

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 2:1-3 - Dead in Sins

Last week we looked at 3 of the most common threats to the doctrine of sin. We did that because the world often seeks to undermine sin and the severity of sin. And if we're not careful that can creep into the church as well. Psychology, sociology and evolutionary biology have all made inroads into the church and I think we need to know just how dangerous they are to the doctrine of sin.

Because if we undermine the doctrine of sin, we undermine the gospel itself. Because the gospel is the good news that Jesus rescued us from sin and the effects of sin. If there's no sin, or sin is lessened, then the gospel itself is lessened.

This morning I want to focus our attention on these three verses at the beginning of chapter 2. They establish for us what sin is and just how caught up in it we were. How bad our situation really was before Jesus saved us.

Just devotional point before we dive in here: there should be times in your life - frequent times - when you think about who you were before Jesus. Where you put away your phone and get away from people and just in the stillness of your heart reflect on who you were before you were saved and you thank God for his mercy on you. Frequently in his writings Paul reflects on his own personal situation before Jesus - and it usually ends with him praising God for his grace.

Paul writes these words to believers - the saints in Ephesus - to stir up their hearts to God. We often need our hearts stirred up to love God. And one of the ways we do that is to just be reminded of how much the Lord saved us from.

Seriously, this week, go sit outside on a bench or take a walk or get alone and contemplate what God saved you from. Maybe you were like Paul who came to faith later in life after years of sinfulness. You thought you were fine with God, or maybe you knew you were wretched, but God saved you from sin and death and hell.

Or maybe you were like Timothy who heard the Bible from an early age, were raised up in a house that loves Jesus and you can't remember the time when you were dead in your trespasses and sins. You should just sit and think on that too. That God was so merciful to you that he saved you from an amazing amount of nonsense and blessed you with a believing family and saved you at an early age.

There are many ways to fan into flame our thankfulness to God. One way is to be reminded of just how much God saved us from.

You remember the plane that went down in the Hudson back in 2009? Sully Sullengerber landed a plane in the Hudson saving almost 200 people? Well they get together every few years to reunite. You know why they reunite? Because of what **almost** happened. They reunite because they were rescued from certain death and destruction. And its a time of remembrance and thanks that they were spared.

We need to do that too. We'll talk about it more when we get there, but look down at **2:11-12 Read**

Paul says remember who you were. One way to fan the flame of thankfulness and worship to God is to be reminded just how much we were saved **from**. This morning let's look at 3 things we were saved from.

1) We were saved from spiritual death. Read 2:1-2a

Alright, just by way of reminder, last time we defined sin as: any failure to conform to the moral law of God in action, attitude, or nature (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology).

That's pretty important because when we're throwing terms around we need know what we mean by them. So when someone sins they are violating God's law and God knows it.

You've heard of victimless crimes? People will often say that something is fine because it's a victimless crime. There's no victim so it's okay if they do this thing. There's no such thing as a victimless crime. Why? Because

all all of our actions, attitudes and nature are evaluated by God. If you're alone on a desert island in the middle of the ocean - God is there and cares about whether you are in line with his moral law.

So that's sin.

Now, we see 2 specific words for sin here. The Bible uses a lot of terms for sin. Iniquity, wickedness, lawlessness, rebellion, foolishness, error. And all of those pick up on different aspects and nuances of sin. But here Paul gives us 2 words.

Trespass and Sin. What is a trespass? If you think of a No Trespassing sign, what is it saying? Do not cross this boundary. So there is a boundary and when someone crosses it, that's a trespass.

So that's how God frames sin here. He has set moral standards, and we cross them. He says don't let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths. That's the bright red line. And what comes out of our mouth? Unwholesome talk.

He says don't lust in our heart. That's the bright red line. What do we do? Lust in our heart.

This was the very first sin. Don't eat the fruit of this one tree. I'm giving you an entire Garden of lush fruit all this good stuff. And what does Adam do? He eats the fruit of the one tree he's told not to.

Paul says that's how we walked. We were trespassers - the way we lived our lives was to run past every bright line God set down for us. We didn't like his laws and rules so we trespassed them.

He also says and in the sins. This is the word we hear most often - sin - is the word hamartia in Greek. The word sin is usually the idea of missing the mark.

When I heard that definition in Bible college what came to mind was archery. Imagine you're shooting a bow and arrow at a target and you can't hit the bullseye. No matter how hard you try, no matter how close you get to the target, you're always off by a little.

But that's not quite right. It's not that we're trying our hardest to shoot the arrow into the center of the moral bullseye and missing the mark. It's that we're intentionally shooting away from the target. We're shooting at the tree behind us, the rocks off in the field to the side, we're launching arrows into the stands of people watching.

This is the picture Paul is painting. When we were unbelievers we weren't trying. Maybe some of us thought you were. But not really. No, we were missing the mark and we liked it. We were trespassing God's law and we liked it.

Because we were dead in our sins. When someone is dead they are utterly unable to do anything about their situation. Dead people don't don't respond to physical stimulus - they don't have the capacity. And spiritually dead people don't respond to spiritual stimulus, they don't have the capacity.

Look over at 1 Cor. 2:9-16 for a minute. This is a great section because it talks about how the Holy Spirit has to be the one to give us true knowledge of God. Yes, unbelievers can understand the content of the gospel. They can grasp some of it. But in order to accept the things of God it has to be the Spirit who imparts that knowledge. Here Paul is talking about the amazing gospel message. **Read 9-11**

So what's he saying? He's saying the Father had an amazing plan in the gospel and it was so amazing only God himself could grasp all of it. So the Spirit - who is God - can also grasp it. So how do we grasp God's amazing plan of salvation? Because we have been given the Spirit. **Read 12-16**

How does a natural man - an unbeliever, dead in their sins - understand the things of God? It's only by the Spirit of God imparting that to them. We preach the gospel and the Spirit imparts the wisdom.

But natural people can't understand this on their own. As Paul says back in **Eph 2** they are dead in their sins.

So this was our state before Jesus saved us: We were dead.

2) We were saved from following sin. Notice that Paul uses this refrain about following. **Read 1-3**

So not only were we dead in sin, but we were defined by things we followed. And Paul points out 3 things we followed before faith in Jesus. Now I don't know if you picked up on this but Paul mentions that we followed a trio: the world, the flesh and the devil.

Have you heard that before? That Christians battle the world the flesh and the devil? Well that's true, we do battle those things. But before we were saved we didn't battle them at all. We followed them. Followed them around willingly and obediently.

A) So the first one is that we followed the course of the world. In the Bible the word world is used in a lot of different ways.

It can mean the planet itself. God created the world.

It can mean people: For God so loved the world.

But what it means here - and what it often means - is the godless system that works all around us.

Jesus says to the unbelieving Jews: **John 8:23:** You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world.

His perspective and their perspective are fundamentally at odds with each other. And it's not just that he's God and actually from heaven. All those who follow Jesus are also from above.

Jesus says to the disciples: **John 15:19:** If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

So there's this tension between the world below and heaven above. And people are either of the world below or of heaven above. And the 2 places are at odds with each other. You guys, this is why the world hates us. We are fundamentally different than they are in every way.

Morally we are different, our loyalties are different, how we spend our money is different, how we raise our families is different, how we view history and the future is fundamentally different. How we spend our time, right and wrong.

James 4:4: Everyone who makes himself a friend of this world makes himself a what? Enemy of God.

The world is the sinful world system that hates God, hates holiness, hates righteousness, and hates Jesus. And the world functions kind of like a brotherhood. Those in the world love each other and hate those of heaven.

Now, to be clear, not every unbeliever hates every Christian. I have a lot of unbelieving friends and people I know. I'm cordial with them, we get along well. But, when push comes to shove we have very different priorities.

That unbelieving world system is what we followed before we were saved. It's what every unbeliever follows even now.

And what happens at conversion - what happens when someone repents from their sin and follows Jesus as Lord, Master - is that they no longer follow the world. Their priorities change.

Most of us have seen people who followed the world for many years and then were converted and their lives slowly started reflecting Kingdom priorities.

B) We also followed the Prince of the Power of the Air. **Read 2**

What does all that mean? Well the prince of the power of the air is a reference to Satan. Satan does have power, and it's a type of ruling power of the spiritual realm.

John 12:31: he is called the ruler of this world. (**John 14:30, 16:11**)

He's also called the prince of demons in **Matt 9:34, 12:24**

So Satan is a prince, a ruler of spiritual authorities, demons. What's the whole thing with the air? **Read 2**

This is the only time in the Bible we have a reference to demonic forces and the air, but at the time of Jesus many Jews believed that the air was Satan's domain. Demons were considered aerial spirits and aerial powers. It's as though they could fly or transport themselves through the air.

We probably don't give a lot of thought to it, but how do angels and demons travel? They don't hop into the F150 and travel down the highway. They don't take the subway. They go through the air.

In fact, the word Spirit in Greek is pneuma, which can also be translated wind or air. We have an air compressor for pneumatic tools - air tools.

That word spirit or spirits always describes evil spirits, demons. So they are of the domain of the air. So Satan is the prince over them. He reigns over the evil spiritual world as prince of the air.

And guess what? We followed him. We did what he wanted us to do. Now that doesn't mean everyone was having seances and coven meetings sacrificing chickens and goats on the back lawn. It just means we were doing his will.

Turn to John 8 for a minute. This is where Jesus and the religious leaders are having a back and forth about who Jesus is. Jesus says these guys are slaves to sin and their father is the devil. It goes about as well as you'd expect. **Read 31-38**

So Jesus leads them on. He says you're doing what your father told you. Which begs the question...who is their father? **Read 39-48**

So they don't like that, do they? But it's true. They are doing what their father tells them to do. Now, again, it's not like Satan was whispering in their ear what to say and do. They're just believing lies like Satan does, and their wanting to murder Jesus, like Satan does.

You ever meet a kid for the first time and you know exactly who his parents are just by the way he looks and talks? His mannerisms and vocabulary?

The same thing is true spiritually, people act like their father - either they act like Satan or they act like God. There are only 2 options.

Back in Eph 2 Paul says we all used to follow Satan. Now if you think about that for a second that's a pretty harsh reality. That's not something we like to hear, but it's true. How do we know it's true? Because Paul says there were no exceptions. **Read 1-3a**

So all evil spirits follow Satan, but so do all unbelievers. We all once lived following him. There are no exceptions. It's not whether we followed him, it's for how long did we follow him.

Think about how radical that is. I think for a lot of us when God saved us we didn't even know we were following Satan. Maybe we didn't seem so bad, didn't seem so rebellious. But Paul says this was our reality.

And when you're sitting in that lawn chair this week thinking about how much God saved you from, remember he saved you from willingly following Satan.

C) The third thing we were following: Our own passions. The flesh **Read 3**

So we've seen the world, the devil, this is the flesh. The flesh in the Bible isn't always just our skin, although it's represented by skin. The flesh is really the sinful desires that work in us.

We call this original sin. When Adam sinned in the Garden he didn't just affect his life, what happened was that he passed down a sin nature to all of his offspring: all of humanity. So now all humanity has a sin nature.

RC Sproul: We aren't sinners because we sin, we sin because we're sinners.

We act out of our sinful desires. And many times we are tempted to sin because of the world. The sinful world desires to tempt us into disobedience. Or sometimes it's Satan himself.

Peter says the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Satan tempts believers in a variety of ways.

But you know what? Many times it's just our own sinful flesh that tempts us. It's our own internal desires. Oftentimes the "flesh" is a euphemism for sexual temptation. Fleshly lusts and passions - that phrase is often immorality. But it could be greed, gluttony, drugs, drunkenness, power, all kinds of desires that well up in our own heart.

We know about the dangers of sin out there - in the world and with Satan. But sometimes I think the biggest danger is sin within our own heart. In our own flesh.

Paul says we lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

Whatever we felt like doing, we did it. If our body said I want this thing, we got it. If our mind wanted some sinful stimulus we gave it to ourselves.

This was our sorry state before God saved us. And it's true of all people.

Rom 3:10...23: There is no one righteous, no, not one, no one understands, no one seeks for God, all have turned aside, together they have become worthless, no one does good, not even one.

This is the whole of humanity.

1 Kings 8:46: There is no one who does not sin.

We are sinners by nature and sinners by choice. We do what our nature desires and that's sin. We were a hot mess.

So we were saved from spiritual death, saved from following sin. You know what else we were saved from?

3) We were saved from God's Wrath. Read 3

Because of our sinful state we were children of wrath. What is wrath? It is anger - righteous anger. Anger from God because we violated his moral law.

Everyone who is outside of Christ - everyone who is not a believer - is a child of wrath. That's why Paul says we are children of wrath **like the rest of mankind**. Mankind - unbelievers - are children of wrath. They are born in sin and born in rebellion to God.

We are conceived in the womb we are spiritually dead on arrival and not just dead, but under the wrath of God.

Now, sometimes this is hard to wrap our mind around because we often read about how God loves the world, or how God gives grace to all mankind by giving them goodness and laughter and common grace. There is a sense in which God is so gracious he can't not love even those who are in rebellion to him.

But make no mistake, everyone who is not a believer is under the wrath of God. How is that wrath expressed? Usually when we think of the wrath of God we think of hell and the lake of fire. God is so holy and righteous and awesome that for someone to violate his law requires an infinite punishment.

And so before we were saved God's wrath was on us. We were the targets of his anger and displeasure.

And this is the crazy thing: even though he had chosen us for salvation, prior to being saved we too were under the wrath of God. We were going astray, slaves to our passions, following Satan.

So here's your homework this week: seriously, I'm giving you homework. I want you to go sit by yourself for 15-20 minutes. And think about your life before Jesus. Or if you were saved at a young age what your life could have been without Jesus. I want you to spend some time thinking about what you were and who you were.

Then I want you to read this. **Read 4-10**

I don't know about you, but after spending 30 minutes talking about sinfulness that passage is a breath of fresh air.

We spend a lot of time on our sinfulness because it's usually our sinfulness that magnifies the grace of God in saving us. It's usually comparing the low of our sin to the heights of God's grace that elicits praise in our hearts.

Spend time this week contemplating your sinful state, but praising God for his merciful grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pray