

How are we? This weekend, across fourteen services on three campuses, there are going to be stories that are all over the map. We're going to see first graders get in the water and say, "At a chapel service, I saw the Power Team rip a phone book in half, and I came to know the Lord." Okay. And then we're going to see another come in and say, "Hey, just through the words of my small group leader, I started to understand and grasp." And then we're going to see others that are 50 years old, that are 40 years old, that are 30 years old say, "I just didn't believe, and this thing happened and God wooed me this way." And there's going to be different ethnicities in the water this weekend, and there's going to be different socioeconomic statuses represented in the water. We live all over the metroplex. We could go on and on and on about the differences that exist in the men and women who will get in the water and be baptized. Like some of them have no church background. Some of them grew up in church and, despite the fact that they went to every youth camp, every Disciple Now, every Fall retreat, listened to Songs From the Loft over and over again, didn't know Jesus Christ at all until recently. So there's going to be a thousand different variances in story this weekend, but if we boil it down to the base level, they all have some things in common.

The first thing they have in common is they were all born with a broken way of seeing that distorted everything. It is a distortion that really oozes in every direction. It starts with a distorted view of who God is. Like we don't see well who He is, we doubt His goodness, we doubt whether or not we can trust Him and we doubt whether He sees us as lovely or foul. This is the major distortion of how we see when we're born. We just doubt that He is that good, that He is that loving, that He will pursue us, that He will care for us, that He will protect us and that He will be there for us. And that distortion leads into a distortion of every other mode of our lives. The distortion of "I don't know that God is good, I don't know that He loves me, I don't know that He'll provide, I don't know that He'll protect me" leads us into one of two errors. The first way is it leads us into the error of thinking we'll be the one to take care of those things, we'll control, we'll make it happen and we will earn the love of others. And that's a distorted view of self that then will pervert your relationships with everybody else. And if you don't go that way, you crumble under the "I am unworthy, I am wicked, I am dirty, I am unclean and I have failed." And that will crush you, and you will view your relationships with others out of your distorted view of your own self, which began with a distorted view of God and who He is.

So if you're the type of fellow that says, "I'll take care of myself, I'll provide for myself, I'll make it happen," then your relationships with others are marked by you using and abusing them. Because they have to stay under your control so that you can control everything, and you crush them. They have to make you happy, so when you're not happy, it's their fault. You put an impossible weight on them. Or because you feel dirty, because you feel unclean, because you feel wicked, you allow others to abuse you and use you over and over and over again. And this is because you have a distorted view of God, which has led to a distorted view of yourself, which has led to a distorted view of others. And normally when you have all these broken puzzle pieces, you think that if you put these broken pieces with these broken pieces, maybe you can get something whole. The problem is if you take these broken pieces and these broken pieces and try to cram the two broken pieces together, you actually further break the broken pieces. So when broken people try to find redemption in broken people, broken people get more broken. And all of this begins, almost every piece of your sorrow, almost every bit of your pain, almost all of your loneliness and despair can be traced back to a distorted view of who God is, of how He sees you, of what He thinks about you.

And then since you have a distorted view of God that has led to a distorted view of yourself, which has led to a distorted view of others, we can see why the world is just a big mess, can't we? Do I need to remind you that there are first graders in the water that said, "My eyes were opened, and I knew I needed a Savior?" First graders don't have crazy testimony stories. It wasn't like, "I got high on crack, and then I killed this guy, and then I came back in from recess. And my Bible teacher said I needed God and I was like, 'I do need Jesus because I smoked crack and killed that guy.'" They don't have that testimony. . . I hope. We've got some ruthless first graders these days. So that's not their testimony, but what happened? They had a distorted view of God, a distorted view of reality. Before this service, there was this one little girl that said, "I prayed, and here are some differences that I just saw. They're not actions, but they're a state of the heart." A little eight year old just said, "I used to think like this, and now I think like this. I used to be afraid of this, and now I'm not afraid of this anymore. What happened? The heart was changed. What changed about the heart? The heart has eyes to see God as He is. And once your view of God is no longer distorted, then your view of self is no longer distorted. And once your view of self is no longer distorted, you see others more clearly and be able to extend grace and mercy to them. And then once that happens, now we're a kingdom of God place where we're changing the world around us.

And that's what we're going to read about in Ephesians 2. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, . . ." Just for the record, dead men don't see clearly; they don't see anything. They don't see, they don't move, they're dead. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 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—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." All this is is a very simple breakdown of what I just described. We have a perverse view of God, which gives us a perverse view of our own self, which then rolls out in our relationships with others, and sin oozes out destruction in your relationship with God, your relationship with yourself, your relationship with others and in the end, your relationship with the world.

Now, what is God's response to this distortion? Well let's look at it. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." I love this for those who struggle with how God might see you. Because some of you are just ridiculous fakes in here. I mean, I know this is a church and I as a pastor shouldn't talk to you like that because you tithe and come, but here's the deal I'll make with you. I want to stand clean before God, so I'll give you the full council of God, and you'll have to hear. That's the trade we'll make. I get to die and feel clean before the Lord, and you get to hear the full council of God. Some of you walk in here and you feel unclean and wicked because this is a game for you. Church is where you come and hope that you're seen as good an upright, and then outside of here, you lead a different life. But here's what I love about this text. He says that we are God's workmanship. It's the same Greek word for "poetry." We are God's poetry that God is writing on us and writing on the days of our lives. We are His workmanship. This is an easy one to get my mind around because I married an artist.

My wife loves to create. In fact, I came home and she was geeked up because she had just written a song and had put it on her Mac and was like, "You've got to listen to it." And I don't know how your wife is, but I got to listen to it and then I got to answer whether or not I liked it 417 times before we went to bed. In that, here's what happens when my wife wrote the song. Out of the core of her being, she vomited all over those pages. Her hopes, her dreams, her experiences written on a page put to music. For we are God's workmanship.

So if there's any doubt whether or not you're worthy, let me answer that question. You're not worthy. What makes grace so phenomenal isn't your worth. What makes grace this thing that we praise God for and worship Him for is not that you're clean. It's that you're dirty and He loves you in it. I have told the Village Church a billion times since I got here that God does not love some future version of you. It's not some cleaner version of you that He likes. It's not like He just tolerates you right now like a thirteen year old boy. It's not like God goes, "Oh, I cannot wait until he gets through with this stage." It's not some future version of you that He loves. You see, Jesus comes and He is the offering for our sin. So all the failings of your life were paid for. He justifies us before God by being obedient unto death. Justification is a legal term meaning that we are innocent because He reconciles us to God. So if all the damage in our lives and the lives of those around us is tied back to a distorted view of God that led to a distorted view of our ourselves that led to a distorted view of others that ended up distorting the world, if God reconciles us to Himself through Christ, is that not the beginning of healing in the rest of the areas? And just so we're clear, that doesn't mean instantaneous healing. He is the Redeemer or Recoverer. He buys us back from the slavery of distortion. He is the great ransom, which is actually a military term. He ransoms us back. He gives Himself, so that we might be bought back. And over and over again, this is the message of what Jesus Christ does in the cross. Regardless of background, regardless of socioeconomic status, regardless of whether or not you shook your fist at the heavens and said, "I hate You" on some dark moment, regardless of whether or not you were involved in some wicked activities that you can feel the shame on you still, He's come and He's ransomed and He's given His life as an offering that those who would trust and repent by faith alone believe in Him, that we might become children of God. This is what we're celebrating here across all these campuses. This is what every man, woman and child that gets in the water this weekend is going to say. They're going to say some version in that. You heard it in this one, and they'll hear it in the next one and every other one. There's a distortion, the eyes are opened to that distortion, there is a surrender to the cross of Jesus Christ and there's this change in how we see the world around us. And this is what we celebrate.

So if you don't have a background in church, you can get really confused about what our message is and what we believe and what we say. Some of you are like, "Well, I just thought you hated the gays and were against sex." Uh, no and no. "I thought you guys just didn't drink beer and didn't watch rated-R movies." Again, no and no. Although we do want to practice wisdom in all things. If you never quite understood what it was we were celebrating, if you were like me growing up, you're probably confused about exactly Christians were celebrating. Were they celebrating their pretend moral superiority? Were they celebrating that they were once bad and now they're not? Because that's legitimate. I see that on Oprah all the time. "I was bad. I did these bad things. Not anymore!" That's not what we're celebrating. We're celebrating that, while we were at our worst, Christ died for us. And we're celebrating that something happened when we became aware of that. Something happened in our minds and our hearts when we became aware of that that changed how we live day to day. We're not perfect, we're still busted, still fail, still are drawn to the flesh, but God, slowly and surely, is making us more and more like Him and less and less like the distorted viewing person we were. He does that all the while letting us keep a little bit of our individuality. It's the greatest story ever.

Let me pray. "I thank You for the courage of the young men and young women, the older men and older women that will get into the waters and will talk about what You've done and how they couldn't see very well and about how now they can. I thank You that, by no act of our own, You open our eyes. And I pray across the campuses, as we move to a time of worship and communion and the breaking of bread and drinking of wine as remembrance of what You did for us on the cross, that we might be stirred up for all that we are in You. Maybe we've come into a place of worship this weekend a little bit banged up and it's been a tough week. And maybe we just had to wrestle with our flesh real badly this week and there were dark things beckoning us this week, wicked thoughts that were beckoning us this week. Maybe it was anger that was wooing us this week. Maybe we've come in an it's been a week with a lot of hurt. So we come to church not as the answer, but we come to Your cross as the answer. You have not abandoned us, You will keep us and there is nothing

that will be allowed into our lives that You will not also provide the strength for us to walk in. We love You. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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