

EPHESIANS MID-WEEK SERMON #1 (SJGC)

Ephesians 1:1-14

PATTI

Jeff and I decided that for the coming weeks, we'll be doing some reflections on **the book of EPHESIANS.**

6 chapters.

155 verses that, if you read them straight through, would take you about **20 minutes.**

But we're going to go slower and apply what we're reading because we don't want to miss what God is saying to us in the details.

The church at Ephesus was one of the earliest Christian communities and it gives us revelation and wise teaching on 2 important topics:

1) Who we are in Christ –

We'll explore the importance of our NEW IDENTITY as baptized disciples.

2) the nature of the Body of Christ

Ephesians explores how Jesus gives unity and purpose to his people.

1:1-2

Paul starts by addressing those who are **"in Christ"**: all the believers in Ephesus. And (he) greets them with blessings of GRACE and PEACE, which are Christ's gifts to those who love Him.

1:3-4

Paul, the author of the book, repeats the phrase **"in Him"** or **"in Christ"**

He emphasizes that believers are united with Jesus - that we are ONE with him because **God chose us;**

Paul is talking about our IDENTITY here, which is so important.

If I don't know the unconditional love of Jesus for me,

then I will always be trying to win the approval of others.

JEFF

As human beings,
what we believe about ourselves
will determine what we do with our lives.

We tend to think it's the other way around.
That what we do with our lives will determine
what we believe about ourselves.

But it's not working.
When we look around and see the rates
of addiction and depression or
abuse and broken relationships,
not all, but so many of these problems are
directly related to how people view themselves.

We are constantly looking for something or
someone to tell us who we are.
We crave AFFIRMATION and ACCEPTANCE,
and we go about trying to find it in two ways.

1) Trying harder to measure up...

to achieve more and more so that others will
consider us "WORTHY" of acceptance.

The problem with that, of course, is...
How will you ever know if you've done enough?
After all, there will always be someone who is

smarter,
stronger,
wealthier,
thinner, or
better looking.

In his book, *Who I Am In Christ*, author Neil Anderson says,
*"Malice is wicked behavior that is often born out of
a sense of inadequacy when we look to others who
have something we desperately need to be fulfilled."*

Peer pressure is so powerful and the pursuit of man's approval so prevalent that people will compromise even their most basic moral principles to gain the acceptance of others...

"Lacking this, they begin to scheme and manipulate people or present a false image to gain approval. When this fails, they envy those who seem to have what they don't have, and the natural consequence is to slander them and bring them down to their own level."

But in Christ, we are accepted, not because of anything that WE have done, but by what JESUS has already done for us on the cross.

Because HE was forsaken, we are accepted. We are loved. We are sons and daughters.

PATI

2) Finding our identity in relationship to other things or people

I want to be careful here, because part of our identity IS in relationship to others.

For example, I am a WIFE, a MOTHER, a SISTER, a FRIEND, and a PASTOR. These are roles that I have in relationship to people I love, but if I were to base my identity on these roles,

then every time I disappointed my husband or became impatient with my children or Hurt a friend or sibling, or preached a sermon that I was less than thrilled with...

my self-esteem would take a nose dive.

Yet so many of us base our identity on our relationship to other things or people, don't we?

Consider BUMPER STICKERS and GRAPHIC TEE SHIRTS, for example. Both of these things are mostly about advertising that I BELONG and justifying to others that I am WORTHY....

because I'm a BROWNS fan, or a BUCKEYE.

because I belong to such and such a COUNTRY CLUB.
or because my son/daughter is an honor student at (fill in the blank) school.

But what happens when the Browns start stacking up losing seasons?
or when the stadium gets shut down or the season cancelled due to Covid-19?

What happens when my son/daughter comes home with straight C's on his/her report card?

Or when I lose my job and can no longer afford to play golf?

When we base our identity on things that are fragile,
they become idols - false gods that CANNOT deliver what they promise

Again, v. 4 says, **“For He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless before him...”**

In some Christian circles, people talk about “deciding” to accept Christ, or “making a decision” to receive Jesus. And I know what they mean, because it can feel like a choice.

But Martin Luther would disagree. He once wrote a book entitled, “THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL”

In this book, Luther argues that human beings are so fallen and broken that we don't even have the WILL, or the CAPACITY to choose the LORD.

Jesus himself says in John 15:16, **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit--fruit that will last.”**

JEFF

Right. The truth is, GOD MADE THE DECISION to have us be with Him even before creation... to be holy and blameless.

That's not something you can accomplish, but something that Jesus has already accomplished for you.

So the Christian life is about living into an identity that is already ours.
When God declares me holy, blameless, and righteous,

then I won't have a need to always win an argument
so that I can prove myself to be "right."
Rightness is already mine in Jesus.

1:5-6

*"⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in
accordance with his pleasure and will—*

*⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One
he loves.*

When Paul calls everyone who is in Christ "sons"
he's talking, not primarily about gender, but about
our identity as those who bear the image of the Father
and receive an inheritance.

It always strikes me as funny when I read the Parable of the Rich Young Ruler,
that this guy comes to Jesus and asks this question:

"What must I DO to inherit eternal life?"

The question starts with the wrong premise, right?
An INHERITANCE isn't something you EARN.
It's not something you WORK FOR.

If you receive an inheritance, it's because
you are IN **RELATIONSHIP** WITH SOMEONE WHO DIED.

God created us to be in relationship with himself.
But our human tendency is always to
turn that love relationship into a TRANSACTION:

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

The answer is NOTHING.
You can't do anything, because Jesus
has done it all for you on the CROSS.

So you are "in Christ" by virtue of what he
has done on the cross and at your baptism,
and you remain or abide in Christ

by virtue of faith, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

But what you inherit according to these verses
is all the things that people search for
all their lives...

grace,
love,
acceptance,
forgiveness, and MORE!

PATTI

Luther said “whatever you turn to in your time of greatest need
is in fact, your god (small “g”).
So I would encourage you to
reflect on the question...

in these past months, in this most unusual and stressful time,
what have you turned to (other than Christ) for
comfort or security,
for identity or approval?

In v. 7, Paul uses the word, “**redemption**”
to describe what Jesus has done for us.
And that word REDEMPTION here

really means **to pay a ransom** in order to
purchase the FREEDOM of a SLAVE.
a ransom.

The blood of Christ was the payment,
setting us free from the penalty of sin.

The redemption brought us out of
punishment and gave us
WISDOM to UNDERSTAND who He is.

1:10-14

We see in v. 10-14 that God’s inheritance is for
the Jews, who were first called to believe in God.
But also for Gentiles and outcasts– for those once considered
to be unclean and unworthy.

In other words, at a time when our world is being divided over issues of racial equality and justice, the kingdom vision of Jesus includes people of every tribe and race. Already in the New Testament, we see Paul seeking to tear down the walls of division and hostility that tend to separate people by tribe or skin color or tradition, or even religion.

And let's just read the last two verses, v. 13-14... because there's a familiar phrase here we should unpack.

*¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were **marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,***

¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

When we baptize children or adults, we trace the sign of the cross on their foreheads and say, "Child of God (there's the identity part, because only Jesus gets to tell us who we are through his sacrament)..."

"Child of God, you have been SEALED with the Holy Spirit and MARKED with the cross of Christ forever."

We could spend a lot of time defending our practice of infant baptism, but let's just say that parents bring their children in faith to the font,

so that they can be part of God's covenant just like Jewish boys became part of God's covenant through circumcision on the eighth day of their lives.

In other words in baptism, the sign of the new covenant, you are given an identity that you grow into.

JEFF

Yes. Exactly. But what does it mean to be sealed by the Holy Spirit? This idea goes back to the days of KINGS

who would take a letter or legal document,
seal it with wax,
make the imprint of their signet ring in the wax,
and then send it with a messenger to the recipient.

And God help the person who opened or lost or damaged
the letter until it arrived at its intended destination.

The Holy Spirit given to us in baptism is the **SEAL**
or **GUARANTEE** of all that God has promised until
we arrive at our final destination in heaven.

If that doesn't give you a sense of worth and value,
I don't know what will!

Worth that is based, not on my performance,
but on what Jesus has already done and promised.

PATTI - PRAYER:

Father, thank you that our identity is in Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today,
and forever, and whose mercies are new every morning. Would you save us
from the folly of taking this truth for granted or of giving too little attention in our
daily lives. By your Holy Spirit, give us grace to rejoice in this day you have made,
to lay hold of your provision, and to be responsive to your leading; in Jesus'
name. Amen.