

“Hurts So Good”

Ephesians 2:8-10

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:8-10)

What thoughts were running through your mind as you watched that drama?

What words were said that stood out to you?

Could you identify with the character being chiseled?

There's a website called www.beforeafters.com. The web address says it all: a photo is taken of a person like say Barry Bonds early in his career and then another picture is taken of Barry Bonds later in his career *after* he had taken steroids.

They show a picture of Michael Jackson as a boy and then Michael Jackson as an adult *after* numerous facial surgeries, the pale skin disease and the fire that burned his hair.

They show pictures of home improvement projects – before and after.

A picture of a bright red Ferrari before it hit a light pole and after it hit a light pole.

A yard before raking leaves and after raking leaves.

Northern Japan before the quake and after the quake.

These kinds of pictures grab our attention; they make us shake our heads in disbelief or stand back and say “wow.” Why are they so arresting to us? Because transformation is a fascinating, inspiring and troubling thing. Deep down inside, we all want to experience transformation, but at the same time, transformation is quite frightening as well.

Ephesians is a letter written by Paul while he was in prison for preaching about Jesus. It was written to a group of churches in and around the large city of Ephesus which was located in what is now known as modern Turkey.

Ephesus was home to one of the great ancient wonders of the world, the temple of Diana, the fertility goddess, but plenty of other gods were worshipped as well. So, it's safe to say that Christians would have been in the minority, and with all the weird looks they received and the persecution as well, I think it's safe to say that many of them were wondering if following the way of Jesus was really worth it. This is probably why Paul spent a significant amount of time reminding his readers of the reasons they follow Christ by reminding them of their condition before they knew Jesus.

At the beginning of chapter 2 Paul writes, “you were dead through trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world...”

Paul reminds them that all of us once lived according to the desires of our bodies, doing whatever we wanted to. In essence, Paul is taking a picture and showing it to his readers and saying, “Look! Remember what you looked like before?” Remember that you are saved!

In 1962, Karl Barth, the great German theologian, was asked when he was saved and he said this, “It happened one afternoon in A.D. 34 when Jesus died on the cross.” Barth's point is this, we don't “get saved” we are saved. Jesus died for us and accomplished salvation that day, we are saved. The problem is that we live as though we are dead in our sins, our bad habits, our dishonesty, our fears and hang-ups.

As the drama said quite clearly, God has made us good. God has saved us and this didn't happen by our own doing. We can't take credit for this. God has saved us and made us. God has made us to be a masterpiece. We only need to be that masterpiece. We only need to be what God made us to be.

The image that was displayed on the screen during the drama was the picture of one of the world's great masterpieces: Michelangelo's David. But this magnificent, 6 ton sculpture didn't start out looking this way.

Back in the 1463, a Florentine sculptor by the name of Agostino di Duccio was commissioned to carve one of twelve Old Testament sculptures for the cathedral of Santa Maria Del Fiore. A block of marble was provided from a quarry in Tuscany, and Agostino got to work. But, he didn't get very far.

He started to shape the legs, feet and torso along with a little drapery and then gouged a hole between the legs. And then, for reasons unknown, he stopped.

Ten years later another sculptor by the name of Rossellino attempted to finish the work but he stopped as well. And so the block of marble sat there in the cathedral workshop yard for 25 years exposed to the elements. People referred to the monstrous piece of marble as "The Giant."

And then in 1501, Michelangelo, who was only 26 at the time, convinced officials that he should be the one to finish the project, and so for more than 2 years he hacked away at that block until, in his words, he was able to set the angel free and reveal his masterpiece – "David" as the world had never seen him before.

Michelangelo believed this about every piece of marble: he believed there was a statue in each hunk of granite or slab of marble. He believed that carving simply revealed what was already there.

Michelangelo's belief reflects the belief of the God we worship here today. God has made us good. So, let us be good. Let us use these hands and feet that we have been given to lift food to the hungry and cups of water for the thirsty. Let us use our mouths to bless and encourage others. Let us be the "new creations" God has made us to be: new creations who do good works.

God has saved us. So let us be joyful. Let us behave as though we have been freed from death and sin and freed for the work of God in the world today. Let us strip off the things that hold us down and join the struggle for freeing others from injustice and oppression. Let us be the liberated people God has saved us to be: new creations who are so flippin' happy at the fact that we have been freed!

But while we have been saved and while we have been made to be good, The Great Sculptor, The Great Creator, God, is never done working. God is always chipping away, removing the things that keep us from being fully realized. This is what it means to be a Christian it means we are never fully done. We are never complete. We are masterpieces yes, but God is always chipping away. And this chipping hurts, yes, it certainly does, but it hurts so good.

My favorite book in the Chronicles of Narnia series by C.S. Lewis is the one that was just released in the theaters – "The Voyage of The Dawn Treader." It tells the story of Lucy and Edmond, who were in the first two books, and their mean and nasty cousin Eustace. The three are magically transported to the land of Narnia where they travel on a ship called The Dawn Treader and experience all sorts of adventures together.

At one point in the book, Eustace finds a gold bracelet which he slips onto his arm and greedily keeps for himself. Eustace falls asleep and finds the next morning that the bracelet has turned him into a dragon and the crew of The Dawn Treader, not knowing the dragon is him, flee from him. Eustace is lonely, hungry and hurting from the bracelet that was constricting his now bulging dragon arm.

But then one night he is visited by The Great Lion, Aslan, who is the Christ figure throughout The Chronicles of Narnia. Aslan leads him to a cool pool of water and tells Eustace the dragon to get in, but Eustace says that he can't. So, Aslan tells him to undress. At first Eustace believes he is supposed to remove his dragon skin and so he scratches away at the first layer and but he realizes that he's still a dragon. He tries a second and third time, stepping out of two layers of skin only to find the same results: he was still a dragon.

It's at this point that Aslan says to Eustace, "you must let me undress you." Eustace the dragon then lays down on his back in the grass and recalled that Aslan, dug so deep that he thought he had gouged his heart with his claws. He began pulling off skin and Eustace would later recall how bad it hurt and yet how good it felt at the same time (like an old scab being removed).

This continued until the thick dark, knobby-looking dragon skin lay on the grass beside Eustace who was once again – a boy. And then it says that Aslan caught Eustace and tossed him into the water. This hurt as well, but soon, Eustace was splashing and swimming in the cool water. After a while, it says, Eustace came out of the pool and Aslan dressed him.

That, my friends, is the life of a Christian as it is presented in Ephesians. We are created, but due to our own sins, we become monsters with fractured relationships with others and God. We try hard to save ourselves, scratching away at the vices and habits that burden us, but we must submit to the Great Creator, The Great Sculptor, The Great Lion who tears and chips away so that we can be the masterpiece he has made us to be. Does it hurt? Absolutely. I won't lie to you. But Oh how it hurts so good.

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS
For Sunday, April 3, 2011's Sermon
Foundational Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-10
www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:8-10

Featured Scripture Reflection: "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." Ephesians 2:10 (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:10) (NLT)

Opening Icebreaker: What are some examples of transformation that you have observed (Example: A home remodeling, quitting an addiction, weight loss, disasters etc.)

Scripture Questions

What is the scripture saying?

- Read **Ephesians 2:8-10**. (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:8-10) What thoughts come to mind when you read that passage? What words or phrases stand out to you? What questions do you have about the text? Are any words or phrases confusing to you?
- Read **Ephesians 2:1-7**. (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:1-7) What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this passage? How does this preceding passage enrich your understanding of Ephesians 2:8-10? What questions do you have about the text? Are any words or phrases confusing to you?
- Read **Philippians 2:12-13**. (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+2:12-13) Compare what Paul is saying in this passage to the passage we read earlier. What questions do you have? What similarities do you see between the passages?
- Do any other passages or stories in Scripture come to mind when you read these passages?

How is God speaking through Scripture?

- What is the "Good News" in these passages of Scripture?
- How does this passage challenge us?
- Is there anything you have heard during the discussion that requires some more thought?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do these passages make me feel?

God's word

- What is God's invitation to you?
- How is God challenging you?
- What will I take away from this time that will guide me?

A prayer

God, I surrender to the work you are doing in my life. I look forward to seeing the plans you have for my life. Give me the strength to endure your transforming power.