

I Am Rescued

Series: Becoming Who We Are (Engaging Ephesians)

January 26, 2014 - Brad Bailey

Intro

My mother-in-law...has become immersed in the whole process of rescuing dogs. She works night and day to identify dogs in shelters and then to find owners before they face another fate.

As a result... at times we get pictures like this. [Sad faces of dogs at shelters]

And sometimes we get to see how the stories end...like this. [Dogs happily with smiling owners]

There is **no story that draws us more** than that of a **dramatic rescue**.

It's been this way **through the history** of human story telling. Whether someone faces the fate of the wild...the princess needing rescue... rescue by soldiers... saving the world from destruction.

When firefighters go into a building and they come out with children, we cheer.

It's why when some person is ruling over others in a horrendous way and the soldiers show up to liberate, we cheer.

> **Someone is in trouble...and their future depends on someone rescuing them from their fate.**

What I hope we will grasp today...is that **these are all just reflections of the ultimate rescue**.

As we continue in our series in which we are engaging the Biblical book of Ephesians... a series entitled becoming Who We Are...we are letting God speak into who we are and how we can live accordingly. That is what the Apostle Paul was writing about. We've heard of how we are blessed by God by receiving the blessing which Christ shared with us. Last week we heard how we are grounded in the hope of our destiny. Today... we must hear where it begins...with being rescued. For our rescue is more powerful and profound than any rescue on earth.

Let's hear of our own rescue...

Ephesians 2:1-3 (NIV)

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Paul begins, " As for you, you were dead." A **rather strong** statement. It may strike you in different ways depending on your personality. **Some** of you may like those who **"tell it like it is"** ...aren't afraid of speaking the truth blatantly.... and so you can appreciate this bold description. **Others** might find this **a little harsh**. The truth is that there are times we must deal with the truth.

How we feel about such truth can be similar to how we feel about doctors. Some want to go often...know anything that may be going on related to their health. Some of us don't like going to doctors...in part because we just don't want bad news. such truth have different feelings about doctors. We may avoid wanting to know what the state of our condition is...but of course we are just avoiding a truth that we need.

So Paul tells us the truth.

Here it is: Apart from some outside rescue...**You are dead**.

That may sound a little **surprising or extreme**...but it's far from being a new truth. It's what we read in the very first book of the Scriptures.

Genesis 2:17 (NIV)

...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

This was the **beginning of man's spiritual death**—his disobedience to the will of God. God said, if you seek your own life apart from me... the separation will bring death....the consequences will be a separation from life. And **what did the spiritual enemy say**... depicted as a serpent? Surely you will NOT DIE. (Gen. 3:4) That is the choice in which we live. God declares the tragedy of our separation from life...an eternal separation...and an enemy tells us to believe it's not true.

Paul says we must grasp the truth of how it has been. As the Scriptures state again in...

Romans 6:23

"For the wages of sin is death"

So to understand who I are... begins with understanding that...

1. I am rescued FROM death

Like many rescue stories...we may not even realize the extent of jeopardy we are in. Many of us may have a sense that we need God to just **fix up** our lives...to **recover** from some tragic losses...to do a **spiritual makeover** perhaps. Not only are these all true...likely more than we know. God has restoration beyond what we can imagine. God can revolutionize your life. I can look back at the trajectory of posture and practice...I have seen it. But there is something much more fundamental at hand.

We are **not just sick**; we are **dead!**

We **don't** just need **rejuvenation**...we need **resurrection**.

We haven't gone from messed up to cleaned up...we have gone from dead to alive.

Our stories may declare that we were lost...lonely... in trouble.... but we won't really grasp our true story until we can grasp that we were dead...facing eternal separation.

He **expounds on** what we belong to...and **what we must be saved from**.

Here we hear the **three dimensions of evil**... **flesh, the world, and the devil**. It begins with our own participation.

First...

I am rescued from the penalty for my own participation and nature (My "flesh")

He says we face the consequences of our own **"transgressions and sins."** [1]

The word "transgressions"...or as many state **"trespasses"** refers to being **outside where** we are suppose to be.

If you've ever **been out in wider land**... you've **seen a sign** that said, **"No Trespassing."** It represents a boundary.... there's a border here, and I'm allowed to be over here, but if I step over this line, I'm trespassing. **I'm in a place** that I am **not supposed to be** and there's consequence for that, negative consequence.

> **Many of us** know that we have **found ourselves** where we are **not suppose to be**.

As C.S. Lewis states [2]:

First . . . human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly . . . they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.

The word "sin" refers to **any way** in which we **"miss the mark"**... act outside the nature of God's true goodness. Now, sin includes our **thoughts**, our **words**, our **deeds**, our **motives**. It includes sin of commission where we do bad things, sin of omission where we don't do good things, sin.

Some may want to **defend themselves**...and claim that they have been judged unfairly. There's a story about a man who was complaining to God about people saying bad things about him. God said, **"Just be glad they don't know the truth."** I think **God might ask** if we'd like people to know the truth about us...the whole unseen truth.

Goes on to speak of our **"sinful nature."**

We don't just act... we act out of our nature. "A dog behaves like a dog because he has a dog's nature." If somehow you could transplant into the dog the nature of the cat, his behavior would change radically. We've behaved as sinner in separation from because that is our nature. (Pss. 51:5; 58:3).

When the Biblical writers speak of **"the flesh"**...sometimes it just means physical bodies...which God created and there's nothing negative implied. But often it is used to speak of **this nature which operates in opposition to the Spirit of God.** We have a **bent** to want **to be God... instead of be under God.** We want the world to revolve around us.

Do you remember the day you learned to sin?

Do you remember the day your parents said it was time to learn how to sin...time for lessons?
No...you don't ...because...we never needed to learn. We are sinners by nature. You don't learn to sin. Nobody has to teach you. Nobody has to sit down and say, "Here's how to do it." It's our nature.

Now that's not a popular view. When people hear people speak of being "sinners" and about such a "sinful nature"...there is a reaction because it seems to decry everything good.

The truth is that we are **born bearing a reflection of God's image**...something amazing...but **also with a posture of rebellion** from the very source of life. We were born not only in state of separation but in a posture that reflects that... that **demands our way.**

How many of you are **parents** and you've **noticed this?**

As Mark Driscoll describes, "You give birth to a child and all of a sudden you realize you're housing a **small terrorist**. They declare war, they throw things, they [wonder if they might] kill you if they were larger. The only thing they lack is size. Those of you that go, "No, no, babies are amazing," you don't have any, do you?"

In those moments we see that rebel and think: "I can't believe they did that" we **should be reminded of who we are by nature**... and of **our need for a new nature.**

That is why I would **encourage parents** to never **think of the ministry of the church to children** to be simply about teaching them about morals. Moralizing won't really save us. We all need a new nature. What we need is to meet the one who saves us by giving us his nature.

You need to have a new nature, and out of a new nature will come new desires and a new mind.

Jesus talks about a tree and its fruits. We're **not trying to make people moral**, but rather introducing people to Christ...who brings about change.

As C.S. Lewis says [3],

"We are not merely imperfect creatures that need improvement: we are rebels that need lay down their arms."

Secondly,

I am rescued from the darkness of the "world" I am a part and participant of

The Scriptures speak of the "world"...or "**the ways of this world**" ...and recognize that when the **powers and patterns of evil are taken up as a social system**....they become a force in themselves. Just as the nature of God bears power when joined with others...and Jesus encourages us to "agree" in prayer...so such agreement has force in the larger system of this world.

The present age: the way the world is now.... is **not the way God intends it to be** in the age to come. **What seems right**, especially to those who are simply '**going with the flow**' of the world around them, actually isn't.

The whole world has been lost...it will be recreated...but the state that it is in must come to an end.

Paul says it like it is: ***We have "followed the ways of this world."*** We are members...and apart from God **we have been active members**. So we are **destined to the fate of this world**.

And thirdly,

I am rescued from the dominion of spiritual forces

Paul makes it clear that we are also following "**the ruler of the kingdom of the air.**" [4]

I know as a culture we **like to "play" with evil**. We live in this **strange mix** of pretending we are "**enlightened**" **beyond belief** in spiritual forces...and yet we are **obsessed with the paranormal** and especially ideas about evil powers.

It's interesting that **some ideas about evil powers** are consistent, namely that there are powers that are **not within our full awareness**. That is what the Scriptures describe. There are forces rebellious to God that desire our allegiance.

Now I know that there can be tendencies to relate to ideas of evil forces in unhealthy / dysfunctional ways...ways that try to cast all responsibility out there... or become magical and superstitious. But I believe we are fools to allow those tendencies send us into the realm of blind ignorance....that doesn't believe in any real forces of evil. Evil has no better "cover" than our prideful disbelief.

The truth is that the strictly secular mind has the hardest time facing the reality of evil that surrounds us.

Paul tells us what we need to face... our condition is actually that of being under the influence of "the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

Modern man hates the idea of being under anyone.

"I'm my own person." can be **our proudest cry**. Ironically it's the **least novel thing** anyone has ever said. It was the first declaration **made in the Garden of Eden**...and it came from the influence of a serpent then....and still does.

The truth is, we are rebels from God... at our very core. So Paul concludes at this point...

"All of us ... Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." - Ephesians 2:3

We are the objects of wrath.

Some of you may think that's a scary word." Good. It should be.

Lets be clear... God's wrath is **NOT in contradiction** to His **nature of His love**...it is an essential part of it. God is good....and **He would not be good if he did not deal with evil**. Love requires that evil not be ultimately accepted. Evil must be ultimately confronted and cast away. the opposite of love is not anger...it's indifference.

Such judgment is no small matter...it is the matter around which God is working.

When it comes to the wrath of God, it's mentioned with about **two dozen words** in the Old and New Testament combined, and the wrath of God is spoken of about **six hundred times**.

Jesus speaks of hell and heaven more than anyone in the whole Bible. We're **under a death sentence**, that the **clock is ticking**, that after this life there is no second chance, that we better get this thing straightened out with Jesus right now while there's still time because the consequence of our rebellion are coming.

I know that **we tend to think** that such "wrath" is too **old fashioned... too primitive**.

How many times have I been told I needed to realize some truth or bear the consequences...and I didn't believe it until I faced it? How many times have I told my kids that the consequences of not doing what we have told them are real...and that they won't go away just because they hadn't been experienced yet?

> The point is that **people feel free from consequences** by simply **denying they exist**...by not believing in them....but that **doesn't actually change what is real**.

Some may feel they can **work the curve of comparison**...they may say, "I'm not a murderer, I'm not a thief, I'm not a killer. I'm a good person, I just live my life independent of Jesus." But of Jesus is the very representation of God.....then it is **rejection of the very center of good**. That's the fault line issue.

WRATH....We may not like to think of it, but the Bible is clear: **the end toward which everything moves is God's judgment**.

As the writer of the Book of Hebrews explains,

"It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27)

That is what we face...death that is set on eternal separation.

- **The judge** just **pronounced his sentence**...and there are no appeals.
- **The doctor** has just **pronounced your state**.

Such news should awaken in us...that will to live...that desire to hear more.

Continue....

Ephesians 2:4-9 (NIV)

⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

If we understood where we truly stand....what we truly face...because of what WE have done and become....our entire lives would **stop here and consider the two most important words** that will ever change our lives: **"But God."** [5]

As this translation states it:

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.... even when we were dead in transgressions."

"But God" - faced with the sentence of death...with nothing we could do...those words change everything.

He "made us alive together with Christ."

You have been given **the life** that exists **in Christ** and **with Christ**.

How? "...by grace you have been saved"

2. I am rescued BY grace

Here we are reminded that **love is the most powerful force in the universe**. And the truest of love is not that which accepts evil...but that which is merciful. In His mercy, He does not give us what we do deserve; and in His grace He gives us what we do not deserve. And all of this is made possible because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It was at Calvary that God displayed His hatred for sin and His love for sinners (Rom. 5:8; John 3:16).

Ephesians 2:8-9...considered one of the most central truth of Scripture...valuable verses to memorize...

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9

We have **nothing to boast about**. There is a **humility involved with grace**. A part of us may want to refuse it. It's that part of us that is so drawn to calling for justice....fairness... not thinking for a moment that it could imply **getting what we really deserve**.

> We have to **choose between the scales of justice** and the **grace of the cross**.

It's described how we receive grace "through faith."

When the Scriptures speak of being saved by "faith"....we **might think of some other quality we must have called "faith"**...and we must have enough...and we become focused on this spiritual quality. But the **focus in not on the nature of faith.... but the object of faith...** on WHAT we are trusting.

It's the object of faith that saves you, and you may be trusting in a false religious system, a false moral system, or a false spiritual system. You're not saved just by having faith in someone or something, that object needs to actually be a Savior who can save. Jesus' very name means "God is our Savior. God is our salvation." That's exactly what Jesus means, so his name indicates his life mission.

It is **HIS WORK**... already accomplished that is extended to those who will receive it...who will enter the way of Christ.

When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn in two, from the top to the bottom, signifying that **the way to God was now open**. As Jesus said upon the cross. "It is finished." The sacrifice was made. Sin worked against us and God worked for us.

> DO you understand....your rescuer is not one who bears some type of obligation. He is not simply following the law of the universe...but rather is acting in love. What a love. He is the one you and I have denounced and dismissed most of our lives.

Continue....

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God's rescue of us is **not the end of the story**...it is **just the beginning** of what can now unfold. So Paul tells us that we are rescued for a purpose.

3. I am rescued FOR good works

Notice...**not BY works... but FOR works.**

You're saved by his works. He works in you, he works on you, he works through you to do good works as an act of worship.

God has transferred us from the dead, **present course of this world** to a **Christ's course in the heavenly places** because of his kindness and grace.

> As a result, we are **restored to our purpose... in the good works of God.**

Redemption has only begun...it is unfolding as the creation of a new humanity and a new world, which has previously existed only in the mind and purpose of God. This is "His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus."

**"Good works" doesn't refer to just being a more moral person
...but to becoming God oriented and God partnered.**

When you are rescued from death...by a love so amazing that one would take all the suffering you had coming...the shame, the separation, the judgment... what can one do but be changed.

Here lies the **great divide** - we try to be good people through rules...whether religious rules or secular "moral" rules...and keep pretending we are better than we are...or we stand before the **face of grace**...and are changed by it.

Human nature will be drawn to the former. But the power of God is love bearing love...His mercy changing us. [6]

When a local prostitute came to a **dinner party at a religious leaders home** and began to wash Jesus' feet... they scoffed...but Jesus explained how it works...saying essentially, **"Who Is Forgiven Much, Loves Much"** (Luke 7:36-50.)

[Movie Clip shown: Scene from "To End All Wars." Movie - A true story about four Allied POW's who endure harsh treatment from their Japanese captors during World War II while being forced to build a railroad through the Burmese jungle. In this scene, after getting caught trying to escape, Major Campbell faces the punishment of death. Yet, Dusty chooses to sacrifice his life for the life of Campbell.]

God knows the limits of moral rules alone...and He knows the power of love...of mercy. If such love...such grace...such a rescue does not change us...we likely haven't really received it.

When you receive Christ.... you get **a new nature**...that causes you to have **a new mind**. How many of you, that's been the case? You met Jesus and the more you learn, you **start to think differently**. You say, "You know what? I used to think this way, but not anymore. I don't think that way anymore. I used to think that this was okay, now I know it's not. I used to brag about this, now I repent of this. Yeah, my mind is changing."

Conclusion:

God is at work in your life...or wants to be.

Are you wearing the "graveclothes" or the "grace-clothes"?

Resources: The title and general thematic idea used for this series on Ephesians was drawn and adapted from Mark Driscoll 'Who Do You Think You Are?: Finding Your True Identity in Christ.' This message also draws upon Mark's general flow in related message, but one will find most specific thoughts to be different or stated differently. Also used: Dunnam, M. D., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1982). Vol. 31: Galatians / Ephesians / Philippians / Colossians / Philemon. The Preacher's Commentary Series; Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Eph 2:1-10b). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books; Darryl Dash reference to "But God";

Notes

1. The Bible Knowledge Commentary - "Transgressions" (paraptōmasin, "false steps"; cf. Eph. 1:7; 2:5) and "sins" (hamartia is, "acts of missing the mark"), though slightly different in their root meanings, are basically synonymous. Both suggest deliberate acts against God and His righteousness and thus failure to live as one should. The plural of these two nouns signifies people's repetitious involvement in sin and hence their state of unregeneration.

Hoehner, H. W. (1985). Ephesians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (Eph 2:1-10). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, Bk 1, Ch 1, p 21

3. C.S. Lewis - The Problem of Pain

4. Regarding the phrase the “kingdom of the air.”

Paul was obviously familiar with the Jewish concept of the heavens of his day. According to that model, there were three levels of heaven:

- The air – the atmosphere in which human life takes place here on the earth
- The universe beyond the earth where the other stars and planets are located
- The third heaven, which is beyond our human vision, is the place where God resides.

So the “kingdom of the air” is just another word for the earth where mankind makes his abode. And according to this verse, there is a ruler who has power over this “first heaven”. (Drawn from Pat Damiani)

5. "But...God." - Many note that the great Welsh preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached one of the most powerful messages on these two words and said, "These two words ["But God"], in and of themselves, in a sense contain the whole of the gospel."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says:

It is the grace of the gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you. You can hide nothing from God. The mask you wear before men will do you no good before Him. He wants to see you as you are, He wants to be gracious to you. You do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers, as if you were without sin; you can dare to be a sinner. (Life Together)

6. The uniqueness of grace within religious ideas

More found at - <http://www.christianity.co.nz/grace-13.htm>

"During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world were discussing whether any one belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time, until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. In his forthright manner, Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."

As Phillip Yancey puts it, "Calvary broke the logjam between justice and forgiveness. By accepting onto his innocent self all the severe demands of justice, Jesus broke forever the chain of ungrace." [Philip Yancey, What's So Amazing About Grace?, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 45.]