

**SERMON**  
**EPHESIANS 2:1-10**  
**GENTLE AND LOWLY: BEING RICH IN MERCY**  
**SUNDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2026**  
**FIRST PRES GRAND JUNCTION**

**Opening Prayer**

This week: we are continuing with our series on the Gentle and Lowly Heart of Jesus Christ. We have said it before, and it is worth saying again: As Christians, we spend a lot of time, talking, praying, and thinking about *what Jesus does for us*. This is all well and good, and all of these things are *vital parts* of the Christian life. But it is *just* as important—and maybe even more important—for us to talk, pray, and think about *who Jesus truly is*. To help us with this endeavor, we are journeying through Dane Ortlund’s book *Gentle and Lowly*.

I think we can look at each chapter of this book as Ortlund’s Puritan-inspired plea for us to *slow down* and give our attention to the crucial topic of *who Jesus actually is*. As we have made our way through each chapter of Ortlund’s book, we may have noticed that there is a wee bit of overlap between each chapter, bordering on repetition. Some readers may find this irksome, while others might find it helpful. When I was in seminary, my preaching professor told us, “In sermons, repetition matters.” Let me say that again: “In sermons, repetition matters.”

If there is something worth hearing, it is almost always worth hearing it more than once. As I have mentioned before, I am a big fan of C.S. Lewis. In his wonderful book *Mere Christianity*, Lewis wrote,

## **SLIDE**

**“People often need to be reminded of foundational truths rather than constantly instructed on new ones.”**

When it comes to the hope, joy, and promise of the Gospel, *we cannot be reminded often enough*. Over the last four weeks, we have looked some of the (many) key passages from the First Testament, with the aim of seeing and better appreciating how the person and work of Jesus Christ are *not* a new direction for God, but instead are the continuation of who God reveals Himself to be in the First Testament. As we heard before in the words of my teacher Patrick Miller,

## **SLIDE**

**“There is nothing ‘new’ in the New Testament”**

Last week, Tom told us about the “guttural response” of God’s grace – God’s “yearning bowels” of compassion for us (some phrases are unforgettable). This compassion is on full display in the First Testament, and it very much

continues into the Second Testament, especially in the person and work of Jesus.

Following from that, we have now completed our four-week miniseries about Jesus and the Old/First Testament, and we are back to where the majority of Ortlund's book gives its focus: the Second/New Testament.

If we have had the time to read this week's we will see that today's focus is on a verse from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians—2:4—but more on that in a little bit.

Before we get to the specific verse, let's zoom out for a moment and ask, "what kind of book/letter is Ephesians?" Well, we know it is written by Paul. Some modern scholars try to dispute this because it reads very differently from some of his other letters like Galatians and Romans. I have never been persuaded by this – it seems quite plausible that Paul – who was a gifted thinker and writer – would have written in different ways for different audiences.

I *do* think it is possible that Ephesians was written for a wider audience than *just* the believers in Ephesus. One of the chief pieces of evidence for this is found in the very first verse of the first chapter:

**SLIDE**

***Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in  
Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus***

Doesn't seem controversial, does it? The text literally says, "to the saints who are in Ephesus"

Here it is in the original in the Greek:

**SLIDE**

**Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς  
οὔσιν [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ] καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ**

While I think it would be fun, this won't be a language lesson. Do you see the brackets? Those brackets are around the words we translate as "in Ephesus". The brackets mean that *these words are not in the earliest biblical manuscripts that we possess*. Later manuscripts have them, but earlier ones do not, and in the world of biblical scholarship, the *earlier manuscripts have greater authority, because they are chronologically closer to the events they describe*.

So if these words "in Ephesus" are not original to this letter, then what does this mean?

I think it means that Ephesians was a *circular* – a letter intended for believers in several different church contexts, and not just in Ephesians. If we read through the letter as a whole (this would not take too much time – it’s pretty short), we will notice that in the rest of the letter, there are *no references to anything specific to Ephesus*.

In other words, this letter was not written to a narrow, hyper-specific church problem. It was written to the church. It was written to believers everywhere. It was written to us.

It was written with *all* believers in mind – and thank God it was! Ephesians is for us, and it is special because in the words of Darrell Johnson,

## **SLIDE**

**“Ephesians is the shortest complete depiction of the Gospel.”**

Along with this, Markus Barth—the son of Karl Barth—went even further by claiming that

## **SLIDE**

**“Ephesians is the pinnacle of Pauline theology”**

And within this letter that is both “pinnacle” and the “shortest complete depiction of the Gospel”, Ephesians 2:1-10 is the *beating heart* of the Good News of our gentle and lowly savior. And within this heart, the *pulse* of the heart is Ephesians 2:4, which says,

## SLIDE

### **But God, who is rich in mercy...**

Ah, what a beautiful verse! I think we could sit with this verse all day.

It’s always fun to focus on the good parts, the parts that make us happy, right? For Heather and for me, this is a *constant* experience with Cameron. These days, he is quite keen about watching movies...**sort of**. In our home, his current favorites are the *Herbie* movies. He is especially enthusiastic about the 2005 remake *Herbie: Fully Loaded*, starring Lindsay Lohan. I guess we could do far worse for movies on repeat!

When Cameron watches a movie, he *loves* to watch his favorite parts (repeatedly), but he also tries to refuse to watch his *less* favorite parts, especially the *endings*. It makes for a confusing and distorted movie-watching experience!

On a much more serious note, the same can be true for our spiritual lives when we only focus on the verses and snippets that make us feel *good*.

Now, in connection with what I previously said in a past sermon about the words “for” and “therefore”, when a verse (like verse 4) starts with “but”, we are once again being told that this truth about the richness of God’s mercy is fully connected to what comes before, and therefore we need to know the broader context.

And what comes before? Ephesians 2:1-3. Let’s hear those verses again:

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in 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. All 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.

There is no denying that this is a harsh text. We might be tempted to hurry past it and get to the good news later in the chapter. But we don’t get to edit Scripture. We receive it as it is — even when it makes us squirm.

In verses 1–3, Paul reminds us of our spiritual condition apart from Christ. What word does he use?

“You were...dead.”

Not struggling.

Not confused.

Not mostly okay.

Dead.

That is not a pleasant descriptor. It is not flattering. And it certainly isn't hopeful. Most of us are willing to admit that sin has some power. We might say, "Yes, sin is real. It can hurt us." But deep down we still cling to this: *I may struggle, but I'm still basically a good person.* We prefer to think we are wounded, or in the words of the Black Knight from Monty Python – "it's only a flesh wound!" — not dead.

This attempt to minimize sin reminds me of *The Princess Bride* (one of the best movies ever made). After Wesley is rescued from torture in the Pit of Despair, his friends think he is dead. But Miracle Max—played by the great Billy Crystal—examines him, sees that Wesley is barely alive, and famously says, "There's a big difference between mostly dead and all dead. Mostly dead is slightly alive."

That's how many of us hear the gospel.

We assume that at worst, we are mostly dead, and slightly alive. We want to believe that we still possess some spiritual spark we can contribute to our salvation. But Paul will not allow that interpretation. He does not say "mostly dead."

He says dead. And dead people do not revive themselves. This is Paul's point: we cannot trust in Jesus *and* trust in our own goodness. Salvation is not Christ plus a little bit of us. It is Christ alone. So, what does this "deadness" look like?

Paul says it looks like "following the course of this world." It means we simply go with the flow — not realizing that the flow itself is bent away from God. In Scripture, "the world" does not mean trees and oceans and biology textbooks. It means creation in rebellion against its Creator.

Left to ourselves, we let a world that does not know God tell us how to live. Our identity, our ambitions, our relationships — are shaped by currents we rarely question. And Paul says it goes even deeper. We are not only swept along by culture. We are entangled in a spiritual reality. "Following the ruler of the power of the air..." This is a poetic description of Satan. Paul is reminding us that there are forces opposed to the reign of Christ. There is more—much more—going on than we can see.

And if that sounds abstract, consider this:

Do we really believe that the global machinery of human trafficking is only human?

Do we really believe that the addictive, soul-shrinking power of pornography is merely economics and algorithms?

Do we really think that the recurring pull of authoritarianism and fascism in every generation is simply human political miscalculation?

The Bible tells us there is more beneath the surface. This is not about party platforms or headlines. It is about a deeper rebellion — a spiritual resistance to the reign of God. Left to ourselves, we do not stand outside that battle. We are caught up in it. And the result?

“Children of wrath.”

If the passage ended there, it would be devastating.

Now, with all of that ringing in our ears — with “dead” and “rebellion” and “misaligned” echoing — listen again to verse 4.

“But God, who is rich in mercy...”

Two words change everything: *But God*. If the story were about us, it would end in verse 3. But it isn't about us. It is about God. And Paul does not say, “But you tried harder.” He does not say, “But you figured it out.” He does not say, “But you were mostly dead.” He says, “But God, who is rich in mercy.”

Rich in mercy — not cautious in mercy, not measured in mercy, not running low on mercy. Rich. Abundant. Overflowing. Lavish. Mercy is not something God occasionally dispenses when he happens to be in a generous mood. Mercy is something God possesses in abundance. It flows from who he is.

And notice what Paul says next: “because of the great love with which he loved us.” Not reluctant love. Not irritated love. Not barely-enough love. Great love. And what does that mercy do? “Even when we were dead... made us alive together with Christ.” Not when we improve. Not when we cleaned ourselves up. Not when we became mostly alive. When we were dead. God did not wait for us to become slightly alive. He moved toward us in our grave. That is the heart of our gentle and lowly Savior. That is the pulse of the Gospel.

Now this becomes more than theology. Today, we are commissioning new Stephen Ministers. And what is a Stephen Minister? A Stephen Minister is someone who steps toward people in pain. They do not wait until someone has it together. They do not wait until someone is emotionally stable. They do not wait until someone has figured out their life. They step toward people in grief, in addiction, in loneliness, in confusion. Why? Because that is what God did for us.

Stephen Ministry is not merely a program. It is a small, visible sign of verse 4: “But God, who is rich in mercy.” When someone sits with a widow who can barely get out of bed, that is mercy. When someone listens to a man who has

lost his job and feels ashamed, that is mercy. When someone walks patiently with a person who is drowning in anxiety, that is mercy. It is not flashy. It is not loud. It is gentle. It is lowly. It is rich. And it flows from the heart of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, this is who our God is. He does not recoil from the dead; he moves toward them. He does not shame the broken; he makes them alive. He is rich in mercy. If you are tired, if you are ashamed, if you feel like you are spiritually barely hanging on, hear this clearly: God's mercy toward you is not almost gone. He is rich in mercy. And because he is rich in mercy, he makes dead people live. That is our hope. That is our Gospel. That is our gentle and lowly Savior. **Amen, let us pray.**