Ephesians 2:1-3

An Awful Diagnosis

Sermon

Last week, if you were with us at the Grand Opening, you heard me share some of my story. Part of which is that within my search for truth…I don't want to be lied to…none of us do. I want the real, hard truth…even if it's harsh. I want reality. I don't want to be told a lie, and I don't want to live a lie. I talked about Neo in the movie the Matrix – he swallowed the pill that would open his awareness to the "real world" in all of its harshness. He realized the world as he knew it had been a lie all along, and he was exposed to a harsh, dark, reality. But he would rather swallow the pill than be lied to and to live knowing that he was living a lie.

The Bible does not give us a positive diagnosis regarding the world around us. Nor does it give us a positive diagnosis regarding the world within us. But the solution that it gives to us is glorious good news. Far better than what we deserve, and far greater than our minds could fathom. In order to realize the glorious reality…we have to be willing to first embrace the harsh truth. In fact, unless you first embrace the harsh truth you can't fully experience or know the rich and glorious blessing of the gospel of Jesus. You cannot fully appreciate the rescue, unless you first know the diagnosis.

The darker the blackness…the brighter the glory of the light that breaks through.

Paul means to shine forth the gospel in all of its glory in this section. He wants to elevate the power of God over every darkness…and for us to know this power in the resurrection power of Jesus (he's been praying for us to know that). We saw the power of God in seating Christ over all things (1:20-23), now we are seeing Christ raised in power over all things as we are dead, but Christ has made us alive…this is the power Paul wants for us to KNOW.

If your child is sick with the flu, and they receive medicine and they get better…you are thankful and you honor the doctor for giving you the medicine. If your child needs a heart transplant, and the doctor finds the right match, and then performs surgery which is successful, you honor the doctor that performed the surgery ***entirely different*** than the doctor that provided medicine for a common flu.

The more awful the diagnosis, the more glorious the rescue! God is not the cause of the harsh reality, we are, but God has allowed the harsh reality to unfold as it has in order to display His glory in the rescue!

Before we see the light of His glory in saving us, we have to first gaze into the darkness to see *from where* He has rescued us. The picture here is grim, it is hopeless. You have a choice, you can either trust the accuracy of the diagnosis that Paul gives us, or you can twist what this says to mean something it doesn't, or you can reject it all together.

Two main points:

1. What is the diagnosis for humanity that God provides in this passage?
2. What is the rescue plan, and how does it provide a cure?

1. The Diagnosis

Look at v.1 - "***You were dead in trespasses and sins".*** Paul says that we were dead…this was in the past…because he is writing to those who have now been made alive. But if you're here this morning, and you have not put your faith in Christ, this is the diagnosis for you here and now that the Bible provides. You have to decide whether or not to agree with that. We have to ask ourselves what Paul means by "dead" here?

First, Paul can't be speaking of a physical death. Notice that he describes those who are dead as walking (v.2), and following (v.2), and living (v.3). Like zombies…the walking dead. Therefore, Paul is describing a ***spiritual*** deadness…namely, we were "dead *to God*".

Second, Paul says that we were dead "***in trespasses and sins (v.2)…like the rest of mankind (v.3)***". He shows in this passage that this is a diagnosis that reaches every single human being created by God. This diagnosis reaches all of humanity. Again, in verse 3 – ***"among who we ALL once lived"*** – this means everyone.

What are "trespasses and sins"? A "trespass" is simply violating God's revealed law. God says, "do this, and don't do that" and we stiff-arm God and say, "NO!" I will be the one who decides! A "sin" is anything within or without us that falls short of God's glorious standard for us as His creatures. God has an intended standard for His creatures to live in a certain way and when we "sin" we fall short of that standard. When Paul says, "trespasses *and* sins" he is reaching both the Jews and the Gentiles, the Jews who have God's law but violate it, and the Gentiles who are created in the image of God but fall short of His glorious standard. BOTH are dead. The Bible teaches, "the soul that sins shall surely die." (Eze. 18:20). Just one sin/trespass contaminates us and is a violation of an eternal standard given by God that demands an eternal sentence.

Third, Paul is NOT saying that we committed "trespasses and sins" and became dead because of them. While it's true that sin leads to death, that isn't Paul's point HERE. Paul is speaking of a ***condition***, a ***state of being*** that we were formerly enslaved to. We were dead, and our deadness resulted in "trespasses and sins".

Where did this deadness come from?

> **Romans 5:12 - Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.**

Now if we had time I would show you that what Paul means here in Romans 5:12 is that when Adam sinned, we sinned in Adam. This is what is known as "original sin". That we are born with a sin nature…fallen desires, fallen mind, fallen will, fall nature – in Adam. Through Adam, death has been transferred to us, we know this because we all die physically, but our physical death demonstrates the condition of our spiritual separation to God. For westerners like us, who are so entitled, this is a hard pill to swallow - that God would accredit Adam's sin and failure to my account so that his diagnosis is my diagnosis. But before you throw out the diagnosis, be careful to not at the same time throw out the solution! The reason we know that in Romans 5 "all sinned" when Adam sinned is because as all are made dead in Adam, all are made righteous through the righteousness of Christ. Paul goes on in Romans 5:12-21 to show that when Jesus lived a righteous life, His righteousness is also transferred to us through faith in Him. This is what Paul has been saying over and over again here in Ephesians…that it is IN

CHRIST that we are forgiven and made righteous before God. So you are EITHER in Adam, or in Christ. Dead to God, or alive to God.

We do not trespass and sin…and then become dead. We are dead, and therefore we trespass and sin. This is a very grim and hopeless picture that is OUTSIDE OF OUR CONTROL.

What are the symptoms of our "deadness"? What does it look like to be dead?

Again in v.1, it looks like "trespasses and sins in which you ***once walked***". Because we are sinful at birth, we have a natural bent towards it, and overtime we walk in it. We are guilty before God not just because we are in Adam, but because WE FREELY CHOOSE TO SIN! It doesn't take long for a parent to recognize this. We don't have to plea with our kids to "stop being sooo good!" It becomes their lifestyle! It is very natural to them as it is to all of us!

In v.2, we "***follow the course of this world".*** It would make sense that the world around us has a strong bent away from God - it's filled with those who are dead to God! John describes the world to us in **1 John 2:15-17** – it is given over to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and to pride. No one has to teach the world to do this…this is our default! We need to be taught what is right…it doesn't come natural to us. After we decide to follow Jesus, we are immediately put at odds with the world because we are fish swimming upstream! There is a very real reason people around you don't like the light that shines from you! To many you will be the aroma of death! Not your death…their own. ***Before you look down on them…remember that you too were dead, but God made you alive!***

Notice also in v.2 that we "follow the prince", the prince of this world, the devil. Satan is at the helm of this world. Jesus called him the ruler of this world (John 14:13). Paul calls him the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). Here he is described as the "prince [or ruler] of the power of the air". In Greek thought, the "air" was the location of the metaphysical. Satan, in a very real way rules over the metaphysical/spiritual world around us. He is "***at work"*** in the "***sons of disobedience***". This is what Satan goes about doing…he seeks to further his rebellion against God through disobedience. People in the world have no idea what I am talking about right now! They are being played like a puppet by their Puppet Master, Satan. That's what disobedience is…it's playing right into the very hands of the devil…so that the devil would put his fatherly arm around you and say, "this is my offspring…my son of disobedience".

How you should HATE SIN! How you should HATE THE DEVIL that tempts you to sin! With every single temptation to sin he is seeking to rob you of God's best! Your problem is NOT that you seek pleasure, your problem is that you are FAR TOO EASILY PLEASED. He is robbing you! He is seeking to rob you of real joy for the sake of a temporary, limited fling that will only leave you high and dry…and you know it! Leave it! Kill it! (Isaiah – parade of pomp and glory) Put it to death…it will not satisfy. Christ will satisfy. Sin will not give you joy. Christ is true joy…in God's presence are "pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11)

Notice further the depths of our deadness within us.

In v.3 our very "***passions/desires"*** are enslaved by our state of deadness. You are a passion factory…you were created that way, there is nothing sinful about it. What is sinful is what you satisfy your passions IN. The word for "passions" is επιθυμια it's a neutral word. It's used to speak of "good desires" as well as negative ones. Paul "desired" to depart and to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23). Jesus "desired" to eat His last meal with the disciples at Passover (Luke 22:15). Your problem is NOT that you

have desires…your problem is that you so often seek to find your desires fulfilled in the wrong places! The Bible often translates this same word 'επιθυμια' as "lusts" when attached to something evil. Satan loves to take good desires and turn them into lusts. This is our natural bent. The Bible calls it "the flesh" or the "sinful nature". That bent within to find satisfaction in sin. We are born with this…the tendency within to find our satisfaction and joy fulfilled in sinful things THAT WON'T SATISFY!

Notice again in v.3 describes our "flesh" or "sinful nature" as ***"carrying out the desires of the body and the mind"***. Interestingly, the word for "desires" in v.3 is actually the word for the "will" – θελγματος. In our deadness, our will's are corrupt – this is very important. The diagnosis Paul gives is not someone who is sick but who "wills" to reach out for God and then God responds and makes them alive. The picture Paul gives is someone who is DEAD…could care less about God, but then God resurrects them from the dead. A dead person made alive. A blind person who sees. A person who has no taste for God, but whose taste is now awakened to Him. We do not seek God, God seeks us. If you are able to see this morning, if you have a passion for God this morning, if you are alive to God it is because God MADE YOU ALIVE!

God doesn't take sick people and make them well. He takes dead people and makes them alive. We have fallen passions, a fallen nature and a fallen will. We do not seek God, we do not reach out to God…our wills are fallen. John made it clear that becoming a child of God was not owing to our will for God…but for God's will for us. John says we were:

"born, not of blood nor of the *will* of the flesh nor of the *will* of man, but of God." (John 1:13)

Yes we make a choice, and yes we have a free will…but our free will always chooses in accordance to our nature. By the way, so does God's will – did you know that God also cannot act contrary to His nature? This is why God CANNOT commit evil…it's not within His nature to do so. But YOUR nature outside of Christ is fallen! You are "by nature children of wrath". You don't need to make the right choice from your free will…YOU NEED A NEW WILL! You need a new will *so that* you can make the right choice!

Something needs to happen within you - Jesus said it this way, "you must be born again!" (John 3:3)

What is the sentence for such a person - someone dead to God, someone willingly walking, following, living in trespasses and sins? Notice Paul says, we are "by nature children of ***wrath***". Over in 5:6 Paul says, "the wrath OF GOD comes upon the sons of disobedience". The sentence is the eternal wrath of God which comes upon the sons of disobedience. Because of our deadness in Adam, and because of our sinful choices to walk in "trespasses and sins", we have incurred the wrath of God and if we die in such a state we will face the eternal and awful wrath of God in hell forever and ever. Jesus said this, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." (Jn. 3:36). You need to believe in the Son…if you don't believe in the Son, the wrath of God remains on you.

Our nature, our passions, our will – all fallen, all dead to God. We need a new nature, we need new passions, we need a new will. This is exactly the rescue that God provides through Jesus…

2. The Rescue

Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was sick, but He didn't go to heal him. Rather, He waited for a while. Then upon hearing that Lazarus had died, He went to him.

He had bigger plans, He didn't want to make a sick person well, He wanted to make a dead person alive.

When He got to the tomb of Lazarus He spoke out, "Lazarus, come forth!!" As God spoke the universe into existence…ex nihilo (from nothing - He created everything with His Word), Jesus, the God-man spoke and dead Lazarus came forth. This is a picture of what the Bible calls ***regeneration***. God calling dead things to life again. Regeneration is the work of God within where we are given a new heart, new mind, new wills, new passions and desires...dead people made alive. If these words mean NOTHING to you…you must be born again. If these words reach you…turn to Christ for salvation! Put your faith in Christ and be saved from the penalty of your sins. This "coming forth" happens in an instant! It happened to me…I went into a church, and left FILLED! I went in blind, and I left SEEING. I WENT IN DEAD, AND CAME OUT ALIVE!

God must shine into hearts to see. It is His sovereign will, His sovereign choice to do so.

The seeing IS the believing. You don't believe, and then see, you see and then believe! Regeneration causes faith, faith does not cause regeneration. The believing is granted to us by God for those who are His children…we saw it in Ephesians 1…He chose them before the foundation of the world…he predestined them for adoption to Himself as sons. So God's plan for us was from the beginning, just as Jesus planned to save Lazarus, and then the point in time came when God spoke into the darkness of my own heart and said, "BRIAN COME FORTH!".

Regeneration is the awakening of our deadness to God. It is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy in the latter days - a new heart and a new Spirit within us (Eze. 36:26-27). It is the realization of the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah – God writing His law upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). It is the Holy Spirit coming within and giving us a new nature, a new will, and new affections for God. Apart from God causing us to live, we have no hope at all. Apart from God causing us to see, we have no hope for sight. But this is what God has promised to do for His children.

If this morning you see for the first time…call upon the Lord that you may be saved. Surrender to Him this morning and be saved!

Two things for us to consider in closing:

First, the new birth, regeneration, is NOT behavior modification. I want to apply this to parenting, but it really applies to everyone we seek to minister to that God has put around us. Your goal in parenting is to steer your children's hearts, passions, desires, affections towards the Lord. God uses that! God uses parenting to draw His children to Himself! Parenting is not simply behavior modification. You have to ask yourself, what do they truly need? When your child does something sinful, that exposes a heart condition that only Jesus can change. Do they need to be more behaved, get better grades, become better listeners, become well-mannered…or do they need to be born again? So much of parenting is geared towards "behavior" and not towards "they're dead…and need to be made alive!". This takes effort, because we have been trained to parent behavior. See the bad behavior, and discipline that

behavior…tell them it's wrong…give them the consequence…move on. All of that is important, but *entirely lacking* if we do not give to them the gospel. How does Jesus, how does God, how does the gospel meet the deeper desire for what they are longing for? Parents, when you correct your children's behavior…always bring it back to the heart and to the gospel! Otherwise you will end up with well-behaved, well-mannered, well-disciplined…dead children. They do what they're supposed to…but when they leave the home, they dive HEAD FIRST into the world. They need the gospel to be made alive!

This applies to everyone we seek to minister to. Christianity is not about helping bad people become good people…it is first and foremost about dead people coming alive. As Christians, we often see the sin, and we hate the sin…and we should…but Paul here in Ephesians 2:1-3 is here to tell you that their PRIMARY problem is NOT their "trespasses and sins", it is that they are DEAD IN ADAM and need to be MADE ALIVE THROUGH CHRIST! This means you must live and preach the gospel…you must preach Christ crucified and risen from the grave. This is the power of God to make dead people come alive!

Finally, the new birth, regeneration, is not a death to your passions and desires. QUITE THE CONTRARY! It is the awakening of your passions and desires for God. When I was saved I new VERY LITTLE about what it means to walk with God…but I was FINALLY FULL! I had God! I would go for walks and like a little child who had been adopted I had conversations with my Daddy! My passion and desires finally found what they were looking for – GOD! This is true of our growth as Christians as well. When God commands you to deny your passions and desires…which He does…it isn't for the sake of killing "passion" or "desire" as though your problem is that you have desires. When God asks you to kill sinful passions and desires, it is for you to pursue greater passions and greater desires in Him! There was no one filled with greater joy and greater passion and greater fulfillment in life than Jesus! The pursuit of God, is not "death to joy" or "death to pleasure"…it is the awakening of true joy and true eternal pleasures in God. "In your presence is FULLNESS OF JOY and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." (Ps. 16:11) The world, the flesh, doesn't come CLOSE to this…full and forever….joy and pleasure in God. That is what God wants for you….He wants it so badly that He commands it of you! Every day…pursue your joy and pleasure IN GOD. Our problem is that we waste our time with silly, stupid, trivial, weak, sinful pleasures – a waste of time! A waste of life! That's why God tells you to kill it. So many people think that becoming a Christian is a major killjoy… "I'm just not ready for that kind of commitment…I want to have more time to pursue what is really fulfilling in life." That's a LIE! You don't KNOW real fulfillment until you come to Christ! Do you want real joy? Real fulfillment?

Here is the call…If you believe this morning, it's a MIRACLE…come to Him! Bring your desires, your passions, your sin, bring it all to Him and plea with God to give you a renewed passion, renewed choices, a renewed walk and life. Come to Him this morning…lay your weak and empty sinful pursuits of joy at His feet…ask for Him to replace it with the joy and fulfillment that only He can bring.

Pray