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SPEAKER

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Grace Unleashed

PART

6

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We Are Made Alive

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:1-7



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We love the families of Providence. We're so thankful for our incredible children's ministry team here. Thank you for loaning a few of your children to us, to encourage us this morning with that video.

Good morning to all of you. My name is Thomas, and I serve as one of your pastors here at Providence. Special welcome to any guests and visitors that made their way in the house with us this morning. We're glad that you're here. Also, as always, a special welcome to those of you joining us in any of our other venues or via the live stream. We're happy to have you in this moment with us as well.

Like the children just read to us, we are in Ephesians chapter two, and we're going to study versus one through seven this morning. So if you have a Bible, I encourage you, go ahead and open it up. Let's meet up in Ephesians chapter two, and we will be in verses one through seven.

Ephesians is a book of the Bible. It's on the right part of your Bible, not as if there were a wrong part of your Bible. That's the right, not the left side of your Bible, and you're looking for chapter two. Chapter numbers are those big numbers that you see. We're going to study versus one through seven, those are the smaller numbers that you'll see interspersed throughout the text.

Have so much I want to talk you about this morning, I want to encourage you with this morning, so let's get right into it. Let's get into it with the word of prayer. Father, we're here for many reasons today, and of the many reasons we came here, Father, we have one great need is that we need to see you. We need you to reveal yourself to us, and in seeing you we need to see who we really are and we pray that will make all of the difference and you would change everything. God, we pray that you wake up Ephesians two to us, you wake us up to Ephesians two as well, you help us to see what you have here for us. We pray that you would change us and we pray that you would glorify yourself in this moment. We ask for it together in Jesus name. Amen.

In Ephesians chapter two, we're going to see Paul, the author of this letter, talk to us about who we were, who we are and he's going to give us some hints at what that means, what we should rather who we should be because of it.

To set up this moment for us, I have just a few ideas, if I could take you down a path of ideas with me, I'll start like this, have you ever heard the saying, don't forget your roots? Maybe you haven't heard, don't forget your roots, in particular, maybe you've heard something from Beverly Hill's Hillbillies where it says "don't forget where you come from now, you here"? Remember where you come from, it's an idea. It's a common, even popular saying in some cultures. People hear this most commonly when they make a big move in life or in location. I would hear this in Montgomery, Alabama as I was actually getting ready to move up here, some nine and a half years ago to start my degree studies at southeastern seminary.

Well-meaning men and women in our church family, they walked up to me on a Sunday morning, the situation would always get kind of intense, and they said, “Hey, look, whatever happens, don’t forget where you come.” I’m like, “Are you scared I’m going to stop drinking sweet tea and pulling for the SEC? It’s going to fine up there. I’m sure they’re good people. I’ll remember who I am, I’ll remember where I come from,” but when I remember where I come from, I remember growing up at the First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

I remember spending Christmas mornings in Troy, Alabama visiting my parent’s parents, I remember going on family reunions in Lou Vern, Alabama, I remember incredibly diverse school experience that was Wetumpka high school. I didn’t misspeak, that’s a W-E-T-U-M-P-K-A. That place was wild. I remember playing soccer, I remember playing baseball, I remember golf, I remember childhood sports, I remember the summer mission trip when I met my then girlfriend, now wife, Elizabeth, when we were only juniors in high school.

Something interesting about remembering, it revives certain memories, makes us grateful for certain things about who we are and where we are, and it has a way of helping shape and define where we’re going. There’s a whole spiritual layer to this remembering that I’m not even covering here, but there’s something about this process of remembering that helps us with where we are today. It’s because your spiritual history has a lot to do with your spiritual identity, and those things together really determine your spiritual destiny. Remembering where we’re from helps us know who we are, remembering where we’re from helps us determine, in a sense, where we’re ultimately going.

Here’s why this is important for us in the context of Ephesians chapter two. Paul, this guy who believed the gospel, he went to this place called Ephesus one day, he planted a church, it’s been a few years, he’s in jail and he looks back and he thinks of this church plan that he loved so much and he writes him a letter to help him remember. You’re going to see in just a couple of week’s time in Ephesians chapter two, specifically verse 11, and then later on in verse 13. Paul is telling them, remember, everything leading up to those verses is intended to jog their hearts and minds to help them look back, to help them do that good work of turning around, of slowing down, of looking back and thinking about where they’re coming from. We would do well to remember this morning how this church in Ephesus got its start.

The story, as enacts chapter 19, the city of Ephesus was in modern-day Turkey. It was an influential city in the Roman Empire. The major industries of this diverse and cosmopolitan city included trade and idolatry. This man named Paul, the author of the letter, he showed up in the town, preaching the gospel. He had news, and it was power.

He was telling people that God, who created the world, has sent a savior to deal with our sin and we can find the joy, the meaning and fulfillment we're all looking for if we'll forsake our idols, if we forsake ourselves and we're look to him. The church of Ephesus got its start because they were a bunch of people who weren't looking for God, they didn't care about God, they were worshiping idols, they were busy with their own life and a man showed up, started preaching the gospel, a revival broke out and people started coming to faith. Paul's writing to that church and he's like, "Look, I want you to remember, I want you to think back to where we were, to what happened because that has a lot to do with where you are today and it has a lot to do with where God will take us in the future."

Paul was eventually put in prison for preaching this gospel and thinking of this church plant, thinking of the church in Ephesus, which he loved so much. One day he sat down to write a letter to encourage them and to continue discipling them and helping them understand who God is, who they are and what that means for them to live in the world. The result of that is the letter that we have in front of us this morning as we get to study the book of Ephesians. We get to read those very words.

We saw just a couple of weeks ago, Ephesians, the whole thing gets its start ... Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus and the saints who are in Christ Jesus. This is the unique issue they faced in Ephesus, these people they were located in two places, they were located in the city of Ephesus, they were located in that particular moment in that particular cultural story, but they were also located in Christ. They lived in two places at once, and the same is true of you and me today. It's as if Paul would write this letter again afresh to us. The spirit can actually do that in this moment. He can ascribe this into our hearts again. There's a way of saying to the Saints in Raleigh who were faithful in Christ Jesus, to us who find ourselves in this cultural moment, to us who find ourselves dealing with these particular cultural issues, thinking, yeah, you're here and Christ is here too and he wants to work in you. If we could do the work of turning around and remembering who we are and where we come from, being aware of our spiritual history as way of coming into this moment and reviving our identity and sending us out of here into our spiritual destiny.

There are three things that we need to remember here, and the first one is this, we need to remember that we were spiritually dead apart from Jesus Christ. This is what Paul covers in the first three verses here. Ephesians is a letter written to the church. This sermon is a sermon delivered for this church, but we're also aware we're sensitive that other people who don't know Jesus yet are probably listening in right here in this room or somewhere, somehow, and we're sensitive to that. While we're talking to the church, we're trying to help the church remember ... This is also a way of telling people for the very first time, this is who God is, this is what God is up to and this is what God wants you to know about yourself and what he wants you to know about him in your life.

Immediately, this sentence has a way of offending our modern sensibilities that we are spiritually dead apart from Jesus Christ. It offends our modern sensibilities because we naturally have an inflated view of self. Some people might even hear this and balk at it, thinking, “Don’t you know that Raleigh has more PhD’s per capita than everywhere else in the country rivaling Silicon Valley? I’m sorry, you’re saying there’s a part of me that’s dead? Other people would balk at this, they would say ‘don’t you know there’s neighborhoods in our city where we have a refined sense of sophistication,’ and you’re telling me there’s part of me that’s dead?” Yeah, because we’re more than our jobs, we’re more than our families, we’re more than our degrees, we are spiritual beings disconnected from God.

The Bible tells the story of God making people in his own image and in his own likeness, making us for relationship. It’s as if God, the Creator, desired to be connected to us, his creation. We were made to be tethered to the author and source of life, and sin comes in and breaks the connection and we will die without our lifeline to God, and we are dead in our sins apart from Jesus Christ.

Three specific ways this deadness is manifested, first, we’re dead in our sins. You see, in chapter two, verse one, we know that sin is missing the mark, God has a standard of holiness and missing that standard means death for us. Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” God has a standard, it’s to be perfect, and each and every one of us, no matter how close or how far, we all fall short of his standard. Romans 6:23 then says, “The wages of this sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life.” So in light of this, there’s so many things we need to know about ourselves, that we are hopeless apart from God. I mean, this is it. This is condemning enough. Let’s not be discouraged when we’re walking around the city trying to tell people about Jesus, or trying to engage as families with other families in town, let’s not be discouraged when we’re sharing with people and people look numb to this. People look like it’s not going anywhere. The Bible tells us they are dead apart from God.

Let’s not be discouraged because the words that we share, like us in the moment, us being a witness, us trying to encourage. It’s what we’re called to do, that’s what we must be faithful to do, but if something’s going to be done about that, God’s going to have to intervene and he’s going to have to use us.

Second, not only were we dead in our sins, we were also slaves to a foreign power. Think about the words, you once lived this way, you once followed the course of this world, you once followed the prince of the power of the air, so what is the world? This is a conversation that many people get into, a little kerfuffle a break in a Christian small group or a life group over this, or maybe you’ll be talking to somebody and it’s like, “Oh, I’m just living in the ways of the world,” what does that mean? Because depending on where you live and when you live, it can actually mean different things. I actually don’t know this, I’ve just been told, but if you were alive 40 to 50 years ago, the ways of the world could mean going to movies and dances. You would be caught up in the ways of the world. It’s meant different things at different times. I love how theologian David Wells puts it, “You can recognize worldliness wherever sin seems acceptable and righteousness seems strange.”

It doesn't take much for me to look back into my life and to see times when sin was very acceptable and the ways of God seems strange. Can you look back and remember as well?

It says "Following the prince of the power, of the air," in the Old Testament, this idea right here, this idea of prince, it refers to a ruler who is local and regional, but there's a sense to where his domain is really isolated in confined but also says that guy, he actually rules over all the air. I think the idea is intentional. Air is ubiquitous, it's everywhere, it's in your bedroom, it's in this room right now, it's in your car, it's between two spouses that are talking to each other on the verge of an argument. It says, "Paul, remember there was a time when you were slaves to that foreign power, when the devil, when your enemy, when your adversary, you were under his control," and he didn't create this world, he isn't everywhere at all times like our Savior Jesus, but he rules over this world. His rule and reign, it can go anywhere and everywhere.

Another way of thinking about this is, it's like, "Man, I don't know, I'm really under the reign, under the rule of Satan? Have I given myself over to that? How is this really true for me in my life?" Well, every person in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, whether you were super devout or not, if you lived in the Soviet Union, in some way you were connected to communism. In a similar fashion, each and every one of us, we are under the reign and rule of Satan without Jesus Christ in our lives. This means we live in a contested space. The world system and the devil both stand to oppose us, along with our own sin and flesh that we just saw and we see right here. Last, we were addicted to our desires.

We're spiritually dead apart from Jesus Christ, we were dead in our sins, we were slaves to a foreign power and we were addicted to our desires. I'm going to try to spend a little more time here on this one, my biggest problem is not out there, my biggest problem is in here. So much of what's going on in Christian communities around the world is we're walking around and we're talking like the greatest thing that's trying to trip us up is out there, it's a job, or it's a relationship, or it's a set of circumstances. My greatest problem ... Those are big problems, those are really high highs and those really low lows out there, but the greatest problem I face is in here. This is what Paul, he really does a good job of setting up for us right here, "Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind, and the result of this is that we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind." We live in a culture of narcissism, we long for attention and self-glorification.

The key right here is that we we're gratifying the flesh. The word is Sarkis, it means we had a self-centered human nature, at every little turn, everything we saw, everything we did, every post on social media, every encounter between friends, every time you saw two people talking across the room, it's like your heart was a little computer and it was constantly running scenarios, what does this mean for me? What are my interests in this? How can I get a little more leverage? How can I get a little more attention? What does this mean for my life? What could the outcomes be? What could happen next? Paul says, "Remember, that's how you used to be." You were addicted to the desires of your heart, you were addicted to the desires of self. This was our nature.

Did you see this? This is who we are and where we are by nature. If this is it by nature, it's going to take a resurrection power to get us out of this. If this isn't just like, "Oh, I'm just having a Tuesday and I just fall into this for five minutes," if this is when you wake up and when you go all day and when you crash at night, this is who we are. It's going to take an incredible power and force to get us out.

We were by nature children of wrath. We don't like talking about the wrath of God. People want to try to shame God for talking about the wrath of God as if we were too affluent or we have evolved and developed too much to need this talk of wrath, but wait until the next tragedy strikes, and perish the thought that it inevitably will, wait until the next tragedy strikes and you're going to hear a bunch of people that are all of a sudden concerned with wrath. We love calling on the state to bring about wrath at different people responsible for shootings, victim's killings. You hear of a kidnapping or an abuse, there's something inside of each and every one of us that understands wrath all too well. We will rise up, we will get on our phones in social media and we will call the state to attention to bring wrath.

The problem with all of that is that we are never the offender in those scenarios, but we've all offended God, and at the level of our nature we are opposed to him. While there are these five different types of wrath that are given in different times and in different ways in Scripture, the idea of wrath right here is like a parent that is gone 12 rounds with a child and just can't do it anymore and eventually the parent looks at the child and says, "You know what? We're done here." It's that passive type of wrath. It's where you see someone that's so stubborn, so disobedient, so dug-in, they're eventually released into it. This is where we are apart from God.

"Apart from Jesus Christ, we are spiritually dead. We are utterly insensitive to God." Think about this in summary, the focus here is not merely on how bad we were, the focus ... I mean, this is real bad. The focus is on how helpless we were, so whether you know what it means to see Jesus Christ or you're trying to get to him for the very first time, see your problem. This is intended to help us feel hopeless. We are right here facing the incredible triple threat of the world, the flesh and the devil.

These are three prison guards holding us captive in our spiritual graves. We were held captive by these terrible trinity of tyrants, ensuring that we can't escape death. The world, the flesh and the devil constantly marching around our grave, watching us day and night, ensuring that we'll never get out. If we think there's any goodness in us to where when it comes to knowing and loving God, "Oh, I can just up and out. I'll just choose Christ today or I'll just invite a little Jesus into my life or I'm going to give God the benefit of knowing me," if we ever think we can get out of this, then while you're lying in your grave, look up and watch one of these terrible tyrants marching around over you and try to get past just one of them for the next two weeks. You can't do it. None of us. Even on our best days, we can't beat the world, we can't beat our own fleshly desires and we can't beat the devil.

This is what we need to remember that we were spiritually dead apart from Jesus Christ. Here's what we also need to remember, that we are spiritually alive because of Jesus Christ. Here's why we need to work through this ... This feels heavy, it's good for us, we need to work through this because we will never marvel at God until we really understand who mankind is apart from him. We will never listen to God, we will never be hungry to hear from God until we understand how lifeless life is without him and we need to remember while we were dead apart from Jesus Christ, this is written to the heart of the church today, we are spiritually alive because of Jesus Christ.

A few things to take in, notice how the second part of the sentences completes what we just saw. While we were dead in our sins, but God made us alive with Christ. We were dead in our sins, but God, he's made us alive. We were children of wrath by nature, we were so rebellious that we deserve to go to hell. There was no injustice in God with this, there was nothing inappropriate, there was nothing offensive, there was nothing oppressive for God. This is simply what we deserved. Wrath was the inevitable consequence for our sin. Sometimes we'll even take that idea though, won't we? And we'll look at God and say, "Oh, why could you be so against me?" But wrath isn't his natural attitude towards us. Wrath is the consequence of our sin towards him. It's as if you were to jump off the top of the Eiffel tower while you're racing to the ground, when you hit the ground and when the ground crushes you, it's not like the ground was naturally opposed to you. The ground, that's just the consequence for the decision that you made. Please don't jump off of the top of the Eiffel Tower.

To make you alive, he had to come to us, he had to remove this cold, dead heart of stone and had to replace it with a heart of flesh. Christian, hear this, God did that in you. God did that in you. Because if it was not him, then you would get to eternity and you would worship yourself forever, and we're not headed to eternity to worship self forever. We're headed to eternity to worship God forever because we were dead in our sins, but God made us alive with Christ. Do you notice how he repeats himself because he so excited in verse five? Why did he break the sentence like this? "By grace, you have been saved." It's like we're just having a conversation, everything is going quite fine, and he just looks at us, "By grace, you've been saved." You're just like, "I kind of got it, but thanks for that." He just jumps in with it again, he's stuck in the middle of the sentence. He's going to say it again in verses 8 to 10 next Sunday. He did this to make it crystal clear what grace is and how grace works.

Grace is not God's response to our initiative. Grace is Christ's riches in our lives at his own expense. Paul is focusing on the power it took to get you saved. Think about this, Christian, you are loved. You were in a bad place, and no matter how hard it feels today, if you are in Christ, this is better than that place and it's only going to get better from here. You are loved by your King Jesus. He died to save you. Not only all of this, but there was a time when we were slaves to a foreign power, but God raised us and he seated us with Christ. We were slaves to a foreign power. We were so under his control that we lived in his house, we heard what he said and we did what he told us to ... But now, now God has come along, God's butted himself into our situation, God has raised us up and he's seated us with him.

You ever heard the song by Tony Bennett, I left my Heart in San Francisco? You want me to run a few bars right now? I'm just kidding. I'm not going to give it to you, but I left my Heart in San Francisco, he's going on and on and on about wherever he is, whatever he's doing, he can't seem to get over that place. Christian, think about this, when you were converted. God made you homesick for heaven. When you are converted, God took part of your heart and put it in heaven.

Colossians 3:3 tells us, "We have died with Christ and our life is hidden with Christ in God." Think about this, God is our home now that we're saved. Heaven, our home, is going to start to govern our taste, it's going to start have control over our affections. This is what you got in verse six right here, this idea of raised. It's a tricky word to actually translate out of the Greek and bring it over to English because [inaudible 00:27:59] have the idea of being being raised up. You can't think of resurrection language here. The specific context here leads us to see this actually has more to do with the idea of being synced up.

You plug your phone in at night and if you made any calendar adjustments, it syncs up with the cloud. You plug your phone in at night and if you added any contacts throughout the day, it gets added. You plug your phone in at night, if there's anything in the cloud that needs to come down and be added into your phone, that's going to be added back. This is kind of the idea here. We have been synced up with Christ, we have been connected with Christ. I even like that because it's kind of helpful, I don't understand how the cloud works, I just trust that it's there because whenever I need something, I go to the cloud and I've yet to have a Tom and I couldn't find it, we're synced up. Christ is raised to the right hand of the father and our lives are now synced with him there. Our hearts have the capacities now to be synced up with heaven. So we can start wanting things that we used to not want, we can start desiring to go places we usually didn't desire to go because our hearts are synced up with Christ, and we've been seated with him in verse six. This means our perspective has shifted.

So to illustrate, it's as if you were captured by Satan. One day he got you and he carried you off. You were living in his home and you were obeying the rules of the house, but God sent a special operative deep into enemy territory, he made his way into Satan's house and he made his way all the way to the room in which you were kept. When he got to you, the special operative, there was something about you to where you weren't going to get up and just start following him because he walked in, there was a deep, deep sleep on the person, so deep that it took a special kind of shock to wake you up. But once you woke up, you came to remember more and more and more. "This isn't my home. I don't belong here. I don't like this place as much as I used to like this place. I don't want to be here like I used to want to be here. I want to do the things that we used to do around here," and then you get a new mission with all of that going on. Don't come home yet, get deeper into enemy territory, make your way around these rooms and see who else needs to be brought up, brought back to life. Live with this homesickness in your heart, and one day you can be called home.

We were slaves to a foreign power, but God has synced us up with Christ and he has seated us with Christ. Last, I'm going to try to spend just a little more time here because I know I needed it in my heart, I imagine you might in yours. We were addicted to the desires of our heart, but God loved us, he saved us, and now he intends to spend his kindness on us for all of eternity.

There was a time when we were addicted to our hearts. Our little computers were running, they were running every scenario to see how it benefited us and how we could get the best and most favorable outcome from every conversation, every post and every interaction, but now God has loved us, he has saved us and he intends to spend his kindness on us for all of eternity. We live in a culture of excess where the great sin is repression. We have these desires in our hearts, and the new cultural norm is if you ever put me a place where I can't exercise whatever desire I want, I can't have who I want, where I want, when I want it, if I can't have whatever combination of desires I want whenever it feels good to me, then you're oppressive to me. It's the world system. You also got an enemy whispering lies into you, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, you should be able to get what you want. You should be able to have that right now. You shouldn't have to wait. It should be on demand right here for you, right now." We got our own hearts that are so twisted, they're so corrupted, we can't help but give in to these things. Christian, but now you have been synced up with Christ, but now you have been seated with Christ. God has done this in kindness.

This word, sometimes it doesn't job with me because sometimes you can actually show kindness to a child, you can actually show grace to a child through spanking. I'm not really into it but we do what we got to do. When you think about it, when you get to heaven, there's going to be no more spanking, there's going to be no more discipline, it's all going to be grace and kindness and love. But if you had to pick one person throughout the entire universe to show you kindness for all of eternity, you would not be a fool to pick God because God has immeasurable riches. He's rich, like rich-rich. Cam Newton is rich, Jerry Richardson, who signs the man's check, that guy is rich-rich, God is richer than rich-rich. You think about this. How rich is God? Have you ever taken time just to stop and consider and just let the meditation do your soul some good, how good is God? How rich is God? You need to spend some time thinking about his riches because when you get to eternity, when we get to eternity together, God is telling us right here, "I intend to take all these riches and I intend to spend it all own y'all." He is going to spend that on you. He is going to spend his riches on his people and he is going to be kind about it.

So to illustrate, think of it like this, Queen Elizabeth II is worth more in her personal royal estate than every billionaire in America. Imagine that she one day were to take an oath, she were to look at you and she were to say, "I'm going to spend everything I have on you." That will put a smile on your face, right? That would shape the way you walk, that would shape the way you talk, that would shape the way you understood who you are, it would shape the way you understood where you were going in life and what you were up to in your purposes.

The wealth of Queen Elizabeth II is like a grain of sand on the Sahara desert compared to the riches of our God. Our God looks at his people, trying to encourage them out of their sin, trying to encourage them into the way of his son and he said, "Remember, there was a time when you were addicted to those things, but I have loved you, I have saved you, I have synced you up, I've legally seated you with my son. We're not about these things anymore." You don't have to waste your life looking for riches here because one day in the future, in the coming ages, he is going to show the immeasurable riches of his grace towards us in Christ.

Think about this, God will never run out of resources and ideas about how to make us happy. He is rich and he intends to spend everything he has on his people to make his people happy for all eternity. So, what are we doing with our lives?

In summary, for anyone in a battle with their sin, know that God has raised you, he has synced you up with Christ, he has seated you with him in the heavenly realms. This language has to do, within the old days if you were to go off to battle, when you come back, if you won the war, you would sit in the place of honor. Christ is in the place of honor. Christ is seated at the right hand of the father, and the Bible says that you are already seated there with him. This doesn't mean we've been raised from the dead, eventually will, this doesn't mean that we're literally seated there, this does mean that we are legally seated there.

Think about the many ways this works out in our lives because knowing this as part of our spiritual history, let the spirit wake fresh ways, this matter for our spiritual identity today and let's listen for the word that his spirit would speak to each of us about our spiritual destiny and the places he's pushing us deeper into enemy territory where we know he's with us, we know he's force. We know a day's coming when he's going to spend all of his love on us and all of his people for all of eternity. Let's think about where we are and let's think about where we're going.

Last thing we need to remember, and I'll start wrapping it up, is this, remember this, but, God. Remember. Remember there are certain realities about you and me that were so real, they were so controlling and we would be dead without him and remember that God came into our lives and God has worked. God calls his people to do a lot of things. Ephesians is about to unfold into lots of mission clarifying ideas for us, God tells his people to welcome people in, but we commonly respond to God, "But God, I don't want to." God tells us to give our time and our resources for the mission and we respond, "But I'm scared." God tells us to open up and to love again and we respond, "But I was hurt." We commonly respond to the initiatives of God with, but I, and one of the keys of the Christian life is learning to replace the but-I's with the but-God's. So much of what defeats and discourages in our Christian life is our impulse response. We look at God, we look at our condition, we look at our situation, and we think, "but I," well, God's looking at us and God's moving towards us, time and time again, and he's moving away.

Another way of saying this is do you notice God always has a way of butting into life? God always has a way of butting into our situation. God always has a way of getting in right when it seems like it's getting thick, right when it seems like we're not going to make it, right when it seems like we're going to lose our grip and we're not going to be able to make it and hold on. Time and time again, our God has a way of butting in always when we need him to, and he's done this all the way throughout the biblical story.

Think of Genesis chapter 50, verse 20, "You intended it for harm, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving many lives." Think of first Samuel 23:14, "David stayed in the desert, in the strongholds and in the hills of the desert. Day after day, Saul searched for him," so he's got an enemy, he's got somebody trying to track him down and destroy him, but God did not give David into his hands. Where would we be without the butts of God? Psalm 49:15, "But God will redeem my life from the grave. Surely, he will take me to himself." Psalm 73:26, "My flesh and my heart, they fail, but God is my strength and my heart and my portion forever." Think of the world that we live in, Isaiah 40 verse eight, "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God will stand forever." Jonah chapter two verse six, "To the roots of the mountains, I sank down. The earth beneath barred me in forever, but you brought my life up out of the pit, my God." Matthew 19:26, "Jesus looked at them and he said with man" with man, this, and a whole lot of other things is right there, "this is going to be impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Think of John 1:18. "No one has ever seen God, but God, the one and only, who is at the father's side, has made him known to us." Acts 2:24, "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, but it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." Acts 3:15, "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead, and we are witnesses about it." Romans 5:8, "But, God, demonstrates his own love towards us that while we were yet still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Then at the end of all of this, at the end of all of this, Paul thinking about the pastor of the church in Ephesus, thinking about his protégé, Timothy, he writes him a letter, and in second Timothy 2:19, he looks at the guy now pastoring these people and he said, "You think about it from which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like the criminal," but Timothy, as you pastor those people in Ephesus, you tell them this, but the word of God is not chained. Don't put a period in your life where God intends to put a comma. Don't look at God, don't look at your situation, don't look at your family, don't look at your friends, don't look at your job and drop a period where God intends to come in and drop a comma. It was getting really, really bad, but God made his way in with his healing, saving, restoring grace and he brought that marriage out of the pit.

Don't look at your family, don't look at your neighborhood and drop a period and think it's finished, when God is sitting here in grace with a bag full of commas ready to rot into our stories and start changing everything.

Three ways we can respond, let's remember our life before Jesus, remembering will make us thankful, remembering will help us overcome the awful insecurities in our own imperfection, remembering will direct our days. Just as we know in second Corinthians 5:15, "He died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him, who for their sake died and was raised." So whatever fails to spring from an overflow, won't flow for long, so let's remember our life before Jesus. Second, let's look to share Jesus with others. Phrases that we see here, that we don't have to feel the weight of anymore, we still need to feel the weight of for the sake of the world. The phrases, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience and the phrase, children of wrath, like the rest of mankind, these are phrases that remind us there are still many, in this moment, living in unimaginable peril. How will they escape? Romans 10:17 tells us, "So faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of Christ." He's given us the message of life, he's put us in a world of need and he tells us, in his spirit, to get to work.

Let's place our faith in Jesus, whether we're here this morning and we hear the word of God for the very first time or this is another time when we've heard it, all of us afresh, let's put our faith in Jesus Christ. I know that my default response to God is "but I" too many times. God says something to me and I look at my God, and I tell him, "But I need more time." He says, "I know, but I." God looks at me and he says, "We need to go here," and I'm like, "but I'm working on it." God looks at me and he says, "I know, but I." Our only hope is Christ. Every other founder of every other religion came into the world to show us a way of salvation, and Jesus has come into the world to be our way of salvation. John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life, and no one's coming to the father except through me." So knowing your spiritual history, it has so much to do with our spiritual identity, doesn't it? The more we take this in, the more it'll shape the spiritual destiny that God would have for each and every one of us.

So in conclusion, don't forget where you come from. Let us pray. Father, we are thankful for your word, we're thankful for this church family where we get to know you and we get to love you in community. God, we pray that you give us just a few moments now to reflect on who we were before we knew you, how you've come to us and how you've butted your way into our problem and in our life and in our situation. God, we pray you'd fill us with such gratitude and you would give us incredible courage and incredible boldness to sense your spirit and to respond in obedience. God, as we give an offering now as well and then we get to sing a few more songs, with every bit of this offering that takes place here, honor you. Ask in Jesus name. Amen.



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