

Ephesians 2:1-3

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[0:00] Please have a seat. And open up your Bibles again to Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2. We'll just be looking at the first three verses of this passage today.

I've been watching a lot of Wimbledon tennis the past couple of weeks. I'm a big tennis fan. And what I love to check out is the shot of the day. Have you seen that on the BBC website or the app? The shot of the day. It's usually this spectacular shot that comes out of nowhere and it kind of blows your mind. So someone, let's say Alcrax, is facing this titan Djokovic.

And Djokovic sends one down the line. And you think that there's no way Alcrax is going to get that. It's out. That ball is gone. It's impossible. But Alcrax does something spectacular.

He dives. He reaches out. Gets his racket on the ball. Smashes it. And he goes flying past Djokovic. Hits the line. He wins the point. It's the shot of the day. And what does the BBC do with that shot?

[1:00] They have all their cameras on it. And they slow the footage down. Play it back in slow motion from all the different angles. And you watch this incredible shot play back in slow-mo.

And why? Why not just play it back normal two seconds and move on? Why slow it down? Because you need to appreciate the spectacular.

It shows you all the details it takes to make the spectacular happen. To see how fierce Djokovic's first shot was. How impossible it was to get to.

That the muscle Alcrax needs to get to it. The sweat on his face. The skill in his racket. That the power of his swing. That the perfection of the contact. You have slow-mo to really appreciate the spectacular.

And that's what I want us to do with Ephesians 2, 1-10. I want to play back these ten verses in slow-mo. To really appreciate the details of something spectacular.

[2:07] These ten verses, they might be familiar to you. But I think that this passage, these ten verses, this passage is quite possibly the best and the clearest.

And just the most powerful summary of the gospel in the Bible. We have here, in high definition, a seemingly impossible problem. A humanity going out.

Surely no one can get that. But God coming down with power and grace and doing this spectacular. And so I want us, over the next few weeks, to go slow-mo.

To just take a few verses each week. In order to really grasp the greatness and the grace of our God. And so, if you're not a Christian here today.

I don't want you to just read these ten verses. And just to let it fly by in two seconds. No, if you want to really know what the church, what this Christianity is all about. Then we need to slow it down.

[3:08] Because the gospel, it's far too spectacular to just let it fly by. So I would encourage you, come back over the next few weeks. And just watch this unfold.

You would have noticed, at the beginning of this passage. The first three verses we're slowing down today. This doesn't start with sunshine and rainbows, does it? These words aren't the immediate warmth of something like, the Lord is my shepherd.

No, it begins with the depths and the darkness and the depravity of sin. And that is because we need to know sin if we're to truly appreciate God's grace.

We only appreciate how spectacular a tennis shot is if we first see how seemingly impossible it was to get to the ball in the first place.

How bad it could have been in order to then appreciate how incredible that save was. Well, if we want to appreciate the grace and glory and power of God, we need to see it against how bad things could have been.

[4:20] Against the dark backdrop of sin. So think of it like this another way. Think of a masterpiece Rembrandt painting.

The white paints on that masterpiece, they only really pop and strike us when it's next to the black oils around it. And Ephesians shows us here that this darkness, to be a sinner, to be us, the situation, it's even worse than you think.

The human condition, our problem, it is far worse than the world realises. And do you see how chapter 2 begins? And you were.

This is written by the Apostle Paul to Christians to say, before your conversion, without God's grace in your life, if Christ had not saved you, this is what you were like.

In fact, this is what we are all like by nature. Do you see those words in verse 3? We are by nature children of wrath. These three verses are the most piercing diagnosis of what every human being is like from the womb.

[5:38] What we are by nature, without God's grace in our life. And look what it begins with. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

And this is the first thing I want us to go slow motion on. Four points today, I'll try and keep it short in this heat. Four slow-mo replays on sin. And the first is this, we were dead.

This is the first point, we were dead. Do you remember a few months ago, a TV show came out called Adolescence? I think it was on Netflix. And it stirred up a big discussion about the human problem.

The TV show, it was about a teenage boy who committed a crime. And this isn't to comment on problems amongst teenage boys, but do you remember, it sparked an interesting discussion on what the problem behind crimes like these are.

And how we can stop this kind of violence. And it was interesting to see people's suggestions. There were cries of, we need more education on this.

[6:43] Lack of education is the problem. So get boys in seminars, and that's the solution. Or role models are the solution. Lack of good male role models is the problem.

So get some good male role models out there. Now this isn't to say those solutions are bad. But do you see what people diagnose as the problem? Lack of education, lack of role models.

The human heart is basically on track if we have those things. But Ephesians tells us here, the problem is far worse than the headlines think.

Not just teenage boys, but we all are, by nature, do you see, dead. Not just ignorant, not just lacking, dead.

And dead in what way? Dead in our trespasses and sins. Dead in our trespasses and sins. Clearly, we walk and move and breathe. In that sense, we are alive.

[7:46] We're not dead in our bodies. No, we are dead in our trespasses and sins. This is talking about spiritual deadness. The moral, ethical, spiritual state of our being.

Our ability to know and love and seek and obey God. That aspect of us, without Christ, we are dead.

So think of it like this. If to know God is eternal life, that's what Jesus says. And be with God and be loved by God and love God. If that is eternal life, then this is the opposite.

This death is to not know God. To be separated from him. To not have love or obedience or any interest in him or his law or his existence.

So take a super-powered x-ray of a human before they experience God's grace. The body may look alive, but x-ray your spiritual self.

[8:54] It's dead. No pulse, no movement, no life. And so this is a damning statement of what we were before Christ saved us.

We were not just lacking a role model. We were dead. And this is God's pronouncement on the human condition. On what is wrong with this world.

All of this, the wars, the fighting, the lies, the fact that you have to lock your door at night. The reason your package disappears off your doorstep. The reason your colleagues can be so vicious. The reason why we are so ashamed of our past. Is because in sin, without grace, we are dead. If you do a slow-mo replay on the world right now.

Every unbeliever. You will see that there's a movement. They are all moving in a certain direction. They are all moving, running away from God.

[10:00] Backs to him. Shut off. Not interested. Dead. Dead. You might have seen a drawing of what the gospel is like. You might know this drawing.

So there's a big chasm. Right? And we're on one side. Humanity's on one side. And God is on the other. And in the picture, we're trying to get to him. Right? But there's a big chasm.

We're trying to get. We want God. We can't reach him. And so the cross comes along. And it bridges the gap. And we can get to God. Now, if you've used that before, don't worry.

I'm not condemning that illustration. It's helpful to show us how the cross, it gets us to God. But do you also see what's wrong with that picture? Are we, in sin, are we trying to cross the chasm and get to God?

Is the picture of humanity here in Ephesians, poor humanity, earnestly trying to find God? Is there a bit of life in us trying to do that?

[11:02] No. If anything, we're running the other direction. We're spiritually dead in our sins. Now, this doesn't mean we are as bad as we possibly could be.

You might object to all this and say, but I know lots of non-Christians who are lovely. They give to charity. They give up their time. And they help their community.

Well, the way sin works is we aren't as bad as we possibly could be. So everyone is running away from God without Christ.

But in God's mercy, we don't run away from God as hard as we could. And so on the outside, people without Christ, they can be lovely.

I can think of my own family and friends who I love deeply who are like that. But this verse is showing us things aren't what they seem. An apple can look perfect from the outside but be rotten to the core.

[12:07] The world. And it's the second thing to see today. We were following the world. That this fallen world has a direction. It has a flow.

So if the non-Christian, the individual non-Christian, is running away from God, then multiply that on a societal scale. Spread that across cultures across this world. Inject that to every government.

And what do you have? The world has a grand movement away from God. You have the course of this world. In this culture, we might call it secularism.

Or when false gods were involved, you might call it paganism. But whatever you want to call it, when we were dead in our sin, we were following this flow of the world. And if you don't think that's true of this world, if you don't think that there is a course of this world against God, you can prove it yourself, okay?

So teenagers here, try standing up in your school cafeteria. Tell everyone to quiet down. And then give thanks for the food and pray to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:19] How will that go down? If you don't get a hearty amen, there is a course of this world. Any laughter and awkwardness and fear that you feel, you are feeling the course of this world flowing against you.

Or when your company is trying to establish its core values, and you go to the boardroom and you chip in, imagine trying to suggest the Ten Commandments.

If the board members don't all say, of course, there's no other way, then that is the course of this world. The votes that come flooding in to kill children in the womb, the votes en masse to end human life on our terms, the unquestionable idea that we can sleep with whoever we want to, that is the course of this world.

It is this corporate, en masse delusion and walking away from God. It's like we're just sheep following each other off a cliff. Is it any wonder Jesus sees the crowds and says they are like sheep without a shepherd?

And it seems normal. It's easy to follow. It's like swimming downstream, going with the flow. But that stream heads off a cliff. And Ephesians says, you Christian, you, without God's grace, you are following that.

[14:49] You are going with the flow, heading off a cliff. And some of us here can look back at our lives and see just that. We may have had very messy pasts that God has saved us from.

Things that we look back on and we wonder, what was I thinking? I was just going with the flow, heading off a cliff, and I didn't even know it. Or even if you haven't had a messy past, just think of all the ways our lives could have gone.

I think of some of my school and uni friends who are just following this course. But in that stream, no thought to God, no thought to his law, his existence is not on their radar.

And I think I so easily could be there. That is an easy life to follow. I was right there next to them. They were in my year, my friends. We played on the same sport team.

I could have been them. And this is the sin. The deadness God saves us from. But there's something even more unsettling.

[15:59] As we see that slow-mo movement away from God, we see we were following something else. We were following the devil. That's my third point.

We were following the devil. Look at verse 2 again. You were dead in your sins, following the prince of the power of the air. This prince, this is the devil, Satan.

This is the fallen angel who's doomed to destruction, who's currently prowling around this world trying to lure people away from Christ. And so Paul is telling us something that we may not often think about.

The devil is real. And he has power in this world, a supernatural power. This is why he's called, do you see, the prince of the power of the air.

So God is king overall, but Satan is like a prince in this world. With limited power, but still power. And the air means the spiritual realm.

[16:58] The devil is working behind the scenes of this world. He's like a puppeteer, getting people to turn their backs on God as he blinds them to the gospel. He's nurturing, do you see, sons of disobedience.

And as we slow down the video of this world, we need to take this seriously. Those without Christ are following the devil. And you may think, okay, that's a step too far.

Okay, maybe things aren't great beneath the surface. Yeah, maybe the human heart is pretty lifeless. But following the devil. My colleague has never even thought about the devil. Or you may be here thinking, yeah, I wouldn't call myself a Christian, but I'm definitely not a devil worshiper. But, well, let me speak to you candidly. You don't need to know you're doing it to be following the devil. You may be living a nice life, never in trouble with the law, no big scandals in your life. You do the nine to five, you have the holidays twice a year, try to live an honest life. Nothing remotely to do with Satan. And you think you're fine. But that's precisely where the devil has got you.

[18:13] You think you're fine. He has conned you into thinking you don't need Christ. That's his plan. That's his perfect plan.

That is following the devil. But I don't want you to think that this is just the Christian pointing the finger. No, look, who's this written to?

This was me. You, Christian, you were following the devil. And where was that heading? Well, where is the devil heading? In the end, he's going to hell.

And he's out to drag everyone down there with him. Dead does not mean inactive. It means we were following the devil. But there is one final thing that we were following.

We were following our desires. It's my fourth and final point. We were following our desires. That there's something else, not out there, but in here, in us, that we were following.

[19:12] Verse 3. We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. The word flesh here, it doesn't mean skin and muscle.

It's not that. It means the sinful aspect of who we are. And so the passions of the flesh, it's our sinful desires that pull us away from God and his law.

The same direction as the world and the devil. We all have desires, don't we? We all want things in life. And we can long for good things.

We can long to be, we have desires to be married. Desires to have children. Desires to have a job. Desires to get into that uni. We can desire good things. God made us with desires.

Desires to have a job. Desires to have a job. But in the deadness of our sin, our desires have become very broken. Our desires, they're no longer trustworthy. They don't pull us toward God.

[20:08] They pull us away. And so mantras like, it just feels right. Follow your heart. Be true to yourself.

It's so common to hear that stuff, isn't it? It's part of the course of this world. And people make huge life choices pulled by these mantras, these desires.

Men leave their wives because their heart felt right. People get into spirals of debt because it felt good.

Teenagers go down very dark paths because they say they're being true to themselves. Be true to yourself is a saying that leads to death. That's why Jesus comes in all his glory and says, take up your cross and deny yourself.

And without the grace of God, these desires just rule us. This is what's going on with the sexual and gender identity movement right now.

[21:16] It's not being driven by compassion or truth or goodness. No, it's being driven by this desire. And it's so easy to do. Our hearts, they want those things, those relationships, those experiences.

And we can get swept up in it. We were swept up in it. But God says, look at this slow-mo. Following your heart only leads to a cliff edge.

And how does God feel about all this? How did God think of us before Christ? How does God think of the world going away from him?

Well, look at the end of verse 4. We were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. Children of wrath.

Objects of God's anger. You cannot be dead in your sin with your middle finger up to God and that holy God not to be angry with you.

[22:22] If you ignore your God and follow the world's ways instead of his ways, you must expect that righteous God to be angry. You cannot follow the enemy and expect the king just to be happy about it.

You cannot love your desires more than the holy, eternal trinity and expect him not to be full of wrath. When we were dead in our sins, God saw us and he was furious.

And this was us. We don't need to point the finger to out there and think that this is only talking about the really bad people out there.

No, brothers and sisters, this was us. From the oldest to the youngest Christian in this room, that includes you children here. Even if you've always believed all your life, all of us without God's grace, by nature, if God did not save us, this would be us.

This is the cliff edge we were all running towards. We can be tempted to think that if we didn't have a really messy past, we were basically all right before.

[23:33] I was one of the nice ones God chose. But no, this was all of us. And this, this is why the Son of God had to die for us.

Why do you think the Lord Jesus had to bear the wrath of God in such a horrific death? Because we were children of that wrath.

He was bearing all our running away, all those shameful desires we never want people to know about. All the ways of the world that we were happily going along with.

All that allegiance to the devil, all that disobedience, all that wrath, the Lord Jesus took upon himself. So that you can be here today and read these words.

You were. Not you are. You were. Christian, this is what you were.

[24:37] Christ has pulled you away from the cliff edge and given you life. You can read this and you can say, I was this, but not anymore. The glory of the cross can only be really seen against the backdrop of our sin.

So, what should we do with this? It's not easy to read. It's not nice to hear what we were. And so, what do we need to do? We need to be really thankful to God.

We were heading off a cliff. We were heading off a cliff. I was so lost. I was so dead. And so, we should be so, so thankful.

It's easy to live the Christian life just thinking, yes, yes, I'm saved. And we completely forget just how bad it could have been. We forget about that cliff edge.

And so, just use this time tonight to just be thankful that we are not this anymore. Never forget, Jesus didn't just save us from a few hiccups.

[25:45] He didn't just save us from a few mild mistakes in the past. No, the Son of God died to save us from this. And now, you can confidently and forever hear these words, you were.

And so, just do one thing from this tonight, okay? Let's be really, really thankful to God. But if you're here tonight, and you can't say, I was this, then I know this isn't easy to hear.

But I don't want this to be easy to hear. That means you must say, I am this. But that doesn't have to remain the case.

God, in all his grace, is telling you this tonight so that you don't stay in it. Because there is a way to live. There is a way to escape the world, the flesh, and the devil.

It is to stop running from God and to start following the Lord Jesus. Bring all your sin to him. Bring all that you have. Jesus wants to take it off you and to give you life.

[26:56] So, come and believe in him. And when you do, you will hear these wonderful words apply to you. You were, but not anymore.

Let's pray. Let's pray.