for the future.

His plan. His purpose. Which he has set forth in Christ Jesus. A plan for the fullness of time to unite all things. All things in Christ.

Things in heaven and things in the earth. And finally we have the scope of this unification in verses 11 to 14.

[8 : 00] That these privileges, these blessings belong equally to Jewish believers and to Gentile believers. Non-Jews.

And having outlined our spiritual privileges in Christ, Paul now in chapter 2 goes on to outline our spiritual position in Christ.

Chapter 2 falls into two halves. Two halves that outline two great realities that God has accomplished for his people, his church, his new humanity in Christ.

In verses 1 to 10, God has made alive in Christ those who were dead. And in verses 11 to 22, God has made one in Christ those who were divided.

Jew and Gentile together making one new people of God. Most of you know that I lead our ministry here in the church to those who struggle with addictions.

[9 : 00] And that brings me into contact with all sorts of agencies and organisations doing similar work. Alcoholics Anonymous is one of the organisations I have been involved with.

And they do a tremendous work in this area. And at every Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, they have some readings that tell you what the meeting is and isn't about.

And one of the sentences from that reading that gets read out at every Alcoholics Anonymous meeting all over the world goes like this. Our stories disclose in a general way what life was like, what happened, and what life is like now.

And in much the same way, the Apostle Paul here in these first ten verses of chapter 2 outlines to the Ephesians what life was like, what happened, and what life is like now.

In verses 1 to 3, 3, what life was like, sins work against them. What happened, verses 4 to 9, God's work for them. And in verse 10, what life is like now, God's work through them.

[10 : 17] The summary of these verses would be, as I've already said, God makes alive in Christ those who were dead. The making alive part, we will come to next Wednesday.

Today, we are going to focus on the dead part. And if you were looking for a title this afternoon, the title would be The Plight of Man. The Plight of Man.

So under consideration today then, verses 1 to 3, what life was like, sins work against us. It might seem odd after speaking in chapter 1 about all the great things God has done in Christ and what Christ's death now meant for the Ephesians.

Paul now goes on to speak about how awful our condition is outside of Christ. Now, why does he do this? Is it because he thinks he said too many positive things in chapter 1 and now it's time to balance the books with some negative reality?

Of course not. We only need to read Paul's letters to see he wasn't that kind of man to say hard things for the sake of it. So why does he write what he writes in verses 1 to 3?

[11 : 25] Well, the reason Paul goes on to mention the Ephesians form a condition is very simple. He knows if they fail to grasp the severity of their sin and the reality of life outside of Christ, they would never grasp the wonder and the power of the gospel.

Paul does in these first three verses what jewelers do on a daily basis. He takes the sparkling diamond that is the gospel and he puts it against the black backdrop of humanity's condition outside of Jesus.

Paul knows that before the Ephesians could fully appreciate the blessings they'd been rescued for, they had to understand the curse they had been rescued from.

And to help us outline the plight of man, I want to give you a series of words all beginning with the letter D. And the first of those D's you will find in verse 1.

The plight of man is that he is dead. Dead. In 1995, Sean Penn starred in a film called Dead Man Walking which was about a man in death row.

[12 : 37] Although the character of the film was alive due to having a death sentence hanging over him, he was what's termed a dead man walking. In verse 1, Paul writes, and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

What Paul is saying is that outside of Christ, we are spiritually dead. This is the plight of man. Man is unable to understand nor appreciate spiritual things.

He possesses no spiritual life and he can do nothing of himself to please God. Just as a person physically dead doesn't respond to physical stimuli, so a person spiritually dead is unable to respond to spiritual things.

A corpse doesn't hear the conversation at the funeral parlor. A corpse has no appetite for food nor drink. A corpse feels no pain. A corpse is dead.

And so with the inner man of the unsaved person. His spiritual faculties are not functioning and they cannot function unless God gives him life.

[13 : 53] And the cause of this spiritual death, verse 1, trespasses and sins. Just as the apostle writes similarly in Romans chapter 6, the wages of sin is death.

And this takes us right back to the garden and to the first sin and the consequences thereof. Yes, Adam and Eve continued to live physically after the rebellion, but there was death everywhere.

Everything was different. There was death in their relationship between each other. Putting on fig leaves, covering up in their relationship. There was death in creation.

All the world under the curse of God. And there was physical death. Genesis chapter 5. And Adam died.

And he died. And he died. And he died. But the worst of all these deaths, the worst of all these deaths was the death and the relationship and the communion that Adam and Eve had previously enjoyed with God.

[15 : 01] The fellowship and the relationship above all else that we were created for. That relationship now dead. Adam and Eve banished from the garden.

Separated from God. And friends, when the Bible speaks about death, that's really what the Bible means. It means separation. Not only physically as the spirit separated from the body as in James 2 and 26, but also spiritually as the spirit separated from God.

Isaiah 59 verse 2. The plight of man is not that he is sick. He is not not well. He is not terminally ill.

He is dead. All men are sinners and all sinners are dead. The only difference between one sinner and another is the state of decay.

The drug addict and the alcoholic who may become to my recovery groups may be more outwardly decayed than maybe the office worker or the lawyer who comes to the lunchtime Bible talk.

[16 : 12] But both are dead. Dead in trespasses and sins. The down and out and the up and out as Tom Allen used to say. One corpse cannot be more dead than another.

So then friends, this means that our world is just one big graveyard filled with people who are dead while they live. After telling the Ephesians that outside of Christ sins work against them is that they are dead.

Paul then tells them more of the effects of sins work against them. First dead, now disobedient. Verses 2 and 3. 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 lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

You will see that there are three forces, three forces behind the disobedience of man. The world, the devil, the flesh.

Following the course of this world, you might be asking yourself, well, what is the course of this world? What does this look like? A good description is found in 1 John chapter 2, 15 and 16 and this is what John writes.

[17 : 39] Do not love the world or anything in the world for everything in the world the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has done comes not from the Father but from the world.

Here are the ways of the world. Cravings, wanting our own way, lusting, wanting more things for ourselves, boasting, wanting to show off to others what we have and who we are so that we appear more important both to them and to ourselves.

And if you read the papers, watch the news or look around and listen to everyday conversations, you'll see this is our world. And the most disturbing thing about all this, we recognize this in ourselves.

Although Paul primarily addresses the church at Ephesus, everything he says here is also true about us. We are dead and disobedient all because outside of Christ we follow, we belong to the one who is the mastermind behind the ways of the world.

He's described here as the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. But you and I might know him better as the devil or Satan.

[18 : 56] He is the father of disobedience. He who first caused Adam and Eve to become disobedience and that disobedience having now infected and affected every human being's sins.

Alarming, Paul says that until such time we come to Jesus and follow Jesus, this is who we are following. Does that shock you?

Does it surprise you? Well, that's what the Apostle Paul writes. That outside of Christ we are following Satan. And friends, Satan wants us to follow him all the way to hell.

Perhaps someone's sitting here right now and thinking to themselves, no such being exists. Isn't it interesting that those who in one breath say, I don't believe in the devil and in the next breath say, I don't know why I did such and such a thing or I don't know what or come over me there.

Polite man there he is, Paul gives the answer. Outside of Christ we are 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.

[20 : 14] The world, the devil, and Paul goes on, the flesh in verse 3. Among whom we all 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.

It's not pleasant reading, but to our shame we identify with Paul's words. Before coming to Jesus, we lived only to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts.

Even though we knew something was morally wrong, we ran with it anyway. For it was what we wanted. Nothing else mattered. These are the three forces that encourage man in his disobedience.

The world, the flesh, and the devil. The world is the external foe. The flesh is the internal foe. And the devil, he is the infernal foe.

We might at this point think Paul has said enough and that this indictment on humanity can't get any worse. Paul's not finished. His diagnosis continues.

[21 : 29] Why? Because as we've already said, unless we acknowledge the plight of man, we will never fully appreciate the power of God, who Christ is, and what it is he has done for us through the cross.

Our third and final day is doomed. Doomed. The terrifying consequence of everything Paul has been saying is what it makes as verse 3.

By nature, children of wrath. Under God's judgment and facing the just consequences and penalty of our sin. Paul says that this is the case for everyone, for every human being, every man, woman, and child ever born, including himself.

By nature, children of wrath like the rest of mankind. Outside of Christ, this is what all of our lives are like. This is sin's work against us.

Simply put, we are dead, disobedient, and doomed. That lets us see why many people consider the Bible to be such an offensive book.

[22 : 47] And why society does everything it can to silence its message and keep its pages closed. People go on with their lives thinking they're doing good, contributing to the lives of others.

They are trying their best. All of this convinces us if there is a God, he must look down and be really pleased with what he sees. Then the Bible's opened and we hear a message like we're hearing this afternoon.

And the assessment is the total opposite of what we thought. We are told that outside of Christ, God is not pleased. Neither is he indifferent.

Rather, he is angry. He is hostile. He looks upon us and rather than see light and life, all he sees is death and darkness.

The Bible confronts us with the cold, hard truth of who we are and what we are. And it commands us to repent, to turn away from ourselves and to run to Jesus Christ for rescue.

[23 : 54] Now, Paul doesn't say any of this just to make the Ephesians or us feel bad about ourselves. rather, he writes these things because he wants us to be absolutely clear about our condition before God in order that we might see more clearly God's grace, God's power and God's love towards us in Christ Jesus.

And friends, we need to be absolutely clear about this. We need to be absolutely clear about the real plight of man. When asked what it is that Jesus has actually done for them.

You know, some folks say things like this, I used to be a terrible drinker. No, I don't drink anymore. You know, I used to smoke. I used to take drugs. I used to swear a lot. No, I don't do any of that.

Jesus really helped me with the grief of losing my wife or my husband. Jesus gives me the strength to deal with my problems.

Now, friends, Jesus does give power to overcome situations like this. But if we don't grasp the fundamental plight of man, we will not fully understand how hopeless, helpless, and desperate we are.

[25 : 14] And nor will we glory and revel and be amazed at what actually the power of God has accomplished in our lives. The plight of man is that we are dead, disobedient, and doomed.

We do not need resuscitation. What we need is resurrection. And nothing and no one in this world can help us as they are in the same boat, dead, disobedient, and doomed.

but God, the power of God can make us alive. And you'll have to come back next week to hear how.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for the gospel.

We thank you that the gospel does not airbrush anything out of our lives. It gives us the cold, hard truth of what we are like before you. The predicament that we are in.

[26 : 30] We are not bad people trying to be good. We are dead people who need to be made alive. Help us all to grasp that, Lord, that Jesus came to make the dead live.

And I pray, Lord, that maybe even the day somebody would have been brought to life. So help us, Lord, to fully understand the real plight of which we're in so that we'll really appreciate the power that you've bestowed in our lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.