

God is at Work

(An Introduction to Ephesians)

Ephesians 1:1-3

This morning, I am excited to begin a new series on the book of Ephesians. I have found in my life the most satisfaction out of teaching verse by verse and have done so through Philippians, James, The Epistle of John, Jude, leaving off with the book of Hebrews which all of these are so jammed packed with truth and instruction that it builds the soul and encourages us and even frees us from lies that we have been told and have adapted to our daily living.

The book of Ephesians is no different. Packed within its pages are words that speak of the reality of life, because how many of us know that reality isn't always what we see? What we think may be right, may not be right at all. What we think is happening, may not be happening the way we see it. So we need to understand what is true so that we can change our "stinking thinking" and line it up with what God has to say.

The letter to the Ephesians was written about 61 AD in Rome during Paul's imprisonment there. It was written to the Christians in the Roman province of Ephesus to ordinary people – tradesmen, craftsmen, doctors, lawyers, some politicians – the typical person you would find in that city. Many of them were even slaves. It was written today it would be written to people like us. We begin in **Ephesians 1:1-2**:

¹ This letter is from Paul, chosen by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. It is written to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus. ² May grace and peace be yours, sent to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the shortest salutation of any of Paul's letters.

Vs. 1. We find three key things verse one.

(1) We see Paul's credentials – an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle was one sent with a message, a messenger. But he was not just any messenger – he was one sent from Jesus.

In fact in Galatians we read that Jesus appeared to him directly. Therefore, what Paul is getting ready to tell us isn't just a bunch of ideas he came up with on his own. The truth that he writes in this letter is what he learned directly from Jesus Christ. So **when you read Paul's words you are reading the words of Jesus Christ.**

It amazes me how often people will read the words of the Apostle Paul and forget this idea and say “well, I don’t agree with Paul” simply because when you read the words of Paul you are reading the words of Jesus Christ. In fact in **2 Timothy 3:16**:

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right.

2. Paul was “chosen by God”. One thing we find about Paul is his amazement that despite who he was (a religious man, hater of the Christian faith, even a persecutor of the church), that God would still through his grace, choose a man like Paul to be involved in sharing the message of Jesus Christ with the Gentiles. **Paul feels so indebted to God’s mercy and grace that he even calls himself in Romans 1:1 “Jesus’ Christ’s slave (Bond-servant), one who was a slave by choice.**

I think that is what all of us should feel, that we are so amazed that God would choose us to reach this world, and that we would feel so indebted to God that we voluntarily become a slave to God for the rest of our lives.

3. Paul describes his audience as Saints(God’s Holy people). When we use the term “Saint” today in our culture we come up with many different views. For some we have this unrealistic view of a type of super-human who has this great world-changing accomplishment. Maybe we come to this conclusion simply because of the many Saints claimed by the Catholic church. **But the Saints that Paul is writing to here are people just like you and me.** (You may ask yourself “You mean that I am a Saint?”) Yes, that’s right. We need to clarify what this term means.

The word Saint in the Greek is derived from the word for Holy. And holy means distinct, different, whole, belonging to God and therefore, living differently. That is the mark of a Saint. It isn’t that they don’t have problems, but that they are those who approach things differently. He has a different lifestyle, he deals with things differently.

How are these people different? Paul is writing to people who are different, who live differently and deal with things differently because they are faithful. They can’t quit. **Being a Christian is being a person who can’t quit being a Christian.**

Once the Holy Spirit comes and lives in us one can’t simply quit being a Christian because there is something in us that won’t let us. The Holy Spirit convicts us even being at times that spiritual-hound dog that hunts us down and keeps reminding us of our need for Jesus Christ. We are different from the rest of the world because we have faith and remain faithful to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Vs. 2. Paul then goes on in verse two and greets his audience with two great inheritances we have – grace and peace (He also does the same in other letters he has written). **Grace is all of God’s power, all of his love, all of his beauty available to us. It is a word that wraps up all that God is and offers to us.**

Peace is freedom from anxiety, fear and worry. These are two characteristics that all Christians should possess. Grace – God at work in their life. Peace – a sense of security and trust. In fact it is true that “**Trust is not knowing, and yet still being at peace or at rest**” Knowing that God is looking out for me and just resting in his peace.

Vs. 3

Paul then goes on into his usual structure of his letter. First he comes with doctrine, the teaching, the radical facts that God is setting before us. And then comes the practical, the application, the working out of these truths in the normal structure of life. It is important that we understand the facts upon which we are to live.

So for the first three chapters of this letter Paul is laying the foundation for the rest of the book. Another characteristic of Paul’s writings is that he gathers everything up into one key statement, and then he breaks it down into its detail. That is what we find here in **verses 3.**

³ How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ.

Four elements in this summary I want us to note.

1. **God is our source.** Everything starts with him. Unfortunately, as human beings we don’t always start there. We get sidetracked, we rely on ourselves and eventually we narrow our viewpoint to what we know and not what God knows. We need to understand and focus on the bigger picture. Natural thinking is always limited, always wrong to some degree, because it isn’t large enough to handle all the facts. But spiritual thinking is always God-centered, and therefore true.
2. **God’s work is to bless.** His goal is to bring about a world, a universe, filled with blessing. He doesn’t want us to be people who think that he needs our praise, or that he needs his ego massaged, or that he gets upset and mad with us if things don’t go his way. God has blessed us so much, that if we would be able to comprehend just how much he has done for us, what is true for us right now, that there would be nothing we can do but stand in absolute awe and amazement. God wants us to be overwhelmed by his kindness.

In fact in verse 4 Paul goes on the list the spiritual blessings we have. (verse 4: blessings all the way back in time to the beginning or foundation of the universe. Verse 5-6: Being made members of the family of God. Verse 7-8: Having our guilt completely and utterly removed. Verse 9-10: God has revealed his plans and what he will accomplish in the future. Verse 11-12: He has appointed us to be demonstrations of his truth, and to live to praise our glorious God. Verse 13: Having received the truth of Salvation. Verse 13: Receiving the Holy Spirit.)

These are the things that make life worthwhile. Without these blessings life would be unbearable, dull and boring. The very things we could not supply ourselves, God has blessed us with. These are the gifts of God.

3. **All of these blessings are found in Jesus Christ.** In fact, all through this book it is going to be made very clear that all these blessings come as a result of being “in Christ”. The only spiritual blessing that can ever come to you from God must always come in Christ. That is why no one can ever experience the grace of God, the blessings of God unless they are found in Christ. Physical blessings are available to the just and the unjust alike, but the inner spirit of man can be healed and cured only in Christ, there is no other way.
4. **The location of these blessings – in the heavenly realm.** Paul is talking about the realm of invisible reality, of things which are true about life in the world but which we cannot see or touch right. The heavenly realm exists right now in another dimension. That is what Paul refers to in **2 Corinthians 4:18**:

We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. RSV

Paul is talking about blessings that you can't see with the human eye, but exist and are a reality in the unseen dimension. These blessings are what can change a life and make us into different people.

All too often, I think we put too much emphasis on God's blessing here and now on this earth. We see it through material possessions, through prestige, through wealth and yet true riches are found in a different level. God's blessing may not come the way you think it will. But God's blessing will be more than you deserve.

Paul speaks to us with the words of Jesus Christ, as a man who has experienced first-hand the undeserved privilege of serving God. To all of us who find ourselves different or holy, people of faith, people who are experiencing God's grace and peace, may we come to understand the spiritual blessings we possess because of the work of Jesus Christ. And once we do we will never be the same.

In a world where we are so focused on what we have or own, may we become more focused on what we have in Christ which will never fade away. You see church, there are things that we have in Christ that we don't spend enough time thinking about. Things that we take for granted or even things that we have never come to understand. And if we only knew, it would make the difference in our lives.

As I have spoken to you about our inheritance that we have in Christ and now as we begin our journey through the book of Ephesians I pray that we will embrace every aspect of our faith.