

Ephesians 2:1-3

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[0 : 00] How lost are the lost. I know that most of the people at the football stadium are outside of Christ.

They are under judgment. But it is water off a duck's back, really. It doesn't strike me. You read the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus came to Jerusalem.

He saw the crowd. And he's moved with compassion. You read some of the figures in church history. They see the crowds. And they are moved with compassion.

I know people today that when they see crowds, that is their immediate response. They're moved with the plight of human beings. But that's not me.

And so I learnt a long time ago that I have to spend time meditating on the fate of the lost. I have to understand the seriousness of their predicament. God's diagnosis of life without Christ.

[1 : 21] Of what I once was and what they are. And Ephesians 2 verses 1 to 3 is not really that easy to read, is it?

When you read it slowly. But I want to say to you tonight that as a church we will never come up with the right solution unless we get the right diagnosis. And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world following the prince of the power of the air the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

If nothing else the Bible will not pretend about the nature of humanity outside of Christ. It's a very graphic description of the state of the lost is it not?

And so let's slowly walk through this verse 1 tells us that the lost are verse 1 dead in their transgressions and sins. I was blinded by the devil born already ruined stone cold dead as I stepped out of the womb.

That's the first of three Bob Dylan quotes tonight. Not that I'm that much of a Bob Dylan fan. I was blinded by the devil born already ruined stone cold dead as I stepped out of the womb.

[2 : 50] This is a self-inflicted mortality that's been brought about by our rebellion against the creator dead in their transgressions to transgress is to cross a line that you know is there.

So for the Jew it would have been crossing the law of the Lord. For the non-Jew it would have been violating the law that was written on their hearts.

Either way they're all culpable. Though we were alive without Christ even though we laughed and cried we fell in and out of love we experienced anger we experienced jealousy we did a gracious thing a kind thing here a thoughtful thing there the bottom line is until we came to Christ we were certified can you see it?

Spiritually dead. The logic of the Bible is very blunt. That the wages of sin is death. That is the pay packet of the end of our life.

We were spiritually like dead like Adam and Eve. You know the moment they rebelled against God they died. You might say physically they didn't die but they were like a cut flower. So you know when you buy someone flowers there is a glory isn't there?

[4 : 08] There's a glory in those flowers that is so beautiful and yet those flowers will soon crumble and implode. And spiritual death leads to physical death that culminates in the second death.

And as you know the one thing that you cannot have with a dead person is a relationship. The relationship is over. You have memories you have precious memories but no relationship.

And God is saying that is what every non-Christian is to me in that sense. I keep them alive but I have no fellowship with them. And that is why funerals are so painful aren't they?

I know of a man who became a Christian from an Orthodox Jewish family when a student it was very shameful for his family. His father got so upset that he took out a death notice in the local paper because as far as he was concerned his son was as good as dead.

It's such a profound diagnosis dead in our transgressions. It undercuts doesn't it? Any attempt at thinking human performance will get you anywhere. It explains the need why the lost need to be born again doesn't it?

[5 : 28] It reminds you that nothing less than a total work of God in the life of an unbeliever is what is required. It is not as though God takes 99 steps and you take one.

It is a work of God from beginning to end. Secondly the lost are described as followers of the ways of this world in which you once walked following the course of the world verse 2.

The problem is not just internally it is externally. It is the environment of which we are a part. It was Jesus said the world does not hate you but it hates me.

And so being deemed to be followers of this world you understand that it is both personal rebellion and corporate. It is collective not just individual.

We do not stand alone. We are part of something bigger. We sided with the enemy. We do not rebel alone. John says though the world was made through him it did not recognise him.

[6 : 38] In fact it kills him. And then in verse 3 the lost are described as those who have developed a loyalty to the evil one. It is a strange verse isn't it?

Verse 2 following the prince of the power of the air the middle of the verse following the prince of the power of the air the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. And so this difficult truth is that the lost are active members in the kingdom of darkness from which they need to be rescued and moved into the kingdom of the sun.

And so what is really shocking about this diagnosis is that you don't have to be in the occult to be in the occult. You just be yourself. And you are part of the kingdom of darkness.

We are not just lost. We are not even just willfully lost. Outside of Christ there is a demonic element to humanity.

Bob Dylan said you may be ambassador to England or France. You may like to gamble. You may like to dance. You may be the heavyweight champion of the world. You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls.

[7 : 58] But you are going to have to serve somebody. Maybe the devil or maybe the Lord. But you are going to have to serve somebody. Bob Dylan was right. Jesus said if you are not for me you are against me.

Do you know that proverbial fence that people talk about that some people think they are sitting on. I am sitting on the fence as it concerns Jesus. The devil claims that fence.

Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25 about the great judgment depart from me into hell. That place prepared for the devil and his angels. that's the first reason why hell was created and anyone who will remain loyal to the devil in opposition to Jesus.

And you notice here the work of the devil the work of the evil one how it's described with respect to the unbeliever the person who is lost the spirit who is now at work as to the sons of disobedience.

And so there is a sense isn't there when somebody becomes a Christian there is a sense in which every conversion is an exorcism.

[9 : 18] Do we believe in exorcisms in this church? We certainly do. Where the spirit the ruler of the spirit of the age who once was in me who I was part of his kingdom I was a willing servant I was never interested in the horror world horror films freak me out the satanic Ouija boards they scare the living day that's on me I did not have a conscious worship attitude to Satan but by being against Christ I was actually a servant of Satan his spirit was actually operating within me I didn't know it until that time when the spirit of the evil one departs from us internally and the spirit of God takes his place Jesus says wonderfully he who is in you if you are in Christ he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world and leads us from one glory to another it's very depressing and very heavy and I wish I could tell you a funny story at this point but I don't have a funny story verse 3 we have the world and the devil and now the third part of the unholy trinity we have the flesh we're told that our orientation was completely self observed self indulgent self centred verse 3 a man whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind all of us there's no us and them tonight it's just us we were in the same boat

Jew and Gentile male and female black and white it's very very inclusive as far back as Genesis chapter 6 verse 5 there is this profound assessment of human nature that every inclination of the heart of man was only evil all of the time and God's heart was broken with pain because of our treatment complete thorough wholesale rebellion and it's a profound diagnosis gratifying the desires of the sinful nature indulging in the desires of a rebellion heart there are times out there in the Christian life when the penny drops on this by the spirit of God the people of God get an insight into it you see it in Isaiah do you remember he encounters the revelation of God in the temple and the angels are saying to one another he is holy he is holy he is holy and his response is whoa woe is me for I am ruined literally woe is me for I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I live amongst the people of unclean lips and you see it in Peter when he encounters the authority of Jesus go away from me for I am a sinful man and Jesus says everyone who sins is enslaved to sin and what the world calls freedom is simply

God handing us over to our self centered natures and then allowing us to reap what we sow and we call it freedom the inherent goodness of humanity is a myth the evidence is all around you take a look what was it that persuaded you that the Bible is the word of God what was it that persuaded you that the Bible is the word of God it's a lady I know for her it was Psalm 116 verse 11 anyone know what that verse says all men are liars that's what she read and she said that is what convinced me that the word of God is true you can translate that as all human beings are liars but it was all men are liars that convinced her of the truth of the word of God she read that and she knew that the Bible was telling the truth she felt that the Bible had understood the human condition for what it is despite all the personal development classes that you can go to wanting you to believe in yourself in spite of all the homespun wisdom from your favourite writer or sitcom in spite of all those psychological tidbits you can get from

Dr. Phil or Dr. whoever it is or Oprah you know always always always assume the inherent goodness of humanity the answer to your problems is you've got to believe in yourself you've got to be true to yourself trust me people get so upset don't they when we don't trust them do I trust you of course not when we don't trust me we're so naive aren't we we know don't we what the human condition is like John Stott said if you were to look into my heart you would spit in my face and if I were to look into your heart I'd be tempted to spit in your face and that's with the spirit of God isn't it now we need to think about this really hard because why do we find this diagnosis of the human condition so difficult why are you thinking this is so hard tonight and part of the reason is there are some really really nice non-Christians out there aren't they in fact they put

Christians to the chin they put me to the chin and that too is part of the evidence you are trying to come to terms with but you don't really ever see the darkness of the human condition the darkness of the human heart until it encounters the personal claims of the Lord Jesus so I was talking with someone I know the other day and his father was a lovely man the man was not a Christian the father his son had become a Christian and the father was dying his son was at his father's bedside and he pleaded with his dad to accept Jesus Christ and the father who I knew of and was a lovely guy said you offend me by asking me to accept someone I've rejected you offend me I'm telling you this man was a great guy loved in the office a charitable man but you don't see the darkness of the human heart until it encounters the claims of

[16:27] Jesus and then it says I want nothing to do with you and so it's not surprising is it that the result of this in the last part of verse 3 is and we're by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind the one thing that we deserve the one thing that we naturally ought to attract from God is condemnation we sin by choice we sin by nature it's an indication of original sin Lever said that original sin is the only doctrine that has been empirically proven the evidence is there despite what people want to believe we are by nature objects of wrath and when you think of the word wrath I don't know what you think of it makes me think of a heavy metal band certain words don't they have certain images wrath but it's not simply an emotion that kind of springs out it's not an emotion that springs out from a righteous God we'll give God enough time and in the end you'll get over it it speaks of

God's righteous his right and holy response from a just God's response to sin and it is experienced in part now Romans 1 tells us that this world is under judgment and we do experience that but it will be experienced fully on the day of the Lord and that day is called the day of God's wrath the day of vengeance as we looked at this one and it is a holy wrath the opposite to love is not anger the opposite to love is indifference and God is anything but indifferent let me tell you but it's what awaits

all those who are lost and outside of Christ Jesus said it very simply at the end of John 3 whoever believes on the son has life whoever rejects the son does not have life and the wrath of God remains upon him do you see the choice it is like the blade and the guillotine ready to drop hence the call of the gospel is to flee from the wrath to come and that is the status of someone who has not come to

Christ of course the blade of the guillotine is removed when you come to Christ no condemnation in Christ Jesus that's why it's so fantastic to be a Christian tonight that's why you can wake up tomorrow morning knowing that every sin has been dealt with but outside of that outside of that you don't want to meet with God unforgiven but if Hebrews says it is a dreadful thing it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God and our God is a consuming fire it is not the Bible it is not Jesus but it was Mahatma Gandhi who said Jesus hates the sin but loves the sinner that was Mahatma Gandhi said that now there's half truth there but whatever distinction you want to make now between the two between sin and the sinner it is a meaningless distinction on the day of the Lord when he comes when both sinner and sin will be dealt with you see how heavy this is tonight we're not making this up there are graphic images in the

Bible that are written in such a way as to evoke fear the Bible goes out of its way to tell you how serious this is let's go to just a couple of places let's go to Revelation chapter 6 verse 15 Revelation chapter 6 verse 15 it's on page 1031 it's one of the expressions of final judgment Revelation chapter 6 verse 15 it says on page 1031 then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful and ever and the slave and free hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks and the mountains calling to the mountains and rocks fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand on that day it will be better for the enemies of God to have a hundred tons of concrete fall upon them than to meet the wrath of the

Lamb and the piercing judgment it is the stuff of nightmares to meet God unforgiving is simply a nightmare and you don't know what terror is until you stand before a holy God and his God appointed son who is judge and you discover that there is no place to run Psalm 2 puts it in this way for those who will stand against the Messiah so complete is his judgment that he will dash them to pieces Philippians chapter 2 says that the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven on the earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God willingly or unwillingly from the height of heaven to the pit of hell people will be forced to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord and King to the glory of God all rebellion will be suppressed and ignored let me quote to you Bob Dylan for the last one the iron hand you know the rebellious word the iron hand it ain't no match for the iron rod the strongest wall will crumble and fall to a mighty

[22 : 30] God for all those who have eyes and all those who have ears it is only he who can reduce me the tears of every earthly plan that be known to man he is unconcerned he's got plans of his own to set up his throne when he returns and on that day God's enemies will beg him to kill them and they will not be able to die and you and I love people who are presently heading for the fist of God's judgment to put it another way they will be shut out from the presence of the Lord this is the last judgment passage 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 come there with me if you will 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 it's on page 989 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 page 989 and God will punish those who punish his people 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 and the second half of verse 7 he speaks to the Thessalonians he says verse 7 he will grant relief to you to those who are afflicted as well as to us when the

Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all who believed because our testimony to you has believed on the last day it isn't going to be a surprise the future is clear and crystal you don't have to wonder what it will be like I want you to realise it is an active judgement it is the language of exclusion to not be in the presence of God of missing out on the glory that is to come of being told by Jesus depart from me for I never knew you of not being able to sit at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Paul Levy it is so happy isn't it there will be a cast of millions there but you won't be there and there will be a failure to taste of the new creation when there will be no more crying and no more grief and no more pain and to

miss out on seeing

God face to face to be shut out from the presence of the Lord to know that there's a party going on next door but you can never get in John Paul Sartre once said hell is other people must be a grief friend to have but hell is no people and no relationship and no God for the person who is a Christian here tonight this world is as bad as it'll ever get but for the person who is not a Christian this world is the best in loving it John Chapman the Australian Houndless in his brilliant book A Fresh Start wrote this he used poetic licenses an account of someone who finds themselves in outer darkness that Jesus spoke of and it goes like this he'd never felt such aloneness before where is my wife he choked only that awful echo not here your wife is not here he tried to piece it all together but the darkness was too thick once in a while he thought he could see a blurred figure or hear an anguished moan he remembered the pain those last moments of terror but it was nothing compared to the feelings that were creeping into his awareness again he cried where is my wife your wife is not here where are my children your children are not here he started a group about in the darkness but all was blindness my god he howled again let me feel the presence of one single human being my god oh he hadn't said those words in such a long time my god and now he felt like the small child being threatened by the deep darkness no candles anywhere no love anywhere where is my wife he screamed your wife is not here where are my children he pleaded your children are not here and then the greatest of all fears came upon him he was terrified to ask but he knew he had to his whole body trembled as he pursed his lips and he wailed into the nebulous night where oh where is god and as the deepest of deep darkness crept in on his soul for all eternity he heard that hideous echo whispering the horrifying of all judgments now listen to this the reason why Jesus cried my god my god why have you forsaken me is so that you would not have to hear those words god is not here he was forsaken so that tonight you do not need to fear being forsaken now i think we need to be careful here i think we need to be careful on a number of levels but the big thing i want to say to you tonight is be careful not to think that you are more merciful than god is because as we read those words from chapo the great temptation is this doesn't the punishment feel greater than the crime i think it does it feels like that to me if i was god i wouldn't be like that and that is only because we just don't understand the seriousness of sin and the holiness of god that's our problem Jesus captures the experience of eternal judgment in just two intentional words he captures it in terms of weeping and gnashing and teeth weeping because of the horror of judgment and gnashing of teeth because of the ongoing

rebellion that continues in hell they're not regretting they're not regretting they're still rebellious they gnash their teeth how lost are they lost let me give you seven reasons why you need to grasp this i promise it'll be less than five minutes more seven reasons why we need to grasp this truth number one if you get the question right to how lost are the lost you will grasp grace like never before and you will never understand the good news unless you understand the bad you will hear words like god has forgiven my sins and it will be like water off a deck's back unless you get the plight of the lost it will be like bullets off the chest of Superman they'll just bounce off like a thousand i love you for a person who's perpetually insecure it has no impact but if you get the question right as to how lost the lost are you will grasp grace like never before number two you grasp the answer to this question how lost are the lost and you will face the darkness of your own soul and the depth of god's love and it should turn you if it hasn't already from a self-obsessed middle-class christian into a gloriously joyful soul number three you grasp the severity of the situation of the lost of what you once were and you understand that you stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest of humanity because you understand that Christ died for you while you were his enemies and you will allow to you will you refuse to allow that route of self righteousness to take control you will know that the ground at the foot of the cross is very very flat and while it may be fair to say that some deserve hell more than others you know and I know that we deserve it well and truly number four you understand the answer to the question and you will find that you will refuse to withhold forgiveness because you know that no matter how much you have to forgive it will always be loose change compared to what

God has had to forgive you and so we can reverently let it go you grasp the answer to this question how lost are the lost and you begin to grasp something of the grief of God and the pain that your rebellion has caused him as well as the righteousness and the righteous way in which he is so justified he would be so justified in being able to send any of us to other darkness number six you grasp how lost are the lost and you know that whatever suffering has come your way will always be less than what you deserve and number seven you grasp the answer to this question and you grasp

the urgency of mission because we will understand that the souls of our loved ones hang in the balance will the next phase of your life be like the last one will the days in front of you be days where you've made yourself deaf to the plight of the lost will you refuse to hear and ponder their destiny and so the question that our friends should ask us is if you really believe us if you really believe in hell if you really believe that because I don't believe in

[33 : 08] Jesus I'm going to hell why haven't you told me let me speak to you tonight if you have realized during this sermon that you are outside of Christ and the words of Ephesians to you are without God and without hope and you are dead in your trespasses and sins and you followed the course of the world and you followed the prince of the power of the air and at this moment you are under God's wrath let me say do you remember the children's talk because do you remember that verse for it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing it is the gift of God and so we take Jesus and we cling to Jesus and we trust in Jesus and we rely on

Jesus and we recognize that he was forsaken so that you don't have to be forsaken and as we sang in our last hymn this morning for those who are in Christ the fears of law of hell and of God with me can have nothing to do because in Jesus Christ there is no condemnation and so will you turn to him and trust in him and rely on him let's pray to to