

# Why Me?

Series: Why? | April 26, 2026 | Preacher: Ben Lahring

Good morning, everyone!

For the past few weeks, I've had a song stuck on loop in my head. It's the song "Who You Say I Am" by Hillsong. But it isn't just the melody that has taken up residence in my head lately. It's one powerful lyric. The opening line of that song asks a profound question that stops me in my tracks every time I sing it:

*"Who am I that the highest King would welcome me?"*

I want you to let that question sit in the room for a moment. Who am I that the highest King would welcome me? It's a question born out of pure awe. It's the kind of question you ask when you suddenly realize you've been invited into a room you don't belong in. It's evocative, perhaps, of that feeling you might have showing up to a formal event wearing an old t-shirt and shorts when everyone else is in full tuxedos and evening attire.

That lyric is the perfect anchor for our conversation today. It sets up where we're heading as we step into week three of our teaching series on grace. We started this series by asking, "Why Jesus?" to understand why He is the only one capable of offering us grace. Last week, we asked, "Why them?" We explored how that same grace is offered to the most broken, historically vile people on earth. We saw that God doesn't reserve His love for those who have their lives put together.

This Sunday, things are getting personal. We're turning the mirror around and asking the question, "Why me?" We're going to wrestle with an uncomfortable human question: Do I really need saving?

## The Heart of the Matter: Do I Need Saving?

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It's easy to look at the world and see that other people need saving. We watch the evening news and see greed, violence, and corruption. When we look outward, the need for a savior is obvious. When it comes to ourselves, however, we view our actions through a softer lens. This brings us to an understandable question. Was it necessary for Jesus to die for good people? If you're doing your best to live a respectable life, why does your situation require the death of Jesus?

To understand this, we need to look at how Jesus interacted with people during His earthly ministry. Jesus engaged with a wide spectrum of humanity. On one end, He spent time with people society labeled as depraved outcasts. Those individuals knew they needed a rescue. They recognized their spiritual poverty and accepted His help.

On the other end of the spectrum, Jesus addressed the religious elite. These were the "righteous" people of their day. They followed the rules, memorized scripture, and held social respect in their communities. But Jesus showed the religious elite that their internal pride, their judgment of others, and their self-reliance created a massive barrier between them and God.

Both the religious rule-keepers and the social outcasts were separated from the source of life. Jesus leveled the playing field. He showed that sin is a condition of the heart and a state of separation from God. Whether you rebel by running into a messy life, or you rebel by trying to be so good that you rely on yourself, the result is identical. You make yourself independent of God.

But what about the rest of us? What about the people who float somewhere in the middle of that spectrum? We aren't notorious criminals, but we aren't religious monks either. Do we really need saving?

## The Diagnosis: Dead Through Trespasses

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To answer that, we're going to look at a letter written by the Apostle Paul to early Christians in the ancient city of Ephesus. Let's look at Ephesians 2:1-3 in the NRSVue:

*"You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, 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, doing the will of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else."*

— Ephesians 2:1-3

What a way to start a chapter. "You were dead." It's a funny statement. It sounds harsh at first, until you realize he's talking in past tense. He doesn't say "you are dead." Paul is writing to believers who have already experienced the grace of God. He's asking them to look in the rearview mirror.

Paul knows that the magnitude of your gratitude is directly tied to the clarity of your memory. If you forget what you were saved from, you'll lose your awe of the One who saved you. You have to remember your helplessness in order to celebrate your current freedom. For lifelong believers, remembering our helplessness means recognizing we are saved from the exhausting trap of self-righteousness. Lifelong Christians need to remember that without grace, we would be hopelessly drowning in the pride and hypocrisy that non-Christians so easily identify in religious people.

## **The Three-Fold Prison**

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To understand the gravity of the Gospel, we need to grapple with the three-fold prison Paul describes in this chapter. After saying we were dead, he outlines the forces that kept us in that graveyard: the world, the devil, and the self.

### **Part One: The World**

First, Paul says we walked "following the course of this world." This is the external, cultural pressure we face every day. We aren't dealing with a metaphor for bad luck. This is a cultural system that makes independence from God seem entirely natural. It's an invisible draft that constantly blows us away from the

divine. Without even realizing it, we drift with the current of a world-system that fundamentally rejects its Creator.

## **Part Two: The Devil**

Second, Paul identifies the architect of that world-system: the devil. He says we were "following the ruler of the power of the air." In the Gospel of John, Jesus repeatedly refers to Satan as the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31, 14:30). In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul refers to him as the "god of this world" who blinds the minds of unbelievers.

The Greek word Paul uses for "ruler" in Ephesians 2 is *archon*, which is the exact same word Jesus uses in the Gospels to describe the enemy's temporary authority over the fallen world system. In the first-century Mediterranean world, the "air" right above the earth was considered the headquarters for fallen angels and demons. When Paul referred to the devil as the "ruler of the power of the air," he was using the standard cosmological vocabulary of his day to help the Ephesians understand that Satan commands the immediate, unseen spiritual forces influencing human culture, and that Jesus Christ has ultimately triumphed over that exact realm.

Paul explicitly names the devil later, in Ephesians 6:11-12. He introduces the unseen enemy in chapter two as the "ruler of the air" and gives him his formal title in chapter six when preparing the church for spiritual warfare. The devil is not an equal opposite to God, but he is a formidable occupier much older, stronger, and far more intelligent than any human.

## **Part Three: The Self**

This external pressure leads to our internal problem: the self. Paul calls this the "passions of our flesh." The word "flesh" refers to the fallen human nature. It's the inward curving of the human soul. When we live by the will of the flesh, we're responding to what we want, when we want it. We place ourselves on the throne of our own lives.

Paul then says we were "by nature children of wrath." The exact phrase "children of wrath" is unique to Ephesians 2:3. In ancient Hebrew idiom, calling someone a "child of" something meant their life was completely characterized by or destined for that very thing. Biblical wrath is never a temper tantrum; it is

a slow, settled, and holy opposition to evil. Think of it like a good surgeon who must actively oppose and eradicate a deadly cancer to save the patient. Being a "child of wrath" means our default, unrescued human nature put us on a direct collision course with that surgical justice.

## The Equalizing Reality of the Gospel

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Critically, Paul doesn't aim this diagnosis only at the wicked people in society. He uses the inclusive phrase, "all of us." Paul is looking at the entire spectrum of humanity—from the most depraved to the most righteous. His diagnosis for the entire spectrum is exactly the same: We were all dead.

It's a little morbid, but you can think about it like drowning in the ocean. The notoriously depraved person might be drowning one hundred feet below the surface. The religious, self-righteous person might be floating face down just one inch below the surface. But here is the reality. They are all drowning. Not a single one of them can breathe the air of heaven on their own. The person one inch below the surface is just as dead as the person at the bottom of the sea. We can't appreciate the joy of the resurrection until we're willing to admit we need the resurrection.

## Unworthy but Never Worthless

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Now, we have to be careful with how we handle this truth. Throughout history, religious teaching has taken this idea of being "dead in sin" and weaponized it. Some church environments lean heavily on guilt, making people feel like garbage. We need to embrace a crucial truth today: understand the profound difference between being unworthy and being worthless. Unworthy does not mean worthless.

Every single person on that spectrum is simultaneously unworthy of salvation while nevertheless being of immense, breathtaking worth to God. Being unworthy means a gift is unearned. We are unworthy of salvation because it's beyond our ability to earn. Yet, you possess immeasurable worth to the God of the universe. When Paul says we were dead in our trespasses, he's describing

our spiritual state of separation. Meanwhile, God maintains His view of your inherent value as His creation.

If you want to know how God views you, look at Psalm 139:13-14:

*"For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well."*

— Psalm 139:13-14

This isn't just how God views the righteous and redeemed. Non-Christians are equally unworthy but of immense worth. God knit us together with intentionality. We are His personal handiwork. We need a rescue because we're priceless treasures hijacked and buried by sin. God doesn't rescue garbage. God rescues His kids.

## The Great Plot Twist: "But God"

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This brings us to the greatest plot twist in history. Paul moves from the graveyard to the promise of resurrection. He follows the heavy reality of our spiritual death with two of the most beautiful words in the Bible. Look at Ephesians 2:4-5:

*"But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ; by grace you have been saved"*

— Ephesians 2:4-5

**But God.** We were dead in our trespasses, incapable of saving ourselves. But God stepped into the graveyard. He didn't shout instructions from heaven telling us to clean ourselves up first. He came down into the dirt to bring us back to life. Why would the highest King welcome me? The answer is grace. God saves you

because He loves you. Your salvation rests on the magnitude of God's grace, not your resume.

When we realize our salvation relies on a free gift, we lose every reason to look down on anyone else. Pride can't survive in an atmosphere of true grace. We recognize every person sitting beside us is a fellow recipient of God's unearned favor. We're a family of rescued people.

## Saved by Grace Through Faith

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So, how do we become followers of Jesus? How do we take hold of this rescue? Paul explains in Ephesians 2:8-10:

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them."*

— Ephesians 2:8-10

We're saved by grace through faith. Grace is God's strong hand reaching into the water to pull us out. Faith is our hand reaching up to grab His. Faith is trusting Jesus did what He said He did. It's dropping the hustle of trying to prove your worth to God. It's dropping the burden of perfectionism and accepting the gift He's holding out to you.

When you receive a birthday gift, you don't pull out your wallet to pay the person who gave it to you. That would be an insult to the giver. A gift is meant to be received with open hands. Becoming a Christian isn't a cold transaction where you take your present and walk away. The gift Jesus offers isn't just a clean slate; the gift is Himself. Becoming a Christian isn't just accepting a pardon; it's accepting a Person. It's stepping out of isolation and into a living, breathing relationship with your Creator.

# A Relationship That Changes Everything

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Because salvation is a relationship, it changes us. We aren't just saved from something; we're saved for someone. Our good actions don't cause our salvation; they flow naturally out of it as a joyful response to being welcomed into His family. We love because He first loved us. We forgive because we have been forgiven.

We started today by asking a very specific question: Why me? Do I really need saving if I try to be a good person? Paul's answer in Ephesians 2 is a resounding yes. Every single one of us was in the exact same boat. Whether you were drowning a hundred feet deep in visible rebellion or floating just one inch below the surface relying on your own goodness, you couldn't breathe the air of heaven on your own. You desperately needed a rescue. But the most beautiful truth of the Gospel is that God didn't just look down at a sinking world in a broad, generic sense. He looked right at you.

If you're wondering why the highest King would ever welcome someone like you, the answer is simple: you are a treasure He refused to leave behind. He desires a relationship with you so much that He was willing to pay for it Himself. We see the weight of that price today in these communion elements. Jesus broke His body and shed His blood to tear down the walls of our isolation. He paid the ultimate price to offer us this ultimate gift of grace.

When we come to this table today, we don't come because we earned a seat. None of us have a resume impressive enough to demand a place at the Lord's table. We come because we're invited guests of the King. We come as people who are entirely unworthy of the meal, yet viewed by the Host as possessing immense worth.

Let's pray.