

OR Death to Life. . .

Introduction: Pg. 976. Very thankful for Jesse sharing his story with us.

Our lives are like a story. We all have a story. From the opening paragraph with our wonderful arrival in the Labor & Delivery to the final sentence when we are laid in a grave, the story of our lives is being written, day by day.

From the greatest moments of our lives to the most mundane, your story is being told. Even in these moments, the pen is on the paper. No moment is exempt.

What does your story look like? How do you want it to turn out? How will it turn out? Are there pages, perhaps even chapters, that you would like to delete? Which parts would you like to edit, reword, insert different characters? We all have pieces of our story that bring great joy and satisfaction, but we also have other parts that sadden and shame us.

FCF: Though we don't want to admit it, when it comes to writing our own story, none of us are a Shakespeare or Hemingway or Dickinson. Is God the author of your story? Or are you trying to write your own story?

Jesus came to invite us into a better story, his story. The story of the gospel is a story that truly . . .

“Greater Than We Know” Ephesians 2:1-10

The Point: Salvation in Christ is greater than we know.

If you ever want a concise explanation of God's work in salvation, go straight to these verses. I can't tell you how many times I have walked through these verses to tell someone what the Christian story is all about.

T: Verses 1-3 describe the spiritual condition every person on the planet is born into and how we all live apart from God and his grace through Jesus. They teach us to. . .

I. Recognize man's desperate problem is greater than we know (2:1-3).

Read 1-3

- Paul pushes back against our modern presumption and says, “We are not good. We are not inherently good people.”
- Now, please understand, Paul's goal is not to be pessimistic or harsh. His goal is to be real. Man has a grave problem, and we should all have an “Uh-Oh!” moment when we read these verses.

What's our problem?

- **We are dead.**
 - Not sick. Not weak. Not a little spiritually lethargic in need of a divine Turbo Shot. We do not need to be tweaked. We need to be made alive, because we are DEAD. Apart from Christ our spiritual pulse is flatlined.
- **We are dead in our sins and trespasses.**

- We have fallen short of God's standard and stepped over the line of God's intentions for us. Tragically, every human being has chosen to reject God's love and live their own way.
- **Cornelius Plantinga Jr.** talks about sin being a distortion and corruption of God's *shalom*. *Shalom* refers to the flourishing and fullness God designed for our lives and this world in the beginning. This is what he says: **"In sum, shalom is God's design for creation and redemption; sin is blamable human vandalism of these great realities and therefore an affront to their architect and builder."**
- Sin *is not* a minor mishap before God. It is cosmic vandalism against God. Our sinfulness is complex.
- **The Complexity of Sin:** *It touches everything*
 - **Mind - What we think**
 - **Desires - What we Want;** We sin because we have a heart that goes after what is sinful.
 - **Affections - What we Love & What we Hate**
 - **Will - What we Choose & Reject**
 - **Emotions - What we feel**
- **The Complexity of Sin:** *It touches everything & everyone.*
 - Did you see the progression? "And *you*" (Gentiles), but then he says, "among whom *we all* once lived." (Not just Gentiles but also Jews, like Paul), but just in case there is any room for doubt, Paul covers that with the final phrase of verse 3 and says, "rest of mankind."
 - Added to that . . .
- **We lived for the world and Satan's ways.**
 - Paul says we "walked" . . .
 - 1) "following the course of this world" -
 - He uses the term "walk" to describe how our manner of life, and our lives were characterized the spiritual system all around us not aligned with God's ways.
 - But it gets worse.
 - 2) "following the prince of the power of the air"
 - We all once lived under Satan's influence. Before God's grace changes us we are swinging deals for Satan's accounts. We lived under the domain of his kingdom. He is God's adversary and is constantly scheming to deceive us into less than God's best.
 - To paraphrase C. S. Lewis: We basically fall into one of two errors: We sensationalize Satan - He is everywhere in everything; or we completely ignore him (as if he is nowhere and in nothing)
- Do you see how serious this picture is? The consequences do not get any more drastic than what we find in *verse 3*.
- We are "by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."
- What does this word "wrath," mean?
 - "Wrath is God's holy hatred of sin; His essential antagonism to everything evil." - Kenneth Wuest
 - **"If we are to understand the biblical teaching, we must distinguish between wrath in God and what we so often see in human anger. Human anger is often accompanied by malice, vindictiveness, retaliation, revenge, and hatefulness. God's wrath, of course, has no such defilements. It is a pure expression of his holiness. It is not an outburst of irrational temper. . . . His wrath is instead about restoring to an unchallenged position all that is good, pure, true, beautiful, and right. And it is about**

removing everything that challenges his rule because it is bad, impure, rebellious, repugnant, or otherwise evil. . . . It is the pure reaction of God to all that is impure.”
David Wells

- Our eternal destiny is real. We were made for more than our existence in this life. Heaven is real. And Hell is real.
- Are you confident of where you will spend eternity?

PIC: Deep down we understand the heinousness of our sin. Newtown - Sandy Hook tragedy . . . “A constant reminder of the evil that resided there.” There are pieces of our lives we wish we could demolish. Things we wish we would have never said, never thought, never done, and we don’t have the ability to do away with them,

T: But God had a plan for our desperate problem. *Paul lays out this good news beginning in verse 4.*

II. Recognize God’s radical provision is greater than we know (2:4-6)

Read 4-7

- Verse 4 begins with two of the most beautiful words in Scripture: “But God”
 - *When we were dead, But God*
 - *When we lived for ourselves, but God*
 - *When we were chasing after self-glory, but God.*
 - *When we looked to success, degrees, pleasure, financial security, comfort, and other people as our functional saviors, as our ultimate satisfaction, BUT GOD.*
- Listen to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones assessment of these two words: **“With these two words we come to the introduction to the Christian message, the peculiar, specific message which the Christian faith has to offer us. These two words, in and of themselves, in a sense contain the whole gospel. The gospel tells us of what God has done, God’s intervention; it is something that comes entirely from outside us and displays to us that wondrous and amazing and astonishing work of God.”**
- What is this wondrous, amazing, and astonishing work of God in the gospel? Paul’s describes salvation with three descriptors. We have been made alive, raised up and seated with Christ.
 - God has made us alive with Christ.
 - No longer are we dead in our sins but now we are spiritually alive. Is there a greater gift than the gift of life?
 - To have a true relationship with God, one must be reborn into his kingdom. **John 1:11-13 says, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”**
 - God has raised us up with him.
 - Because of our union with Christ, not only have we been raised to life out of death, and we also, from God’s perspective, have ascended to reign with Christ in the heavenly places.
 - God has also seated us with him.
 - This is our position now. We have been seated with Christ to reign with him.

- No longer are we under the prince of this world. We are elevated to a superior position where we can now triumph over Satan and his devious schemes to tempt us away from our devotion to Christ.
- All of this happens because of our union with Christ. We are so connected to him that what is true for him is true for us!
- This is what Jesus says to his followers in the gospel: what is mine belongs to you. (John 16:15; 17:14).
- Positionally, this is true. It has happened. It is a fixed reality. This is what Paul does in all of his letters: this is who you are, now this is how you should live. This is your position because of Jesus. Now, this is how you should live in practice. Some have aptly summed it up by saying: “become what you are.”

How has all of this happened?

- Because God loves
 - God is great.
 - God is great in power (1:19ff)
 - God is great in love (2:4)
 - And he has loved us. He has given us Christ.
 - **“But God demonstrated his own love for us in this, who (ROMANS 5:8)**
 - It’s not as if God has some love and he may or may not give it to us. You don’t have to grab a daisy and pick the petals off one by one, “He loves me, he loves me not; he loves me, he loves me not.” There’s no guessing game here.
 - He has poured it out in Christ. He has held nothing back.
 - Behind Ephesians 2 looms the beautiful shadow of the Christ. (Ephesians 1:7)
 - That is why he is also - rich in mercy.
- Because God is rich in mercy
 - Mercy is withholding what we deserve.
 - Though we deserved the wrath and judgment of God, Jesus died in our place that we might receive mercy.

Do you see how Paul builds these stark contrasts in vv. 4-6 and vv. 1-3? Salvation is more than forgiveness of sins, amazing as that is. We are delivered, rescued from

- Death to LIFE
- Satan to CHRIST
- Wrath to LOVE, MERCY & GRACE
- If you have not yet experienced salvation in Christ, please do not have a “not now” attitude with God. Jesse and so many of us could tell you how much more amazing it is to say, “right now, I’m in.”

T: God’s radical provision is certainly greater than we know. Last, but certainly not least . . .

III. Recognize God’s ultimate purpose in salvation is greater than we know (2:7-10)

There is one grand and ultimate reason God has saved us. *Verse 7.*

- God is not only rich in mercy, and great in love. He is immeasurably rich in grace.

God saved us to showcase the riches of his grace.

- This is God’s ultimate mission in saving us. Do you see what Paul is saying here? We are Trophies of his Grace! If you are in Christ, you will shine as a brilliant display of God’s kindness and grace.

- The NFL will give out **this Lombardi Trophy [PIC] tonight**, to the New England Patriots. (By faith, okay)
- Let's think about this trophy in comparison to God's trophies.
 - The Audience: All of Creation
 - The audience tonight will be about 160 million viewers.
 - The audience for God's trophies will be the entirety of creation from beginning to end and it's duration will not stop.
 - The Duration: Forever
 - Tonight: the Super Bowl will last for roughly four hours.
 - What about God's showcase? Paul describes it with the phrase: "in the coming ages."
 - What does that mean? Forevah! **F. F. Bruce** explains with a poetic vibe: **"one age supervening upon another like successive waves of the sea, as far into the future as thought can reach."**
 - The Purpose: Trophies tell Stories
 - Sparkle, shine, . . . Attention Grabbing . . . but the trophy represents something. There was work that went into the accomplishment.
 - Tonight, we will hear about all of their hard work and skill and accomplishment.
 - But God's trophies will tell the story of not our work but his work.

This is why Paul keeps writing in *verses 8-10* further emphasizing how God has worked by grace to showcase his grace.

Verses 8-9 are some of the most quoted verses in the Bible, and rightfully so. They are worthy of our deepest consideration and powers of memorization. Let's read these together: "For by grace . . .

- Paul makes it abundantly clear: **God has saved us by his grace**; there is no "self-achieved salvation."
 - First, he says "it is *by grace*."
 - Second, he says "it is not of yourselves."
 - Third, he tells them it is "a gift." Can a gift be earned? No, at that point it becomes, what? A wage.
 - Fourth, he says this is "so that no one can boast." Our only boast is Christ. [**But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**] (Galatians 6:14)]

Verse 10 completes the argument. Clearly this salvation is of grace because you are "God's workmanship . . . He created you in Christ"

- "Workmanship"
 - The Greek word for "workmanship" is *poiema*. You are God's poem, His masterpiece.
- **God has created us for good works.**
 - God did not save us, so that we would sit back and relax. He saved us that we might live a life of good works.
 - God is so gracious, that he already has good works prepared for us in advance. Our job to fulfill the desires God puts in us and the deeds he puts before us.
 - Now, don't miss the relationships between faith and grace on the one hand, and works on the other hand.

- Grace leads us to action that reveals our faith is alive, active, vibrant. **James 2:17, “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”**
- Our works is not the reason for our salvation but the result. Works are the fruit, that flows from the root of grace.
- See how this undercuts the fear that grace means we can live however we want to live? No. Grace compels us to live for God.
- The Protestant Reformation was a time leaders were chanting *sola fide* = salvation comes by faith alone through God’s grace alone.
- Yes, but they also loved to say: *sola fides iustificat, sed non fides quae est sola!* Or: *faith alone justifies, but not the faith which is alone!* (Storms)
- Every good endeavor . . .
 - It all tells a story of grace.
 - These cans of soup; they tell a story of grace. When there is a willingness to take of what we have for the good of someone else, that is a good work.
 - Your work, Your family (Moms hear me on that), Your driving habits, Shovel snow for your neighbor. Restrained your tongue. Sent an encouraging Bible verse to a friend. They all provide opportunities to do good works.
 - Our lives should be filled with good works for God and the good of our neighbors.
- Inclusion: Isn’t Paul a sharp guy and excellent writer?

T: God displays the riches of his grace by our good works, and that is another way we shine like a trophy for him.

Conclusion: One person said Ephesians 2:1-10 is “the ultimate rags-to-riches story—from the lowest depths to the highest heights—” The gospel is such good news that we can build our individual lives and this church on it.

I love what **Tim Keller** puts it: **“Because the gospel is endlessly rich, it can handle the burden of being the one ‘main thing’ of a church.”**

• Is the gospel the main thing in your life? Has God moved you from death to life?

- If so, does the gospel cultivate wonder in your heart?
- Does it ever stop you in your tracks?
- When is the last time the gospel moved you tears?
- When is the last time you were so grateful and filled with joy over the gospel that you couldn’t contain your excitement?

The gospel truly influences everything. It brings us back to God. It changes the way we view others, with both greater compassion (because people have a desperate problem apart from grace), but also with greater expectation (because God has big plans for each of us. There is not one person he can’t make new and release for good works).

Let’s live in light of this great gospel for the glory of his name.