

Dead Men Walking: Who You Were (Ephesians 2:1-3)

I. Introduction

- 1⌘⌘A. **Ephesians Summary Statement:** The reconciling wisdom of God has been gloriously displayed in Christ calling us to walk by grace in the peace He has given us

B. Review and Preview:

1. Last time we were in Ephesians, we finished chapter 1 which I called, To the Praise of His Glory
 - a. Paul had started Ephesians by praising God for the great glories of salvation, focusing on God's sovereignty which chose us, predestined us, adopted us, redeemed us, made known to us, and gave us an inheritance in Christ
 - b. And at the heart of Paul's rejoicing was God's inscrutable plan to bring all things together under one head, that is Christ, and the outworking of that in the union of the Jews and the Gentiles in the church
 - c. So after rejoicing in these glorious truths, Paul demonstrated his unity with the Ephesians by praying for the Ephesians, and he prayed specifically that they would see and know the wonder and the power of this salvation
2. This morning we're moving into Ephesians chapter 2, which I'm going to call: You Were... But Now
 - a. In Ephesians 1, Paul prayed that they would know the depth of God's riches and power in salvation, and now, Paul is going to tell them in no uncertain terms what power they have experienced in Christ
 - b. And he does that by bringing them back to the beginning, reminding them of what they once were and showing how God's power had broken in gloriously to effect salvation for them - the power that had been demonstrated in Christ had now also been demonstrated in them, bringing them from death to life as well
 - c. Paul does this twice in Ephesians 2, there are two cycles where Paul reminds them what they were and what they are now and these cycles grow on each other
 - d. In the first cycle, Paul considers the common lot of all mankind - reminding them that they were dead in their trespasses in sins; Jews and Gentiles alike were dead, but God made them alive again in Christ
 - e. In the second cycle, Paul considers the specific lot of the Gentiles - reminding them that they were cast out, separated from God's people, but God had brought the far near and preached peace to both in Christ
 - f. So Paul's themes in Ephesians 2 track very closely with the themes he introduced in chapter 1 - Paul wants us to see the great glory of salvation, to see that God alone has done it, and to see that the crowning glory of salvation is peace - peace with God but also peace with each other - the radical, otherworldly unity that the church has in Christ
3. We're going to go through chapter 2 over four weeks
 - a. I'll start this week by considering the "who you were" of the first cycle: You were dead...
 - b. And then next week I'll complete the first cycle by considering the glories of salvation: But God...
 - c. And so, I've titled this first section "Dead Men Walking: Who You Were Meets Who God Is"

1 C. Read Ephesians 2:1-3

- 1 D. **Proposition:** To rightly understand salvation, we must remember where we started: we were hopelessly trapped in the worst condition possible.
1. The identity of our condition
 2. The evidence of our condition
 3. The inescapability of our condition
 4. The universality of our condition
 5. The fatality of our condition
 6. Application

1 II. The Identity of Our Condition

1 A. Ephesians 2:1-3

1. And you were - Paul starts this section off very clearly. He is reminding them of who they once were, where they were before they knew Christ
2. And Paul uses two words to describe who they once were: they were dead in **trespasses** and in **sins**

B. Trespasses and sins

1. Partially, Paul is being poetic or using rhetorical flare here with this repetition, he's emphasizing the reality and severity of their condition by using repetition
2. But also these two words are important
3. Trespasses often carries a legal or financial connotation - it focuses on the fact that we have violated God's law and we have put ourselves in debt to God - it's almost an objective term, objectively, you were wrong
 - 1 2 a. So we see trespasses, debt, and legal demands paired in Colossians 2:13-14 - *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.*
4. Sin can sometimes carry a more personal or relational connotation - it focuses on the fact that we had rejected God, had refused relationship with Him and had rightly provoked His wrath
 - 1 2 a. So we see sin, enemies, and reconciliation paired in Romans 5:8-10 - *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*
5. Paul wants to evoke both of these connotations - objectively and subjectively we were in trouble - we had violated the standard and had angered our God

C. So Paul is really clear about what our condition is

1. We had rebelled against God, we had violated His law and we had personally offended Him
2. And Paul doesn't view this as an incidental fact, but it is our very characterization - our identity is sinners and trespassers - that is who we are

1 III. The Evidence of Our Condition

1 A. Ephesians 2:1-3

1. In which you once walked - Paul has already characterized us as trespassers and sinners, but he goes and extra step and says we walked in trespasses and sins
 - a. Our characterization was not merely theoretical, but practical we were sinners and we lived in sin, we were trespassers and we trespassed constantly, this is how we walked, this characterized the fiber of our lives
 - 1 b. And this starts a theme that is going to persist through Ephesians - walking - Paul starts here by reminding us how we used to walk, as sinners and trespassers, but he is going to build on that, showing that God saved us so that we would walk a different way (Ephesians 2:10), so we must not walk as we used to (Ephesians 4:17) but must walk in accordance with salvation (Ephesians 4:1) - that would be a pretty decent summary of the thrust of Ephesians
- 1 2. But Paul goes further in characterizing how we lived -he says - we all once lived in the passions of our flesh
 - a. Paul says that instead of being obedient worshippers of God, our lives were characterized by following every desire that we had in our flesh, instead of pursuing the passions of God, we pursued the corrupted passions of our flesh
 - 1 b. And he's even more clear in the next phrase, we - carried out the desires of the body and the mind - we were ruled by our base desires
3. In other words, our lives bore fruitful evidence to our character - we were, by character, sinners and trespasses, and our sinfulness overflowed as we pursued all the foolish things that we desired, we were guided solely by our corrupted wants, instead of seeking after the knowledge and the glory of God
 - a. It is not hard to make the claim that we were trespassers and sinners because the evidence is staring us right in the face - we may not like that truth, but we can't escape that truth, the evidence is right before us
 - b. We know we were sinners and trespassers because we lived as sinners and trespassers, we could do no different, it's who we were

1 IV. The Inescapability of Our Condition

1 A. Ephesians 2:1-3

1. So far Paul has charged that we were sinners and transgressors and we gave ample evidence of that characterization because we lived out our sin - we were ruled by our passions, carrying out our own base desires
2. Paul says that we were ruled by our own desires, but that's not all that we were ruled by - we had a greater power that held sway over us
13. He says we were - *following the prince of the power of the air* - we were slaves serving a dreadful master, our condition was inescapable because we were not our own masters, we were slaves, slaves of sin and ruled over by Satan
14. And Paul goes on to describe more clearly who our ruler was - *the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience* - we were slaves of the Devil, bound to follow his course and do his will

1 B. But the word Paul uses here is important - Paul says we were under the mastery of a spirit - the spirit of Satan

1. This word is important because this is one of the theme words of Ephesians, we've already seen it several times in Ephesians 1
112. Ephesians 1:13 - *In him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*
123. And Ephesians 1:17 - *[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him*
4. Paul is setting up a picture of a cosmic war in the realm of spirits, a war in which the Holy Spirit opposes the spirit of Satan, a war in which, in one way, we are merely pawns
5. And Paul says we have been willingly captured by the wrong side, the side that is opposing the absolute victor, Christ

11 C. And we see that this contrast persist, because Paul does not only contrast Satan as the opposing spirit, but as the prince of this world

11. This directly contrasts with what had gone before, Ephesians 1:20-23 - *according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*
2. Christ is the One seated at the right hand of God, the rightful ruler of this world, the victor in the war of spirits, and the conqueror of this world
3. But Satan has set himself up as the opposer, the erstwhile prince of this world, and temporarily holds this world in opposition to Christ - and this is the war that we have been caught in

D. Understanding this imagery is important, because it will come back up in Ephesians several times

11. For example, Paul will remind us that we are in the midst of this battle in Ephesians 6:11-13 - Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day,

1 E. But right now, in these verses, the main point is the hopelessness of our position, the inescapability of our condition

1. We were trapped in sin and slaves of Satan, we were in a terrible position and there was no way we were getting out of it
12. And so we can return to the first words of chapter 2 to see how Paul sees our position - he says we were dead - *you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked*
3. We'll come back to that phrase in a few minutes, but one of the connotations of that phrase is that our condition was permanent, we had no hope of changing our lot - dead men can't do anything about their deadness, dead men don't decide to become alive one day

1 V. The Universality of Our Condition

1 A. Ephesians 2:1-3

1. As we go through these verses, Paul designs this passage very carefully to clearly state that we all are trapped in sin
- 1 2. So we start with - *and you were dead* - remember, in Ephesians, 'you' is 'you Gentiles' or perhaps 'you Ephesians'
3. Paul starts out by positing his least controversial argument - the Gentiles were excluded from the people of God
- 1 4. But then he strengthens that position by saying that they were - *following the course of this world* - the general pathway of this world was running in enmity to God, wherever you looked, everyone was walking as God's enemies
 - a. As a side note - this is why we shouldn't put any hope in the powers of this world - we don't, we can't have a political or worldly hope, this world is following its prince, Satan, this world will walk in enmity toward God
 - b. I think sometimes the church in America has forgotten this truth and pursued political power - but this will be doomed to fail and will only lead to compromise and corruption of our glorious message
 - c. If you put your hope in the powers of this world to bring about righteousness and peace, you will either be sorely disappointed and/or you're hoping in the wrong thing
5. But Paul wants to make his point clear - the Gentiles were trapped in sin, but it wasn't only the Gentiles - so he comes back to his you/we pairing - you Gentiles and we Jews
- 1 16. He starts by saying - *you were dead in trespasses and sin* - but in verse 3, He says that - *we all once lived* - this way, we all once lived in sin
- 1 7. So he concludes these verses by saying that this you and we were - *like the rest of mankind* - this was the common lot of all men, all men were trapped in sin, dead in sin, doomed to God's wrath, this is where we all start

B. This universal condition of man is taught throughout Scripture, and Paul says it most clearly, perhaps, in Romans

- 1 1. Romans 3:9-12 - *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*
- 1 2. Romans 3:23 - *For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

1 VI. The Fatality of Our Condition

1 A. Ephesians 2:1-3

- 1 1. Paul saves his worst news for last - we were inescapably trapped in sin and continually gave evidence of our sinfulness, and this means that we were enemies of God - *we were by nature children of wrath*
2. Our sin was a terrible condition on its own and we were ruled over by a terrible master and unable to escape, but the true terror of our position was that we stood in the path of the wrath of God
3. In some parts of the 'so-called church', the wrath of God has become an antiquated concept - God is a God of love not of a God of hate, but Paul would stringently disagree, Paul knows a holy God who hates sin with a depth of passion that we can't even imagine, and His holy wrath burns against sin and will destroy sinners
4. In fact, later in Ephesians Paul would address the people of our day who ignore the wrath of God saying - *Let no one deceive you with empty words* - God's wrath will come on the sons of disobedience

B. So we shouldn't forget, ignore or set aside the wrath of God, God's wrath burns against sin

- 1 1. So Paul says similarly in Romans 1:18 - *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*
- 1 2. And this was the testimony of the Old Testament as well, Nahum 1:2 - *The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.*
- 1 3. In fact, this is so central to who God is that God's holy wrath is found in the proclamation of His name in Exodus 34:6-7 - *"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin / but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."*

1 C. And here in Ephesians Paul says, that was us, we were the recipients of God's wrath, God's holiness burned against us

- 1 1. We were hopelessly trapped in the worst situation there could ever be, and so we can return again to the first words of chapter 2 - *and you were dead*
2. We already consider how those words connote the inescapability of our condition, but that isn't the depth of those words - we stood in a position of deadness - we were dead and were doomed to death eternally
3. God was our enemy and demanded our death, and he would bring it about forever

1 VII. Applications

1 A. Remember and Repent

1. In the next few verses, Paul is going to declare a radical change for those who are in Christ, Paul says this is what we once were, but not what we are now, if we are in Christ, this is no longer our characterization
2. But, in Ephesians, Paul sees a radical change for those in Christ that has a gradual realization in time - that change needs to be progressively lived out - this means that at times and to varying degrees, these things still characterize us, we still walk in trespasses and sins
3. So the first thing this passage calls us to is repentance - to remember what we once were and how so often this still characterizes us, we too often still look like this, and to mourn over that and repent
14. Our attitude ought to be the same as Psalm 38 which we read this morning - *O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath! ... I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin.*
5. If you are in Christ, remember these things and continue in repentance
6. And even more, if you are not in Christ this morning, then these things absolutely characterize you and this passage calls you to repent, to see these truths and to run to Christ for salvation

1 B. Remember and Rejoice

1. In our passage this morning, Paul declares that we **were** by nature children of wrath - the important word there is 'were', not 'are' - for those who are in Christ, we were children of wrath, but we are no longer - what this passage describes is what God has saved us from - we used to be condemned, despicable slaves, but we are no longer
2. So, as we meditate on these things, it ought to produce in us an attitude of rejoicing, a chance to remember all that God has done for us, a chance to remember what we were so we can see how great salvation is
13. As we come to this passage, we should be like Psalm 103:2-5 - *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*
4. To rightly value the greatness of our salvation, we must remember where we came from - and this is one of the main points of this passage - remember what you were so that you can rejoice in what God has done for you

1 C. Remember and Return (thanks)

1. As we remember and rejoice, we rejoice not because we rescued ourselves from this, but because we were rescued from this - we were dead slaves, unable to do anything to rescue ourselves, but God came down and rescued us
2. So paired with our joy in salvation ought to be a deep seated thankfulness - a recognition that we did not deserve and could not demand salvation, but God freely provided it to us anyway - so as we read this passage we ought to return thanks to our great Rescuer
13. And this is the attitude that Paul wants to develop in us through Ephesians, as we see in Ephesians 5:20, we are to be - *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*
4. This passage reminds us of our hopelessness, literally our deadness - we could not escape our condition and had no hope that anyone would rescue us, but we were rescued and we ought to be thankful

1 D. Remember and Refuse

1. As we come to this passage, I think there is one more important application, again focusing on the word 'were' - if you are in Christ this is what you were, it is not what you are
12. Paul is going to return to this theme in Ephesians 5, even using many of the same words and phrases, Ephesians 5:6-7 - *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.*
3. This is what we were, but we are no longer slaves of sin - so we must not go back, we must refuse to allow sin to hold sway in our lives anymore - we have been rescued, we do not want to be captured again
4. And as Paul says in Ephesians 5, God's wrath is real and God's wrath will burn against sin forever - if we do not refuse to participate in sin, we may find that we never were rescued from God's wrath, that in the end we were sons of disobedience, that we were simply swept along with the current of this world
15. So as we remember what we have been rescued from, we must refuse to go back - we must dedicate ourselves to pursuing the things of Christ, and as Paul says in Titus 2:12 - *deny ungodliness and worldly desires and live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age*
6. Remember what you were - remember the horror of who you were and the terror of God's wrath - and refuse to ever return