

Transforming the Walking Dead

REVIEW: We are working our way through the book of Ephesians. Two weeks ago we completed chapter 1 and it ended in a great way! Paul is praying that Christians would come to understand the gifts that he (Paul) was praising God for in the opening verses of chapter 1. One of those things Paul wanted us to understand was the power that we as believers have access to: the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

TRAN: That power is going to come into play again as we move into chapter 2.

INTRO: Now, I personally am not a fan of the show, but there is a show out that has become wildly popular lately called: *The Walking Dead*. It is all about zombies. The popularity of the show is due in part to the “zombie phenomenon” that has swept across our country. It is believed, by some, that there will be a virus someday that will turn people into these “walking dead” people known as zombies that feast on human flesh. In fact, it has been revealed that the Pentagon has come up with a response plan if there ever was a zombie apocalypse.

I’m sorry folks - okay, really I’m not sorry, but I have to laugh at these folks that believe in a zombie apocalypse but don’t believe in God. Overwhelming evidence that God exists and I have yet to ever see or hear any evidence of zombies.

TRAN: Why do I start the sermon out on the cheery topic of zombies? What do zombies have to do with the Bible? Did you realize that there are “walking dead” in the Bible. It is in the very passage we are about to look at.

Ephesians 2:1-10

I. The walking dead - 2:1-3

A. Did you see the zombies? It is in the first sentence! “you were dead in your transgressions and sins”

1. Does Paul actually mean that these people were dead, or that you and I were dead? - Of course not

2. We were spiritually dead because of our sins

3. So allow me to paint the picture

a) We often talk about the now and the not yet in terms of our salvation
(1) The Bible says that we are saved, we enjoy the benefits of salvation here and now, and it even speaks so assuredly about our final home in heaven that it makes it sound as if we are enjoying those benefits NOW, even though we have not arrived in heaven,

Transforming the Walking Dead

sin is still a part of life, and we have to deal with the fallenness of this world

- (2) We often do not apply this now and not yet to sin and what life is like because of sin
- (3) The picture is that because of the sin we were born into
 - (a) Thank you Adam and Eve for inflicting the world with this sin infection
 - (b) However we cannot get too high and mighty, because I know my affections for God are not strong enough to honestly stand here and say that I would have done better if it had been Keith and Eve in the garden
- (4) Because we were born into sin, because we personally have sinned, the end result of that sin is death - spiritual death, or completing the separation with God
 - (a) So in a real sense, the not yet is invading the now
 - (b) Those that do not know Christ as their Savior are walking around as the walking dead
 - i) Please don't think zombies that only have a one track mind
 - ii) These walking dead can enjoy life, can enjoy relationships, in fact, life, love, relationships often blind them to their own condition so they do not see the end result is death, and that they are walking around in this life as dead people

4. WOW! All of that and we have not even finished the first sentence!

B. Paul goes on to describe what this state of walking dead is like

1. He lists three things:

- a) We followed the ways of this world
- b) We followed the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient
- c) We used to live among them, gratifying the cravings of our flesh

2. Allow me to tease out a few things here

- a) First, before we roll too far along, all of these things are in the past tense - these used to be true about followers of Christ

- (1) All except the spirit that is NOW at work in those who are disobedient

- (2) That is a currently ongoing thing

b) The ways of this world

- (1) The world has a way of looking at things that seems right and true

- (a) Revenge: you hurt me, I will hurt you in some way

- (b) The end justifies the means - get to the top any way you have to

Transforming the Walking Dead

- (c) We all know the verse: there is a way that seems right to man, but the end leads to death
 - (2) So the very culture we live in has a way of looking at things, reacting to things, doing life that is counter to what God wants
 - c) The ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit...
 - (1) A little background:
 - (a) The kingdom of the air is an odd title here, but it seems to have its background in Jewish understanding of the heavens
 - i) God is in the highest heaven
 - ii) The space between heaven and earth, the air is the realm in which the spirits operate
 - iii) Then there is earth - man's domain
 - (b) Further, the designation of "spirit" is given to what most theologians understand to be Satan
 - i) Mind you that Paul never uses that name, so we must be careful not to read too much in
 - ii) But this certainly is a good description of Satan
 - (2) So what Paul is pointing out is that first we danced to the beat of a culture that did not know Christ
 - (3) Second, we danced to the beat of an evil spirit that desired for us to be disobedient to God
 - d) "Gratifying the cravings of our flesh"
 - (1) The final area Paul mentions is our own flesh
 - (a) He does not mean our literal flesh, but the desires we crave naturally, but that can undo us if not governed by God
3. There is something imperative to notice in these verses
- a) Paul mentions three things that we were captive to - three
 - b) Too often we fall into overemphasis or underemphasis on these areas
 - (1) For example: Some people see demons behind every door
 - (a) There is a spirit for this behavior
 - (b) A spirit for that behavior - and yet the Bible never says that!
 - (c) That is giving too much weight to the spirit world and its influence
 - i) Should we know it is there and real - of course
 - ii) Should we live in fear? NO! Ch. 1 told us we don't have to
 - (2) The flip side is not truly believing the spirit world is real, or can influence us at all
 - (a) Some Christians don't take Satan and the demons seriously enough

Transforming the Walking Dead

- (b) That is a huge danger in western society because we have come to not believe in superstition
 - (c) Again, it is real - not to be feared, but real
 - c) Let me give you a practical dose of reality
 - (1) When the Bible tells us we need to be saved, what is it that we need to be saved from?
 - (2) Our sins! NOT the demons! Not even the devil, although we are told to be on guard
 - (3) Not the world around us
 - (a) It is our sins that separate us from God
 - (b) It is our flesh - our desires that in the end do us in
 - (c) That is what we need to work on
 - (4) So overemphasis on Satan or trying to blame the world around us doesn't fly
 - (a) Yes, we will be saved from these things eventually
 - (b) But it is our sins that are the problem
 - 4. One other thing to notice is the verse says that we were by nature, children of wrath
 - a) Because we were influenced by society, and by Satan, and chose to sin, wrath is what awaits us
 - b) Now the wrath mentioned is not like we often think of it
 - (1) We hear wrath and think some outburst of anger
 - (2) The reality is God's wrath is a building up of His displeasure that we have ignored His Word, and chosen our own path, when He is what our heart's should desire
 - c) If we stopped at verse 3 we would have a very one sided picture of God - and sadly, this is where we lose many people because they don't like the idea of God being wrathful
 - (1) But I have to ask, if there is no wrath to be protected and saved from, what makes God's mercy and grace so appealing?
 - (2) Answer: nothing! It makes God into a fluffy marshmallow that just loves and eradicates the concept of sin
 - C. The fact is that we do not stop at verse three, and we move on to the most beautiful part
- ## II. The most beautiful "but" in the Bible
- A. We just have seen the depressing condition of man, the reality of which most of us never want to really look at, described in the first three verses
 - B. Then we get to what I call the most beautiful "but" in the Bible
 - 1. What you used to be was objects of God's wrath BUT GOD

Transforming the Walking Dead

2. Because of His GREAT love for us - this is the reason all of the great things Paul will go on to describe is taking place - the reason that we WERE objects of wrath
- C. God who is rich in mercy
1. There are several words that are connected that make this section of Scripture so rich
 2. Love, mercy, grace, kindness, gift - it's again, Paul stacking up words to describe such an incredible outpouring from God
 - a) We in no way deserved this expression from God
 - b) Which makes it SO AMAZING and SO SWEET
- D. I want you to notice the parallels that run rampant in this section and the last section of chapter 1
1. By God's power, He raised Jesus from the dead - 1:19-20
 - a) We are "made alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" - 2:5
 2. Christ was raised and seated at God's right hand in heavenly realms above all powers - 1:20-21
 - a) God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms (in Christ) - 2:6
 3. These parallels are simply amazing
 - a) The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, transformed us from the walking dead (in our sins) into the new and living church (in Christ)
 - b) The same power that raised Christ to the heavenly realms, raised us to the heavenly realms as well
 - (1) However only Christ sits at God's right hand
 4. The point is clear that when God raised and exalted Christ, God raised and exalted Christians as well
 - a) We would do well to understand that
 - b) We would do even better to live in that manner
 - c) We now have a new life with Christ
 - (1) With this new life comes privilege, and honor
 - (2) But also responsibility
 5. Keep in mind that all of this is true if you are "in Christ"
 - a) If you are "in your sins" - living in that world, operating in that world, you are NOT a Christian, and these things are NOT true of you
 - (1) That does not mean if you sin these are not true of you

Transforming the Walking Dead

- (2) If you are comfortable with sin and live in it to where we cannot see the Holy Spirit at work within you, you do not know the grace of God
- b) If you are “in Christ” - living in Him, working with Him, growing in relationship with Him, then yes, this is about you
- E. I also want you to note the reason for God showering these riches on us in verse 7
 - 1. It is to demonstrate His great riches and grace for the coming ages
 - a) Think about it: people who were objects of God’s wrath!
 - b) Now they are raised with Christ and exalted with Christ
 - c) They are seen by the Father as His children - like Christ
 - 2. In the beginning of the book the goal of salvation was the glory of God
 - a) Now we add to that the fact we stand as trophies, so to speak, that display to the world God’s grace
 - b) Something we should be mindful of as we engage those that have yet to come to know the grace of God like we have
- III. It is by grace you have been saved - 2:8-10
 - A. Paul already mentioned it once that it was by grace we have been saved (v. 5)
 - B. Now Paul gives us a full explanation of that grace
 - 1. It is imperative to note that it is BY GRACE we are saved
 - a) Faith is merely the avenue - it is NOT ultimately what saves us
 - b) What saves us is God’s grace, that we receive through faith
 - 2. Too many people get this confused as if faith saves us
 - a) Faith is part of the process and you cannot please God without faith (Heb 11:6)
 - b) But it is the grace of God reaching to us, displayed in full in the Person and work of Jesus Christ that saves us
 - C. He then says “this is not from yourselves - it is the gift of God”
 - 1. Many preachers have taken this to mean that the faith is not from yourself
 - a) However, the sentence structure in Greek tells a different story
 - b) The word for “this” does not agree in gender with faith - in fact no word does in the previous part of the sentence
 - c) What this effectively means is that “this” refers to the whole process of salvation
 - (1) Salvation does not come from us, or our efforts
 - (2) It comes from the grace of God extended to us
 - (3) This is the understanding the context demands

Transforming the Walking Dead

2. So what is happening is, over and over Paul is assaulting us with the idea that we did not deserve, earn, or merit our salvation in ANY way
 - a) It was all from God
 - b) God chose us to be in His family - simple as that
- D. Verse nine - “not by works so that no one can boast.”
1. If ever there was a verse in the Bible to level the playing field
 2. If you ever felt like, “I can’t live up to that person - they are so strong in their faith, they are so good.”
 - a) Paul just leveled the field
 - b) It is not by works that we are saved
 - c) No one can boast because it has nothing to do with you
 3. I have often said that there is no trash talk in heaven
 - a) “I sang in the choir for 50 years”
 - b) “I witnessed to 300 people since I came to know Jesus”
 - c) “I gave a cup of cold water in Jesus name - that’s biblical, you know that has to count for something!”
 4. Last time I reminded you of the “Gospel Prayer” that we studied about 2 years ago
 - a) Allow me to remind you of another part of the prayer
 - b) “In Christ, there is nothing I can do to make you love me more...”
 - c) You can’t work to earn God’s love
 - d) You can’t merit your place in heaven because it is not about you
 - (1) No matter how often I say these things, Christians still have a hard time coming to grips with this
 - (2) God did it! All you did was sin - that was your entire role in salvation
 - e) There is no bragging rights in heaven
 - f) All bragging will be about how awesome God is
 - (1) “Praise Jesus that He can save a wretch like me!”
 - (2) “Praise the Lord that He does not count my sins against me like I deserve!”
- E. This final verse is HUGE
1. Before I dig into its implications, let me point out something we often skip over - the verse is PLURAL!
 - a) We often take these things as if they were written straight to us personally, rather than corporately - in fact most of the NT is corporate
 - b) Why this is so important is because the verse is not saying you personally are God’s handiwork (or masterpiece)

Transforming the Walking Dead

- c) It is saying that Christians - the body of Christ - the church is God's handiwork, His masterpiece
- d) That implies that each person that makes up the Body of Christ is His masterpiece as well, but the verse is plural and written to us all
- 2. We, the church, ALL Christians, were created in Christ to do good works
 - a) Make sure we get this order - we did not attain our salvation by doing good works
 - b) We were created for good works
 - (1) Salvation is not from good works, but it is for good works - producing holy living and obedience
 - (2) John Stott puts it this way, "Good works are indispensable to salvation - not as its ground or means...but as its consequence and evidence."
- 3. Now, do not miss what this, not implies, but screams at the top of its lungs
 - a) If you are truly in Christ, if you truly have faith
 - (1) And let's define that - it is not just what you believe, or how hard you believe, or a way to escape judgment
 - (2) Faith as Paul is using it carries the idea of a living relationship, an attachment, a union with Christ
 - b) If you truly are in Christ, if you have genuine faith, you will act on that faith
 - (1) It is like getting married - you change your lifestyle, your decisions, your very life around this new relationship
 - (a) Is it any wonder that later in Ephesians Paul compares the church and Christ to a bride and Groom
 - (2) If your faith is not changing EVERYTHING about how you think, how you act, what activities you engage in or do not engage in (and I don't just mean sinful behavior), how you serve Christ, how you grow in Christ - if this passage does not describe your idea of faith, check yourself
 - (a) This is faith
 - (b) Faith leads to good works that God prepared for us to be involved in
 - (c) Not to do so says that you are either immature in your understanding of faith - and so this sermon should act as a corrective, or it means that you have never really experienced a genuine relationship with Christ
 - c) If we are ever increasing our surrender to Christ, that means ever one of us should be asking ourselves the hard questions

Transforming the Walking Dead

- (1) Do I have the proper understanding of faith: one that invades every part of me and re-defines me like marriage has or will redefine me?
- (2) If I am increasing my surrender to Christ, what might He be calling me to do? What activities, what ways of serving, what ways of doing good works?
 - (a) What could I be doing?
 - i) When you hear of someone in our church needing help, how about you organize a team of people to assist?
 - ii) When you know someone in your neighborhood needs help - same thing.
 - iii) Why doesn't someone start a ministry in the church that I want to be involved in? Good question - why doesn't SOMEONE
 - (b) What is holding me back from doing these things?
 - i) Lack of training?
 - ii) Self-confidence
 - iii) Feeling like someone else can do it (apathy)
 - iv) Not wanting to make room in my schedule?
- (3) Your assignment - I rarely give assignments, but today you have an assignment
 - (a) Take time TODAY to ask yourself the hard questions
 - (b) DO NOT let yourself off the hook - no easy, pat answers
 - (c) Do some serious examination
 - i) Perhaps you will realize that you don't understand what faith really is
 - ii) Or perhaps you have a good understanding of faith, and you are surrender to Christ, but God is calling you to surrender more
 - iii) Whatever the case may be, this is your opportunity to really dig deep and explore where you need to go with God