

Knowing God Through His Blessings – Ephesians 1

As I mentioned last week, we have an opportunity to get serious about who we truly are in Christ. During this time, we are going to walk through some of Paul's teachings from the book of Ephesians. My hope for you, as we work our way through this great book, is that you discover some foundational truths about your faith, and when coupled with your deep self-reflections, those truths will then help you grow stronger as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Think of this series of messages as a crash course, from Paul, on discipleship and basic Christian living. Paul used this letter to encourage many of the new churches in the surrounding areas of Ephesus by informing them about things such as God's plan for all humanity through the work of Jesus, how the "good news" effects the believer's life, the importance of recognizing our blessings and worshipping God through prayer and thanksgiving, how to handle new relationships in the church, and what is needed to fight the spiritual battles we will face. This book is rich, it's deep, it's encouraging, and I'm looking forward to our journey over the course of this series.

Now, Ephesians is a general epistle written in similar style to Paul's other epistles. He includes a basic introduction and conclusion, with two main teaching sections sandwiched in between. The first section, chapters 1-3, focuses on basic, new believer's, theological doctrine. The second section, chapters 4-6, focuses on Christian behaviors. Let's begin this morning by looking at chapter one. Let's see how Paul praises God for who HE is and how HE has cared for us. **Read Ephesians 1:1-14.** I love how Paul starts out. "To the SAINTS who are FAITHFUL." He says, this book is for every believer, every follower of Jesus Christ, and then he proceeds to offer a series of praises to God. Giving thanks is one of the foundations of our faith. **Colossians 3:17** states, "*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*" Intertwined with Paul's praises, we also find areas of our faith that are foundational and should be understood as uncompromisable truths.

To belong to God as an adopted child is a blessing, direct from our creator. Paul praises God for choosing men and women for salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Of all creation, it was mankind God chose to save and establish eternal relationships with. And, because of this, Paul says, we are "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavens". God blessed us by choosing us and allowing us the opportunity to choose Him. God blessed us by adopting us into His family, but that only takes place when we choose Jesus. Because of Jesus, we are blessed to stand before God holy instead of depraved. We can stand blameless instead of condemned. We can know that our blessings include God's unconditional love! Forever!

Look how Paul describes our blessing of salvation. Salvation in Christ means we have been rescued and delivered from the bonds of sin. Salvation in Christ means that all our sins have been forgiven; past, present, and future. Salvation in Christ means you have received an abundance of grace. You know; the love, peace, and fulfilment of promises given to those who do not deserve it. Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace"? I've grown to disagree with that statement. Why? If you are redeemed, then you are no longer identified as a sinner. Will you sin? Absolutely! But, once you're saved, you are identified as a SAINT. What a blessing! WE must shift how we think about who we are in Christ. Are you going to trespass against God? Yes. But one of the blessings of your salvation is that in those moments, you are still redeemed.

Your identity is that of a saint, who because of the battle between flesh and spirit, will sometimes give in to the flesh. Remember how at the moment of salvation, a person, as Jesus said, “*must be born again*”? And this new birth means that every new believer is a new creation in Christ. Your new identity is that of a saint and no longer that of a sinner.

How else are we blessed, according to Paul here in Ephesians 1? We have obtained an inheritance. What have we inherited? We have inherited the Kingdom of God. We have inherited the will of God in our lives. We have inherited a family of fellow believers. We have inherited the Spirit of God. And it is the Spirit of God that guarantees our possession of all these things. And look what Paul says there at the end of verse 14, “*to the praise of His glory.*” Let me say this about Ephesians 1. The context of this book surrounds the idea presented by Paul in verse 3 when he states that God “*has blessed us in Christ with every blessing in the heavenly places*”. We are more blessed than we realize and it’s time for us to recognize this and start identifying ourselves as such.

Paul ends chapter one with a prayer for the new believers. Let’s look at the rest of this chapter. **Read Ephesians 1:15-23.**

Paul acknowledges their faith and how that faith leads them to love the other saints. It reminds me of the first verse from **1 John 5(1)**, which says, “*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.*” In other words, our faith drives us to love the way our Savior loves and for that, we should give praise to God. The truth is people are sometimes hard to love. We love because of Christ’s love.

Paul prayed in verses 17-18 that believers would grow in their knowledge and wisdom of Christ. When our insight into who we truly are in Christ becomes real to us and we begin to embrace these things, then our demeanor begins to shift. We begin displaying a new countenance. Perhaps even a new disposition. Paul prays that our hearts will be opened and the things which are dark will be replaced with a new hope and filled with the riches of God’s glories, and not the glories of man.

Paul also wants us to recognize the greatness of God’s Power. It’s like how I frequently remind you that because of the Holy Spirit living in your heart, you also have God’s power present as well. How great is the power of God? It’s great enough to raise Jesus from the grip of death, so you must believe it is great enough to help you “*fight the good fight*”, every day! We must comprehend the greatness of God and allow His power to permeate every ounce of who we are. This was what Paul was praying at the close of this first chapter of Ephesians.

Finally, we must acknowledge our place, the church’s place in the hierarchy of the Kingdom. God placed Jesus in a position of all authority, over heaven and earth, to include the church. What does this mean? It means, we must be careful to conduct ourselves and the actions which flow out of here in a manner that would please God. In a manner that pleases the Lord. When you are outside these walls and you speak of Mt Freedom, not only are you representing this body, but more importantly you are representing Jesus.