

Eph 2:1-6

Good morning and thank you for joining us and happy NYE! I know you have a lot of places to choose from to attend church and we're grateful that you're here with us this morning.

Would you please turn in your bibles to Ephesians 2?

I want to begin this morning by sharing 3 names with you, names which you probably won't recognize at first.

SHOW PIC Guy Laliberte' began his circus career on the streets of Quebec by living off the handouts of bystanders. He played the accordion, walked on stilts, even swallowed fire. In 1987 he and his friends risked the little money they had to perform in the Los Angeles Arts Festival. The rest as they say, is history. Today, they're known as Cirque Du Soleil. Guy is the CEO. And it's estimated his net-worth is \$1.2 billion. **CLOSE PIC**

SHOW PIC Ursula Burns was born to a single mom, and lived in a New York City housing project. Her mother ran a daycare center out of her home and ironed shirts to make enough money to send Ursula to private school. Eventually she graduated from NYU, and was hired as an intern at Xerox. Ursula worked her way up from bottom to eventually be the CEO, becoming the first African-American woman to be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

CLOSE PIC

SHOW PIC Leonardo Del Vecchio was one of five kids that his widowed mother couldn't support, so he was sent to live in an orphanage. Del Vecchio went to work in a factory making molds for auto parts and eyeglass frames. He even lost the tip of his

index finger in an accident. At age 23, Del Vecchio opened his own molding shop. Today, that shop has become the world's largest maker of prescription eye-ware and sunglasses. Ray-Bans and Oakleys are made by the former orphan. When he died last year, his net worth was around \$25 billion. **CLOSE PIC**

Don't you love rags to riches stories! But with all due respect to Guy Laliberte', and Ursula Burns, and Leonardo Del Vecchio - the greatest rags to riches story is YOURS!

Spiritually speaking we've gone from rags to riches! We started out a pauper - an orphan on the streets - and look at us now... we're a child of the King - we sit in heavenly places in Christ!

This is what we find in Chapter 2 - your story, my story, every Christian's story. It's the ultimate rags to riches story!

To fully understand the context of this, we're going to read verses 1-10, then begin our study.

1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been

saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The title of this mornings message is THE NEW YOU
Let's pray

From time to time as a chaplain I help carry the bodies of the deceased. Sometimes it's picking them up and placing them in a body bag, and carrying that body bag up stairs or whatever for transportation. And you may know that sometimes dead bodies can make some weird noises, and even twitch a little sometimes.

9 years ago in Mississippi, Holmes County Coroner Dexter Howard called it a miracle that 78 year old Walter Williams was alive. The coroner was called to the Williams home in Lexington, MS where the family members believed the 78 year old had died.

Williams had no pulse and was pronounced dead Wednesday night at 9:00 PM. Then early Thursday workers at the Porters and Son Funeral Home were preparing to embalm Williams when he started to kick inside the body bag.

Family members were called as Williams was taken to a hospital. The coroner believes Williams' pacemaker had stopped working

and then started again. Family members said Williams, a farmer, told them he was happy to be alive.

But for every Christian that's our story too. We were dead in our sins and all of a sudden we started kicking in this body bag.

1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, Rather than just rags to riches - our story is death to life! Chapter 2 begins with a flashback that describes our lifestyle before we gave our lives to Jesus.

And mind you this isn't to condemn us, but to illustrate just how far we've come now that we're in Christ!

There are two different ways to measure a Christian's spiritual progress. First, you can compare where we are now - with where we need to be... (that can be downright depressing because none of us arrive on this side of eternity).

But you also can compare where we are now - with where we once were. And that's what verse 1 does.

Verse 1 reminds us, **"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins..."**

Now this of course isn't describing us physically but rather spiritually speaking we were dead! Hey even in times of staggering inflation, the wages of sin remain the same - it's always death. **Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Our sin causes us to be separated from God-which is spiritual death.

Look at **Isaiah 59:2, But your iniquities have separated you from your God;**

And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

A person “dead in trespasses and sins” is like a car that's not running on all cylinders. The person consists of a body and soul, but their spirit is dead. They're two-thirds of the human God created. No wonder life is such a struggle!

Life without God is full of never ending frustration. Robert Orben puts it, “Do you ever get the feeling that life is a violin solo and you're wearing mittens?” For the person separated from God, life is confusing and chaotic.

2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, SHOW PIC You've all seen it as you drive along the roads. Vultures circling over a carcass, until they finally swoop down and pull apart the defenseless creature. **SHOW PIC**

Here in verse 2 it describes two scavengers that take a bite out of the spiritually dead - “the course of this world” and “the prince of the power of the air” or Satan himself.

“The course of this world” describes ungodly values that permeate society and culture. And the course of this world is so powerful most people are blind to its influence before they come to Christ.

The Bible tells us in **1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.**

“The lust of the flesh” is the belief that feeling great is found in physical pleasures rather than spiritual joys.

“The lust of the eyes” is all about looking great-solely by outward beauty rather than character.

And “the pride of life” assumes being great is making a splash in this world, rather than living for eternity.

Sadly, all this is what makes the world-go-round - physical pleasure, outward beauty, immediate fame.

But godliness is the opposite of the world-godliness is all about spiritual joy, and inward beauty, and eternal impact.

Satan knows how to play us. Satan uses the ways of this world to draw us into a superficial lifestyle. A life that’s all pop and fizzle - and very little substance.

**Haggai 1:6 “You have sown much, and bring in little;
You eat, but do not have enough;
You drink, but you are not filled with drink;**

You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;
And he who earns wages,
Earns wages to put into a bag with holes.”

Have you ever noticed that there’s nothing in this physical world that truly satisfies?

Life apart from Jesus is like going shopping with a bottomless shopping bag. You stuff the bag, and stuff the bag - but at the end of the day - after you’ve checked out - you come to realize you threw away your resources, and have nothing to show for your efforts.

I’ll never forget the Time Magazine article that summed up the decade of the 90s. “Anything goes, but nothing lasts.”

This is still the lie that Satan spreads. He sends people on a wild goose chase in life, without a goose.

So verses 1 and 2 tell us we were separated from God by sin. We were seduced by the world and snared by Satan. But it gets worse... sin stained us at the core of who we were

3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Our modern world believes that people are generally good, that at times we slip up and do evil, but we’re good at heart.

Yet in reality the opposite is true. On occasion we slip up and do good, but our basic nature is evil. Our tendency, our natural inclination, is to be selfish, proud, rebellious.

Hey, ever notice you never have to teach a toddler to sin?

We shouldn't be shocked when we hear about an increase in violence or some new perversity among folks without Christ. They're only being what they are.

So let's summarize verses 1-3, which is our testimony before Christ. We tried everything to feel and look and be great by stuffing stuff in a shopping bag that has a hole in the bottom. And as foolishly as we were acting, we couldn't do any better, since we were only being true to what we really were. We were separated from God - seduced by the world - and snared by Satan - and stained by sin... We were trapped in a life of futility and failure.

It's wisely been said, "The most deceptive trait about the chains of sin is that they're too light to be felt, until they're too strong to be broken." And this was us! By the end of verse 3 all hope seems lost.

That's why Ephesians 2:4 is perhaps the most beautiful verse in all the Bible.

4 But God, Verses 1-3 described all of us, but God. Aren't you thankful? The phrase but God means forget everything said before this, because this makes all the difference in the world.

But some will say 'you don't understand the things I've done.' But God.

'I've blown it so bad'. But God
I've wasted so many years of my life. But God.

Even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, He loved us.
4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

God is rich in mercy. We can't even appreciate the measure of mercy that's been extended to us.

And notice God is rich in what we need most - "mercy!"
He's "the God of second chances!"

I've heard it said, "God's throne is not made of marble, but mercy!" This is why He calls it "the mercy seat."

When we come to Jesus, broken, what do we find-not condemnation. Not guilt. Not 'go do a bunch of things and prove your love'. No when we come to Jesus we find mercy.

Even though we did nothing to deserve it - or initiate it - God stepped in with His mercy.

Remember God didn't stand back until He saw potential in us - until it looked as if we might finally come around to love and worship and serve Him.

No just the opposite! God took the risk of being rejected. He reached out to us at our lowest point and most desperate hour. While we were “dead in trespasses and sins” - while we were separated, and seduced, and snared, and stained, God stepped in to show us mercy through the cross of Christ.

SHOW PIC

Have you ever noticed we humans have a difficult time initiating love? As kids we developed a crush, and wrote notes to our potential sweetheart, “Do you like me? Check Yes, No, Maybe.” Why is it we struggle to initiate love? It’s because we don’t want to reveal our love, until we’re sure the other person loves us. It’s the fear of rejection - of our love being spurned. **CLOSE PIC**

Yet God has no such fear. He holds nothing back. In naked love Jesus hung on the cross for my sins, and yours too! **Romans 5:8**
But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God says come as you are.

Verse 5 continues to roll out the richness of God’s mercy **5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),”** Rather than mess around and treat the symptoms of sin, God went straight for the cure. He signed you up for a Divine transplant.

He placed His Holy Spirit within our hollow spirit. He made alive what was dead. A spiritual resurrection occurred, God sparked new life in you. He put the paddles of the Holy Spirit on your chest, and jolted you to life. You who were dead in trespasses, He made alive in Christ.

Imagine your house in a lengthy power outage. It's been many days. The house is dark, cold, and dreary. Then frumph! Somewhere down the line a repairman hits the switch, and power comes surging back into the cold wires. The furnace roars back to life - your house lights up, the appliances all chirp.

What happens when the power comes back on? Everyone cheers! Power has been restored!

This is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He gives us spiritual life.

In Christ we become fully alive by the Spirit of God. And that's not all! According to verse 6 another marvelous thing happens to people who put their faith in Christ.

6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Not only are we made alive, we're elevated. We're lifted up and seated in Christ.

We don't sit in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus, or at least not yet. Instead, we sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Since our life and identity is in Christ, as He sits in heavenly places, so do we.

Because we're in Christ we have a right to the kingdom of God, anticipating the glory of heaven. We're just pilgrims passing through this world. Our real home is heaven.

We are not only made alive in Christ, but now we can come to His table. We can fellowship with Him, talk to Him, and learn from Him.

Don't buy into the lie of Satan-you can live dead. That's the thing that deceives us, that we have to be careful of. Because if you die physically while you're dead spiritually, you're lost forever. You have to be born again spiritually while you're still alive physically to survive physical death and spend eternity in heaven.

In Christ, all of these things have taken place. He has made us alive. He's raised us up together with Him. He's made us sit in heavenly places.

Why would he do that? Why would He take dead stinkers like you and I and do all this incredible stuff for us? Verse seven gives us the reason. We'll pick up our study in verse 7 next week. Read ahead!

If you're a Christian, you have a rags to riches story! From enemies of God to recipients of God's grace toward us. This is your story, if you know Jesus!

And if you don't know Him, if you've come in today thinking there's no hope, realize the Holy Spirit wants to write you into this script and make this story yours.

Remember those two really big words, "But God..." No matter who you are or what you've done - you're not beyond God's reach. He is rich in mercy! He has more than enough mercy to

cover your sins. Every person can go from rags to riches in Christ Jesus!

And remember this is Paul we're talking about who penned these words. This is a guy who murdered the church. Listen, I don't care what you've done today, what you think you know about God. Saul of Tarsus murdered the church, Persecuted the church, killed Christians, he made Christians blaspheme the name of Jesus. This is the man who's writing, who includes himself! There's no one here this morning that's out sinned Paul before He came to Christ.

All of this is available for you today. If today you're sitting here and the Holy Spirit, by God's grace, is making any of these things real to you, today is a day that you can give your life to Him and your eternity can be changed, the rest of the days of your life can be changed.

I'm gonna say a prayer...

As we get ready to do some baptisms here, we're going to release the older classrooms so they can celebrate these wonderful moments

Why do we get baptized?

Water baptism symbolizes the death of our old sinful nature. What do you do with a dead body-you bury it. And that's what baptism symbolizes.

Baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality, signifying that you've buried all the guilt, all the sin, all the shame of the old life.

And then coming up out of the water, you rise in the newness of life in Jesus as you identify with His resurrection. That's why we do full immersion baptisms.

I want to encourage you, even if you haven't signed up to be baptized, we have extra clothes here if you're ready to take that step of obedience.

Or if you have been baptized before, but you want to make a rededication in your life to serve Jesus baptized too, right now.

Listen I understand it might feel embarrassing, and maybe part of you is just absolutely fighting yourself inside your body right now, trust me I've been there, I get it.

But I want to encourage you with 2 things. Number 1 we are family here. We're here to love you and support you and encourage you and cheer you on in your walk with Jesus Christ.

The second reminder is this. If you can't make a stand for Jesus Christ here, in this room, amongst family, you won't be able to make an effective stand for Him out in the world.

We have clothes in every size all the way up to 3XL, so there is no excuse for you-that's by design. Don't leave here today wishing you woulda done it.