

Sunday Morning Sermon
Every Spiritual Blessing: An Outburst of Praise
Ephesians 1:3 – 14

Do you ever wonder “Who am I? What am I doing?” Have you ever had one of those moments when you are out shopping for something – like shoes – and all of a sudden you think, what am I doing here? I have fifteen pairs of shoes crammed in my closet and I only wear four of them. What drives me to go buy a pair of shoes that I don’t even need? Have you ever found yourself unnecessarily animated or excited in a conversation? Suddenly your energy level intensifies, your blood pressure rises, and you find yourself insisting, “No, that’s not the way you do it!” Later you think, what was so life-and-death about that situation? Why do I do what I do? Who really am I?

Well, you are experiencing a small identity crisis. You are experiencing a bit of confusion about who you really are. As we begin our study in the book of Ephesians, this book is all about your identity. It is all about who you are in Christ. Indeed, 27 times in this book it tells us that we are “in Christ.” So, the secret to changing our unsatisfactory behavior is an understanding of our identity in Christ - who we are because of what God has done and is doing in our lives. Our problem is that we often go after the behavior instead of stopping and taking the time to understand our identity. The truth is that what you really believe about yourself will often come out in the way you behave. When we really understand all that God is and has done in our lives, it will automatically result in positive changes in our behavior. That is why Paul takes the first three chapters to develop a wonderful description of our identity in Christ, and then in the last three chapters he applies that understanding to our actions and interactions with God and others. God is saying over and over again, “Remember who you are, remember who you are!”

As we begin, Paul explodes in a verbal outburst of praise. He is so excited and so thankful for God’s many blessings that a continuous cascade of words spew out of his mouth. Indeed, in the original Greek,

these 12 verses constitute a single complex sentence. Paul doesn't stop to take a breath. Like a snowball rolling down the hill gaining size and speed as it goes, his praise builds and builds and builds into one glorious doxology. And this verbal outburst is ignited by the words, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*" Imagine that! There is no end to Paul's praise because there is no end to the blessings that we have been given because we are "in Christ." You are so blessed! In this passage, Paul introduces us primarily to three images describing some of the blessings from the three persons of the Trinity:

I. God the Father has adopted you in eternity past! (1:4-6)

⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

We cannot understand what Paul is saying without coming to an understanding of what it would have meant in Paul's world. Paul was writing to an abandonment culture where babies were frequently abandoned. Just outside the Eastern gate of Ephesus there was a garbage dump where people would bring babies they did not desire. When a child was born, it was brought to the father and he claimed it or turned around and walked away. Perhaps he wanted a boy and had a girl or wanted a girl and had a boy. Maybe it had a birth defect or health problem. Most often, the child would be left in the marketplace for someone else to claim. (We certainly have the same problem in our culture where we either abandon a baby in the womb and abort it or pass it off to others to raise it.) But sometimes, someone would come along and take the child in and raise them either as a slave or to be their very own child. **What a blessing to Paul's readers when the God the Father reminds them that you are identified not by who threw you out, but by who brought you in. Before eternity even began God chose you. He determined where you would live for eternity. But he did more than that! He decided that he would bring you to the place where you would one day be permanently separated from all sinful thoughts, sinful motives,

and sinful practices - all the dilemmas and destruction that sin brings into our life. But there is more! You would ultimately stand before him spotless without any defect or deficiency of any kind. You would be perfect in every way! Why would he do such a thing; how could he do such a thing? It is because of his extravagant unconditional love that drove him to send his Son to save you from your sins. You are his child with all the privileges and status of full adult son-ship. As the song says, you do not have to wait until you grow up to be what God wants you to be! In God's mind he sees the end product. You are what God wants you to be!

Entertainer Garrison Keilor recalls the childhood pain of being chosen last for the baseball teams. The captains are down to their last grudging choices: a slow kid for catcher, someone to stick out in right field where nobody hits it. They choose the last ones two at a time—"you and you"—because it makes no difference. And the remaining kids—the scrubs, the excess—they deal for us as handicaps. "If I take him, then you gotta take him," they say. Sometimes I go as high as sixth, usually lower. But just once I'd like Darrel to pick me first and say, "Him! I want him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes. You, c'mon!" But I've never been chosen with much enthusiasm. Did you ever think about the fact that you are so valuable to God he chose you early—with enthusiasm. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:4).

II. God the Son redeemed you in history past! (1: 7-12)

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things

according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Important to understanding this term is the fact that Ephesus was the slave center of the Roman world. The term redeemed literally means to release from slavery. In Paul's time, it would not be uncommon to find a person who as a baby was picked up at the marketplace and raised as a slave. Then at about the age of 13 they would have been taken to the marketplace and sold. Their primary identity would be that of a slave to their master. But occasionally someone would come by and pay the ransom price to set them free from their slavery. Paul is saying that God did that through Christ for you. God adopted you even though it would cost him dearly. Jesus would shed his very blood, all of it, and he would experience a moment of even more agony as he was literally abandoned by God while suffering under the weight of paying in full the penalty for your sin. Your debt has been paid in full! God has set you free from your enslavement to sin. There is power, power, wonder-working power in the blood of the lamb. Every sin you have ever committed has been forgiven. And to that God adds wisdom, insight, and understanding of things you never thought imaginable –including God's plan of bringing everything into submission to Christ in the future, and the glorious inheritance that awaits the redeemed. Paradise lost will become paradise regained.

One of the magnificent 19th-century military expeditions conquered no new lands for Queen Victoria. You won't find it mentioned in history books, but because of the monumental logistics, military historians compare the landing in Ethiopia in 1868 to the Allies' invasion of France in 1944. For four years Emperor Theodore III of Ethiopia had held a group of 53 European captives (30 adults and 23 children), including some missionaries and a British consul, in a remote 9,000-foot-high bastion deep in the interior. By letter, Queen Victoria pleaded in vain with Theodore to release the captives. Finally, the government ordered a full-scale military expedition from India to march into Ethiopia—not to conquer the country and make it a British colony, but simply to rescue a tiny band of civilians. The invasion force included 32,000 men, heavy artillery, and 44 elephants to carry the guns.

Provisions included 50,000 tons of beef and pork and 30,000 gallons of rum. Engineers built landing piers, water treatment plants, a railroad, and telegraph line to the interior, plus many bridges. All of this to fight one decisive battle, after which the prisoners were released, and everyone packed up and went home. The British expended millions of pounds to rescue a handful of captives.

Now realize this, if you were the only one that God had chosen in the past, he still would've sent his Son to die for you.

III. God the Spirit has sealed you in your personal past (1:13-14)

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

The third image we have is the image of a seal. For a paper document you would make a seal with the melted wax in which you press your family ring or crest, leaving an indentation. When the wax dried it made a seal. The seal marked the ownership of the document. For cattle, people started to brand them with hot irons with their seal of ownership. **How many of you have seen the movie *Gladiator*? Maximus, played by Russell Crowe, has four letters tattooed on his arm: SPQR. They marked him as a soldier of the Emperor. Soldiers were tattooed. Captives and slaves were branded.** Paul is saying, "Do you realize that when you came to believe, you received God's seal upon your life?" And this seal is God's guarantee that you are his. It is his engagement ring. This seal is none other than the indwelling Holy Spirit. Someone has said:

My grandmother was the queen of canning. She was known throughout the community for her incredible preserves. I remember well sitting on a stool in the kitchen and ... watching her every move as she made her famous goods. I would ask, "[Grandma] why are you always melting that wax over the fruit?" I didn't understand how wax could make any positive contribution to the flavor. She answered, "The wax seals the jar tightly so the fruit can't be contaminated. If I didn't seal it, the fruit

would eventually rot." As an amateur in the canning business, I could see the importance of the picking, purchasing, and canning stages. But I saw little importance in the sealing of the preserves. [But now I realize that] you and I are God's preserves. What good would it do for God to choose us, redeem us, and call us into union with his Son if he did not have a plan for preserving us as heirs of eternal life?

Conclusion:

This morning we have discovered that you have an amazing new identity. Your identity is no longer found in your house, not in your title, not in your children, not in your education, and not in your looks. When you cross over to the other side it will be to a triune God who adopted you, who redeemed you, and who has sealed you. When I gain a full appreciation and basic understanding of this new identity, it automatically changes my behavior. There is no void to fill in my life. When I get a sense of the extravagant grace and amazing love that God has for me, I think differently. I no longer have to find peace and joy in the things I buy or in the acceptance of others. I have more than money could ever buy. I am loved and accepted more than I could ever be accepted by anyone else! I am free to love and I'm free to give grace because I've received love and received grace. I am because he is - my adopter, my redeemer, my guarantor.