

# The Timeline of the Christian

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[ 0 : 00 ] At verses 1 down to verse 10, for a very short time, and it will be a short time for us together, I want us to focus carefully on these verses, and focus carefully what Paul is saying to the church in these verses, and focus carefully on what we, even here this evening, can learn from God's Word, as Paul wrote to the church all those years ago, and all those miles away.

The last time we were clearing out the loft back home down in Graver, we found one of our old digital cameras, our first, I guess, digital camera, in that camera was still the wee memory card. So we took it out, and we plugged it in to the side of my laptop, and then we saw photos from perhaps 8 or 9 years ago, probably actually longer back than that now, and these photos, they showed our house, they showed the village, they showed the island, but 9 years had changed a lot. New houses being built in the village, our own house had changed so much in that time. We saw faces who were no longer with us. We saw wee babies who are now almost teenagers, some of them.

It was crazy looking back and seeing how much had changed in just a short time. In this section of the letter, Paul is taking the Ephesian Christians back through time for a second.

[ 1 : 35 ] He is reminding them of what they once were. He is bringing them back to what they once were before they knew Jesus, before they had heard about Jesus. He then carries them through the course of their lives and reminds them that you once were this, then something happened, and now look where you are, and also look where you are heading.

He brings them a timeline of their lives. The church in Ephesus, I'm sure you've heard from Mr. Campbell's teaching of a church in Ephesus, was a mixed church, mostly Gentiles as far as we can understand.

Many of these Gentiles were non-Jews, coming from pagan backgrounds, coming from other cultures, other religions. But here they were together now, worshipping alongside Jews who had become Christians, who had become believers, and they're worshipping together.

Unlike other letters, Paul doesn't really bring up any major issues. He gently leads them through what they are to believe.

He reminds them, these are Christians he's writing to. The church he's writing to, they knew what to believe, but he reminds them again and again what they should be believing. There's not one Christian, if we're honest here this evening, no matter how long we've been on our walk, we can admit that we always need reminding of the wonderful truth of the gospel, the wonderful reality of the gospel, and the true beauty of who Jesus is and what he has done for his people.

[ 3 : 12 ] So I want us very briefly, as we go through these verses, to take them as they come. First of all, roughly verses 1 down to verse 3, looking at what they once were or what we once were, and then looking at verse 4 and verse 5, and seeing what took place to transform that, what change took place, and then finishing off looking at where they now are and where they're heading.

So what they once were, what we once were, where we now are, and where we're heading. And what took place to transform the Christians in Ephesus, 2,000 odd years ago, what took place to transform the Christians here in Barvis, 2,000 years later.

First of all, let's, if you have your Bibles open as we go through this, it'll be easier for us all, because we're going through it verse by verse, and seeing what God's Word is saying to us. As we do so. So first of all, looking at verses 1, roughly down to verse 3, where Paul reminds them what they once were, he opens up this section of his letter, he pulls no punches, he gets straight to the point, he instantly reminds them what?

He reminds them they were dead. And you were dead. Dead in their trespasses, dead in your sins. There's no room here for uncertainty with Paul.

He reminds them quite simply what they once were. He makes clear that there's no sitting on the fence. You're either alive in Jesus, or you're dead.

[ 4 : 48 ] Either have his new life in you, or no life at all. My question is, why? Why was that true? Why were they dead? Well, he tells us that. Because we were born sons and daughters of Adam.

We were born with sin as our default position, as we see in these verses. By nature, children of wrath at the end of verse 3. By nature, we're born that way.

We're born with sin in the genes with respect. We're born wanting and seeking to and doing quite well our rebellion against God. We're born with the sin of Adam and Eve already in our veins.

The effect of that takes place too, don't we? Now, there's some, some who'd argue perhaps the reality of what's called original sin, that some would say, well, just because Adam's sin doesn't mean that that sin is carried across, down to me.

Let's say that is true. Let's say there's no such thing as original sin. There is, and we'll get to that.

But say there's not. Say we're wrong about that. Say 2,000 years of church history is wrong all of a sudden, and there's no such thing as original sin.

[ 6 : 00 ] It makes no difference. Because the first sin you make, the first sin you commit, the first sin you do, you're already condemned, as much condemned as you are anyway. But scripture here makes clear.

In these verses it's clear. By nature, children of wrath. We're born this way. We're born fighting against God. We're born as sons and daughters of disobedience.

We're born hating our Creator. We're born despising Him. None of I'm saying it's surprising to any of us, I'm sure.

We all know this to be true. All the Christians here know fine and well that before we were saved, how do we feel about God? Either terrified of Him, or wanted nothing to do with Him, or just chose to ignore the reality of Him.

But either way, we were not His friends. And He was not going to be our God. And we see that again in verse 2 and verse 3. Part of the genes, part of who we are, sons and daughters, deserving of righteous judgment, sons and daughters of disobedience.

[ 7 : 09 ] verses 1 down to verse 3, paint a stark picture, a real picture of what we are before we're Christians.

Very often the image is used of salvation. It's like someone drowning and salvation is then being thrown a rope or thrown a life raft of some sorts.

But that's not the image Paul's painting here. Paul's not saying, before we're saved, we were almost going down, almost sinking, we were stuck in a bog, almost gone under. Paul says, no, we were gone, dead, at the bottom of the sea, at the bottom of the bog.

Jesus doesn't just come and give us a wee hand out of the bog. Jesus doesn't just come and give us a wee help to our lives. He came and gave us new life. So much greater than that.

Jesus gives us new life. Not just a helping hand. He revives us, transforms us. Takes what is dead and people who are dead and gives them everlasting everlasting true life.

[ 8 : 18 ] It tells us here, we what? In verse 2, we followed the course of this world. We were taken in, were we not, by the promises of the world. The world offered us and promised us so much.

If you do this, you'll be happy. If you do this thing or eat this thing or believe this thing or live your life this way, then life will be so much easier for you. We believed all the false and broken promises that's offered to us every day.

We believed all these promises and they did what for us? They did nothing but make us worse and worse and worse. Striving for the next shiny thing that came across our paths.

Looking for something, anything, to give our lives meaning. Searching for something more, something bigger, something better. And why?

Why are we like that way? Because as long as we're living in verses 1 to 3, as long as we're not alive to Jesus, as long as we carry on living our lives not caring for Jesus, not having him as our saviour, that we're not living lives we're built and made to live.

[ 9 : 28 ] Romans 1 tells us that we're all born knowing about God but we suppress that truth, we hide that truth, we do anything and everything we can to ignore that reality.

It's also true that we're built for a reason. We're built to praise God. We're built to worship God, built to serve God.

And the world offers us the reality, the supposed reality, that we live lives that we try and find our own meaning.

Try hard and find your own meaning. Try your best. Live a good life. Nothing wrong with that. Of course there's not. Nothing wrong with having a nice family and trying hard to look after your family. Nothing wrong with trying to do the best you can of your life. But if that's all you live for, then surely you find yourself asking, what's the point? If you listen to the world, we find out that we are here as creatures stuck on this planet, a planet hurtling through space for no reason whatsoever, stuck to the side of this planet till we die.

[10:48] One day our planet will burn up, one day the sun will explode, and that's it done. Who cares? A cold, uncaring universe. If we compare that to the gospel reality, the gospel reality that tells us we are made with and for a purpose by a God who is not uncaring, but a God who is truly caring, and who cares for us as his people.

What comes to mind is not as the first question and answer of our catechism. Chief end of man. What is our purpose here on earth? Why did God make us man's chief end of what?

To glorify God, to enjoy him forever. We can't do the second bit without doing the first bit. We are built to worship God, we are made to love and to serve God, and as we do that, we also enjoy him. There is no real joy, no real life outside of Jesus. Verses 1 to verse 3 make that so painfully clear to us.

See, we all think that we are so free, and amongst my own age group, my own friends, even, the argument you hear is that Christians, you are all just, you are just slaves.

[12:08] You are slaves to the church. You are slaves to a 2,000 year old book. You are slaves to what old men tell you to believe. You are slaves to what you think is true to your fake God in the sky is telling you, and so on and so on.

The reality is, we are all slaves really. We all have our master, and this verse makes that clear to us. We all have our master.

And who is a master in this verse? Who is a master of those who are dead in sin? Who is a master of those who do not believe and do not care for Jesus? He tells us in verse 2.

Following the course of the world, following who? The prince of the power of the air. Paul's using language here of power, language of fierce power, but not holy power, not good power.

Who is this prince? It is the devil. The powers of evil, powers of darkness. We all have our masters.

[13:18] We either serve the one who made us and who knows us, or we serve who they serve here in verse 2. Is it enjoyable to preach that? Of course not. But is it necessary?

Of course it is. We don't just say this, we say it because Scripture tells us it's true. And because in our lives we know it's true. But unless you're serving Jesus, unless you are his, unless you love him, unless you can call him your saviour, you are still serving a prince of power of the air we find in verse 2.

He is still your master. You're still following the course of the world. And again, my friends, if this is striking an accord with you at all just now, then don't let the chance go.

Again, I don't know where many people here this evening where you stand before God. I don't. But if any of this is striking an accord with you, if you know this to be true about you, if you know that you're in verses 1 to verse 3, if you know as of yet you have no care for Jesus, if you know the reality of what it is to find no meaning or purpose in the world, if you know what it is to know that there's something else for you, then don't let that chance pass you by because it's not coming from you.

We see that in these verses. We're born in disobedience. We're born always against God, going against him all the time. If anything in your mind and your heart is pushing you towards God, it's from him.

[14:50] Don't waste the chance you have this evening. Talk to a friend. Talk to family. Talk to the elders. Don't ignore this calling in your life.

Don't ignore that thought in your mind. So Paul starts off this chapter with painting a bleak, a grim image of where these Christians once were.

verses 1 to 3. It's not a pleasant thing to read, but it's an image that's clear. Before they knew Jesus, they had no hope and they were dead.

The question is, what took place in the lives of the Christians in Ephesus and what took place in the lives of the Christians here this evening to take them from these verses, to lift them up from the

bottom of the grave, as it were, to give them life?

We find our answer in verse 4, for me personally, one of the most beautiful verses in all of Scripture. Verse 4, 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.

[16:13] By grace you have been saved. And so on. But God, these two simple words, one simple phrase, contains such wonderful power, such wonderful truth for us this evening.

Such beauty for the Christians here. All we've just seen in verses 1 to verse 3, all of this hatred and darkness, all this rebellion against God, hatred towards God, following the prince of a powerful ear, following his orders, following his leading, all this disobedience, all this misery, all this sadness going round and round and round in verses 1 to verse 3, and then it stops dead in verse 4.

And these two words come out, but God. By all means, the rest of this phrase, the rest of verse 4, could well read something along the lines of, but God, because he is holy, because he is perfect, decided that mankind should live no longer and remove him face of the earth, or, but God, because he is perfect, and because mankind is not perfect, decided that we should have no saviour.

But God, because he is holy, because he is just, because he is good, decided that the evil of mankind, the evil of sin, had no place in existence anymore, and wiped mankind of the face of the earth.

what does the rest of verse 4 actually say? But God, being rich in mercy, because of a 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 so on.

[18:13] In the middle of our rebellion, in the middle of our fighting against us, in the middle of our hatred, in the middle of our disobedience, in the middle of our darkness, what do we see? God steps in, and he shows us mercy.

He shows us love. The love of God shown to those who do not deserve it. And we could spend the next five, six hours, days, weeks, months, and years, talking about the love of God for his people. For a second, let's just skim the surface of this verse here, where it tells us about the love of God at the end of verse four. What do we see it saying?

Because of the great love with which he loved us. So this is talking about the Ephesians, talking about the Christians here this evening, that before we were Christians, God knew us, and what? He had a love for us. Now, when did God first love any of us here this evening? When does God first love any of his people? Again, that's a question, of course, that could give us hours of amazing, beautiful scripture readings and content, but we have an answer for that question.

[19:41] the answer is actually found in Ephesians chapter 1. If a Christian here this evening is to ask, when did God first love me? When did God first show his love towards me?

We have in Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 3 where it tells us, blessed be the God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will.

When did God first show his love to us? Was it the day we decided to come to church more often?

Was it the day we decided to actually start reading our Bibles properly?

Was it the day we got down our knees and prayed out to him? Before we were born, before this building existed, before our universe existed, Ephesians 1 tells us, before time itself existed, God had had, God had in his love predestined his people for adoption as sons.

[21:18] Before time and reality itself, God has set his love on his people. This is not just some dry theology for us, this is mind bending and knee dropping stuff for us.

It should be. When we hear this, we should drop to our knees and praise. What does it mean? It means that right now, if you're here tonight as a Christian, what does it mean for you? It means that God knew you and he set his love on you when?

Before you cared about him at all. Before you knew him at all. Why is it important? It means that we can have assurance.

You've had a bad day, a bad week, perhaps a bad year. Perhaps you've not followed your saviour well this year. Perhaps you've had a rough time of it.

Perhaps you struggled with various sins and various problems and you're at the end of this year thinking, what a mess I've made of things. What a mess I've made of my walk.

[ 22 : 24 ] What a mess I've made of my witness. And the question might be creeping into your mind, does God really still love me? Does he really still care for me?

Am I still really his? And our mind should go to this verse in Ephesians chapter 2 as we're reminded in verse 4 of a great love shown to us when whilst we're still sinners he loved us.

Whilst we're still sinners he showed us that love. When did the love begin? It began before time itself. If we turn back a page to Ephesians 1. this is important for us as Christians to understand this.

And our text even reminds us of that. That our salvation is what? Our salvation is all through him. By grace you've been saved.

By his work, by his effort, by grace we've been saved. we know this but how often do we have to remind ourselves of that? John Owen, a man as we know is not known for his brevity, not known for his short works.

[ 23 : 35 ] Thankfully he had a few short quotes and one of John Owen's most famous short quotes is this. That all we contribute to our salvation is the sin that makes it necessary.

All that we contribute to our salvation is the sin that makes it necessary. God does the work and God did the work. Christ came and did the work.

Christ now is reigning as king of the right hand of the father, still doing his work. God gives us new life. God makes us new creatures as we have that wonderful assurance.

He saves us from eternal death. He saves us from verses 1 down to verse 3. All for his glory. grace. For by grace you have been saved through faith.

This is not your own doing. The gift of God. Verse 8. It's the power of God and that power alone that changes us from death to life.

[ 24 : 45 ] That's what separates the Christians here this evening from those who are not yet Christians. Christians. It's not our efforts. It's not our attendance in this building.

It's not our good work. It's not our services. It's not our knowledge of the Bible. It's not our attempted understanding of theology. It's not how good we may sound when we speak about things.

It's not how well we've trained. It's not perhaps for anyone standing up here. Not for how good or bad our seminary days went. Not for how well our exams are.

Not for how good or bad our Greek Hebrew verbs are. What separates us from non-Christians? What separates tonight the Christians and non-Christians?

It's one thing and one thing alone that we know our life is in Christ. But we know him as our saviour. And again and again we see this that the Christians are what?

[ 25 : 42 ] We are in Christ. With Christ. See that in the end of verse 5. Who are dead in our trespasses made alive together what? Not by Christ.

Not because of Christ. Made together alive with Christ. For right now the Christians here exist with our saviour in us alongside us leading us ahead of us.

We know we have a saviour and we know he is Jesus. And we know that regardless of our poor excuses of service at times that he is faithful and because he is faithful we know that our hope is sure.

What changed in verses 1 to verse 3? Well verse 4 changed it all didn't it? What changed the Christians here this evening to take them from verses 1 down to verse 3?

Well verse 4 changed every Christian here this evening. every Christian here in various ways and different ways, different times and different stages of our lives we experienced in our own time what it means to know the love of God for us.

[ 27 : 02 ] And the Christians here at one point that we recognised that we needed transformation that we needed help we needed saving and we realised crucially there's nothing we can do to help ourselves so what do we do?

We cried out for that salvation we cried out for help we cried out to God we cried out to our saviour and he heard us he transformed us and we know ourselves we are still so liable to sin still so liable to mess everything up again and again but the truth is the Christians here this evening that slowly but surely but definitely we are being made more and more like our saviour that this verse 4 transforms everything for us that phrase but God changes everything gives us life it gives us current hope it gives us future hope it means that right now we can in a sense relax because we know our

saviour lives and we know that he is all powerful and we know he reigns as king and we know that he is ours but also we know that we are his because why because he showed his love to us before the universe itself began to exist because he knew us cared for us and the corridors of eternity of his was such a thing

Christ set his love on his people he knew he was coming to save you he didn't just come and hope that some would believe as some people do believe that no Jesus knew he knew that you'd care for him he knew that one day he would come and transform your life as we heard last week in Isaiah 55 who is that transformation open to it's open to all who will believe and all who will believe and all who will come this evening it's open to all who are willing to say that Jesus is God that he is a saviour and that his work is sufficient to save me it's open to all who will say I believe it I trust in it I want it to be mine I want this Jesus as my saviour as my king I want this God as my God the truth is he is anyway he is God right now whether you like it or not believe it or not care about it or not Jesus is king right now whether you like it or not or believe it or not the reality is he is king right now when you're either his friend and his servant or you're still in verses 1 to verse 3 and you are still his enemy quite simply the state of the Christians we move down to the end of this section the state of the Christians is quite simply one who has been taken from darkness and placed into light and that's been done by God we were enemies of God combating against him and then through his saving power he intervened in our lives he transformed us he changed us we now like I said we can now call him our God call him our father we can now call Jesus our saviour also call him our elder brother we go from hating God despising him to now loving him and seeking and desiring and wanting to actually serve him this is no small change in the life of any Christian no small change in life of anyone what does this verse tell us about our new life as Christians we see that in verse 6 where we see the transformation in verses 4 and verse 5 and in verse 6 what does it tell us it tells us that we've been raised up with him because

Jesus rose from the dead we have the sure hope and confidence that one day we will also rise and what there's more than that that itself is amazing but there's more than that and what and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus it's a strange phrase is it not we're very much aware that we're here right now in this building the Ephesians were in their small gathering when this letter of Paul was read out two of them what does verse 7 actually mean what does it mean for them and what does it mean for us in the end of verse 6 it's hope future hope but current hope but just as Christ was raised up we've also been raised up with him just as he's now seated in the heavenly places we also have that same hope does our mind not go to

[ 32 : 20 ] Jesus talking to the disciples and encouraging them as it came close to his death as encouragement what did he tell them he told them that he's going to prepare a place for them if he goes he will return and take them one day home to himself and that's the sense we have in this verse that we are here we're serving here we're living here we're working here we live our lives in this village and in this island but at the same time we also have a place secured for us in the heavenly places we have that place there for us just as sure as Christ was again our place is also sure and if all that's not enough we then see in verse 7 in the coming ages and the sense of that word in the ongoing sense in the ages and ages and ages and ages to come he might show or he will literally he will show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ

Jesus he saves us now he loves us now but there's more to come as eternity goes on and on we will only see and know and experience more and more of a wonder what it is to be a son or daughter of God what that means for us we can't say for sure but we can say it's something incredible verse 7 points towards a future for the Christians that is beautiful that is wonderful that is with our saviour and that's through him we will experience more and more and more as the ages take on forever and ever but just in case we get too heavenly minded Paul then reminds the Ephesians you're still here in verse 10 you're still here for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand we should walk in them you're here for a reason

God has saved you and placed you here for his purposes for his reason as long as you're here as long as you're are serving him and able to serve him that is what we're to do we all serve in different ways we all know that we can't all present we can't all do this we can't all do that we can all serve and we all should serve somehow and we see that the serving has been prepared for us prepared for us beforehand long long before we were on the scene God knew how he was going to use us we have this future hope yes but also right now as Christians as people we are to keep working on

keep going on keep doing what we're called to do keep serving the ways we serve and these good works are what they're good works that we now do as Christians these good works we do won't impress God anymore won't make him love us anymore care for us anymore what we do do is we demonstrate our love for him so we keep living each day seeking to serve him this version encourages that yes we're heading for verse 7 one day but right now

God is still making use of us as his people as his servants as his workmanship as his carefully crafted items see images that we have elsewhere of God building his church and using us as living stones to build that church up some of us we know ourselves are quite rough stones and most of us if we're honest need quite a lot of work being done to us a lot of rough edges to be chiseled off before we're even more useful but he's still using us each one of us here this evening who can call Christ our Lord and our saviour we are part of this living church we are part of his workmanship we have purpose we have use and God is making use of us all the time we are reminded that the day is coming where we will rest and rest with our saviour and eternity will go on and on as we grow and as we are shown more and more in verse seven of his immeasurable riches that's all fine and well for

Christians but we have to go back to verses one to verse three and ask if you're still here this evening and you're still in these verses if you still find yourself in verses one to verse three if Jesus still means nothing to you if Jesus is not your saviour yet then how many times have you heard the gospel message how many times have you heard the same thing told to you again and again and still you're just not listening I'm not coming to harangue I'm not coming to tell you what to think I'm coming to tell you and share with you God's word it's our prayer I'm sure as a congregation that you would come to understand that verse four is just as much for you as the Christians around you all the work has been done for you there's nothing you can do but come to him there's nothing you can do to impress God nothing you can do to earn your way into his good books nothing you can do to earn his salvation because Jesus has done all for you already if only you would come and believe come and believe and lay your life at the feet of the one who gave it to you in the first place he knows you better than you know yourself and his purposes for you are the only true purposes you were made for come and know this

[ 38 : 28 ] Jesus come and know this saviour come and serve the christians here come and live a life alongside the christians here knowing their saviour serving their saviour looking forward to the day the final day where they will come and meet their saviour face to face don't waste this chance don't waste your time the christians here let's rejoice rejoice rejoice as we read these verses go home again this evening and take your time on that chapter a beautiful chapter as we're reminded again and again as the great joy we should have as christians the great joy that our god intervened that he saw us as we were but he didn't leave us as we were he intervened and he transformed our lives for his glory by his son let's bear our heads now word of prayer our lord god we thank you again for great wonder we have of your word that in your living word we see the greatest truths in your living word alone can we be assured of what we are hearing is true and right in your living word alone we hear that jesus has come jesus has done all the work for all who believe in him lord help that to be a reality for us this evening for everyone here to know jesus to hold him as our savior lord you forgive me for anything i said that was incorrect we give you praise the power is always in your living word and never in the preacher never in the man who stands here we give you praise for that wonderful reality where we falter and fail that your word is always right and always good and always true we do pray for this congregation again lord bless them and bless us just now as we come to sing our final item of praise help us to do so with hearts and minds full of joy understanding what we are singing as god we sing in christ's precious name amen we can sing from scottish psalter and psalm 103 scottish psalter psalm 103 that's on page 369 of the blue books scottish psalter psalm 103 we can sing psalm 103 we can sing psalm 1 down to psalm 11 and 12 so that's psalm 1 down to verse 4 and then psalm 11 to psalm 12 a wonderful psalm i could sing a whole psalm but i better not it's a psalm that is a wonderful reminder for christians here of the great work god has done in our lives and a psalm that tells of what god will do if only you would come to him psalm 103 verse 1 oh thou my soul bless god the lord and all that in me is be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless bless oh my soul the lord thy god and not forgetful be of all gracious benefits he have bestowed on psalm 103 verses 1 to 4 and then verses 11 to 12 to god's praise oh thou my soul blessed god the lord and all that in me is be still love his holy name to magnify and bless bless oh my soul the lord thy god and not

