

Ephesians 2:1-3 "Talked With Any Corpses Lately?"

If we were to roughly outline this second chapter it would probably go something like this: What you were, what you are, and what you can become as the unified Body of Jesus Christ.

What you were, outside of Christ, was spiritually dead as Paul clearly tells us in the first three verses of this chapter. What you are, in Christ, is one who has experienced the magnificent grace of God which has resulted in life in the resurrected life of our Savior Jesus Christ, which is what we see in verses 4 through 9.

And what you can become, as the unified Body of Jesus Christ, is very important to understand, and it finds its expression in this chapter in EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

This is who we are in Christ, God's workmanship, and together we have been called to walk in the newness of this life. Paul shows these Ephesian believers, many of whom were Gentiles, that both Jew and Gentile share in this new life.

EPH 2:18,22 "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

What you were, what you are and what you can become, as God does a miracle in your life through Christ. And though this chapter concerns the Body of Christ, it is really all about our Lord Jesus who accomplishes this great work in our lives.

This morning we are going to look at what we were outside of Christ. This is not a bad place to start because it gives us a proper perspective of who we were in relationship to God when we did not know Him by faith in Christ.

This is a humbling place to start because it peels back the veneer of man's perceived self-worth and exposes the real state of man. It's not a pretty picture, but unless we all see ourselves in the light of God's holiness and righteousness, we will never really understand from whence we came and appreciate what we now possess in Christ.

It's like the little rich kid, who all his life, never had to struggle for anything. And because of that, he never appreciated the great wealth he had access to. He squandered it and took it for granted. But a day came when he lost it all and he began to see what life is really all about. Over the years he was forced to work hard and finally regained much of the wealth he had grown accustomed to enjoying in his youth. But this time he understood the value of what he had.

You and I can find ourselves in a similar situation. We as Christians in the twentieth century, especially here in America, have a tendency to become spoiled in our faith. In most cases we don't have to suffer because of our faith. We read books on the martyrs of the past and we find it hard to relate to because that's not real for us. We don't have to lay our lives down for our faith the way many others have had to.

And so our Christian experience can be one like that rich kid. Everything is sort of given to us on a silver platter. We have more access to fellowship, bible study materials, and every other imaginable tool one could use for growing in our faith, than any other Christian at any time in history.

Radio, television, books, tapes, the Internet. It's amazing, in this electronic age, to see all of the different sources we have available to us to study the word of God and reach this world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And yet, what is the overall condition of the Church today?

It's at one of its lowest points. There is an astounding number of "Christian" churches today that do not believe in the inerrancy of the Word of God. They do not believe that sin is the major problem in our world, but rather a problem with low self-esteem. We're having an identity crisis.

And that's true. And the reason there is this identity crisis is because many of the major mainline Protestant denominations in the world no longer identify themselves with the One who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father except by Me."

Of course, many pay lip-service to that as you go to their websites under the heading, "What we believe." And, in many cases it is orthodox, but once you begin to look closer at what ministries they have, what their emphasis on evangelism and discipleship is, what their types of books they promote, it becomes clear to anyone who

has any discernment that their orthodox statements do line up with what they practice.

And so, to get a proper perspective on what it truly means to be a Christian it's good to go back to our roots once in a while and get a fresh perspective on where we came from and where we're going and how we're going to get there.

And so this morning we'll look at that and hopefully come away with a better appreciation of just how serious this sin problem is and how we should be praising God every day and asking Him how we might be better used by our Lord to bring this good news to a dying world.

The word dying is not an overstatement. In fact that's how Paul begins this next section.

EPH 2:1-2 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

Keep in mind that Paul is speaking to Christians, born again believers in our Lord. He has been reminding them in the previous chapter, the life they have in Jesus Christ. And this life is the direct result of Christ's resurrection from the dead, assuring us that this life is real, not some fairy tale. It is God's power which is at work here in our lives.

Eph1:19-21"That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

And so, we have this contrast set before us. God's power and life; man's weakness and death. It is only the power of God that can reach down and bring life where there is death.

Jesus Himself tell us this in JOH 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

But let's talk about this death. Paul begins by saying, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,..." (EPH 2:1)

Again, these are believers Paul is speaking to and he's reminding them of their former state outside of Christ. Now the word he uses here in the Greek for dead is nekros and it means dead, like in dead.

It can also be translated corpse. In fact, this is how the word nekros is used in MAR 9:26 when Jesus is about to cast a spirit out of a young man. "The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse (nekros) that many said, "He's dead."

And so Paul is telling us here in Eph.2:1 that this is how we were. It is obviously not talking about being physically dead. They were very much alive, and yet they were very much dead, spiritually. Dead man walking.

But what does it mean to be dead? How dead is dead? Well, I think most of us would agree that when the body dies it is quite incapable of bringing itself back to life. An outside force would have to accomplish this. But, not just any outside force; the miraculous force of the very God who created all things.

We have one such example. Lazarus. Lazarus was a friend of our Lord Jesus. But he became sick and died. How dead was he? "On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days." (JOH 11:17)

Being dead four days in the tomb can have some very interesting results.

John 11:39 Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days."

After explaining to Martha and Mary that He was the resurrection and the life we read in JOH 11:43-44 ... "Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

This is what dead is. It's being absent from the body and the body begins to decay. In fact, I'm surprised that over the last million years or so that man hasn't decided to evolve himself into the type

of being which doesn't die. After all, if fish can decide to evolve themselves into reptiles and then into mammals and then into man, why can't he decide to evolve to such a degree that his body just continues to live? Why do people die?

Because the wages of sin is death. And sin is an affront and rebellion against a holy God who created man; no evolution. Death is the result of that disobedience. Man can scream and whine and cry and stomp his feet and say, 'I don't care what God say's, I'm not going to play by His rules, I've got my own set of rules.'

Really? People try that line with the IRS. God is infinitely greater than any human institution which acts as though it is a law unto itself. God is the final authority. No one escapes His judgment. All will stand before Him one day to give an account.

To be spiritually dead is a very serious problem. Like physical death, spiritual death carries with it the inability to make ourselves alive. But unlike physical death in our present world, spiritual death continues for eternity. Death is a separation from something. In physical death our spirits are separated from our bodies. But in spiritual death, we are eternally separated from our God to suffer torment forever. This is called the second death.

Revelation 20:14-15 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Add to that, our physical bodies will be resurrected. We who hope in Christ will have a glorified body that will be like Christ's, but those who are separated from God will also be resurrected in their bodies to suffer eternal damnation.

Daniel 12:2 ² "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt.

John 5:28-29 ²⁸ "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.

Revelation 20:13-14 ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds.

¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Death is a real serious problem. And in this life, to be a dead man walking is to be one who is physically alive but spiritually dead and unable to have a relationship with God. This is Paul's point. He is saying that all of us were spiritually dead, unable to change our condition.

And this condition is something we, by our very natures, enjoy. We don't want to be subject to God. We don't want to have to come under His authority. That was Paul's point when writing to the Romans.

ROM 3:10-12 "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

The reason no one seeks God, or is righteous, or wants to be subject to the Lord, or understands the things of God is because our dead, lifeless beings have at their core that which is nothing short of a cold stone of a heart.

Zechariah 7:12 ¹² "They made their hearts *like* flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.

We'll see later in the book of Ezekiel how our hearts of stone are the very things that keep us from desiring God as those stone cold hearts of death must be replaced with hearts that live and beat for God and only God will be able to do that work.

Our deadness wants to think it is life, but it only keeps us in the dark and separated from the light of the life found only in Christ. Now, notice how this spiritually dead state works.

EPH 2:1-2 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

What is exciting about this passage is that this is referring to that which was in the past. These Christians used to be dead, they used to live and follow the ways of this world. They used to follow after

the ruler of the kingdom of the air, which is a reference to Satan. And so the inference is that they once were dead but now they live.

But when they were dead they sought the temporal pleasures and power and glory found in wealth and so forth. The Greek word for "live" here in verse two could be better translated "walk". They used to walk in this deadness.

This might seem to be a contradiction in terms and yet it shows us that death has a life of its own. It's not going anywhere towards God, but it is active in its pursuit which will eventually lead it to this final death or separation from God forever.

This also shows us man's willingness to walk away from God. There is no excuse that the devil made me do it. Man chooses to rebel against God in light of the fact that he knows there is a God to be sought. No one can say, I didn't know.

ROM 1:18-20 "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Prior to Christ giving us life, we walked in death because we chose to walk in death. We chose to follow the course of this world which Paul says is a world that is subject to follow Satan. To follow the ways of this world is to follow "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

This ruler of the kingdom of the air is none other than the Prince of the power of the air. And don't think for a moment that he is a benevolent or kind ruler. He will give what you want, and will lead you further and further from the truth because he has only one thing in store for people and that is destruction. That's why he is referred to as Destruction in Scripture. He's given the name Abaddon which means destruction. (Rev.19:11)

This prince of the power of the air suggests that he most certainly has authority and power in this world. And we know this power has been used to deceive people.

John speaks of such deceptive power.

REV 12:7-9 "And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who [deceives the whole world (NAS)]. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."

Satan is quite active, as Paul mentions in our text, when he says, that Satan is "now working in the sons of disobedience." The word working is the Greek word *energeo* and it's where we get our English word energy. It means to be operative, to be at work, to put forth power.

Satan is energized and is actively pursuing people to deceive them into an eternal judgment with himself. Misery loves company and Satan is doing his best to take as many with him as possible.

But the interesting thing about verse two of our text this morning is that it still places the emphasis on the choice of each individual person, not on the fact that he's been deceived. Satan is actively at work in this world, he's energized to deceive, but verse two says he's working in the sons of disobedience.

People will not be judged before God because they were deceived by Satan. They will be judged because they disobeyed God who revealed Himself in the creation of this world and in His Son. This word disobeyed in the Greek can also be translated, obstinacy. Obstinate opposition to the divine will.

This is what the deadness of man's heart is all about. It seeks its own way and it moves away from God not towards Him. It walks in deception which is really a fantasy world. It's not reality.

The reality is that God will not be mocked and He must judge sin. To walk in the deadness of this fantasy produces death and destruction and yet men call it life and happiness. If that isn't deception I don't know what is.

Satan offers what he calls life and people are dying to get in line. And the line Satan uses hasn't changed all that much from what we saw in the Garden of Eden.

GEN 3:4-5 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

In your dreams. By the way, don't think that Christians can't be deceived by the enemy. We are not exempt, but we certainly have a great advantage in that we have the Spirit of God who is the Spirit of Truth.

Paul warns the Corinthian church in 2CO 11:3 "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

We see a similar problem with the Galatian church.

GAL 1:6-7 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ."

One thing we need to keep in mind is that these sons of disobedience in the second chapter of Ephesians are not so different from us. We should be able to identify with them because we too used to be exactly like them. And the reason I bring this up is because there's the temptation to look down on these people and think that we're better than them.

We may have a better life in Christ, but it wasn't because of anything we did to attain it. Christ is the One who came into this world to die for the penalty of our sins. He's the One who rose from the dead. He is the One who opened our eyes to this life and even gave us the faith to believe. We, of course were the ones who believed on Him, God didn't believe for us, but we must never think that there was some inherent good in us that enabled us to see the light.

We, just like the rest of the world, were moving away from God. And so, when we look at the world there should be a real compassion for them who are lost and a desire to love them with the truth. Praise God someone shared the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with us at some point in our lives.

Christians don't have room to be condescending or judgmental or take a "holier than thou" attitude when it comes to his or her relationship to the lost in this world. We were all part of the lost, which is why He's commissioned us to go out into the world with the truth.

This is why Paul makes the connection one more time in verse three.

EPH 2:3 "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

No one can boast that we made ourselves alive in the spirit and were able to seek the things above and therefore were able, in and of ourselves, to make the right choice for God.

No, all of us, (and here Paul includes himself), all of us also lived among them, that is the rest of sinful, rebellious people, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

This verse is overflowing with this idea that we were actively pursuing our sinful natures. We were actively "living" in a way which would result in "death". Paul seems to use a play on words here between verse 1 and verse 3. We were "dead" in our trespasses and sins, and we "lived" among those who were also dead.

In other words, we were no different from anybody else who was running from God and seeking to please self, thinking that this is life, when in fact it's death. This should humble all of us in Christ because it takes us right back to the beginning of this letter.

EPH 1:3 "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."

He loved us, He chose us, He delivered us and He promises that we will be with Him forever. And when we meditate on this glorious truth we begin to see how magnificent the grace of God really is. We begin to understand that we've been called out of this darkness of sin which has one consequence, God's wrath.

"We were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." What does that mean? Someone might say, 'I don't know, but it doesn't sound good.' You got that right. It's not good.

In most translations Paul is using language which shows us that there is a connection to a head, to a father, to a family. In verse 2 he uses the phrase, "sons of disobedience". And now he uses the

phrase, "children of wrath." The NIV uses less descriptive language when it uses the phrases, "those who are disobedient;" "objects of wrath."

To be a son or a child denotes a personal relationship with personal consequences. And there are really only one of two families anyone can belong to. We can either belong to our father Satan or our Father God.

Jesus Christ made this clear.

JOH 8:39-44 "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Their father, Satan, is an abusive father whose plan is to ultimately murder these children. What kind of father is that? Why would anyone follow such a father? Because they don't have eyes to see through his lies and deception because they choose to believe a lie, because they are dead in their trespasses and sins.

On the other hand our heavenly Father means us no harm. His love is pure and righteous and everlasting as John records for us.

JOH 14:23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Our Lord Jesus is the same One who said in REV 3:20 "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

He desires that none would perish and yet the unregenerate heart willingly continues as a child of wrath even as the light of Life reveals Himself as the only Savior.

Wrath is the outworking of God's righteousness and holiness. Wrath is part of the very nature of God which cannot dwell with sin and must punish it. To be children of wrath is to guarantee that the only thing waiting at the end of this life is condemnation and a burning hell forever.

That's what we all deserve and that's what we all were, even as the rest of mankind, children of wrath. Paul understood this when he said in ROM 7:24 "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

This is the response we want to hear from the world when we share the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those are words of life because they see the hopelessness of continuing on a path of self and destruction. This is the kind of response God works in the lives of children of wrath and sons of disobedience, just like he did with us.

This can only be a work of the Holy Spirit who takes dead men and raises them from the grave of wrath and destruction unto Christ so that they are now enabled to respond to Christ's command to come out of the grave.

Titus 3:5-7 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This is what it means to be born from above or born again. Only as God births us from above are we able to respond in faith to the hope that we have in Christ. We must first be made alive and then the Lord takes off the grave clothes of our old self that kept us in darkness.

It's when we have our eyes opened by God and we see our utter hopelessness that we begin to see the grace and mercy of God and like Paul we respond in ROM 7:25 "Thanks be to God -through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

The question is how do we show our thanks to God for delivering us from wrath to life? And do we appreciate this life in a way where we understand where we came from and then desire to do everything according to God's word and will to separate ourselves

in the power of the Holy Spirit from that former life that dishonored God.

Ephesians 2:1-3 are verses of hopelessness. They describe death, sins and trespasses, belonging to the prince of the power of the air, living in the lust of our flesh and being by nature children of wrath. It's when we come to verse 4 that we see a word that is probably one of the most comforting words in all the Bible. But...

Next week we'll see how this word gives us the greatest hope this world could ever know. But in the mean-time, consider where you came from if you know Christ, and rejoice in this life we have in Him with lives that demonstrate we belong to a Father who loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son to die for us. That's a Father worth loving back with a life of gratitude and thankful trust and obedience.