

For those of us who were with us last week, welcome back! If you were here last week, you know that we have just departed on a journey through the book of Ephesians. If you have your Bible with you, and I hope you do, I invite you to open to Ephesians 1.

As you open your Bibles, let me tell you a little story. I am currently working on a master's degree at Moody Bible Institute. It is the same school where I completed work on a bachelor's degree in biblical studies. DL Moody is the namesake and founder of Moody Bible Institute. As one of the modern-day heroes of our faith, Moody is best remembered for his ministry to the youth in inner-city Chicago, for his solid preaching of God's Word, and for the founding of Moody Bible Institute.

In one of his sermons, Moody recalls a story that happened one time when he was traveling to a church where he was invited to preach.

While standing in front of the church, a young man drove up. He had an aged woman with him. "Who is that young man?" Moody asked a nearby friend. His friend said, "Do you see that beautiful meadow and that land with the house on it?" "Yes," Moody answered. "Well, the father of this young man drank that all up." Moody's friend proceeded to tell him all about him. His father was a great drunkard, squandered his property, died, and left his widowed wife in the poorhouse. "And that young man," Moody's friend said, "is one of the finest young men I ever knew. He has worked hard and earned money, and bought back the land; he has taken his mother out of the poorhouse, and now he is taking her to church." When Moody heard the story, he thought, "This is an illustration worth remembering". This is how Moody applied it: The first Adam, in Eden, sold us for nothing; but the Messiah, the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, came and bought us back again. The first Adam brought us to the poorhouse, as it were; the Second Adam makes us prosperous and blesses us with every spiritual blessing in God.

This illustration from DL Moody's life is an illustration of redemption. The story tells of a woman who was left broken and destitute. She was led to the poorhouse with no way to redeem herself from her condition. But the story isn't really about the widow, it is about the son, and what the son did to redeem his widowed mother out of her poverty and bless her in so many incredible ways.

That's how the opening of the book of Ephesians begins. It begins with the story of God and what He has done through the Son, that is Jesus Christ, to redeem us from the poorhouse and bless us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places:

Ephesians 1:3

3 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,**

If you were with us last week, you remember that we opened **Google Maps** (figuratively), we dropped a pin, and we checked out street view in the book of Ephesians. Just like a road trip, we looked ahead to see where the road of Ephesians was taking us. Let's drop that pin again this morning and check out street view to see where Ephesians is taking us on this journey...

Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you

were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The destination, the central theme, for the book of **Ephesians is unity and oneness in the gospel of Jesus Christ**. Here's how the journey through Ephesians works:

As we approach Ephesians 4 (tracker), we get to look out the window as we travel and see incredible views of God, His gospel, and what He has done for us. With every site and landmark, our understanding and appreciation for the main emphasis of unity and oneness in Ephesians grows.

Once we arrive at Ephesians 4, we get to camp out a while and explore the area. We get to see how the story of God and what He has done invites us to live our lives in unity and oneness with God and with others.

Alright, pit stop over. We've checked the map to make sure we know where we are going. Let's get back on the road and consider the opening poem of Ephesians 1.

In Ephesians 1:1-14, Jesus is mentioned SIXTEEN TIMES. So, the book of the Bible with the strongest emphasis on unity opens by speaking and exalting the name of Jesus over and over and over again.

Here is our **first clue** to the biblical promise of unity for those who are in Christ: it is not about us, it is all about GOD and what HE has done through JESUS. As Christians, our very lives are centered in Jesus.

As a fish finds life in the water, we find our lives in Him. As a bird finds freedom, safety, and life in the air, so we find our freedom, safety, and life in Christ. As a plant finds life in the richness of the soil, we find our life in Christ and in the richness of His blessings that He lavishes on us...

Ephesians 1:3

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

Very clearly, the subject of this verse is God, not us. Our unity, if it is ever to be found, can only be found in God alone and in what He has done for us. He has blessed us, in Christ, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. What are these spiritual blessings that God has blessed us with?

They are blessings that we have received through the acts of God and what He has done for us through **the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit**.

It is so fitting that the first landmarks we will pass on our scenic journey to Ephesians 4 are images of the unity of God as portrayed in the Trinity.

We know that there is only One God of heaven and earth. The Lord our God is ONE. Our ONE God exists eternally, and He eternally exists as THREE distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three are each their own person, but they are completely ONE. The nature of God Himself is a revelation of the oneness and unity of God. Just as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit exist as

three persons who are unified in perfect oneness, so we also, by being united with God in Christ, exist with God in perfect oneness through Jesus.

So, Ephesians outlines the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ with an original poem written in Greek. In the original text, verses 3-14 are not separated by punctuation, but are written in a poetic form. The poem has three parts: the first praising God for what He has done through the Father, the second praising God for what He has done through the Son, and the third praising God for what He has done through the Holy Spirit. How fitting that Ephesians, the oneness book, begins with a picture of the oneness of God. Truly, there is no greater picture of oneness and unity than our God.

So, Ephesians helps us get our thinking right from the very beginning. The strong emphasis on God reminds us of our place. This life is not about you and me, it is about God and His glory.

A right understanding of ourselves always begins with a right understanding of God. Pastor Jerry always says that our **THEOLOGY informs our MEOLGY**. When we see God the right way, we see ourselves the right way. From the onset, Ephesians invites us to have a right view of God. One of the greatest causes of division in the church is from a misunderstanding of God. It is not enough for us to just be united in a spirit of love. Yes, that is vital! But we must also be united by sharing the mind of Christ. We must call true what God calls true if we want to experience unity.

I want to warn you. As we pass these landmarks and look at God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, you may see things that challenge your current view of God. I have often read words in this book that did not agree with my worldview or my opinions. As I have learned to trust in God's Word, I have come to the conclusion that, when the Bible says something I don't agree with, the best place for me to start is by assuming that it is right and I am wrong.

We are coming up on the first site on our journey! Let's look out the window and take in the sites as we marvel at the glory of God the Father in opening poem in the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:3-6

3 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, 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 to himself** 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**.

Theology is the study of God. SO MUCH THEOLOGY in just three short verse! This is the view outside our window on the journey of understanding unity and oneness in Ephesians. It is a view of God the Father and what He has done.

I find it very interesting that, in the book on oneness and unity, that the first view we get of God is a view that has caused division among believers throughout much of church history! It is the view that God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. It is the view that, in love, God the Father predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will.

There are plenty of resources that expound on this argument of election and freewill in the archives of church history. You can easily look them up. Rather than expound on the argument, this morning, we are simply going to expound on these verses about God the Father and what they tell us about God. We

are going to discover how the right view of God invites us into unity and oneness with Him and with one another.

What are these verses saying? The Bible clearly states that God has chosen us in Christ from before the foundations of the world. What does this mean?

It means that it was always God's plan to act on our behalf, to rescue us from the poorhouse, and to restore us to prosperity by lavishing on us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places! It means that none of this world or what has happened is an accident. It means that God is not trying to fix some big mistake. It means that God, in His eternal wisdom and insight, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of his glorious grace, determined to reveal Himself to us and to show us His great love and grace from before the foundations of the world were even set in place! It means God has not lost control. It means that God is sovereign and in complete control.

Ephesians 1:5

he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will

Ephesians 1:8b-9

in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

Ephesians 1:6

to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

When God laid the foundations of the world, He had a plan in mind. His plan was for our good. God does not have to discover who He is. God knows exactly who He is. God is aware of His goodness, His kindness, His mercies, His grace, His justice, His power, His majesty, His love, and His glory! He does not need to reveal Himself to Himself to know Himself! He is fully aware of His glory!

But we are not. For us to know God, we must discover who He is. We have to see Him. We have to see His great works so that we can come to understand just how glorious He really is. God desired to share His glory with us, He wants us to know His glorious grace. So, God set a plan in motion. A plan that was established before the world began. A plan in which His glory and His greatness would be placed on full display for all the world to see.

In the beginning, the Godhead, the Trinity, was in perfect agreement to create a perfect world. The world was, indeed, perfect. No sin. No brokenness. No failure. God filled the world with so much to enjoy, so much to discover, and so much to create. Then, God made man, the crown of all His creation. He made men and women in His own image, with His divine nature in them. He made them eternal beings, made to live with Him forever. God lived in unity and oneness with mankind. He walked with them in the garden. He spoke with them. He gave them meaning and purpose. The world was made perfect.

Soon, the people God had made would reject God and turn their backs on Him. They were lured away from God by their own desires and by the cunning lies of Satan, enemy of God. God did not invite evil into the world, but instead gave men and women a freewill so that they could do as they pleased. The

first Adam did as he pleased, and he gave himself to sin and death. He traded the goodness of God for a fleeting selfish pleasure. He ate the fruit of the tree that God had forbidden them to eat from.

In that moment, Adam experienced in himself the just payment due his error: Adam died a spiritual death. Natural death is a good illustration of spiritual death. Natural death is the separation of our bodies from our spirits. We know there is something wrong about death, that death is not the way it is supposed to be. Death causes pain and separation. It feels so permanent. Once we have lost a loved one, it is always with us.

Spiritual death is like natural death, but even more severe. Spiritual death is the separation of our spirit from God's Spirit. It is unnatural. We sense that there is something very wrong about our spirits being separated from God. We sense a hole in our lives that is beyond our ability to fill up. We know that spiritual death is not the way it is supposed to be. Spiritual death causes pain and grief. It can feel so empty, so permanent. From the moment we are aware that something is missing in our spirits, the reality of spiritual death is always with us.

After the sin of Adam, Adam died spiritually. His spirit was separated from God's Spirit. The Bible teaches that every person who was born of the race of Adam was born in the likeness of Adam, that is, spiritually dead.

Ephesians 2:1-3

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Like Adam, every person who has ever lived has been separated from God and dead in their trespasses and sins.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Adam is the ONE MAN who sinned. Through his sin, sin entered into the world, and death with it. Through Adam's sin, death spread to all men.

In other words, like the widow and the son, we were set. But our father, Adam, was intoxicated with sin. Through Adam, sin entered into the world and we were sent to the poorhouse.

Now, that analogy breaks down because it makes it sound like it was all Adam's fault. Certainly, we were born in the likeness of Adam, and it was through Adam that sin entered the world. We need a second analogy to understand our own sinfulness. Adam isn't the only one who sent us to the poorhouse. We sent ourselves to the poorhouse, too. Consider the analogy Jesus gave of the *prodigal son*.

Like the son in the story, in sin, we separated ourselves from the Father. We elevated ourselves above God and His goodness. We decided to leave His household, His family, and to pursue our own way of living. In doing so, we experienced total and complete loss. Our sin left us destitute. Through our own sin, we found ourselves in the poorhouse. Separated from God. Left to die.

But God the Father, out of His glorious grace, enacted His plan: the plan He had established in perfect agreement in the Trinity before the foundations of the world. God had looked forward from eternity past. He saw us before we ever were born. He saw the day we would fall away from Him, and He saw how desperately we would need to be redeemed. In love, He launched His rescue mission to save the world from sin by sending His one and only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth to die for our sins.

This is not cheap grace. This is glorious grace. God's plan cost Him dearly, but it was the best plan. It was the only way for God to reveal to us the glory of His spiritual blessings and His glorious grace. The Bible says that God the Father (look out the window) loved the world so much, that He gave His only begotten Son to die for our sins. In Jesus's death, our sins can be fully forgiven. The Bible teaches that **anyone who believes on Jesus** will receive the promise of the spiritual blessings of the poem in Ephesians 1!

This was God's plan. From before the foundations of the world, God looked ahead, saw our need, and made a plan so that we could be rescued from our sins.

Ephesians 1:3-6

3 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, 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** to himself 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.

It was in love that He predestined us for adoption. We were children of Adam. We were lost in our sins. Through Jesus Christ, God made a way for us to leave our broken, worldly family and be adopted into His loving, eternal family. Through Jesus, God has made a way for anyone who will believe to come to know Him. The entire world is invited to leave their worldly families behind and to join the family of God through Jesus. This promise is available to all who will believe on Jesus.

God did all this according to the purpose of His will. Nothing has happened by accident. This is important for us to consider. Everything that has happened has been part of God's plan. Every joy, every sorrow, every trial and test, every milestone and every failure... God saw it all. He is not making up for a mistake! God has allowed all that has happened so that you and I, right now, in this moment, might know the praise of His glorious grace! That in our fallenness and sinfulness, God did not depart. Instead, He acted on our behalf. He made Himself known to us, and He acted to rescue us from our sin. He planned it this way so we could be made holy and blameless. He determined it would be this way so that we could be adopted out of Adam's sinful line and become children of God the Father in His eternal family. Ultimately, He planned it this way for His own glory. The spiritual blessings we have received from God in Christ are not first about us! They are always first and foremost about Himself and His glory! And because God is good, when He is glorified, we who put our faith and trust in Him are the benefactors of His glorious grace.

And can it be that I should gain?
An interest in the Saviors blood?
Died He for me who caused His pain-
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be!
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

I cannot give a full answer, but I can contribute to the answer of why we gain from His reward. It is because HE is GLORIOUS! And because the Father is so GOOD, when He acts to reveal His glory, we are the benefactors! His acts are not about us, they are about His glory. But, when He acts, and align ourselves with Him, we get to be the ones who benefit from His glorious grace. Incredible!

Look out the window! We are just driving by the incredible view of God the Father. If we pulled the car over, we could just picnic here for hours or even vacation right here for weeks! But, in this series, we are on a journey to discover the unity and oneness promised to us in the book of Ephesians. Our understanding of God the Father is so important to grasping the fullness of God's promise for unity and oneness to us. Take one more look out the window. What do we need to remember and embrace this morning as we look at God the Father?

1. He is glorious, and His mighty works display His glory
2. He has chosen us before the foundations of the earth, and He has predestined us for adoption to Himself as part of His family

Here we must pause. For some of you, you have not received His grace and been adopted into His family. You are still dead in your trespasses and sins. You are still following after your own desires and the cares of this world. You have not become a benefactor of His glory because you have not softened your heart and aligned yourself with God. Your heart is still about you instead of about God. That can change this morning. Oh, we still have so much to learn about God! But you know enough to become part of God's eternal family right now. If you know that you are separated from God by your sin, if you know that Jesus died so that your sins can be forgiven, and if it is your desire to align yourself with God and trust in Him, you can be saved right now! Saved from sin. Saved from spiritual death. Saved and brought into God's eternal family. All you must do is believe and allow God to shift your heart from being self-centered to making Jesus the center of your life. Will you do it?

Pray. The next step is baptism!

What God has done is for His glory, not yours. You are a benefactor of God's glorious grace. Baptism is your way to express to God your gratitude. It is a simple way to obey Him and demonstrate with your life that He is your King. It is a way to praise His glorious grace to others and proclaim His goodness in your life. It is a way for us to celebrate with you and to live up the name of Jesus together.

If we were here this morning, I would invite you forward to talk to Pastor Hugh. COMMENT. We will follow up.

3. All He has done is to the praise of His glorious grace – not to us, but to His name be the glory
4. Everything that has happened has occurred inside of His will

It is on this last point that I want to challenge you, saints in Jesus, before we leave this place this morning. Because we live in a fallen world, all of us know pain. We know the hurts of sin that come when someone we love wounds us. We know the searing pain of grief that comes from the loss of a loved one, whether by death or by estrangement. Deep inside, we feel the brokenness of this world and the shadow of sin that causes suffering, pain, and divisions all around us.

Within every human heart, of every race and culture, is one unifying question. **Does my pain and my suffering matter, or is it pointless?**

When we get a picture of God the Father, we understand that it all matters. Every hurt, every pain, every loss matters in so much as we embrace the reality of who God is and receive from Him the spiritual blessings we have from Him in Christ. Every challenge we experience, every suffering we endure, is intended by God to cause our hearts to trust Him and love Him more. Satan wants to use our losses, our sufferings, our struggles, to rob us, kill us, and destroy us. But we are aware of his schemes.

Every trial we face is an opportunity. We can either give opportunity to Satan, or we can agree with God and give opportunity for Him to work in our lives. God accomplishes His purposes through suffering. Jesus had to suffer for God's purpose and will to be accomplished. In our lives, when we suffer, it is an opportunity for us to press in to God and know His glorious grace more deeply. It is an opportunity for us to praise God for His glorious grace and lead others to Him.

So, **what are you experiencing right now that is painful or difficult?** What challenge or loss are you enduring? What hardship are you facing? Will you bow in prayer with me?

Identify something that is causing you pain or trouble in your life.

Now, in light of what you've heard about the Father this morning, what do you need to do with that struggle? Will you allow it to lead you away from God, or will you allow God to use it to reveal to you even more of His goodness and His glorious grace? Will you enter into despair, or will you lift up the name of Jesus and praise the Father for all He has done?

It starts with your view of God. What will you believe today? If you will believe what God has done for you and fully embrace it, you will experience the lavishing on of His spiritual blessings and His glorious grace.

Take a moment in prayer, church family. Pause and make a decision. Where will you place your faith this morning? Will you trust in God? If you will, He promises you will know His glorious grace, and it will lead your heart to praise!

COME BACK STRONG next week on September 20th.

Gather the kids – The countdown timer for Bible Zone LIVE will start soon.