

## Ephesians 2:4 “But God”

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Proposition: we don't have the answers to life's messes “But God” who is rich in mercy and full of love has a habit of breaking into those situations. “But God.”

This morning, we return to Ephesians 2 and we focus on two words in verse 4. Two of my favourite words in scripture: “But God”. These two words appear so many times in the Bible and they sit in my heart every time I hear of an impossible situation, where someone's life is in a mess or facing huge obstacles. I may not know the answer “But God”. I just know that I know, that our God is in the habit of coming into difficult situations, dark and messed up situations and doing the miraculous.

Now it's always been like that from the very beginning.

### **Genesis 1:1-2 (NIV)**

***1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty,***

### **Isaiah 45:18 (NIV)**

***<sup>18</sup> For this is what the LORD says—  
he who created the heavens,  
he is God;  
he who fashioned and made the earth,  
he founded it;  
he did not create it to be empty,  
but formed it to be inhabited—***

The Hebrew phrase Tahu va bohu is used in both passages, meaning formless and empty. In Gen 1:1 It says that the earth was created formless and empty and in Isaiah 45:18 it says that the earth was not created formless and empty.

Now, if you ever think you have found a contradiction in the Bible, you haven't. It's simply that you need to do some word studies and understand what is being said in context.

Many Bible scholars have looked at this and suggest a sequence of events that fit with scripture. Now to abbreviate what would be a long teaching, it would seem to me that the world was created with form and not empty as Isaiah says and I suggest existed for an unknown period of time. However when the head worship leader in heaven, Lucifer was cast down to earth with 1/3 of the angels (which we now call demons) something cataclysmic happened on earth, maybe something like an ice-age. Maybe that is when the axis of the earth tilted, something dramatic happened and the earth got messed up.

Then we come back to verse two of Genesis 1 and we see what happened next.

***<sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.***

***3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.***

There was a mess, but God's Spirit was hovering over the mess and God said “let there be light” and there was light.

God breaks into the mess and changes everything. That is what God has been doing from the very beginning.

Now we come back to our text today. Ephesians 2: a chapter that focuses on Gods work. God's work for us, vs4-7; God's work in us, vs8-9; God's work through us, vs10 and God's work among us, vs11-22.

This chapter begins by reminding us how messed up someone is without a relationship with Jesus. In fact, how messed up we all were until we knew the Lord.

***2 In the past you were dead because you sinned and fought against God. 2 You followed the ways of this world and obeyed the devil. He rules the world, and his spirit has power over everyone who doesn't obey God. 3 Once we were also ruled by the selfish desires of our bodies and minds. We had made God angry, and we were going to be punished like everyone else.***

***4-5 But God was merciful! We were dead because of our sins, but God loved us so much that he made us alive with Christ, and God's wonderful kindness is what saves you.***

Let me paraphrase these verses for you.

Without Jesus, you were spiritually dead; you did what felt right to you, blown around by the fads and the trends and the culture of this world. The thing is, Satan is the God of this age and was behind all those trends and selfish ambitions. You did what made you happy, following the desires of the stomach and lusts of the flesh, the more you fed those lusts the more you needed to feed them. Because God will one day wipe sin out, if we have not been cleansed through the work of the cross, one day we will be punished, wiped out with them. We were spiritually dead, never satisfied and doomed to judgement, to hell. For all have sinned and fall far short of God's standard. For the wages of sin is death.

***John 3:36 (CEV)***

***36 Everyone who has faith in the Son has eternal life. But no one who rejects him will ever share in that life, and God will be angry with them forever.***

You and I, people who didn't know Jesus, were messed up, driven, unfulfilled, empty, and doomed.

"But God", "But God as merciful."

You and I were dead, driven, unfulfilled, doomed But God came in Jesus to take our sin and to set us free.

Jesus didn't come to make bad people good.

He didn't come to make good people better.

He came to make dead people alive.

You were once wiped out by sin, because of Satan, messed up, in the dark. But God entered in and there was light and there was form and there was purpose.

Sometimes I find myself in situations as a pastor where people are sharing a mess, something terrible they are going through. And often I don't feel like I have all the answers. Some yes. Some direction from the Bible or from the voice of God but not all. And we look at the darkness, the mess together and they ask me what shall we do? And there is so often a deep confidence, a deep certainty, not that I know the answer to all their questions but that I know Him, and I know what He is like. And while my mouth might say, "Friend, I am not sure of all the answers in this situation," the Holy Spirit within me rises up and I can't help thinking "But God". My God is in the habit of coming into messes like this and doing something dramatic.

I am sure you recall well the story of how Abraham and his very hot wife Sarah were travelling through Abimalek's kingdom in Genesis 20 and how Abraham faithlessly says to his gorgeous wife, "If King Abimalek's men see you they will want to give you to the king and kill me so if they come tell them you are my sister and, yeah you will be taken and added to the Harem but at least I will live." And sure enough Sarah is spotted and the men question her and she obeys Abraham and says that Abe is her brother, she is taken and likely to be defiled and abused.

**Genesis 20:3 (CEV)**

**<sup>3</sup> But God came to Abimelech in a dream and said, "You have taken a married woman, and for this you will die!"**

Man, talk about a marriage crisis. This marriage was over, "But God."

One of the biggest dilemmas most of us face in life is how to set things up for our children and our grandchildren so that when we die, they will be taken care of. And so life insurance has become a very lucrative industry in our generation.

In Gen 48 we see father Jacob is dying, he is doing what all parents do as they approach the end of life. He is trying to set his children up to succeed when he is gone, but he doesn't offer them life insurance; he offers them life assurance.

He is dying and he turns to his son Joseph. Notice what he says:

**Genesis 48:21 (CEV)**

**<sup>21</sup> After that, Jacob said, "Joseph, you can see that I won't live much longer. But God will be with you and will lead you back to the land he promised our family long ago.**

You and I can set up insurance policies and make sure our kids are rich when we die, and we all will. You cannot control their careers, or their health or their marriages, but you can give them this assurance:

"Christina, Daniel, Benjamin, my three grandchildren, I don't know what will happen or what you should do about that situation or this career choice, "But God" who has been with me and has been so good to me, will be with you also."

In Acts 7 the first martyr Stephen was being questioned by the High Priest and in Stephen's response he retells some of Israel's' faith history and how Joseph was so badly treated by 10 of his brothers and treated unjustly then used by God to save the whole Jewish race and he says this in verse 9:

**<sup>9</sup> These men were our ancestors.**

***Joseph was also one of our famous ancestors. His brothers were jealous of him and sold him as a slave to be taken to Egypt. But God was with him.***

Man, when there is dysfunctionality in families and between siblings, when life has dealt you an unkind, hard to understand blow, "But God" was with Joseph and God will be with you also. You will recall well what Joseph said to his terrified brothers:

***Genesis 50:20 You tried to harm me, but God made it turn out for the best, so that he could save all these people, as he is now doing.***

In Judges 15 there was a man named Samson. He had just killed 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass; an incredible victory. He sings a song about how great he is and there in the desert becomes incredibly thirsty, in fact so thirsty he thinks that he might die of dehydration. And so he calls out to God for help:

**Judges 15:19 (CEV)**

**<sup>19</sup> Samson was tired and weary, but God sent water gushing from a rock.<sup>[a]</sup> Samson drank some and felt strong again.**

**Samson named the place Caller Spring,<sup>[b]</sup> because he had called out to God for help. The spring is still there at Jawbone.**

What do you do when you think you are going to die, when you are dry and thirsty physically or spiritually. You call out. "But I am a sinner, I struggle with stuff." you say. So did Samson. Call out to Him and let Him transform the mess.

In first Samuel 23 David is being chased down by Saul. Saul, the incumbent king, was threatened by David. He knew that David had been anointed to replace him and he had been chasing David, trying to kill him for years.

**1 Samuel 23:14 (CEV)**

**<sup>14</sup> David stayed in hideouts in the hill country of Ziph Desert. Saul kept searching, but God never let Saul catch him.**

Friend, it might seem to you like there is something evil, some temptation, some Saul chasing you down. It's so big and so threatening and you are wondering how you will be kept safe from it.

**1 Corinthians 10:13 (CEV)**

**<sup>13</sup> You are tempted in the same way that everyone else is tempted. But God can be trusted not to let you be tempted too much, and he will show you how to escape from your temptations.**

God will always show you a way out at the start of the temptation. Always, although you may not choose to notice it.

I heard the story of a man who was really struggling with his weight. He must have been an American because his issue was jelly donuts. He makes this promise to God, a vow, Lord I am eating these things every day and it's really bad for my health, so I repent and I will stop buying them.

One week later, he is driving into work and he thinks, you know, it would be a nice gesture if I buy my workmates a tray of jelly donuts for morning team.

Being a Christian he prayed. Lord I know I am living on the edge on this one but if you provide me with a car park right in front of the bakery, I will take that as a sign that you want me to get the donuts for the guys. And sure enough God provides a car park right in front of the bakery, after his 10<sup>th</sup> circuit of the block.

But God will always provide an escape. You may not choose to take it but it will be there.

One final illustration. 60 years ago three topics were taboo in NZ culture. You were not to talk about sex, religion or politics. And people used to keep those things out of their conversations deliberately. Too divisive. Today everyone talks about them, and the media is full of every kind of sex imaginable. Religion is all good as long as you don't say what you believe is the only way, politics is all on especially if you are criticising national leaders. But there is one topic in our society which is still taboo, and that is death. People fear death. People botox and pill-take and seek surgery to stop them thinking about the inevitable. We are all going to die. My mirror confirms to me as my hairs grow in crazy places, as glasses become necessary and energy diminishes, as photos reveal so many wrinkles, that I am destined to die one day should the rapture not take place soon. But unlike the world, death is not a scary thing. We are not trying to earn our salvation like all other world religions. We are confident in what Jesus has done for us. King David during a low point in his life confidently said this

**Psalm 49:15**

***But God will rescue me  
from the power of death.***

Friends, brothers and sisters. Do we know the answer to every problem? No.

Not even close. But God. We know Him, we know what He is like. This is what God does, he breaks into the mess, where there is no shape and form and things have become empty and meaningless and He changes everything.

He's been like that from the very beginning.

When husbands and wives are stressing about the future.

When parents are freaked out about what their children are doing.

When being chased down by a temptation or some real threat.

When people are faced with physical death.

When people look to you and me and ask us to give them all the answers.

Maybe we don't know the solution to their situation, but we have a very real and powerful message to give them.

"But God, "But God", "But God."

But God who is rich in mercy and full of love will break into your situation if you let him. That is what He is like. That is what He does.

The mess may be real, but the message is more powerful. "But God"