

EPHESIANS – “THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM”

Ephesians 2:1-10

May 29, 2022

In this series on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians – this is what we have already learned as we looked at chapter 1:

- In the first half of chapter one – we learned that we need to praise God for all the amazing things He has done for us by blessing us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing **IN CHRIST JESUS**. We praise God because when we come to believe and accept Christ as our Lord and Savior we are adopted into God’s family, and gain all of the spiritual blessings that are available to every child of God. As a child of God, we have been blessed in three ways: *“In him we have **REDEPTION** through his blood, the **FORGIVENESS OF SINS**, in accordance with the riches of God’s **GRACE** that he lavished on us”* (Ephesians 1:7-8). And the best part is that we never have to doubt our salvation because we have been permanently sealed with God’s mark of ownership, the Holy Spirit.
- In the last half of chapter 1 we learned that there is much more to salvation than being content in knowing where we’ll spend eternity; we learned that we have an obligation to grow and mature in spiritual wisdom and divine insight (revelation) so that we would know God more fully and claim our inheritance. To do that we need the “eyes of our heart” enlightened so that we can see the invisible spiritual world around us, having a clear glimpse of God’s photograph imprinted on our mind, seeing the spiritual realm available to us for this reason: *“That you may know the **HOPE** to which he has called you, the **RICHES** of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparable great **POWER** for us who believe”* (Ephesians 1: 18-19). Because of what we have been given as His followers, we learned that since we have the keys back as stewards of God’s creation which was lost to Satan when Adam and Eve sinned – we have the important role, as God’s instruments, in reclaiming everything that has been stolen and lost to Satan, using the authority that comes from Jesus’ powerful Name. That means wherever we go and whatever we do, Jesus’ Spirit goes with us, and according to the promise found in **1 John 4:4** we can overcome this world, *“because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”* Therefore, as Christ’s soldiers in this spiritual war against evil and

darkness, we have nothing to fear, because we do not fight *TOWARDS* victory – we fight *FROM* victory!

As Paul begins chapter 2 – he takes a step back to answer the question, “*Why does mankind need to be saved?*” This is a very relevant question for us today in this secular society we live in because the majority of those around us don’t understand the Christian concept of salvation. Society has drifted so far from Christianity that these concepts that were well understood years ago have now become a foreign language and, in some cases, brings hostility and persecution from unbelievers. The average person outside of the church does not see the need to be saved, believing, “*There’s nothing wrong with me? I’m okay without God in my life!*”

This question about human nature is one of the great questions of life – “*Is mankind naturally good, or are we naturally sinful and evil?*” If society believes that mankind is basically good, then any abnormal behaviour can be solved with better education, increased positive reinforcement, social programs to help change the person’s behaviour, and if all else fails then remove them from society as a last resort. On the other hand, if society believes that mankind is naturally sinful, then something must be done beyond our natural abilities to rescue us from our bondage to sin and the eternal consequences of our sinful nature. The teaching of the Bible is very clear on the answer to this question – we are all born with a sinful nature inherited from our ancestors Adam and Eve, and we’re so lost in sin that it is impossible for anyone to save themselves, “***For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God***” (Romans 3:23). The problem is that every human is rebellious and naturally follows their selfish lusts and desires, causing them to come under the judgement of God’s wrath. That is why Christ came to this earth on God’s rescue mission to save all that was lost and the church has a vital role in that rescue mission!

These verses reminds me of those TV home renovation shows, like “*Extreme Makeover*” that take dysfunctional homes that have all kinds of issues and transform them into beautiful functional homes. Those reality shows begin by introducing us to a family dealing with all kinds of issues with their home, and then they ship the family off and bring in the wrecking crew and start the reno, remodel the home to make it more liveable and then totally redecorate it so that it’s unrecognizable. Then they bring the family back to unveil the transformation, which always receives a tearful response. We can easily get hooked and watch episode after episode and it’s basically the same story only with different families, different situations, and different homes. These transformation stories are loved by many and touch people because they resonate with us at a spiritual level. Our

basic need is that we all need renovation, something is broken within us that needs to be fixed, and Paul especially loves to tell these transformation stories.

Ephesians 2:1-10 is a transformation story in which Paul tells us the heart of the problem for every human – like those families and homes there are serious sin issues in everyone’s lives that need a Jesus fix, and only Jesus can bring about a transformation that helps us to live out our lives in joy and victory. The wrecking crew of the Holy Spirit comes in and remodels our lives from the inside out, creating this beautiful place in which the Holy Spirit lives!

In **Ephesians 2:1-3** Paul does a good job in explaining our past sinful condition – which every believer needs to understand, so that they would know that it was by His grace – His undeserving favour and mercy – that you have been saved from God’s judgement. It’s not about you – it’s all about God! Paul’s point is that a person needs to first know they are lost before they will want to be rescued. The problem today is that many around us don’t realize they are lost and in need of a Saviour. In these first three verses of chapter 2 Paul lists three reasons why Almighty God had to reach down to rescue mankind:

1. **We were dead** – “*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins*” (verse 1). Paul is not talking about physical death here, but spiritual death, which means total separation from God – having no relationship with God and not in anyway guided by His Spirit; instead, walking in the ways of the world and living in darkness under the power of Satan. The problem is that we were all born separated from God, but the good news is that we can receive the gift of eternal life – as Jesus said in **John 3:36**, “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.*” Then here’s another problem, Jesus reminds us in the parable of the Good Shepherd that the devil wants to make sure that we stay dead, so he comes to deceive, steal, kill and destroy, but Jesus comes to give life, abundant life, “*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*” (John 10:10).

The Bible makes it very clear – if you chose Jesus, you have life, but if you don’t choose Jesus, you don’t have life. So, in the spiritual sense, real life, an abundant fulfilled life doesn’t begin when we are born, life begins with out acceptance of Jesus as our Lord. The unbelievers around us may look very much alive, they may be wealthy and successful in life, but if they don’t have Jesus, they don’t have life. There are a many around us who look like everything is going well for them, but because they are cut off from the

source of eternal life available only through the Lord Jesus Christ, they are spiritually dead. So, Paul is reminding us here, not to get too self-righteous, or too spiritual because you were once just like them – once you too were DEAD – but God intervened!

2. **We were devilish in our thoughts and actions** –Paul says that is the way in which we lived at one time, *“It wasn’t that long ago that you lived in the religion, customs, and values of this world, obeying the dark ruler of the earthly realm who fills the atmosphere with his authority, and works diligently in the hearts of those who are disobedient to the truth of God”* (verse 2 Passion Translation). The Bible makes it clear that when you are not a believing Christian then you are not only spiritually dead, but you are also a slave to this world and a slave to the ruler of this world, which is Satan. However, most unbelievers would say, *“I’m not a slave! I’m free. In fact, I’m freer than you folks who go to church. I’m free to do whatever I want on Sunday mornings, while you folks have to get up early and dress up to go to church. So, don’t call me a slave!”* Yes, we are all free to choose, but the problem is that the temptations of this world cause most to naturally choose the things that are contrary to God’s ways and God’s commands because they have been deceived and need to be awakened, which leads us to the third reason we need saving.
3. **You were depraved** – which means we are all sinners by nature and can’t help it because we were born that way. In **verse 3**, Paul identifies himself with us as being depraved, *“The corruption that was in us from birth was expressed through the deeds and desires of our self-life. We lived by whatever natural cravings and thoughts our minds dictated, living as rebellious children subject to God’s wrath like everyone else”* (Passion Translation). We all lock our doors and cars because even a good person may be tempted to take what is not there’s. We often hear people say, *“Mankind is basically good. Give them the right kind of family, the right kind of environment, and the right kind of education, then their goodness will come out.”* But is that true? If you took a baby rattlesnake and put it in a nice terrarium, giving it all the best things as it grew up so that it would be happy, healthy, and content. And then once the rattle snake becomes an adult, what do you think would happen the first time you reached in to pick

it up? It would bite you because that's its nature. That is what Paul is telling us, under the right conditions, or by following the wrong crowd, our depraved nature would raise its ugly head. And that's why we all need an extreme makeover to line up with God's will for our lives, for our nature to be transformed!

What Paul is speaking about in these first three verses is that there is a clash between two worldviews – between the worldview of believers and unbelievers. A worldview is the way or the outlook on how we see the world, our assumptions and beliefs that govern how we view and understand reality. Our worldview is the lens, or the frame of reference on which we build our lives: our actions, our thinking, our direction, our decisions, and our experiences. To get the right perspective on our Christian worldview, Paul is saying that every believer must first start by knowing where they have come from and the new identity, they now have IN CHRIST with all its benefits!

Paul reminds us here that right in the midst of our depravity and secular worldview, being a slave to Satan that God reached out to save us. ***“BUT GOD still loved us with such great love”*** that He stepped into our condition and brought about a great transformation, an extreme makeover. Paul uses only two short words to open **Ephesians 2:4**, but they are powerful words. “BUT GOD” stepped in and interrupted the mess mankind was in and because of His love, provided an answer to our dilemma. The phrase ***“BUT GOD”*** is the transition from death to life, from hopelessness to hope, and for complete restoration. You were dead in sin, ***“BUT GOD”*** intervened with His unconditional love, creating this masterpiece!

In **verses 4-5** Paul gives us this beautiful picture of our present condition as believers, ***“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.”*** And then in **verse 8-9** Paul reinforces and strengthens what has taken place in our lives, ***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** This is the Christian worldview that every believer lives by, knowing that they were saved by God's grace right in the midst of their depravity, darkness, and secular worldview. And it was nothing they did, it was not by their good works, or good behaviour, or anything else they may have done in their

human strength and abilities. Salvation is a gift from God so that no one can boast. No one can earn their salvation! It's only by grace can be saved!

Just over five hundred years ago, it was the verse ***"It is by grace you have been saved"*** that began the Protestant Revolution under Martin Luther that shook the Roman Catholic Church to its foundations, bringing Christianity out of bondage of a works mentality into a new era of understanding God's grace.

Another issue here is this verse found in James that seems to be a contradiction to what Paul is telling us here that we are ***"saved through faith...not by works,"*** and what James tells us, ***"Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action (works), is dead."*** James words are not against what Paul is saying, but they are looking at the same coin from different sides. Paul and James are addressing this topic of faith and works from different angles, but are saying the same thing, but they are speaking to different audiences. Paul here in Ephesians is speaking to non-believers who are asking the question, *"How do I receive my salvation?"* And he needs to make sure they get the order right: 1) Christ did His part by dying on the cross and rising from the dead – 2) our part is accepting the gift of salvation by faith – 3) and then God works in and through us to do good things (good works) in our lives. For Paul the math of the Gospel is **Jesus + nothing = everything**. However, James is speaking to a different audience – James is speaking to believers who have become complacent, believing that now that I am a believer (having my ticket for Heaven) I can sit back and coast through the rest of my life – just wait it out, resting on my salvation. I don't need to get involved in politics, in social issues, trying to change society for the better – it's all going to burn anyway. For James the math of the Gospel is **Faith – Works = Nothing** (no rewards)!

In many ways the story of the Bible is like a **lost and found story**. Adam and Eve lost their intimate connection with God in the fall, plus gave their authority over all of creation to Satan, so God needed to begin a rescue mission to reclaim us and His good creation. Mankind was made in the image and likeness of God, which means that Adam and Eve were not only created to dwell on this earth with God's creation, but they were also created to live in heaven with their heavenly Father. We often misunderstand heaven as only something created for us to go to when we die, as some place to look forward to in our future, a place to escape this world, but Genesis tells us that heaven existed before the fall and is our true home. In a mysterious way that I don't understand, we were created for living in heaven as well as living on this planet; however, because of the fall, mankind had been

locked out of heaven, separated from God's presence, but God gave Adam and Eve a promise that one day heaven would be unlocked again. The promise was that this sinful condition is only a temporary condition until God's Son, Jesus Christ, comes to restore all that was lost, and that takes us to verses 6 and 7.

That is why back in **Ephesians 1:3** – Paul began his letter by telling us that heaven has been unlocked for those in Christ, ***“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”*** The good news is that in Christ we have been restored to what was lost in the fall. Adam and Eve were originally created to be seated in heavenly places with God, while at the same time growing the family of mankind to expand the Garden of Eden and fill the entire earth. As God commanded them, ***“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it”*** (Genesis 1:28). God's original plan was for Adam and Eve to have generations of kids who would continuously expand the Garden of Eden until it filled the entire earth, claiming the entire earth for God. And the good news for us is that God has not changed from His original plan. God only put His plan on hold until Jesus came to defeat the devil!

When Jesus came to this earth – it was God's message to us, saying, *“I have come to get MY kids back, so let's get back to MY original plan ‘to fill this earth and subdue it!’”* That is what Paul is talking about in **Ephesians 2:4-9**. What was lost has been found, all because Jesus has restored access to heaven for us by dying on the cross. Jesus got God's kids back by coming down to this earth and becoming a human like us to pay the death penalty for our sins; thereby, bringing us back into a right relationship with God our Creator. And when Jesus had accomplished all that His Father sent Him to do, the Father raised Jesus up and seated Him at His own right hand, to wait for His enemies to become a footstool for His feet (Hebrews 10:12-13). In other words, Jesus is now at perfect rest and peace, and **verse 6-7** tells us that when we are seated with Christ in the Heavenly realms – Christ's rest and peace is also available to us. ***“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparably riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”*** Our lives are so much better with Christ than they were when we were living in sin, and that is merely a taste of what is to come for us in eternity!

So, this incredible act of love has unlocked something for you and for me that begins at salvation and carries on into eternity, and that leads us to **verse 10**. God saved us for a purpose – to do good works, which is the divine calling and purpose He chose us for, before the creation of the world, ***“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared for us to do.”*** The Passion translation says that ***“We have become his poetry,”*** our lives are beautiful poetry written by God, while the New Living translation says that ***“We are God’s masterpiece,”*** our lives are priceless, like a great work of art that’s displayed in an art gallery.

On this journey of faith, I don’t often feel like His masterpiece or His beautiful poetry because like any great work of art or piece of literature, God is still working on me – I have many areas that still need work. So, there are a few things we need to understand as His handiwork:

1. We are a work in progress – we are in God’s hands, and He is skillfully working on perfecting us. God has a picture in His mind of what who we are to become, so skillfully with each brush stroke on the canvas of life, or each pen stroke on a manuscript, or chisel strike on a block of marble, God is working away on His masterpiece.
2. It might hurt a bit – as God is chipping away on what’s not needed to liberate the masterpiece within, we will feel pain and discomfort. One of Michelangelo’s greatest works was the marble sculpture *“David.”* Using a chisel and hammer the great artist was liberating what was hidden within this block of marble, as Michelangelo stated, *“Every block of stone has a statue in it, and it is the task of sculptor to discover it.”* Likewise, God is renewing the masterpiece within!
3. When it’s finished it will be amazing – once we get to Heaven we will be perfected, and everything will make sense!

Let me leave you with an illustration that may help us to understand what Paul is saying in these verses – we currently live in a culture in which comic book heroes like Superman are celebrated like never before. Comic Con weekends are held in many major cities where hundreds of people came out and role play, dressed as their favorite superhero. Most of us have started out our lives having dreams of doing something *“super,”* something *“above and beyond”* the ordinary, wanting

to leave a lasting mark, and that is why there continues to be a huge market for superhero movies and Comic Con weekends. People flock to these events because there's a part of us that thrills at the thought that somebody's ordinary life can suddenly be transformed into something extraordinary. And then, we can also see how badly we need superheroes today. This world needs new kinds of leaders in the business world, health world, science world and especially in the political world with a transformed worldview, with a vision for truth and justice to make this world a better place for us and future generations!

Paul is telling us here in Ephesians 2 – as believers with a Christian worldview, we have the capability to become a superhero for Christ – because we are “*seated with him in heavenly realms,*” and because we are “*God’s handiwork (His poetry or masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus to do good works.*” God’s superheroes are needed today more than ever before – to redeem what has gone wrong, to set right what is broken, to reclaim what Satan has stolen, and to display God’s power to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons, bringing God’s kingdom down to this earth.

The encouragement from this chapter of Ephesians is that **YOU ARE GOD’S MASTERPIECE MADE FOR GREAT THINGS! YOU ARE A SUPERHERO FOR CHRIST!**