

The Way We Were

Ephesians

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There's a familiar phrase that people use when they're remembering good times. People will say that "we're going to take a stroll down memory lane." And those times of remembrance are innocent enough, but sometimes, as you look back over the past and you remember good times, maybe when your kids were younger, they can leave you with a little bit of a sense of nostalgia that things used to be better and leave you a little bit dissatisfied in the present, if you're not careful about it. Well, the passage that we're going to look at here this morning in Ephesians chapter 2, Paul is going to take us down a spiritual memory lane, a trip down spiritual memory lane, but it has the opposite effect. It's the exact opposite of what we do when we remember good times gone by. Paul, in our text this morning, is going to help us remember that salvation has delivered us from a dreadful past and left us in a place of great blessing. And rather than leaving us nostalgic for days gone by, this passage leaves us grateful that things are better now and will only continue to get better as we walk with Christ into the future. The Apostle Paul shows us the plight from which we have been delivered in Ephesians chapter 2, and I invite you to turn there with me. We're going to look at the first three verses this morning and actually make our way through them here today.

Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 through 3. Where the inspired Scripture, we're reading the very Word of God to His people, said,

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Let me call your attention just by a little way of overview of the past tense nature of this passage. Paul is looking back on what his readers used to be rather than describing their present condition as he is writing. Look at verse 1. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." Verse 2. "You formerly walked according to the course of this world." Verse 3. "We too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh. We were by nature children of wrath,

even as the rest." That's your cue to get oriented into what Paul is talking about. He's talking about something that is in the past for his readers. And let me remind you that he is writing to Christians. Now, in chapter 1 verse 1 he said, "I'm writing to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus." And so, he's writing to people who are Christians now, and he says in this point of Scripture, he's looking back and saying, "Let me remind you of what you once were." And what it reminds us is this: that we all were born into a condition of alienation from God. We were separate from Him. As we're going to see, we were captive to hostile powers. We were under the domination of our own sins, and we were in a position of being captive to the certain judgment of God. The state of man apart from Christ is hopeless and Scripture teaches us that we cannot know God, because our sin separates us from Him. Those of us who are Christians, we look back, and we say, "This is what I use to be like." Paul doesn't have to detail all of the particular gross sins of our lives. He's talking on a broader scale and talking about the environment in which we lived, and what was inside us, and what the certain outcome of that was. Paul is speaking on a massively grand and broad scale here in a way that shows us that being a sinner is so much more than simply being someone who commits individual sins, someone who has a string of bad habits, or someone who sometimes lets curse words come out of his mouth. No, the plight of sinners is far greater than that. And our plight from which we have been delivered was far worse than we normally think about it as. We think about it in terms of "now I no longer commit this or that sin" and being a Christian, but we need to realize that it was so much more that we have been saved from.

So, the question for you this morning, Christian, is this: precisely what has God saved you from? We're going to look at it from two perspectives and, given what Paul said here, and there's a spiritual dimension to both. There's an evil spiritual dimension, and there's a righteous spiritual dimension, both of which salvation has delivered you from. First of all is this: you were captive to evil powers. You were captive to evil powers. And when I say captive, I mean that you were enslaved, that you were in bondage from which you could not deliver yourself from. You were in a cell, and you had no key. You were under the depths of the ocean, and you had no one to throw you a life preserver. There was no escape from the domination of spiritual forces that were at work in your life, and I know that we don't think this way. We're were so prone, you know, we're creatures of our sight, and we walk by sight, and we just see things as they are, and we look at the world around us, and we interpret things by what we see. But understand, beloved, that when God saved you and brings you into the Scriptures, He's bringing you into a realm for you to understand the fullness of what you were delivered from. You didn't even know how bad it was. When I was saved back some many years ago, I had no idea how bad my condition was. I was convicted of particular sins in my life, but my sinful nature, the sinful realm in which I lived, the satanic environment which dominated all of the philosophies in which I moved and had my being, I was clueless on. And that's true for all of us. We are never totally aware at the moment of our conversion just how much we are being delivered from. And that's why we come to Scripture to learn. We come to Scripture for God to tell us. In humble dependence we come to His Word. And here God says, "Let me tell you the fullness of what I have saved you from." And so, that's what we're seeing here. We're looking back into the past now as Christians, now as those who

have been delivered, and God says, "Let me show you what I have saved you from." It's as if you were at the top of a really great cliff, and now you are in safety, but you had been running toward the ledge and were going to jump off onto this incredible drop. And someone has you by the arm and says, "Let me show you just how far you would have fallen had it not been for me grabbing you and saving you." And you look out and say, "Ahhh!" It takes your breath away. This is so pervasive. This is so desperate. It is so dangerous. And let me just say, I'm going to speak primarily to Christians today, but let me say to you, those of you who you know that you're not a Christian, I'm not describing past tense for you, I am describing your present existence in what we are about to say. So when I say, "You were captive to evil powers," I'm speaking to Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ who share this great salvation with me. Those of you who do not share that salvation, you can substitute the present tense, and this is what your life is now. This is where your soul is now. This is where your soul is headed. And so, the distinction between saved and unsaved is a bright line, and it is a distinct difference, and we need to keep that in mind as we listen to God's Word this morning.

"You were captive to evil powers." Paul says that in fact "you were dead in your trespasses and sins." Look at chapter 2 verse 1. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." That was your spiritual existence. Now, watch what happens. We've looked at this verse over the past two weeks. We're not going to spend any more time there. Watch what happens now as we go into verse 2. This type of grammar just really geeks me out. I mean this really gets my juices flowing, when you see things like this in the Word of God, and you start to see the relationship of one verse to another, and the context, and exactly what the words are doing, and what they're explaining for us. Here in chapter 2 verse 1, Paul said, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." Now watch it in verse 2. "In which you formerly walked." What he's doing here, what verse 2 is, it is an expansion of the thought. He's given us a little bit of a summary in verse 1, and now in verse 2 he's saying, "Let me amplify and explain to you exactly what that meant. You were dead in your trespasses and sins. Let me show you exactly now what I mean by that and go into some detail with you." And see, what the writers of Scripture do for us is that they explain a doctrine, they announce, they proclaim a doctrine, and they don't just leave it there, but they go and they explain the implications of it. They go into detail with it, so that we see the fullness of the picture.

If I just told you in a five-minute conversation, if I just gave you a little three minute sermonette up here and said, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, and now you need to know Christ," that would be true as far as it goes, but the full weight of what that means would not rest upon your soul. It would not affect you like it should. You would not see all of the different dimensions at which this truth is true of you. And so, Paul gives a summary statement. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." And then he goes on to explain exactly what that means and exactly how dead you were. And he's going to give us a threefold sense of that captivity to evil in verses 2 and 3. And so, you were captive to evil powers. Now, we're going to look and we're going to see three aspects of what that captivity was like. What were you like before you became a Christian? Where was your life existence at? What was your threefold slavery before God saved you in Christ? It's around you. It's inside you. It's above you. Your total inner and

outer environment was arrayed against you in such a hostile manner there was no possibility that you could've saved yourself. There was no possibility that you could've even recognized the danger that you were in. Just like a fish swims in water and is oblivious to its environment, contrary to what you might've been taught by that doctrinally rich movie "Finding Nemo," a fish has no awareness of its environment. It is not self-perceptive. It can't analyze and see what is around it. Well, beloved, that was you before you were a Christian. You were in an environment, and you just assumed it all. You just moved, and lived, and breathed, and had your being in a hostile environment that was leading you to eternal destruction, and you couldn't step outside of that environment to assess it apart from the revelation of God.

What was that threefold slavery, that threefold captivity before God saved you in Christ? Well, first of all you're going to see that that the world enslaved you. Paul says in chapter 2 verse 2 that you lived, look at the text with me. He says, "In which you formerly walked according to the course of this world." He says, "You were born into this world, not just in a physical sense, but you were born into a spiritual environment that governed the way that you thought, that governed the way that you acted, that had influence upon you in ways that went beyond anything that you could have thought." You were born into a spiritual environment. You walked. You had your manner of living in a world, in a society, in a philosophical environment that rejected truth, rejected Christ, and followed the thinking and the fashions of the times. It's true that there is, at one level, a sense, and this is often explained in the fact that, you know, you look at the supermarket counter, and the glossy magazines, and media, and all of that, and you see that that is driving much of the thinking of the world. And that's true, but I want you to realize that it's more than just that. It's more than just that obvious outward hostility to the things of God, that positive attack on scriptural truth and scriptural morality. It's more than that. There's a negative aspect to it that is even more definitive and that cannot be denied. What I'm about to say cannot possibly be denied and people who are in the world would even affirm what I'm about to say.

Think about the world in which you live. Think about everything that defines life, and entertainment, and media and news around you. The course of this world defined from God's perspective can be said like this: they have no interest in the Bible. Indeed, they do everything they can to silence it and mock it, to define it out of existence. There is no place for the Scriptures in public discourse, is there? It is not welcome in public discourse. They have no interest in repentance or prayer. People love their sin. They have no sense. They like to be independent. They like to be assertive. And so, the whole spirit of dependent prayer about which we sung earlier in the service is something that they would mock and reject and say, "I don't need that. Apparently, I'm stronger than you if you need that, because I don't." That's the spirit. That's the course of the world. They have no love for Jesus Christ. If they use His name at all, they use it to curse and mock, not to reverently bow before Him, not to love Him as the Creator of all things, and the Savior of the world, and the One to whom they will one day stand before in judgment. They don't know Christ like that. They don't want Christ like that. They would hear none of it. That's the course of this world. It is totally anti-God. It is totally anti-Christ. It is totally anti-Scripture. They have no abiding interest in heaven as the abode of a holy God, where His

people will worship Him. Oh, they don't want to go to hell. They want to go to someplace nice, and dreamy, and green, where everything is love and peace, but to be at the throne of a holy God and to cast crowns at His feet, and to love Him, and to worship Him, and to give Him all of the glory in a reverent response of worship throughout all of eternity, that is something they don't want. If this room were filled now with people of the world, and I told them, "This is what I'm going to talk about. You have the opportunity to walk out, and there's no hard feelings." There would be a stream of people heading for the exits, because they don't want that. It's the course of the world to reject everything about the central truths of Scripture and everything that we hold dear as Christians.

And that's the environment in which you were born into. You were born into a spiritual environment in the world that would do nothing to point you to Christ and would do everything to point you away from it. What I'm about to say is a side point, but it's something that I think about a lot, and I just want to point something out to you. Even the things in the world that are morally neutral are anti-God, in this sense. You know, when we were in California, we often took our kids to Disneyland, and I have nothing against Disney at one level, and we enjoyed that and enjoyed our many times together there. You can find certain programs and television that are not attacking outwardly your morals, but think a little more deeply about it, beloved, as you enjoy those things. Realize that, even if they are morally neutral at one level, they're totally absent of the things of God, the things of Christ, the things that we hold dear. You could spend years in Disneyland and never hear a word about Christ. You could spend years watching "The Waltons" and "Little House on the Prairie" and never be exposed to the Gospel. And so, realize that even in the best, most morally innocent things that this world seemingly has to offer, that even there, there is a total absence of truth, a total absence of Christ, a total absence of the Gospel, a total absence of the conviction of sin, and just realize the environment in which you are in. The course of this world is not at all designed, even at its least offensive level, to drive you to the things that matter the most in the eyes of God. We could say it this way, there is no debating what I'm about to say: they prefer their opinions to a biblical worldview. They're not interested in Scripture. Even those, watch this, because this will hit pretty close to home: even those who engage in political action against various kinds of immorality, name the external sins that you want to: abortion, homosexual marriage, whatever else you want to add to the list there. When people enter into that realm, to see how much the world enslaves them, you must acknowledge that as soon as they enter into a political round to engage those issues, they shut down Scripture, because Scripture won't gather votes. It will offend voters, and so they have to silence the Gospel to team together with other religions that are anti-Gospel, but would share a sense of outward morality, so that in order to engage the world, even on the sins of the world, Scripture is silenced, because people go in and they say, "We can't possibly talk about the Scriptures here, because no one will listen. We'll lose before we begin." Look, if you're embarrassed by the Bible in your politics, then you are captive to the world. The world has so enslaved you and the opinions of men have so gathered in your thoughts, and fears, and your deferences, and what you're trying to accomplish that when Scripture is silenced you have given into the spirit of the world, even if you're standing for an outward sense of morality. And beloved, I say that by way of illustration simply to help you understand how captivating, how enslaving, how dominating the world environment

is, that even people with whom we would sympathize on the social issues go silent when Scripture starts to speak, because they don't want to join in that. They know that the world will reject it. That's how dominating the world environment is, that even Christians, not thinking clearly, shut the book of the Bible when it comes to engaging these matters, and thereby sever their spinal cord to what gives them power in the first place. I'm actually not making a political point here. I'm making a spiritual point simply helping you understand how dominating, powerful the influence of the thinking and the philosophies of the world are, that even Christians will stop speaking Scripture when it starts to matter the most. That's the environment in which you lived. That's the point.

Paul says, "We were all like that." And whether we were outwardly religious in our unsaved condition, or whether we were defiantly immoral, the world system drove us away from God and shaped our lives. The evolutionary thinking of the world was defining our education and our thinking. And so, you were in an environment, you were swimming in a sea of existence that you could not escape. That's where you formerly walked. That's what was defining you before you were a Christian. Somehow, something other than the saving Gospel of Christ determined your course of life. And just to realize that it manifests in different ways, whether it's outward religion, or defiant sin, or just a blind casual indifference to the things of God, it all has a common root. The world environment, the course of the world, has no interest in Scripture, no interest in Christ, no interest in the saving Gospel. "That was you. That's where you were," Paul says. It's frightening to think that we were a fish in a sea, and we couldn't jump out of it, and the harvest net of judgment was coming to sweep us up. We didn't even recognize our environment, and we couldn't escape it. We were just going to be gathered up with all of the other rotten fish and brought to judgment. That was you. That was me.

Now, what else can we say about our former captivity from this text of Scripture? Ephesians 2:1-3. The world enslaved you, yes. But secondly, it was more than that: Satan enslaved you. Satan enslaved you. We were subject to supernatural powers that were hostile to us, and hostile to the God who saves. Look at verse 2 with me again, and please look at the text with me. Don't just take my words for it. All we're doing here is we're just giving the sense of what Scripture has already said. And here it is in verse 2, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world." Notice the parallel construction. According to. "According to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." Paul says, "Your former walk was according to the ruler of the power of the air." Stated differently: your former life was in line with the world and with Satan, with the devil himself.

Ephesians emphasizes this evil realm, even though it tends to slip out of attention even in the best of Christian preaching. The book of Ephesians emphasizes this evil realm and warns us against it, not only here in chapter 2 verse 2, but look over at chapter 4 verse 27. Chapter 4 verse 27 says, "Do not give the devil an opportunity." Chapter 6 verse 12 says, our struggle, actually, look at verse 11. "Put on the full armor of God, so you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood." It's not against men. It's not against outward forces that we see with our physical

eyes, "but it's against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Look down at verse 16. "Take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."

So, throughout the book of Ephesians from start to finish, after Paul finishes his burst of praise and prayer for believers, he is introducing, he is mindful, right at the very surface is this opposition of a hostile force named Satan, the devil, who was aligned against you in your spiritual well-being. Scripture says that Satan is the father of lies. He is the prince of the power of the air, which somehow indicates the realm in which he operates. We won't try to define that this morning, but in that invisible realm Satan influences the world for evil, and that is consistent with his wicked career that Scripture traces back all the way to the Garden of Eden where he first tempted man to sin. And we see the results of that. We see the catastrophe that fell when Satan tempted man into sin and paradise was lost and death entered into the world. Scripture says, "That was the course. He was the one. That nature is what defined your walk in the world." Wow. He is a deceiver. He deceives men, and he deceives nations, and he does it, watch this, especially with Halloween coming up, he deceives men and nations, not in a red suit with a pointy tail and a pitchfork. No, no, no, that kind of trivialization, that making a joke of it, totally diminishes the reality of the enormous supernatural spiritual threat he is to all of mankind collectively and individually. Satan is a false angel. He is a fallen angel, better stated, who generates ungodly philosophies and false religion which oppose God's truth.

Turn over to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. I want you to follow me through a couple of things here. Just back a couple of pages in your Bible, 2 Corinthians chapter 11 beginning in verse 3. I just want you to get a sense, in these brief cross-references of Scripture, a sense of the realm in which Satan operates, because we trivialize it too much with our superficial thinking. In 2 Corinthians 11 verse 3 Paul said, "I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different Gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully." He's correcting the Corinthians for being too undiscerning and welcoming in teaching and a false Gospel that was actually satanically inspired in order to deceive them and to lead them astray from Christ.

Drop down to verse 14. Actually, verse 13. As he talks about these false teachers, he says, "Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness whose end will be according to their deeds." Now, watch this. Where is it that Satan operates? Where is his realm of operation? How does that manifest itself in the course of this world? How does it manifest itself in the way in which you formerly lived? It manifests itself through false systems of philosophy, false teachings, false Gospels, and whether it is atheism or a works based religion, or whether it's New Age stuff, or whether

it's devil worship, it all has a common thread, a common root, of Satan blinding men to biblical truth, so that they will not receive the Gospel of Christ.

You're in 2 Corinthians. Turn back to 2 Corinthians chapter 4 for just a moment. I want you to see where the where the attack is, where the realm of operation is. Paul says, "Even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Here's his realm, beloved, false teaching that blinds people to the Gospel. Systems of thought that distract people away from the simplicity and purity of repentance and faith in Christ. It trivializes the evil realm when people blame Satan for their sins of the flesh, or they blame the devil, because they can't find a parking spot. What we need to understand is the description that Scripture gives to us of Satan is that he is behind entire systems of thought in order to obscure Christ from the eyes of sinners. And every false religion, every teacher who does not just lay forth the necessity of repentance and faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sin is being animated by, ultimately by, the work of the devil, because it's through false teaching and false hopes of salvation where Satan lures people into traps and has them trusting in things other than Christ for their spiritual well-being. That is where the deception lies. He blinds them, so that they won't see the Gospel of Christ. And it can be very elaborate. It can be very seductive. It can seem very, what's the word I'm looking for? Very respectful, very dignified. Think of the college professor smoking his pipe in his classroom. It doesn't have to be, you know, sacrificing animals in a devil sacrifice thing. It's all over! It's everywhere! And the multiplicity of deception simply makes it all the more difficult to find your way through the maze. In fact, you can't find your way through the maze with your dead and sinful mind.

And what Paul is emphasizing, turn back to Ephesians chapter 2 right now. What Paul is saying is, in the context, the overall context of Ephesians 1 and 2, Christian, brother and sister in Christ, what Paul is saying is, "That's the realm to which you used to belong. That's the life that you used to live before you came to Christ. You were captive to Satan with the rest of the men." Watch this. In your natural power, in your natural strength, with your natural thinking informed by a worldly environment that is anti-God, those were your tools of weaponry to try to get out from the domination of a supernatural foe with supernatural intelligence, engendering false systems of thought to keep you from the Gospel. You were hopeless! I was hopeless. There was no way out. You were tricked. You were deceived. You were brought into a spider web of deception, and there was nothing that you could do to get out of it except to watch that spiritual black widow get closer and closer to you, ready to strike the venom of your eternal destruction. That's what you used to walk in. That's the ledge that we're looking over. Nothing less than the abyss of hell, and you were defenseless. You were dead in trespasses and sins, in a world environment that wouldn't help instruct you to find your way out, but instead drove you deeper into the deception, somehow, orchestrated by a fallen angel, Satan himself, and that was the course that you walked according to. Look at verse 2 with me again. "According to the prince of the power the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience," which we saw from 2 Corinthians, blinds people to the Gospel, blinds them through systems of thought and sends out servants who look like servants of

righteousness with their pointy hats and their gold gilded robes, with their suits and million-dollar smiles, and who knows how much cosmetic surgery, and all telling you what you want to hear. "God wants you healthy. God wants you happy. God loves you just like you are." Do you see how bad it was?

Paul's point is that you shared in that manner of life, but he's not done, beloved. It wasn't simply Satan and the world that enslaved you, although that's very true. These were the evil powers that were at work that you couldn't see and that defined your environment. But Paul goes further and says and gives his third aspect of the slavery of the captivity to evil powers. It's not just foreign, outside you evil powers that you were enslaved to, you were enslaved to your own evil desires. Look at verse 3. This is one of the places where it's a shame that there's a verse break, but it's okay. We can live with that. Verse 3. "Among them we too all formerly." So, Paul, like we said last time, expands it out and says, "This is true of Jews and Gentiles alike. This is true of all of mankind. There are no exceptions to what I'm saying here." He's making universal declarations of truth, dogmatic statements about the lost condition of mankind. "Among them we too all formerly," there's the past tense, let me just remind you, "lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind." It's true that you were subject to external forces that were beyond your control, but you were also subject to internal forces, motions, and sinful, evil desires that dominated your own heart.

As we saw last time, Paul isn't simply condemning others. He includes himself in this, but what he's saying here is that, "We lived in the lusts of our flesh. We owned this. This was ours. These were our desires. These were our sinful ways, and it's what was inside you as well." And he says elsewhere in Scripture, you know, we think of the word "lust," and we think about it simply in terms of illicit sexual desires. That's true. That's included, but it's broader than that. Galatians 5 talks about the lust of the flesh in terms of sensuality, and strife, and jealousy, and anger, and drunkenness, and other things that mark unbelievers. Let's be honest, wasn't that your life before Christ? Maybe you could put on the show for others, especially those of you that were raised in a Christian home, but wasn't there rebellion in your heart? Wasn't there an indifference to Christ? Before you were a Christian you weren't animated by a sincere love and devotion for God as the supreme desire of your heart, and living in humble repentance, and looking forward to the second coming of Christ, where He would come and take you as His own. Some of you young people now, just cold and indifferent to the Gospel, even if outwardly everything looks fine. Look, you're hostage to that. You can no more change your nature, you can no more generate holy desires than you could grow a third arm. And you wouldn't even want to, because you like your life the way it is. This is what Paul is talking about. This is the depravity of man. This is the total inability of man to save himself or to improve his spiritual condition. That's where we all were.

The depravity of man, this evil within, explains our lost world, our lost society. Why are there wars? Why are prisons overflowing with people who have done reprehensible things? Why is there widespread abortion? Why are there broken families? Why do authorities abuse their power for the sake of their own greedy gain? Why do adults abuse defenseless children to gratify their perverse lusts? Why do people not far from here roll

in the street addicted to heroin? Why do men and women like you and me persist in evil habits that we know are destructive and wrong? Why? It's because they have evil minds; it's because they have evil hearts. It's because unsaved men hate Christ and hate His righteousness, and when you turn away from the light all you can do is walk into deeper darkness. This is the case of humanity. This is the case of mankind. Don't think for a moment, beloved, don't allow yourself to be swept up by sugary sounding philosophies that say that there's a spark of divinity in each of us. There's not. There's a core of evil in unsaved men that explains the world in which we live. To see the world around us and to deny the spirit of the age is just utter folly and foolishness. It's willful blindness.

And the point here, beloved, is not to talk about the world out there. It's for you to realize as a Christian that that is the spirit that animated your life before Christ. Whatever the particular manifestation of your evil desires were, whatever the sins were that you loved, whether you were proud and boastful in your intellectual arrogance, whether you were a slave to alcohol and drugs, whether you were profane, whether you were immoral, some of you, no doubt, we won't even go there. Look back at your past. Realize what God saved you from, but realize also, furthermore, that that is what owned you. The reason that your life was so off track, the reason that you were so polluted, looking back on it, the reason you were so polluted wasn't just the world, it wasn't just Satan, although they were contributing factors. There in your heart were the lusts of the flesh that reigned supreme, and you indulged those desires of your flesh. You indulged those desires of your mind, and in indulging them it's obvious that you were never going to be the means of your own escape. That's why you couldn't overcome your evil habits before you were a Christian. Your life, beloved, flowed from what was inside you. And with others of evil mind, with other unsaved men, at the core, even if you didn't fully understand it, at the core, you hated Christ, and you hated His righteousness, and you resented the demands of the law that were on your conscience. That was the fountain from which your life flowed. And so, this trip down spiritual memory Lane. You were captive. You were enslaved. You were in bondage to a whole host of diversified forces that were way beyond your capacity to recognize, let alone to escape. You were enslaved by the world. You were enslaved by Satan, and you were a slave to your own lusts.

Now, I don't enjoy dwelling on the negative like that, but do you understand that as a church and as a pastor we have a responsibility to let God's Word speak for itself? We can't resent this and say, "Oh, I want positive stuff. I want to know how to live a better life, and a better marriage, and all of that." No, we take God's Word on its terms, and we just go through it systematically, and we let it speak to us as Providence dictates the timing, but we let God's Word speak. And we don't resist, and watch this, beloved, please. Please pay attention with what I'm saying right now: we don't resist, and we don't resent when Scripture tells us what we used to be like. A true Christian says, "That's all true. That was true of me." A true Christian embraces this. A true Christian doesn't hide his sin any longer. And though we don't have to have a public ceremony where we all get up to a mic and vomit out our past unrighteousness, we don't need to do that, in your heart, look, if you're a Christian, in your heart you're looking at this and saying, "Wow! This is true. This is true. This is true." I don't mind telling you as your speaker this morning, the world, Satan, evil desires of me, true, true, true. It's a true/false test, and

every answer is true of all of us, either in our former life before we were saved or of your present life now if you're resisting Christ. You see, Scripture just totally humbles and crushes the pride of man. It leaves us with no avenue of declaring our own power, or no avenue of declaring our own self-righteousness, or declaring our own wisdom.

When we open the Bible, beloved, when we open the Bible, and we read what God says, we are not seeing the wisdom of the world. We are not seeing what attracts the world. We are opening the Bible in order to get the wisdom of God and the power of God, even though the world defies that, and denies it, and rejects it as utter folly, and foolishness, and fables. We don't care. They're wrong! Scripture is true. And part of the outworking of your repentance, beloved, part of the way that you bring forth the fruit of a changed life and a reoriented heart is that you increasingly and clearly look at the world and say, "I stand opposed to all of it. I reject the philosophies of the world. I take my stand, and I receive my truth based on the Word of God alone." The Word of God alone. You can't have your feet in both camps. You can't straddle the fence. You can't love the world Monday through Saturday and come in on Sunday and pretend that this matters to you. You can't have it both ways. You must reject the world. You must reject the devil. You must reject your own sinful, indulging self. You must come to Christ in such thorough repentance that says, "I am leaving everything behind. I reject everything about my environment. I disown all claims to self-righteousness. I reject the devil. I reject my sin. I disown myself. Oh Lord, I come alone naked to you and ask you to save me in your holy mercy." That's the only way it could be. You separate yourself from all of this anti-God world, Satan, internal stuff that Paul describes in verses 1 through 3. And then in part, you spend the rest of your Christian life learning and mortifying it all the more. You reject it in principle, and then you work it out in practice. And that's why you can't indulge your sins. That's why you can't indulge your evil thoughts. That's why you can't be the same. You've rejected it all and a true Christian would not want it any other way. We see the world philosophy is ugly. We see Satan as a sadistic foe bent on destruction, not only of our souls, but the souls of others around us. He's going to successfully deceive countless numbers into an eternal destruction, and we can't dabble with it. We can't dabble with it in being flimsy and shaving the corners off the Gospel, the uncomfortable truths of the Gospel. We can't do that. And we realize we've got to mortify the remaining sinful desires of our own flesh, all as a part of an appropriate working out of repentance.

Well, look at the world, Satan, your evil desires. Come back to me here and let's just ask a really simple question: with all of that evil in the world, the devil, inside us, with all that undeniable wickedness, you do not expect a holy, righteous God to overlook that, do you? The One who deserves all worship? The holy, righteous God of the universe? The Creator who dwells in unapproachable light? Who is kind to His enemies day after day, giving them sun, and food, and air to breathe, while they continue to reject Him in a world that is arrayed against Him, which would gladly turn its nuclear weapons against God if only it could? You don't expect a holy God to just bypass that, do you? To just wink at that and say, "It's okay." No, you see, you were captive to evil powers. That's the negative side. On a positive righteous side, point number 2 this morning: you were condemned by God. You were condemned by God. God is righteous. God is opposed to

all this evil and it will not go unpunished. Look at the end of chapter 2 verse 3. Paul says, "You were by nature," by intrinsic existence, here's what you deserved. "You are by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." This phrase "children of wrath" shows that our very nature, a child owns the nature of his father, for better or for worse. By nature, what your nature called forth was the enduring wrath of God. Before your salvation, you deserved judgment. Scripture says, "The wrath of God was abiding upon you. It's revealed from heaven," Romans 1 verse 18, "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." All of it. Including yours.

And so, it's not just that there were these wicked forces that were opposed to your spiritual well-being, God had you, viewed you, you were under, you were in a condition of deserving His wrath. God's wrath is not an angry tantrum. Let's vindicate the righteousness of God right here. When we think about the wrath of God, don't equate it with the way that you blow up when you don't get your way. That is not what we're talking about here at all. We're talking about something much, much different. God's wrath is his settled, determined opposition to sin and all that opposes His righteousness. It's not an explosive anger. It is a relentless determination that righteousness will be vindicated in the end. God's righteousness will be vindicated in the end. He will not tolerate one rebellious molecule in the universe when all is said and done. That's settled. That is not subject to negotiation, which means that in your unsaved state you were trying to swim upstream against a determined wrath, and the eventual outcome of the current of that great river was going to sweep you away. There was no way that you could resist it. One writer said this, and I quote, "He is a holy God, and, therefore, He does not stand idly by when people act unrighteously, transgress His law, show disdain to Him as Creator, or spurn His kindness and mercy. He acts in a righteous manner, punishing sin in the present and especially on the final day."

Look at it again before we leave it and move on to other things next week. Look at it there in verse 3. Actually, let's review the whole passage in light of the way that we've seen it here this morning. To read this with a sense of depth and the sense of dread certainty. Chapter 2 verse 1. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." They were by nature disobedient. Verse 3. "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." That's pretty harsh truth, but it's true. It's pretty severe, but it's right, and the whole point of Paul's saying it right here at this particular point in Ephesians is this: Paul intends for you to appreciate how great your salvation is. Let me remind you of it, because I know it's easy to forget things week-to-week. Sometimes I don't remember what I preached the prior Sunday and so, I'm sympathetic when you might forget too. Remember what Paul's doing in the bigger context here. Verse 15 of chapter 1. "I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus." And now verse 16. "I do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers." Verse 18. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." And then he goes on,

chapter 2 verse 4 and 5, talking about that power saying, "God made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." That's the context. What's here in the center is simply to help you understand and appreciate the vast wonder of what God has done for you in Christ.

Beloved, when Jesus lived and died and rose again and He ascended into heaven where He lives and intercedes and makes intercession for all of the saints, When Jesus lived His righteous life, when Jesus came down from heaven, you just get lost in the wonder of it. When Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, came down incarnate in the form of a babe, and grew, and lived a perfectly righteous life, which He offered as a sacrifice for the sins of everyone who would believe on Him at the cross, when He was buried, when He was raised again, Scripture says, "For our justification," when He ascended into heaven from where He rules with power at the Father's right hand, you realize the greatness of our salvation. You were dead in sin, but now you're alive in Christ. You were enslaved to this world. Jesus said, "I have overcome the world." You were enslaved to Satan. Scripture said from the very beginning, Christ would come and bruise him, crush him on the head. You were enslaved to your inward lusts. Christ gave you a new nature. You were born again, and a new heart, a new creation, the old things passed away, behold, new things have come. You were a child of wrath and Christ bore that wrath on your behalf on the cross and carried it away so that your slate would be clean; so that you might be justified, declared fully righteous in the presence of God and His law with no charge left to condemn you. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. By grace you have been saved." Understand how you got there. Look back down the barren trees of spiritual Memory Lane and see the destruction that was left behind in your wake. A vast arid desert behind you from which nothing good could grow. And now, extending the metaphor a little bit, here you are in this place of blessing surrounded by the the great spiritually lush riches of Christ. Blessings all about you. Freed from the world. Freed from Satan. Freed from your lusts. Forgiven! Declared righteous! With the hope of heaven forever, and ever, and ever.

And realize how you got to where you're at today. It wasn't you. You weren't smart enough. You weren't strong enough. You weren't righteous enough to even want it, let alone to choose it. When you recognize the desperate lostness of your prior condition, and you realize now you are in Christ, then you realize that God made you alive together in Christ, that God saved you, watch this, that God, motivated by great love and mercy on your soul, that God energized with unlimited power to accomplish His will, that God in perfect mercy, perfect grace, illimitable love punished Christ Jesus Himself for your guilt in order to give you the gift of eternal life, which you did not deserve, and you could never have earned on your own. Realize that one day we're going to stand in front of a literal man, the God-man, Jesus Christ. One day we're going to see him face-to-face. We're going to be in the presence of the One who died to cleanse you from guilt, the One who lived a righteous life that could be credited to your account, the One who overcame the world, the One who defeated Satan, the One who defeated sin and death and hell, and we're going to be in His presence, and we're going to belong there, because He died and rose again to do that for you as a gift. A gift. Drop down to Ephesians 2 verse 8. In all of your undeserving, beloved, in all of your wretchedness, in all of your total lostness, verse

8, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Freely given. Bought at one great price, the blood of Christ. You see, only when you look back down the lane of your pre-conversion existence do you ever begin to appreciate the riches that have been bestowed upon you. What should you do today? What should you do right now? You should give thanks to God and His Christ for your salvation. What should you do as you walk out those doors in just a moment? You should be resolved to obedience. You should be resolved to gratitude. You should be resolved to magnify Christ for this inexpressible gift that saved you from so much to give you so much more.

Let's bow in prayer.

Father, thanks be to God. Thanks be to You for Your indescribable gift. It's hard to look back and see how black it was for us, Lord. It's hard to walk in this environment and realize now that we're strangers and aliens to it. But Lord, better to be a stranger and an alien on earth than to be an alien to heaven, to not to belong to Your kingdom. Father, corporately and individually, we own everything that Your Word says about what we used to be like. We own, we acknowledge, we admit, we confess without reservation, without mental qualification, we freely state, O God, that what Your Word says is true. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We walked according to the course of a wicked world, according to the course of a wicked Satan, and we indulged the desires of our flesh. We were children of wrath, even as all the rest. Lord, there was no distinguishing merit about us that attracted Your favor to us. This was Your unmerited goodness poured out upon us, and, Lord Jesus, it was at the price of You and Your perfect life. We have been greatly redeemed. We have been greatly loved, O God, by You. We have been greatly saved, and we are being greatly kept until we see a great, eternal vision of the glory of God that goes beyond all that we could ask or think. Thank You, Father, for saving us from the way that we were. Thank You for what You are making us, what You will finally accomplish in us. You will perfect us. You will glorify us. We will belong in Your presence as adopted children into the family of God. We're amazed. We're humbled. We're grateful. We thank You. The words seem so inadequate Father, but truly, God, thank You for what You have done in Christ for us.

Father, for those here that don't know Christ, work in their heart too. Do the work in them that You did in us in order to bring them to repentance and faith in Christ. Save them, not for our sake, but for the sake of Christ and the sake of Your Word. Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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