Series: I Am Saved… color

Message: 01 From

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Theme:

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On July 8, 1741 British Colonial Christian theologian Jonathan Edwards, preached a message to his congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts, titled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”.

In our “Headline” culture, where we never read more than the headline, a title like that wouldn’t go over very well today.

In fact many over the years have heard that title and chided Christianity as worshipping some kind of statistic God who enjoys dangling sinners over an open pit of hell as He watches them squirm in fear.

But if you past the title, and actually read the sermon (I would encourage you to do that this week), you will quickly find that it is actually a message of hope, a message of profound grace.

I tell you this by way of encouragement for you this morning. This morning’s message may start our sounding a bit doom and gloom.

But hang in there with me. Don’t tune me out too soon. Because, as you will see, it will end by leading us to God’s wondrous grace.

**If you would, please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 2, page 996.**

This week and next, we are going to be looking at the first ten verses of chapter 2. I am calling this short two week series “I Am Saved…”

Today we will consider what **I am saved from**, verse 1-5. And then next week we will look at what **I am saved for**, verses 6-10.

The apostle Paul begins his letter to the church in Ephesus in chapter 1 by looking at salvation from God’s point of view.

Paul shows how God has blessed us with all blessings in Christ and how one day all things shall be subjected to Christ.

Now as we move into chapter 2 Paul talks about salvation from the perspective of the individual Christian.

He shows what we were before God’s work in calling us to Christ (what we have been saved from) and what we are now to become and to do as a result of God’s working in us (what we are saved for)

Chapter 1 gives us the past, present, and future of God’s great plan of salvation. While chapter 2 gives us the past, present, and future of the people who Christ has saved.

Let’s read this passage starting in Ephesians 2:1. “**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 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—3 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.**

Let me stop right there for now.

You know, when we think of the past we always seem to look at the past with nostalgia. We tend to remember the “good ol’ days”.

On our way back from Mansfield yesterday, Dana was reading this “Geezer Test! Are You “Older Than Dirt?”

Count only the things you remember, not the ones you were told about:

1: Blackjack Chewing gum

2: Waxed Coke-Shaped Bottles with colored sugar water

3: Candy Cigarettes

4: Soda pop machines that dispensed Glass Bottles

5: Coffee Shops or Diners with Tableside Juke Boxes

6: Home milk delivery in glass bottles with cardboard stoppers

7: Party lines on the telephone

8: Newsreels before the movie

9: P.F. Flyers

10: Butch Wax

11: TV test patterns that came on at night, after the last show and were there until TV shows started again in the morning.

12: There were only three (3) TV channels if you were fortunate

13: Peashooters

14: Howdy Doody

15: 45 RPM records or 33 1/3 records

16: S&H green stamps

17: Hi-FI’s

18: Metal Ice trays with levers

19: Mimeograph paper

20: Blue Flashbulbs

We always remember the past in the way we want to remember it.

As Paul looks at our past in the opening verses of this chapter, he does not look at our past with nostalgia but with a good dose of realism.

This realism causes Paul to paint one of the most pessimistic pictures of human nature found anywhere.

You will not find this sort of realism concerning our past in any other book in the world. The Bible is real and deals with real people as they are.

There is no glamour here. There is no covering up here. Human nature is displayed here in all its ugliness.

John Stott, in his commentary on this, says, “Paul first plumbs the depths of pessimism about man.”

However, we also ought to note for the sake of balance that Paul, again I am quoting Stott, “rises to the heights of optimism about God.” and how his grace saves sinners.

The question becomes, how are we to assess human nature?

This is an important question. How we answer this question will shape the way we discipline our children and the way we educate them.

It will shape the way we deal with people’s problems. It will affect the way we deal with criminals, with those with mental health issues, and addictions.

Our view of human nature shapes the way that we view life in general.

Let me add here that when I am speaking about human nature I am not speaking about human worth.

We are all created in the image of God and in fact are loved by our creator. Every human life has worth and value.

Human nature deals with the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, which humans are said to have naturally.

The popular view today is that basically mankind is OK.

Sure, we have our flaws and there are one or two bad apples among us, but these can be explained by blaming it on their upbringing or their circumstances in life.

But at the heart of all human beings, there is goodness.

We are all basically good. All we need to do is to encourage that “goodness” to come out more.

That is the view that in general, is expressed and believed today.

The Bible, on the other hand, says about the human condition is that we are in fact sinners by nature. In and of ourselves there is no good.

**We are dead in our sins.** Dead so far as our relationship with God is concerned (v 1).

Read verse 1 again: “**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins…”**

God told Adam that if he disobeyed Him, then Adam would die. And since then every person born into our world is born dead, that is spiritually dead towards God as far as his or her nature is concerned.

**1. HUMAN BEINGS ARE WALKING CORPSES. (Vs. 1-3)**

This means that as a spiritual corpse no one is able to make a single move towards God or think a single thought about God or even correctly respond to God unless God is first present to bring the spiritually dead person to life.

Paul writes in Romans 3:10-12 “…**as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.**”

The Bible teaches that apart from Christ we are spiritually dead and our human wills are in bondage.

Left on our own we will never freely choose to follow Christ but will in fact always choose to reject Christ. Dead people do not will to do anything.

The Bible is clear that sin is our master so that instead of turning to God and accepting his gracious offer of salvation of salvation we turn from Him and live for self.

Now this biblical idea of human nature is completely foreign to our world today.

Our world has adopted the view that we are all good, we just need a little help getting the good out. As a result our schools and homes lack discipline, our jails are full, crime is not deceasing, drug use is increasing, and mass shootings are more frequent.

If you see people as basically good then all you need to do is to educate those who are causing the problems and they will get better.

Pass a few laws, restrict access to certain types of guns, identify and stamp out all hate speech (I still wonder who gets the right to define what is and is not hate speech), and things will get better.

Now hear me! I am not saying that we shouldn’t do something. God has given rulers and authorities over nations and given them responsibilities to govern for the good of the people.

I think back to my own childhood. When I was ten. My best friend and I would catch grayfish. Use a rubber band and tie a M80 to its back (if you don’t know a M80 was basically a ¼ stick of dynamite). We tied a M80 to it, light it, and then drop it back in the water.

A ten-year old boy playing with a ¼ stick of dynamite! I wouldn’t have thought it then, but it was probably a good idea to outlaw M80’s.

Listen, even if we passed laws outlawing all weapons, if we don’t change hearts of people it will not fix the real problem.

If someone is bent on doing harm they can use a gun, a knife, or a van.

The problem is not the tool, it is the hand that holds the tool.

We are all sinners, born that way. Until the heart is changed at best all we can hope for is to reduce damage that sin causes.

Only the biblical view of human nature fits the facts of our world today.

But, of course, no one will accept that because that would mean they would have to accept God.

And people are not prepared to do that because that makes them accountable to someone other than their own feelings.

Paul gives us the picture of human beings living as dead corpses in these verses.

Although as sinners before God we are spiritually dead, we walk actively in sin.

We are dead towards God but we are alive to wickedness.

Paul uses very strong words to show that although sinners are spiritually dead we actively follow the ways of the world and the devil and we spend our time gratifying the cravings of his own sinful nature.

We are alive to sin but dead to God so in that sense we are the living dead. We are walking corpses.

Moreover as sinners we are trapped by the very things that are destroying us.

We walk in the ways of the world and unless we cease to do so this will eventually destroy us but we do not realize it and when we are told we simply won’t believe it.

After all, how can following the ways of the vast majority of people in our world lead to our destruction? How can so many be wrong?

To follow the ways of the world means that we are entirely controlled by the world’s thought system.

We think as the world thinks, and the worlds thoughts are sadly reflected in the media today.

The way that people dress is not controlled by their own free choices as they think but it is controlled by the world by those who dictate to us what modern fashion is; what is acceptable to them.

This is why people have to have designer this and designer that, they are simply following the ways of the world.

The way we think and behave is controlled by the world in which we live, we are slaves to it we dare not go against the current trend or the current thinking, we are simply afraid of the consequences of doing so.

Paul also says that we are enslaved by the devil too (v 2).

“**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 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—**

The ruler of the kingdom of the air is the devil; he is the one who is at work in the disobedient.

Paul here is telling us how the devil enslaves us, it is not that he is personally present in each person’s life.

Satan is only one creature and can’t be in more than one place at one time. Though he does have his demons all over.

But Satan enslaves us through the evil spirit of the age or perhaps outlook would be a better word, the present outlook in the world is how he rules today.

He rules by simply presenting lies as truth and truth as lies.

He convinces us that there is no God or if there is he is so weak that He is no good to us except when we need Him in a crisis situation.

A discharge of God keeps the devil in power; he keeps ruling those who are sinners.

Paul also tells us that we are slaves to our sinful nature or what the older versions call the flesh (v 3).

“…**we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind…”**

We are fallen sinful human beings, this embraces our wicked deeds our evil desires and our perverted thoughts.

We all love to gratify our sinful desires and cravings. Gluttony is a massive problem today.

Lust and greed are displayed before us every day of our lives, as we see another marriage fall apart because someone gave in to lust.

Everyday people are seeking help with their debt problems because they are slaves to the cravings of their sinful nature.

But then there are sins that we might not see as easily because they take place within our hearts and result from the cravings of our sinful natures.

Sins like pride, sinful ambition, hostility to the revealed truth of God, malice, envy.

The truth is we are trapped by these sins.

In such a condition we cannot and will not turn from them, we will not seek after God and we simply cannot stop ourselves from sinning and from giving in to our sinful nature.

We go after the world; we go the way of the devil, and we go on seeking to satisfy our cravings even though this way often leads to misery.

We cannot change. We cannot stop it. We simply are in slavery to our own sinful human nature. Is there no hope then?

Well we will come to hope in a minute but the picture gets even worse before it will get better.

**2. WE ARE OBJECTS OF HIS WRATH (v 3)**

“**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 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—**

**3 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.**

Just when we thought things couldn’t get worse we are told that we were by nature objects of God’s wrath.

Now this does not sound as terrible as it is today simply because the world has been deceived by the Evil One to not believe in a God of wrath.

People speak about the wrath of God, even some Christians speak about it, in such a way that it suggests that this teaching is almost an embarrassment to the Christian church.

People don’t mind us speaking of God’s love, or even his mercy or justice but not of his wrath.

Wrath and people’s idea of God does not fit together.

But the fact that we no longer believe in the wrath of God is simply another outcome of our deadness and our following in the ways of the world, the devil and our own sinful nature.

The fact that the wrath of God seems an out of date concept is just further evidence of the bondage that Paul has just been describing.

The worldly mind does not take God’s wrath seriously because it does not take sin seriously. We do not take God seriously!

Yet if sin is as bad as the Bible says it is then nothing is more just or reasonable than the wrath of a holy and righteous God.

God’s wrath is not like man’s wrath. God’s wrath is consistently against sin. It is always controlled. It is not a hot tempered sort of wrath that you see in people.

It is also judicial; that is, it is his judgement against sin.

Now God’s wrath is being revealed against sin in this world today.

Romans 1 gives us examples of ways that God’s wrath is revealed today in our world.

Listen to what Paul writes in Romans 1:21-25: “**For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.**

**22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things**.

**24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.**

Paul says that when the truth of God is rejected then this leads to a darkening of the understanding.

It leads to the worship of false gods, sexual perversions, lies, envies, hatred, murder, strife, deceit, and disobedience to parents are all consequences of our rejection of God.

They are all an outworking of God’s wrath against sin.

But there is also a future dimension to the wrath of God that is yet to be revealed. The writer of Hebrews says “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:28-31).

How much worst can things be for the human race, we are in slavery under the control of the world, the devil and our own sinful nature.

We are experiencing the wrath of God now because of our sin but one day we will experience his wrath in his final judgement on sinners, when we are cast into hell because of our sin.

But, all is not lost there is hope for sinners like us and that hope is found in verses 4-5.

**3. GOD’S RADICAL SOLUTION (vs. 4-5)**

Ephesians 2:4-5 “**But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved…”**

Just when it seems there is no hope God gives us hope. We cannot help ourselves out of the situation because we are dead in our sins.

Others can’t help us out of it. They can only point the way to us, but only God can help us. He is the solution to our problem.

We are dead in our sins so what God does for us is He makes us alive unto God. He performs a spiritual resurrection on us.

He reaches down to us in grace and He brings us to life, He gives us spiritual life.

In Jonathan Edwards’ message “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” the hand of God is not holding us over the pit of hell waiting to drop us.

The hand of God is holding us back from the edge of the abyss. It is keeping us from falling into the judgment we deserve.

The hand of God is reaching out, in our sin and our rebellion, to offer us new life, forgiveness, and grace.

While we were in our sins we ran from God. Now we run to him. Before we could not respond to Him now we respond to His call.

Before we rejected His offer of salvation now we accept it.

This is what God does, we cannot do it ourselves for in our deadness we have no desire to do it but now God has made us alive.

You see apart from the power of God in bringing us to spiritual life, there would be no hope for anyone.

But because God in His grace and mercy, which He shows towards sinners, there is hope for even the most hardened and determined sinner we know.

This is why Paul said that it takes the same power to raise one sinner to newness of life than it did to raise the Lord Jesus from the dead (1:20).

If we are saved then we simply ought to raise our voices in praise to almighty God for reaching down to us in our deadness and making us alive in Christ Jesus.

It should lead us to tell others about our great and gracious God who is the only solution to the problems of the world.

And finally, it ought to lead us to pray for sinners that God in His grace and mercy might come to them and make them alive unto Christ.

You see once we really grasp the hopeless situation of sinners then we will make prayer our number one priority.

The question is, have you really grasped the plight of sinners or have you been taken in by the worldview that people are basically good?

Our prayer life will reveal to us what we **really** believe about human nature and whether we **really do believe** that God and God alone has the answer to sin and death.

**Benediction “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**