

Part 1: The Gateway to Worship

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The poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "You become what you think about all day long."

For instance I've gone hunting far more times than I've gone to an NFL game. But the truth of the matter is, I don't consider myself a hunter, but I do consider myself an NFL fan. Why? Because one occupies my heart and my mind, and the other does not.

Emerson rightly identifies a unique connection between the occupation of our mind and the actions of our life. In other words what our mind is preoccupied with shapes the occupation of your time and efforts in life.

The problem is that humanity has no lack of obsessions, and yet it doesn't appear that the objects we think about are actually capable of making us into the people or the society we imagine. And it's out of this tension that Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, a book which holds out the promise of better individuals and better societies, due to a better object of affection.

We are starting our new series in the book of Ephesians which was a letter written to the church in Ephesus. Paul knew this church quite well as he helped start it and spent a considerable amount of time there. Which means that Paul also knew what this church needed. Ephesus was the cultural and religious center of the day. Located on the western coast of Turkey it was the gateway to Asia, an economic center with a booming trade industry.

It was also a place where religion thrived. One of the Seven Wonders of the World, stood there during the days of Paul, the temple of Diana, making it the religious center of Asia.

It also boasted during this time a newly constructed stadium, roughly the size of Washington-Grizzly, that demanded the affection of entertainment driven individuals.

And in the middle of all of this commotion was a small start-up church struggling to understand its nature and purpose. And Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to help them understand their identity as a church.

Maybe you've wondered why Christians go to church? Why do we gather together? You aren't saved by going to church. So why do we continue to come week after week to church? Why should this gathering shape our weekend plans, priorities and schedules?

Paul's point in this book is that the church is the society where believers begin to become what they behold, and reap the fruit of that transformation in every area of life.

Our series is called "Beautiful Occupation" because this book is split almost perfectly in half. In chapters 1-3, Paul describes the theological make-up of the church, and in chapters 4-6 Paul talk about the practical nature of the church.

In part one Paul wants the church to see the gospel as the beautiful occupation of the Christian heart, and in part two Paul traces the implications that has in the occupation of our lives. In becoming preoccupied with Jesus the church becomes more like Jesus.

And today we are going to look at four things in Paul's opening address to this church. First we are going to look at where God has blessed us, and then we are going to see three reasons why this blessing should occupy our hearts and minds.

So this is what we are going to see today: **To Know God is to Know Christ, In Christ we are redeemed, In Christ we are chosen, and In Christ we are sealed.**

Look with me at the first six verses of Ephesians 1: **Ephesians 1:1-6.**

Have you ever started a conversation with someone where it feels like they are starting the conversation about four steps ahead of where you are?

This is quite exactly how Paul opens this letter. He opens with a casual greeting and then he launches almost immediately into deep worship. It's a sort of divine eulogy, a blessing rich with doxology. If this book were a pool, verses 1-2 would have been that ladder, and what follows would have been the Mariana Trench.

And the verses we just read, and the verses that we are yet to examine are some of the most theologically dense writing in all of scripture. And I should warn us right now that there are two errors we can make when we encounter writing like this.

The first is to study the theological implications of Paul's writing. To examine the depths of election, predestination, sovereignty and atonement but to miss the worship which is the goal of this. The other is to say, this is too complicated for me, I don't need to know this, and to therefore miss the goal of this passage as well.

Because the end of this passage is praise. We saw that in verse 6 didn't we? Paul is writing what he is writing so that we might praise God's glorious grace. This theme is all over this passage look head to **Ephesians 1:12, 14.** To the praise of God's glory.

The end of God's goal for us is worship. The question is how do we get there? What is it about God that should stir us like Paul to erupt in doxological, worship filled emotion? Where do you go when you want to worship?

I want you to think about that. Hindu's go to temple when they want to worship. Muslims go to Mecca, and orient their daily prayers in the direction of it. Missoulians go to worship in the mountains. For just about every person, religious or not, our worship is bound to a place.

But this isn't so for the Christian. God didn't give us a place of worship he gave us a person to worship. Church is a place of worship, but it's not the place that is special, it's the person who is worshipped by those who come to the place which makes it special.

This is our first point today: **To Know God is to Know Christ.**

Last week was Mother's Day. And many of you took to social media and paid right and due homage to your moms. However I didn't see very many people post something like this: "Dear mom, you birthed me, thank you."

Now is that accurate? Yes. Is it true? Yes. Is it wonderfully good news for you? Absolutely. So why is there a shortage of cards saying so? Because it is possible to admit this truth without ever acknowledging the relationship which makes this truth all the more beautiful.

It is the relationship we have with our mothers which cause our hearts to sing. That's what you posted about, her kindness, her specific care, her humble service, her deep affection.

But how many of us have that kind of understanding of God. Most of our theology ends with "You saved me." And we think that is sufficient. But do you really understand the relationship that went into that? Can you really see in clarity where and how God loved you in that?

If someone asked us why we love our mom's we might say: because she gave birth to me, but if we are sincere about our affection our description would certainly go beyond that. Then why is it that our description of God's glory and love often stops at the admission of "He saved me" without going further into that relationship?

Behind the depth of theology in this text is the simple truth that if we want to see God as glorious we must see where God has placed his glory, we must see where he has loved us, and where he has chosen to relate to us.

Look at this passage again and notice the way in which God has shown himself to us: **Ephesians 1:3-6**.

This passage is on fire with worship towards God the Father, but the access point to this relationship is Jesus. In other words to know God is to know specifically what he has done for us in Jesus. Jesus is the gateway to the glory of God.

The Greek preposition "in" is found 10 times in these 14 verses where Paul is describing something that we have "in Christ." Verse 3, God blessed us in Christ, verse 4, God chose us in Christ, verse 6, God blessed us in the Beloved (that is Christ), verse 7, in Christ we have redemption, verse 9, the purpose of God is set forth in Christ, verse 10, God is going to unite all things in Christ, verse 11, in Christ we have an inheritance, verse 12, we hope in Christ, verse 13, in Christ we heard the word, In Christ you believed and you were sealed.

We have all been parts of fads. Do you remember shoulder pads in your clothes? Tamagotchis hanging on our backpacks? Saggy pants? Motorola Razors? Pokémon Go?

We know what it's like to go all in on something only to look back five to ten years later only to see it as silly and outdated. But here in Ephesians 1, Paul is pulling back the veil of time from eternity past to eternity future and displaying the one beautiful occupation that has never faded.

For the past 2,000 years the church in her truest form has been preoccupied with Jesus Christ her savior. At times, specific sects of Christianity have tried to center the church on something else, but history shows that once you lose the centrality of Jesus you quickly find yourself as a footnote in a history book.

Paul wants the church to know, Paul wants you to know the infinite beauty, blessing and glory of God which is seen only when we see clearly the way in which Jesus has saved us. And this is now what Paul turns to for the rest of his introduction. He wants us know to see what it is that we have in Christ. So let's look at our next point: **In Christ we are redeemed.**

Read with me: **Ephesians 1:7-10.**

Earlier Paul made the point to highlight God's love for us by reminding us of the adoption we have in Jesus Christ. God loved us, and because he loved us he sent Jesus so that we might be adopted through the work of Jesus.

If any of you have gone through the process of fostering or adoption you know how costly this process is. Sometimes the cost is emotional, sometimes the cost is financial, and sometimes the cost is felt everywhere.

The cost of our adoption into God's family was the cost of Jesus's work to redeem us. And here Paul begins to break down that redemption and we learn three things about it.

What Paul is making clear here is that our redemption was costly. Our redemption was extravagant. And our redemption was organizing.

Our redemption was costly because our problem wasn't that we were missing out on a life well lived. Our problem wasn't just that we didn't have eternal life when we died. Our problem was that we were sinful, we rebelled against God by refusing to worship him. The problem was that we earned God's just condemnation.

Our sin demanded our death. And the word redemption used here carries with it an economic aspect. We have been redeemed as one would redeem a slave in the Roman culture. You could buy back someone who was under an obligation, and you could redeem him.

This is what Jesus did for us. **Hebrews 9:22** shows us the cost. The price for our sin was the very blood of Jesus, but what's even more amazing is that despite the infinite cost, God's grace was more than enough to redeem us.

Look again: **Ephesians 1:7-8.** God lavished his grace on you. If you've ever had a toddlers you know the extravagance that comes when they try to fill up their own cup. It starts as a drip, but eventually the whole milk jug empties itself into the sippy cup.

So it is with God's redeeming grace. To us our debt was an infinite void that we could never cross, but because of God's richness to us in Jesus, he overflows his grace to us. God's grace is extravagant. As we try to make headway in being a healthy church, you, by God's grace are probably going to encounter new sins in your heart.

Satan is going to try and lie to you: "Keep it hidden. Don't let anyone know." But doesn't God's extravagant grace call out to you? It has been lavished on us. When the depth of our sin grows, God's grace grows infinitely more. It is only because of this that we can go to our friends and say, "I'm weak and I need help," and a good friend will take you to this well and say drink for God has lavished you with grace.

Jesus' redemption also organizes the whole of our lives: **Ephesians 1:8-10**.

Our salvation helps us understand the reason for everything and the end of everything. We were made to be united to God and worship him, and that truth frames for us everything we hope for and experience.

The next point Paul makes is that **In Christ we have been chosen**. Look with me at **Ephesians 1:11-12**.

Now depending upon your translation it either opened this passage as the ESV just did: "we have obtained an inheritance" or as the NIV translates it "In him you were also chosen." This is because the Greek word translated in some places as inheritance and others as chosen means "to be appointed" or "to be obtained." And Paul's grammar is a little vague as to if it refers to what believers have obtained, or what God has obtained.

But either way Paul is saying that God did the choosing. He chose to have us, and he chose that we would have him. He predestined us according to his will. At the heart of us possessing God, or God possessing us, is the will and plan of God.

This is a re-articulation of what he said earlier: **Ephesians 1:4-5**.

So what does it mean that in Christ you have been chosen? Didn't we choose God? Isn't that what happened when we believed? Yes you did. That's the case Paul makes very clearly in Romans 10. But we also see here that you believed precisely because God chose you to believe.

Now often we bristle at this doctrine, but as we continue to walk through Ephesians it will keep coming back, and keep being explained. But remember Paul's writing here is not just so we would understand our salvation, it's that our understanding of salvation would lead us to worship, and in this doctrine of God's choosing love are two soul stirring truths.

God's electing and choosing will means that God knew you and God knows you. If you've ever been on a date or in an interview you know the drama of trying to meet an appearance. When Sarah and I dated, I acted like I liked country music because that's the kind of music that girls liked. The problem is I soon began to feel the weight of this façade and it had to end.

When it comes to how we view God, many of us feel this weight. We know we need to act a certain way, or talk a certain way. We feel we need to present a specific picture of ourselves to God and to others. And there can come a point where we feel that following Jesus is this eggshell walk of exterior performances.

This is why the allure of hypocrisy is so strong even though everyone hates hypocrites.

But when God chose us in Jesus, when he predestined us according to his will, that we should hope in him, God saw you in the rawness of who you were. He knew you. Look at God said to Samuel in **1 Samuel 16:7**. You don't need to hide your sin from God. He saw the worst of it.

And he still chose to love you through Jesus. God didn't love who you pretended to be, he really loved you, warts, sins and all. That's what Paul said already, "In love he predestined us for through Jesus."

This is why Jesus makes all the difference, God's choosing love for us in Jesus not only reminds us that God knew you at your worst, but it also means that in Jesus, God knows you at your best. God doesn't just love sinful people and leave them there. God loves sinful people and he changes them.

Look back at what Paul said earlier: **Ephesians 1:4**. Have you ever been stuck in a rut? Stuck with particular besetting sins? Isn't this a beautiful reminder of what we have in Christ? God through the veil of history itself, before the foundations of the world not only knew you in your brokenness, but he chose to see you as what you will one day be: holy and blameless before him.

That's a powerful love isn't it? I love my kids so much. I would give up my life for my wife. But I certainly haven't seen them at their worst. I don't know what their heart has muttered towards me. And despite my extreme love for them, my love can't change them. My love for my child will not make them sin less. My love for my wife can't even make her like mayo.

But Jesus' love for us chose us at our worst and predestined us to one day be at our best by his power. There is wonderful and blessed hope that you can grow past your sins and find true change because God knew who you were and in Christ he knows who one day you will be: holy and blameless before him.

And again we see that reprieve: **Ephesians 1:12**. Why has God chosen you? Why is God granting to you an inheritance? Why has God chosen to cleanse you and purify you in Christ? To the praise of his grace. Not to the praise of our brains or brawn, but his mercy! God saves us in Jesus so that we might not boast in ourselves but in God's redeeming and choosing love.

And lastly we see this: **In Christ we have been sealed**.

Read with me **Ephesians 1:13-14**.

So far we have seen in Ephesians all three persons of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and now we see God the Holy Spirit.

The entire efforts of the whole Godhead have come to bear, and are promising you blessing after blessing in the faith of the believer. There really is nothing more miraculous than your salvation. People pay millions of dollars for original artworks by Van Gough or Picasso, and in our salvation we have the original artwork of God himself and it is freely given to us in Christ.

And here Paul shows the enduring value of such a gift. But first he makes an important distinction. There is a difference between hearing the gospel and believing in Jesus. Did you see that: **Ephesians 1:13**.

Lots of people have heard the gospel, but hearing doesn't equal believing. Believing is different. Believing is your responsibility to God's electing. Believing is your heart hearing in truth, by the power of Jesus and saying: that is the redemption that I need.

Believing is more than ideological, it is relational. We see that even in the language Paul is using: "Look at what is in Christ." He is not calling us to look at Christ. It costs us nothing to look at Christ. I look at lots of people every day. I can tell you what they are like by looking at them, but in order for me to tell you what is in them I must know them, and to a degree they must know me.

Belief is knowing and being known by God through Jesus in a relationship which is nothing more than divine grace. We are saved not by hearing the gospel but by believing it. We are blessed not by looking at Christ, but by looking at what is in Christ. Have you done that? Do you believe that Jesus and Jesus alone did everything required to save sinners and restore you to God?

If you do, Paul says you have been sealed by the promise of the Holy Spirit. Not only did God the Father predestine you, not only did the Son redeem you, but now the Spirit of God endures you until you take full possession of your faith in heaven.

Here we see even more the blessing of God's choosing of us. How many of you have had your tastes change over time? Maybe you liked black licorice once, but know you don't. It happens to almost all of us. But we don't lose much sleep over it.

But if our salvation is up to our ability to freely choose God on our own as if it were up to our own affinity for him, what confidence do you have that you will wake up tomorrow and still believe in the gospel which you heard?

For those of us with loved ones wrestling with dementia or Alzheimer's, what hope do you have that their cognitive ability can be one of ongoing belief? Our hope is that God has chosen to seal your faith with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Because God himself bears witness in your heart not apart from you, but with you. Hope holding on to hope. True believers will endure because we have the very nearness of God sealing us in faith.

Sarah and I had a miscarriage and a pregnancy we thought would miscarry back to back. And one night we were talking about how hard those trials were, but Sarah mentioned how much harder it would be if our firstborn died. A child who we had known for years already outside of her womb. She said, "If Owen died, I don't know what I would do. I would hope I would believe, but it would be hard."

This is where this wonderful doctrine of what is ours in Christ is so dear. For those who believe in the gospel, you will believe even when the world itself begins to crumble because when you are at your very weakest God will not abandon the faith that he himself provided.

This is what Jesus means when he says **John 10:28-29**.

The gospel of Jesus continues the work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit to carry you in your faith even when life is at its hardest.

And this work, done in the shadow of life's trials is the blessed reminder of what will one day be our possession forever. One day our faith will be made sight and we will no longer need faith in Christ, for we will have Christ present and always in eternity.

Look again at where this culminates: **Ephesians 1:14**. To the praise of his grace.

Three times that phrase has been repeated in this text. Three times it is attached to the work of Jesus, and it is seeing the work of Jesus which gives us over to praise for God the Father.

In verse 11-12 it looks back into eternity past, in verses 13-14 it looks forward into the New Heavens and the New Earth. And in verses 3-4 it looks at what we have at this very moment. Past, future, and present all robed in portraits of praise to God because of what Jesus has done.

Paul's message to the church is loud and clear: How were you made? You were made according to the will of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Why were you made? You were made to praise his glory.

If you are a believer this week I want you to pray that God might open your eyes to what is in Christ. May that vision occupy your mind so that we might become the people and society that God desires us to be.