

Ephesians

The Greatness of the Blessing

4-26-09

Eph 1:1-14

This is one of my favorite Books of the Bible

You see Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a short course

On the theology of the church

It was written from Rome during his first imprisonment around 62 AD

Like Romans - Ephesians deals with the most fundamental doctrines

But it has a greater emphasis of the sovereignty of God

Like 1 & 2 Corinthians this Book deals with the church

But Ephesians highlights the church's spiritual dynamics

And gives guidelines for our new relationships

In which the reality of our new humanity might be seen

And like 1 Peter and James Ephesians speaks of spiritual warfare

John Mackay calls Ephesians – the greatest – maturest – and for our time the most relevant of Paul's letters

Armitage Robinson calls it – the crown of St. Paul's writings

Ruth Paxson called it the Grand Canyon of Scripture

The poet Samuel Coleridge termed Ephesians

The divinest composition of man, because it embraces first, those doctrines that are peculiar to Christianity

The commentary writer William Barclay called it - the Queen of the Epistles

It presents the basic doctrines of the faith clearly and practically

You could make an argument that Ephesus was Paul's favorite church

He founded the church and spent two years teaching it

As he left the church to return to Jerusalem

He gathered the elders around him gave them a few final words

And then they gathered in a big circle and hugged him and wept and prayed

I think it is interesting that this letter

Is strictly theology and application and has no correction in it
That would suggest that the church at Ephesus was living right
Compare this to the Corinthian letters and you will see what I mean
Paul loved these people –

He was thinking of them – he was concerned for their welfare

So he wrote them a Christian Handbook

It begins with pure theology and then switches to practical application

There are two maybe three natural divisions in this Book

Watchman Nee wrote a commentary on Ephesians and titled it

Sit, Walk, Stand

Sit is the theme of chapter 1 to through chapter 3 and is pure theology

The word is taken from **chapter 2 verse 6 – He raised us up and seated us with Him in the heavenly places**

Walk is the practical application of the theology and comes from chapter 4 verse 1

I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called

Stand the final section is about spiritual warfare

And comes from chapter 6, verse 11 - **Put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil**

I would recommend that over the next few weeks

Read through the Book – and do it more than once

As you study it if you allow it to

Ephesians will lift you up into the very presence of God

As it teaches trains and encourages you to live for Christ

I recommend that you rewrite chapter 1, verse 1 this way

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to the saints who are at - Strongsville, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus

Then as you go through the Book personalize its contents

If you do, your understanding of the work of God

In you and in the church will be strengthened

As you let the Holy Spirit guide you through the Book

Ephesians will prompt you to seek God's glory as the chief end in life

And not merely your own personal well-being or happiness

READ 1,2

Ephesians is profound but not because it is mysterious

It is profound because of the clear way it presents basic Christian truths

Ephesians presents the basic doctrines of Christianity

Comprehensively, clearly and practically

In it we are told who we are

How we came to be as we are

What we shall be

And how we should live in the light of that understanding

John Stott writes - The whole letter is a magnificent combination of Christian doctrine and Christian duty, Christian faith and Christian life, what God has done through Christ, and what we must be, and do, in consequence.

There are some things I want to point out in the salutation

First - Paul is an apostle because God chose Him

He wasn't just walking down the street one day and decided to be one

Apostle means "sent one" It is God ordained and a calling not a choice

Paul hasn't even started his letter

And he is already stressing the God's sovereignty in his own life

We see the sovereignty of God in the choosing of His representatives

And we will shortly see His sovereignty in the election of His saints

The second thing I want to point out is Paul's greeting

The Greeks began their letters with the word rejoice – chiare

Paul replaced it with charis - grace

And then included the standard Jewish greeting – peace

So the salutation is intended for both Jewish and Greek Christians

And it is intentional – we are one in Christ – no one is second class

Grace is the power of God for salvation and for right living

This Book is about grace and its effect on our lives

Remember grace is about the power of God

And you have Peace when you experience the power of God in you life

And just so you won't miss it Paul lets you know

That this grace and peace come from the Father and from the Lord Jesus

READ 1:3-14

The Letter begins with a hymn of praise

Every week Chris and I discuss the service before we pray about it

Every element of the service is important

The music – the reading – the prayers – the message – giving

Even the announcements

I value each of these and I believe God does also

All of it is worship or at least should be

But over time I have come to the conclusion

That perhaps the most important part of the service is our praise time

Why – because it is only during the singing

That we openly voice our praise to God

The sermon is important – you know I am going to say that

But the purpose of right theology is to lead us to doxology

Understanding God should always lead to a deeper love of God

As we discover more about God and His character

What He has done for us

What He is doing right now in our lives and what He will do

Our love for Him should grow

And a deepening love of God will always lead to praise

Almost all of Paul's letters divide into teaching and application

Faith and living it - doctrine is followed by duty

This letter is no exception

When I first became a manager and had to write reports

I quickly became known as “run-on sentence” Ken

My boss would review what I had to say – approve of it

And then tell me to rewrite it and add a few periods

It is as though once I got going on a topic
I couldn't put a period in until I had finished the topic
I was writing entire paragraphs made up of one sentence
Well let me tell you I had nothing on Paul
Verses 3-14 are actually one long sentence
Paul begins with the praise to the Father for every spiritual blessing
And then just keeps on going – reminds me of me
Adding phrase upon phrase – doctrine upon doctrine
All of them interconnected
The easiest way to break this sentence down is by Person
3-6 are about the Father – 7-10 are about Jesus and 11-14 the Holy Spirit
Now listen carefully

**Paul is saying that the blessings listed as coming from the Father
Became yours when you received Christ as Lord and Savior**

You don't have to ask God for them
Do you go to God and beg for salvation – why not – you already have it
It is important to note that you already have every spiritual blessing

Every spiritual blessing is already yours
You don't have to ask God for something He has already given you
You have – past tense – received every one of them already
These are not earthly blessings – good health prosperity – great kids
They are heavenly blessings

God does give material blessings to you as well
Jesus promised His disciples that He would provide everything they needed
In Phil 4 Paul says of those who give to God

My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches

As you give to God it keeps on coming back to you

But material riches are relatively unimportant

When measured against spiritual riches

They are nice to be sure

Don't want to say no to any of them - but they are temporary

While spiritual blessings are eternal

Now Paul lists these blessings that are yours in this first sentence

We will take a closer look at these in future weeks

But let's just survey what blessings are already ours

The first blessing Paul mentions is that of election

Election means that before you chose God He chose you

And it is because God chose you that you chose Him

Verse 4 – just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world

Once in a while someone will ask - what if Jesus hadn't died on the cross

Well in God's economy there are no what ifs – no buts – no maybes

There are no surprises to God

You can be certain - The cross was a done deal before man was ever created

God knew men would sin – Jesus knew He would redeem them

God knows the future as well as He knows the past

Jesus went to the cross for you

Election teaches us that salvation comes from the Lord

Paul makes it clear in this passage

Those whom He foreknew He chose in vs 4

He predestined in vs 5 He gave in vs 6; He forgave in vs 7

He lavished grace in vs 7-8; He made known His will in vs 9

He included in vs 13 and He marked with the Holy Spirit

Everything you have or ever will have is from God

Salvation is God's work from beginning to end

The second great blessing Paul mentions is adoption

You have been adopted by God as a son or a daughter

In love He predestined us to adoption as His sons through Jesus

Adoption means you are now in the family of God – you are His child

One of the fears adopted kids have is that they will lose their new home

They have an abiding sense of unworthiness

Nobody has ever really loved them before

And they aren't sure they can trust the love of their new parents

Often it is the same with those adopted into God's family

There are lots of believing Christians who are afraid they won't make it

But God does not change His mind

He won't love you today and dislike you tomorrow

He won't include you now but exclude you down the road

Adoption into God's family is forever

And it is on the basis of adoption that you are called

Heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ

Because you have been adopted

You can call the creator of the universe – Abba Father – Daddy

Because of adoption you have unlimited access to the throne of God

Call on the Father any time day or night

He is never too busy for you – you do not have to await a summons

Nor take a number

Most of the successful busiest executives I knew had a standing order

If I am in a meeting or even with a client - If my kid calls put them through

That is the way it is with God – He is never too busy for you

The next great blessing is redemption

Redemption means that you have been purchased

Delivered from the slavery of sin and Satan

Transferred out of the kingdom of darkness

And into the kingdom of God's beloved Son

The price of your freedom was the blood of Christ

In ancient times a person could become a slave in one of three ways

He could be born a slave

He could be captured and made a slave

Or he could become a slave because of a debt he couldn't pay

Interestingly the Bible speaks of people being slaves to sin

In all three of these ways

We were born in sin – passed down from generation to generation

We have been conquered by sin – and it owns us

We have a sin debt we cannot pay

Redeemed means Jesus delivered you from the power of sin

By His death on the cross

He paid a debt he didn't owe because we owed a debt we couldn't pay

Now listen there is no other acceptable payment for our sins

It is either through the blood of Christ or it doesn't happen

Then you have had your sins forgiven

Paul links redemption and forgiveness of sins together

But though they are closely linked they are not the same

Redemption means freed from the power of sin

So that it no longer rules over us

Forgiveness means that God wiped the slate clean and declared you righteous

Jeremiah wrote – **I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more**

The apostle John reminds us – **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness**

Then God has revealed to you His great purpose in history

God's purpose is to bring all things in heaven and on earth under the authority of Christ

Have you ever wondered what God is doing throughout history

He has a purpose and He is working His plan

The world we live in is broken and getting worse all the time

There are countries who are bent on the destruction of Israel - and us

Nationally and internationally things seem out of control

But behind the scenes of history is almighty God

Bringing this world to a climactic end

So that His great purpose for His Son and His children will be fulfilled

It certainly is not happening now

But one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father

Those are knees in heaven and on earth

That means every created being - every created being will bow before Jesus

Then God has sealed you with His Spirit

Seals authenticate documents and declare that the words they contain are valid

The importance of the person whose seal it was validated the importance of the document

The greater the rank of the writer the greater the importance of the document

You have been sealed by the King

When you became a Christian

The Holy Spirit was given you as an authentication that you truly belong to God

And all of the promises God has made you will come to pass

There is a wonderful old hymn that goes

Loved with everlasting love; led by grace that love to know; Spirit leading from above;
Thou has taught me it is so. Oh, this full and perfect peace; oh this transport all divine;
with a joy that cannot cease, I am His and he is mine

The Spirit within you continually confirms – you are His and He is yours

Finally God has blessed you with an inheritance

With adoption comes inheritance

There was a C&W song with the tag line – I'm gonna live forever

Well let me tell you - You are gonna live forever

In a mansion with a new nature and a God given purpose to life

Glory awaits you

Now the Holy Spirit is more than a seal on a document

He is more than the guarantor of God's promises

The Holy Spirit is not only the guarantor of your inheritance

He is a portion of your inheritance

Paul confirms this when He says the Holy Spirit is a deposit

The Holy Spirit is a down payment

Until the day you receive the full inheritance

Now you have all this in Christ alone

Verse three tells us that all spiritual blessings

Are given by God to those in Christ and no one else

The term “In Christ” or “In Him” or similar phrases

Occur 164 times in Paul’s writings

It is because of our identification with the Son

That the Father gives us these great Spiritual blessings

Nothing of God’s that is ours is ours apart from Jesus Christ

These blessings come only with faith in Christ

But in Jesus you have everything you need for life and godliness and eternity

Martin Lloyd Jones said – If you leave out the “in Christ”, you will never have any blessings at all. Every blessing we enjoy as Christian people comes to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot be a Christian without being “in Christ”. Christ is the beginning as well as the end. He is the Alpha as well as the Omega. There are no special blessings for Christians apart from Him.

After telling you all that you have because of Jesus

In the next chapter Paul writes

Separate from Christ you are excluded from citizenship in Israel and are foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Ask Paul if all roads lead to God

And he would tell you that the only way to God is through Christ Jesus

And through Christ alone

What do you have when you are “In Christ”

You have every spiritual blessing

You may suffer in this life

You may lack some of the things others have

But in the final analysis it will be all right

You have something that this world can only dream about

You have every spiritual blessing there is

They come from the Father - You have them through Jesus Christ

And they are guaranteed by the Holy Spirit

John Calvin summed it up this way – Whatever happens to us, let us always assure

ourselves that we have good cause to praise our God. and that even if we are poor and miserable in this world (by the way which we are not) the happiness of heaven is enough to appease us, and to sweeten all our sorrows.

In Christ alone we take our stand – all other ground is sinking sand

All other ground is sinking sand

In Christ and only in Christ all the promises of God are yea and amen

This coming week meditate on just these first 13 verses of Ephesians