

Ephesians 2:1-3

Captive

Reading from Ephesians chapter 2, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience —³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Ephesians 2:1–3 ESV) What we were before Christ was captive to the “the prince of the power of the air” and “by nature children of wrath.” How terrible a state we were in, but oh, God had a plan, a wondrous plan, reading out of the Book of Matthew, “an angel of the Lord appeared to ~~him~~ *Joseph* in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for **he will save his people from their sins.**’ ” (Matthew 1:20–22) God’s plan was for His Son Jesus to come into the world to “save his people from their sins!”

The purpose of a sermon series about the Advent Savior is to make clear our great need of a Savior making it apparent to all who hear. We have a need that only a great Savior can fulfill. In verse 1 we need a Savior because we “were dead in *our trespasses and sins.*” We see in verse 2 that without a Savior a person “walks, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air.” Without a Savior the alien prince of this world holds us captive. Lastly, in verse 3 we need a Savior for without a Savior we are “by nature children of wrath.” Prior to Christ we belong to the world and the world for a time belongs to Satan. His

name starts with “S” – so let me use “Ss” to help us remember the plight of an unsaved person for they are:

Sick to the point of spiritual death by their sin.
Sabotaged by Satan
Sentenced to Hell

For these reasons and others we desperately need a Savior. The world certainly won't tell people that because of their sin they need a Savior. Many churches won't tell people either; they preach a watered-down gospel meant to appeal to the world. Only in a remnant church will you hear the unfiltered truth of the Bible. Paul says this has been true from the beginning when God marked out His people, “[Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.’](#)” (Romans 9:27) The remnant will be saved, the few who truly believe. Paul says this will continue to be true in the “Church Age” which is the name for the time from when Jesus started His church and was resurrected until He returns. Paul wrote, “[So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.](#)” (Romans 11:5) By God's grace we were chosen and saved to worship the only true God. We are part of the remnant.

Remnant

Outside of our church and the small number of remnant churches who hold fast to the facts, difficult as they may be, teaching the truths of the Bible, the very Word of God - many churches are changing and watering down the Word of God into something else. Here are three basic facts from the Bible –

- Without a Savior **all** people are spiritually dead and incapable of any spiritual good.
- Without a Savior **all** people are captured, blinded by evil and the supernatural person named Satan.

- Without a Savior **all** people live under the wrath of God and are sentenced to eternal torment in hell.

What is it about these simple facts that mankind works so hard to deny? I am sure there are many reasons but here are two simple ones. First, God's truth is unattractive to unsaved people. To believe God a person has to admit they are broken and need a Savior. People by their fallen nature always want to be in charge of their own destiny. Second, these truths have to be learned from God and not from man. Without a Savior people have no spiritual knowledge or wisdom in which to discern God's truths and His will.

Salvation begins with divine revelation. God must reveal these things to people or they perish. Eternal truth is not found in TV shows for they promote the worldly. Eternal truth will not even be found in man's endeavors to make the world a better place. One learns the truth about who they really are from the Word of God, the Bible. Once God regenerates a person's soul they will be able to see and understand the truths of the Bible. Their eyes are opened and suddenly they begin to see confirmations of God's truth in history, in the present lives of mankind, in scientific discoveries and the foundation of society itself. God opens people's eyes and they are no longer spiritually blind. At that point Satan can no longer disguise what God wants His children to see as they observe this world. If one does not start with God's revelation of who they are, they will be like blind people who develop elaborate theories to prove that there really is no such thing as sight or vision and that color and light are the inventions of self-righteous people's imaginations projecting onto the world's reality their own dissatisfaction with the dark. So too, the spiritually blind come up with elaborate theories to mold God into man's image so God serves man. This is why so many churches have lost their way. As the German philosopher Karl Marx said, "*Die Religion ... ist das Opium des Volkes*" or in English "religion... is the opiate of the *masses*." So not only is this statement

classic Marxism but it is also American materialism folded into American religion. Marx wanted to outlaw religion, but American society of business wants to use religion to project materialism and consumerism onto society. For American this is the real reason behind Santa Claus. The Christmas Season use to be focused on the birth of Christ but over the last 100 years the focus has been moved to Santa Claus – a nice man with love, kindness and presents. It is nice season of the calendar year but it takes many peoples focus off of Christ and makes them feel good, as a drug or opiate temporarily does, even though they are lost, for they temporarily feel better by the drug of materialism. They have joy until the credit card bills come in January. The Christmas season has been framed so people feel good about themselves and see no need for a Savior. What makes people feel bad is if they do not give and receive enough presents. For those who are alone, without a job, for those who cannot afford the opiate of materialism the Christmas season is a time of depression and the suicide rate goes up. This is so ironic when the best present, the eternal present, the free gift of Christmas is Christ the Savior. Christ is the gift that brings peace and joy for eternity.

So, let me review the true reason for Christmas. As the angel said to Joseph, “**She Mary will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.**” (Matthew 1:21) God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, “... to destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8) God the Father, “**raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**” (1 Thessalonians 1:10) “**For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**” (Romans 14:17) The purpose for which God sent His Son is unacceptable to the world, for if the world accepted Christ it would stand convicted. The evidence of God, His Word, His Son and His truth ring so clear through thousands of years of history that Satan cannot outright oppose God’s truth. So, Satan takes the truth and twists it, leaving just enough truth in his lies so it will

appeal to people's inner need for salvation, but instead of receiving salvation through God they look to a nice and magical man, named Santa Claus and all the good will towards men that comes with Christmas. Then people buy their salvation by doing the good deed of giving presents and donating some money to a charity. This makes people feel better at least temporarily and it makes lots of money for those selling all the stuff. The American culture is enslaving people into a never-ending cycle of seeking happiness, through the opiate of having more and more stuff. We become slaves to the world system of materialism.

The Way Out of Slavery

The only way out of this cultural slavery is to listen with our souls to what God is saying to us and about us. We will not find what God has to say in the newspaper, Facebook, Twitter, under a tree, but only in His Word that has been preserved for us in the Bible. God has spoken so that all might hear, but if our soul is dead then it will take the Savior to supernaturally bring it to life. If you do not have Jesus as your Savior, open your mind, your heart and your soul to God and let His Word speak to your hopeless condition that world says is all that there is. Do not be disillusioned but allow God into your heart and if you let the Bible show you your condition without a Savior; Jesus will lift you out of this world, out of this fallen age and make you clean and holy before His Father. Jesus brings truth and lasting joy and peace to one's heart and soul.

I urge you to listen as I read out of Paul's inspired letter to Ephesians, hear the truth that without a Savior the prince of this broken world is holding you captive. Open your heart and you will know without Jesus you are a child of God's wrath. Reading from God's holy and true Word, without Christ [“you are dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you ~~once~~ walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the](#)

sons of disobedience — ³ ... carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” If you do not have Jesus in your heart come to Him this day and celebrate the true Christmas. For those of us who worship Jesus as the Christ I say to you keep Him as the reason for the season by sharing the testimony of what Christ has done in your life with those who do not yet know Christ. Share with people the lasting grace and hope of the only true Savior.

Let’s look at Paul’s warnings here in the first three verses of Ephesians chapter 2 in order to understand belonging to the world as apposed to belonging to God.

Captive of an Alien Prince

Reading verse 2, “in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” There are three things in this verse I would like us to understand. First, there is a being that rules and has authority of the air. Second, this prince works in the hearts and minds of people who have NO Savior. Third, the people without a Savior walk in or live engaged in this evil age; they live in the fallen world and are therefore sons of disobedience.

The prince of the air, what does this mean? After all the entire earth is enveloped in air. Between heaven above and earth below is air and this is where people live. We are surrounded by air and we breathe air to live. We sometimes hear people say, “There is excitement in the air.” What this saying means is that the excitement seems to be affecting everyone. Its impact is wide spread and is being felt by large numbers of people. Paul’s point in verse 2 is the same. The influence and authority of the evil prince is so prevalent that he refers to it as the “power of the air.” People need air to live and to live without a Savior to filter the spiritual air we breathe, we then breathe the air of Satan. The earth is temporarily the dominion of Satan and

under his power. Satan rules as prince but he is not alone, he has authority over other forces. As we read in chapter 6 of Ephesians, only those with a Savior are able to “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” As Christians ¹² “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

(Ephesians 6:11–12) So, it is not just Satan, but he commands rulers, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil. There are armies doing battle in the “heavenly places” and this continues to take place in “this present darkness” – the angels of God and the demons of Satan are in spiritual battle and we are called to put on the armor of God and do battle here on earth. These spiritual beings and this spiritual battle is as close as the air we breathe. This spiritual battle is not just about heaven or hell for Paul says, we do battle **against the rulers ... of this present darkness**. Present darkness refers to the time between Jesus’ resurrection and His return; in other words, this present darkness is the world we live in until the return of Christ. The most vivid image of the spiritual world and battle is found in the book of 2 Kings. The king of Syria was frustrated because the prophet of Israel knew his plans and the armies of Israel were always one step ahead of him. So the king decided to capture the prophet Elisha (**el·ee·shaw**) so he could defeat Israel. The prophet and his servant were staying in the city of Dothan. We take up the story, close your eyes and listen and see with your heart and mind, “**When the servant of the man of God (*Elisha*) rose early in the morning and went out, behold, the Syrian king’s ~~an~~ army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’ ¹⁶He (*Elisha*) said, ‘Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and said, ‘O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.’ So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” *Now my beloved, open your***

eyes and did what you saw in you mind's eye look like the screen? The story ends with ¹⁸“And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, ‘Please strike this people with blindness.’ So he God struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:15–18) God protected Elisha with His army. God is more powerful than all of Satan’s demonic hoards. Let me ask, “What protection does one have today without Christ as their Savior?”

Again, let me ask you, “Who do you think leads the great armies of heaven holding back the utter destruction of every person and the entire world?” There will come a time when God’s wrath is poured out, poured out on this earth, but not against His children, His wrath is against the unsaved people of the world those who belong to the prince of the air. The Apostle John wrote of Christ’s coming, “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems (*diadems are crowns of the highest authority over every nation*), and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.” (Revelation 19:11–16) What amazing imagery of the spiritual realm all around us. We see through the eyes of Elisha as we live today, and of the future John speaks of when Christ returns. Why the God of heaven waits to send Jesus back who is “King of kings and Lord of Lords” – I do not know. But since I do not know, nor can anyone know the time, then we are to be faithful living to bring glory

to Christ and to share His gospel in hopes some will hear and no longer be children of wrath but children of God.

Because of the fall in the garden we know the normal state of affairs of this world and men is evil. It is only by God's grace that Satan does not control it all. God has His remnant church living for His glory. If it were not for God's church how much more evil would there be in the world? God's church is to do battle in this world to push back the darkness.

Further, we know God loves those who are saved for it says, "[He God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,](#) ¹⁴ [in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.](#)" (Colossians 1:13–14) Jesus delivers people from the wrath to come. Jesus brings people out of this world to become children of God and even though we live in this fallen world we can do so with joy, peace and love. So during this Christmas season it is the children of God that experience true joy and peace among men. As we read out of Luke for this third week of Advent the shepherds in the fields received the news of Christ birth with great joy. When the angels announced the birth of the Savior they sang out to the shepherds in the fields, "[Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!](#)" (Luke 2:14) God's peace rests in the hearts of those with whom He is pleased and those are His children brought back to Him by His Son and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As we grow more mature in this life and in the Word of God we grow in our understanding of just how desperate people's need for a Savior is. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is one of my hero's of the faith. I love reading his writings. This faithful servant of God faithfully preached at the same church, Westminster Chapel in London, for 40 years. He was asked towards the end of his ministry at the age of 81 if he had final words for this generation. He replied by quoting scripture, it is

“Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” (1 Thessalonians 1:10) What wrath is coming? The prophet Isaiah tells us, “For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, *this is what Elisha and his servant saw*, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶ For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many. (Isaiah 66:15–16) This is the future wrath poured out on the earth, but for now Christ is Savior, for now there is time to come to Him and be saved. Christ will save you from the sickness of sin, from being captive by Satan, from the death sentence of hell; Jesus will save you from yourself. The time grows nigh, Jesus said, “**the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.** ²⁴ **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.**” (John 4:23–24) This is what Christmas is about – Jesus Christ the Savior who gives people eternal salvation. Jesus said, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**” (John 14:6) This Christmas remember your Savior and make it a goal to share the gospel message with someone who needs a Savior. It is a matter of life and death. It is what God commands Christians to be and do. This season is truly a merry Christmas. Meaning Christ’s Mass or time spend in worship of our great Savior.