

"He Loves You (Yeah, Yeah, Yeah)"
A sermon preached at Heritage Presbyterian Church
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Jonah 4:1-11
Ephesians 2:1-10

Jonah 4

¹But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. ³And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

⁵Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

⁶The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." ⁹But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." ¹⁰Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should I not be concerned about

Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

Ephesians 2

¹You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

I. Introduction

It's good to be back with the church family, and I have to admit that the week off as the Spring semester began was very helpful to me. And I am thankful for the numerous positive responses to Reverend Dawson's pulpit supply last week. I shared with him - anonymously, of course - the content of what several of you emailed to me. When I saw him at school this last week, I asked him if he had checked his email, and he broke out in the biggest smile I have seen

on his face I think I have ever seen. Several of you would like to hear him preach again, and I think that will definitely be possible moving forward. And I promise you that when Reverend Dawson sent me his sermon info, I had not told him of my plans to preach through Ephesians in this early part of 2024. He and I both agreed that the hand of God must have been at work to have his sermon fit so seamlessly with my plans. All in all, it seems like a good week was had by everyone.

So today, let's pick up where we left off two Sundays ago and take a look at Ephesians chapter 2. We will see that many of the themes from chapter 1 will be present in chapter 2./

II. Pivot to Ephesians

(slide2) Two weeks ago, we took a look at Ephesians 1:1-14 and saw that Paul's focus in that chapter 1 fell on three different topics: First, that God is working to overcome divisions between heaven and earth and divisions on earth itself; second, that our salvation comes at God's behest and God's initiative, and not because of who we are or what we do; and third, that God's salvation comes with the expectation that we will live "holy and blameless" lives that will give others reason to give praise to the God who saves us. Our passage this morning seeks to reinforce these last two items for us.

Like our passage from chapter 1, the first seven verses of chapter 2 constitute one loong and complicated Greek sentence (so, rightly, the Catholic Study Bible), but unlike chapter 1, most translations agree in dividing these verses into three smaller sentences: verses 1-2, verse 3, and verses 4-7. So let's start there and see where it leads us.

(slide3) Paul begins in verses 1-2 (note that the initial verbal form is a participle, *Kαὶ ὑμᾶς ὄντας*; the first finite verb does not occur until verse 5 [e.g., Barth AB 1:212, "Verse 1 is a broken sentence, containing no subject and no verb. Only vs. 5 shows what Paul was setting out to say"]) by affirming our spiritual situation prior to God's saving us. He

affirms that "You" - again, probably "You Gentiles" - "You were dead through the trespasses and sins (τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις; note that the translation "through" is an interpretation of the dative case, which some have taken to be causal [Fowl NTL 66, "because of your transgressions and sins"]; as instrumental as does the NRSV, or as indicating the sphere of one's existence [Hoehner EEC 308, "in your transgressions and sins"; Baugh EEC 147, "in your transgressions and sins"]; Lincoln WBC 93 suggests that the dative case indicates both the cause and the manifestation of death," following Barth AB 1:212) in which you once lived" in the first part of verse 1. That word "dead" is obviously not a reference to their physical death but to their spiritual state, a state that is the consequence of their "trespasses and sins." While some commentators try to find different nuances between those two words, I concur with the consensus view that they are virtually synonymous with each other, and so verse 1 is considering spiritually dead Gentiles who are spiritually dead through their trespasses and sins. So it comes as no surprise that verse 2 continues by asserting that the *reason* these Gentiles are spiritually dead through their trespasses and sins is because they were "following (περιεπατήσατε) the course of this world, following (the previous verb is repeated in the NRSV translation though it is absent from the original text) the ruler of the power of the air." That verb "following" is worth noting because it is the same verb used to describe the Christian walk of faith in this life, as in Romans 6:4 ("*walk* in newness of life"), Ephesians 5:2 ("*walk* in love") or in 2 John 4 ("*walk* in truth"). The Gentiles then are following, or walking with and alongside of and in the footsteps of, "the ruler of the power of the air," a long and rhetorical reference to Satan (e.g., Bruce NICNT 282 ["There is little doubt that the devil is the being described as 'the rule of the domain of the air'"]; Fowl NTL 69 ["There is little doubt that the text is a reference to Satan"]; see also Best new ICC 204; Lincoln WBC 95; Barth AB 1:214; Martin IBC 25; Hoehner EEC 311; Baugh ECC 149). But that's not simply a danger from their past lives, because the last part of verse 2 affirms that Satan is "that spirit that is *now* at work (νῦν ἐνεργούντος) among those who are disobedient" (note that τοῦ πνεύματος is in the genitive case, apparently in apposition to τοῦ ἀέρος, whereas we would expect it to be in the accusative case in

apposition to τὸν ἄρχοντα. Nida and Bratcher, UBS Handbook 41, explain this "as the result of attraction of the preceding genitive phrase," a view with which most commentators agree; see, e.g., Best new ICC 206 ["It is better then to take πνεῦμα as in apposition to τὸν ἄρχοντα (cf Ewald, Grosheide, Masson, Abbott, Gnllka), the genitive being occasioned by the preceding genitives (for appositions which transgress strict grammatical correctness see BDR §137:3; cf §167:2)"]; Barth AB 1:211 ["that spirit which is now at work"]; Cohick new NICNT 143 ["the spirit who now works as in apposition to the ruler"]; note however that Abbott old ICC 42 thinks that the genitive case is correct and that the genitive is dependent on τὸν ἄρχοντα in parallel to τοῦ ἀέρος and hence he translates this phrase "the rule of the spirit," as does Bruce old NICNT 279 ["according to the ruler of the domain of the air, (the domain" of the spirit"]; while Lincoln sees the genitive in apposition to τῆς ἐξουσίας and hence he translates the phrase "[the ruler] of the spirit that is now at work," as does Hoehner EC 315 ["Others propose that it is parallel with τῆς ἐξουσίας, 'of the realm,' governed by τὸν ἄρχοντα, 'the ruler.' This makes the most sense. Along with τῆς ἐξουσίας, τοῦ πνεύματος is best classified as a genitive of subordination, 'the ruler over the realm of the air, [the ruler over] the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience'"]; Fowl NTL 66). The New Testament is clear that the impetus to human disobedience to God comes from the human choice to follow the call of Satan versus the call of God.

(slide4) How do we end up following the call of Satan instead of the call of God? That dynamic Paul makes clear in verse 3, where he widens his net to say "All of us" - now we Jews along with you Gentiles - "All of us once lived (ἀνεστράφημὲν ποτε; see also 2 Peter 2:18, "those who *live* in error" and compare, from the other side, 2 Cor 1:12, "we have *behaved* in this world with frankness and godly sincerity"; 1 Tim 3:15, "you know how one ought to *behave* in the household of God"; Hebr 13:18, "desiring *to conduct* ourselves honorably in all things"; 1 Peter 1:17, "*live* in reverent fear") among them in the passions of our flesh (ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν; the only other place this phrase appears in the GNT appears to be 1 John 2:16, "for all that is in the world - the desire of the flesh"), following the desires of flesh and senses (τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν)." That's a long and rhetorically beautiful way of saying, "All of us lived the way we wanted to live" (so Nida and Bratcher UBS Handbook 42, "'all of us ... lived just like we wanted to' or ' ... did whatever we wanted to'"). For some of us that may have meant pursuing riches and fame. Others may have coveted after power and influence without regard for those we trampled in our race to get what we want. But *what* we wanted wasn't as important as the fact that *we* are the ones who wanted

it. Our desires are inherently selfish because *we* want them. And by golly, once we know what we want, we'll do anything we have to do to get it. The problem is that pursuing such selfish goals for ourselves because we want them isn't a good thing for us or for Paul, which is why he ends verse 3 by reminding us that "we" - again, we Jews and you Gentiles - "we were by nature (φύσει) children of wrath, like everyone else [is]." For Paul, this isn't just a problem for Gentiles; it is equally a problem for Jews. And the whole history of the Jews preserved for us in the Old Testament would support him. There were times, here and there, when the children of Israel actually did what God wanted them to do. But such times were few enough and far between enough that eventually the children of Israel went into exile as punishment for their disobedience.

(**slide5**) Thankfully, what *we* want for ourselves and what *God* wants for us aren't always the same. That comes to the forefront in verses 4-5a, where Paul affirms that "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." A couple of years ago, my Giant Schnauzer Thea developed bloat. We rushed her to Sage emergency in Concord and told them to do whatever they needed to do to save her from the bloat, and we were prepared to pay whatever it cost to save her. After some surgery, the removal of a small amount of dead tissue, and the completion of a procedure that ensured that she'd never get bloat again, we took her home and she has been a happy girl ever since.

Well, if we hoomans are willing to do that for our fur babies, is it so hard to imagine that the God who created us would be willing to do that for the children who were created in his own image? We didn't worry about the cost of saving Thea's life because she meant that much

to us. So why should we be surprised if God didn't worry about the cost of saving us because we mean so much to God? We did what we did because we loved her and could afford it. Doesn't that resonate with Paul's reference to God's great love and God's rich mercy? Verse 5 ends by reminding us that "by grace" - an obvious reference to God's grace - "by grace you have been saved." That's worded with the passive voice "have been saved" and underscores again that the act of salvation comes from God only and only from God.

(**slide6**) Paul continues in verse 6 by affirming that the God who "made us alive (συνεζωοποίησεν) together *with* Christ" is the same God who "raised us up (συνήγειρεν) *with* him and seated us (συνεκάθισεν) *with* him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Notice that these verbs are all expressed with the past tense instead of the future tense, as is more common in Paul's other writings (see, e.g., The HarperCollins Study Bible on this verse ["In the authentic Letters, Paul views salvation as a future event (see Rom 5:9, 10; 13:11; 1 Thess 5:8"); Best new ICC 217 ["The perfect tense σεσωσμένοι is unusual in the Pauline corpus. Paul normally uses the verb in the future (e.g. Rom 5:8, 9; 9:27; 1 Cor 3:13) or with a future reference (e.g. Rom 11:14; 1 Cor 5:5), though he also speaks of salvation as an ongoing process (1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor 2:15) and uses the cognate noun to describe that process (Rom 10:10; 2 Cor 6:2). Only once (Rom 8:24) does he set salvation in the past and there it is qualified by a reference to hope"]; so, similarly, Barth AB 1:221 ["In the undisputed Pauline writings the term "to save" most frequently describes future, eschatological salvation in the last judgment (Rom 5:9; 10:8–9, etc.), though it is also used to denote the personal experience of the saints who hear, accept, and confess the contents of the gospel (1 Cor 1:18, etc.)"]; Bruce old NICNT 286 ["In Paul's thought, salvation for the most part belongs to the future: it is "nearer to us now than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11)"]; Fowl NTL 74 ["Although it is more usual for Paul to speak of salvation as a future activity (cf. Rom 5:9, 10; 10:9, 13; 13:11; 1 Cor 5:5; Phil 3:20; et al.), he can also speak of salvation as a present state of affairs (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15; Phil 2:12)"].). Paul doesn't mean this literally, as though we who weren't even alive when Christ was raised from the dead were raised from the dead with him. It is far more likely that Paul intends this as a figurative or rhetorical expression, as when someone asks us to do something as we say in response "Done!" That doesn't make us prophets who knew what we were going to be asked to do and literally did it

before we were asked. That kind of exchange simply affirms the reality that the one making the request can trust that what was requested will be done quickly, efficiently, and expediently.

That's the kind of thing that Paul appears to be affirming here. I live my life here in Benicia and Vallejo. I don't yet live with Christ in the heavenly places. But I will. Not today, probably not tomorrow, and hopefully not for another few years. But I am completely sure that I will be with Christ in the heavenly places at some point.

(**slide7**) Verses 8-10 bring this paragraph to a close by reminding us of what was proclaimed in chapter 1, namely that our salvation has a goal that extends beyond being risen with Christ and being seated with Christ in the heavenly places. After affirming, a second time, that our salvation is the consequence of God's grace and not of our own works in verse 8a, and affirming for a third time, that our salvation is the gift of God and not the result of works in verses 8b-9, Paul concludes by reminding us that we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." For **good** works (ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς; see Acts 9:36; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10; compare the synonymous phrase τὰ καλὰ ἔργα in Matt 5:16; John 10:32; 1 Tim 5:25; 6:18; Titus 2:7; 3:8), not bad or selfish or sinful works. And note that the origins of these good works don't come from us or from our sense of ethics and virtue; these good works were prepared beforehand (προητοίμασεν; elsewhere in the GNT only in Rom 9:23 ["in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which" - a reference back to "the objects of mercy" - "he has prepared beforehand for glory"] but in the LXX see Isa 28:24 ["Will he prepare the seed prior to working the land"]; Wisd of Solomon 9:8 ["a copy of the hold tent that you prepared beforehand from the beginning"]) by God "to be our way of life (ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν)". That phrase "to be our way of life" uses the same verb translated "to follow" in verse 2 and is thus intended to contrast the life we all used to live when we followed Satan by living life according to our own selfish wants, needs, and desires and the life God wants us to live by living life

according to the good works God has already prepared for us. And what are those good works? You'll see them often if you read through the prophets with me this year. We will read about those good works in, say, Micah 6:8, "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God." Bob Saxby reminded us of that when we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination on November 12th last year. We'll see it in Isaiah 1:17, where the prophet proclaims to his audience, "learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." And we'll see it yet again in Amos 5:24, where Amos proclaims, "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream." That's the kind of thing that God expects us to pursue, the kind of life God wants us to lead, the kind of impact God wants us to make in this world.

III. Pivot to Today

(**slide8**) In essence, then, our passage is kind of like a rhetorical before-and-after depiction of our existence as faithful followers of Jesus. The "before" is described in verses 1-4, while the "after" comes in verses 5-10 and is attributed solely and only to God's actions for us and through God's grace. Before, we followed the ruler of this world, Satan; after, we follow the God who saved us. Before, we walked in our own selfish wants and needs, and thus in our own trespasses and sins; after, we walk in the good works that God has prepared for us before we were even born. Ephesians chapter 2 once again destroys the false dichotomy between faith and works that is so characteristic of the modern church today. Paul is **not** saying that our good works save us; we are after all "saved by grace" in verses 5 and 8, "and this is not of our own doing" in verse 8. But being saved by grace isn't the be-all and the end-all of God's purposes.

Paul emphasizes in verse 10 that we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works," and those good works are the reason why we have been saved.

Nor should that be surprising. There are many organizations that have a code of conduct that all of its members are supposed to match. My son, Tyler, is a Marine Corps logistics officer. But I'm pretty sure that if he were ever caught embezzling money from the Marines, he'd be kicked out of the Marines. Every once in a while I read about a college football team that has kicked a player off the team if they have been arrested or charged with certain crimes, especially around violence or sexual misconduct. Even math teachers can be terminated by districts desperate to hire math teachers if we are physically or verbally abusive to our students or if we use racially charged language in public.

So the church shouldn't be surprised that our lives within the kingdom of God should also reflect certain standards, standards determined by God in advance, centuries before we were born, standards that are reflected throughout both testaments: acting on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized; acting against the powers that be when those powers that be are corruptly using their power to their own benefit instead of advocating for the oppressed and the marginalized; welcoming everyone who seeks the counsel and comfort of God whether or not they look like us, talk like us, think like us, or vote like us.

(slide9) Our first Scripture reading this morning comes from the book of Jonah. That short little book turns on the question of whether Jonah will obey God's command to preach God's word to the people of Nineveh, the people who will eventually take the northern kingdom of Israel into exile. Jonah tries to evade that responsibility by running away because "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and

ready to relent from punishing" (Jonah 4:2). In other words, Jonah didn't want to preach to the Ninevites because if he preached they might repent, and if they repented God might forgive them, and if God forgave them, they wouldn't be wiped off the face of the planet as Jonah thought they should be. And so at the end, God asks Jonah, "~~should I not~~ [shouldn't I] be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?" (Jonah 4:11). The obvious and expected answer to that rhetorical question is, "Yes, of course God should be concerned about Nineveh."

And so should we. Our passage from Ephesians challenges us to make sure that our behavior as Christians is aligned with God's expectations for us; to make sure that our daily lives confirm our confession of faith in the Risen Savior, not contradict it; to be ever and always conscious of the fact that the reason God saved us is to spread the gospel of kingdom to a lost and dying world not by what we say but also by what we do. So whoever our Ninevites may be, let's make sure we show the world that we care for our Ninevites just as much as God cares for Jonah's Ninevites by what we do, what we say, who we stand with, and who we stand against. Hallelujah! And amen.