

EPHESIANS 1:1-3
GOD'S BLESSING – THE SOURCE AND THE SIGN
PASTOR ROB GODARD
CLOVERDALE BAPTIST CHURCH
December 2, 2007

It is told of Mahmoud, who conquered a great portion of India hundreds of years ago, that when he would conquer a new area, he would destroy all of the false gods. He would find the idols and he would wreck them, tear them down, and leave them destroyed at his feet. It is told that he came to a shrine where there was a large idol sitting there and a number of people were gathered around that idol. He forced his way into this temple and these people surrounding the idol said: please don't hurt our idol. In fact, it's responsible for everything good that has ever happened to us and we are dependent on it for riches and wealth and good crops and help for our children. We will give you all sorts of gold and treasures if you won't break down our idol as you have been breaking down the idols of places around. The story in poetry says:

Ransom vast of gold they offer,
Pearls of price and jewels rare,
Purchase of their idol's safety,
This their dearest will he spare.
And there wanted not who counseled
That he should his hand withhold
Should that single image suffer
And accept the proffered gold.

But this warrior, after a moment's pause said that he would rather be known as the breaker than the seller of idols, and he struck the image with his battle axe and his soldiers soon joined in and in an instant, the idol was broken to pieces. It proved to be hollow and had been used as storage, a safe for precious gems and jewels. As the image was shattered, these jewels fell at his feet – much more than he had been offered to save this idol.

Again, the poetry:

From its shattered side
Revealing pearls and diamonds
Showers of gold
More than all proffered ransom
More than all a hundred fold.

Die to self:

Oswald Chambers, in commenting on this story, says: Such an idol is self - pleading eloquently to be spared and offering in return pleasures and treasures untold. But when Paul, ignoring self's plea, learned the secret of losing his life for

Christ's sake, he found true wealth and pleasure. The Christ against whom he had directed his rage and venom now possessed and energized his whole personality in such a way that he could only describe it as Christ living in him. He learned the treasure so profoundly that he was able to say with joy: To live is Christ, to die is gain.

So many of us are promised things from self. Really one of the great demonic ploys and their attack on Christianity and their attack on us as individuals, is if you will just save this one idol, it offers you satisfaction, it offers you wealth and treasure. The Bible says: die to self. Give it up, serve me with all of your might, follow the God of the Bible, and die to self. Jesus said: if anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross, deny himself daily, and follow me.

Ephesians 1:

If you have your Bibles, open them with me to the book of Ephesians. We have this tremendous privilege, God willing, of working through this entire book. I am not sure how long it will take, but it's been exciting to study and to read. I hope many of you have spent time in this marvelous book this week. I truly believe that if you are willing to saturate yourself, to read the book every week, and to read Chapter 1 every day until we move on to Chapter 2, which will be a number of days, that not only will you never be the same again, and you won't – God's word is truly sharper than any two edged sword and it does shape us – not only will you never be the same, but we as a church will never be the same. There'll be an energy, a renewed passion and delight in the living God, and a willingness to treasure Jesus and what He has promised far beyond anything else the world could offer.

I hope too that you are taking the time to memorize Ephesians, Chapter 1. If you do just one verse a week – that's not very much, just read it over and over again when you are driving. Don't read it while you're driving but maybe when you're stopped at a stop light, just read that one verse and put it with the one you've memorized before it. And again, I would say that in the battle that God has called you to fight for joy and for a passionate pursuit of being able to say honestly and authentically: for me to live is Christ, to die is gain - that being placed in your mind will be a powerful tool in this battle.

Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you.

I truly believe if you are willing to do this, things will never be the same.

This book starts off beautifully.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To God's holy people in Ephesus, ^[a] the faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we could move very rapidly through this because this is very typical of greetings in this time when they would write letters. It's almost like the way we sign letters. If you haven't got your Christmas letters going yet, you should. Or Christmas emails I suppose now. But you know how we sign our Christmas letters – Love, the Godards. I hope you don't sign yours that way. But: Love, whatever your last name is or your first name. This is kind of like that – it's a greeting, it's the way they would start a letter.

But there's some profound truth that if we're willing to analyze and enjoy and rejoice in could literally change how we live our lives, through the power of the spirit of God - opening our eyes to the richness of this. It's exciting stuff - information that is not just information to know, but to have a profound impact on our lives. This text has a lot to teach us. It starts off with: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. Something incredibly profound in the start.

God changes and calls people:

I want us to notice first that God changes and calls people. God changes and calls people. There's immense hope here for anyone who's praying for a lost loved one who is struggling to find hope themselves. Hope for forgiveness, maybe when you think your sin is great, or hope for a lost loved one who doesn't know Jesus whom you've shared Jesus with for years and years and they constantly reject the Jesus of the Bible. There's hope here in that first introduction of Paul.

God can change anyone:

You remember who Paul was? He was a man named Saul. This word reminds us of two incredible truths. God can change anyone. Saul was a Jew from Tarsus which was a major city in Asia Minor. He was in a multicultural world, he was a scholar, he was zealous for the religion that he was in. By the way, religion does not save you. Being passionate does not save you. He was passionate, way beyond all of us here. So passionate that we think he had the entire Old Testament memorized. So passionate that he gave his entire life to stamp out anything that would go against the Jewish God or the Jewish understanding of God. And the key people he was fighting were Christians.

Galatians 1:14, in talking about this man Saul:

I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Saul was brilliant. Saul was passionate. Saul was religious. Saul was wrong.

If you were going to pick someone who could not come to Jesus, it would be someone like Saul. He was on the opposite side. He was persecuting followers of the Way. In fact, when Stephen, a man of God, a preacher of the word, a servant of the living God, someone who stood out among all Christians, was

being murdered by people around him – Saul stood by giving his approval if not actually blessing this as a key leader.

He was going to Damascus to persecute Christians, to hurt them, to kill them, to separate families, to abuse them. And God met him there in power. Just the introduction – the word Paul – is a reminder that no one is beyond the incredible grace of God.

I don't know about you but there are some times when I am praying for people that I love dearly that don't know Jesus, some who even are opposed to Jesus and the Jesus I believe in. There's this inkling of: God, will You ever save them? God, are they beyond Your saving?

Don't give up hope:

And then I open my Bible and I read the word "Paul", and I realize that not only is no one beyond saving – God chooses often to save those furthest away to display the wealth of His glorious grace. The grace of God can change anyone. Don't give up hope.

Maybe this morning, you've come and you look at your own life and you see sin, and it's vile to you, and there's a part of you that is almost giving up hope on your Christianity, your own pursuit of God, your own relationship. We're going to talk this morning about what it means to go after God as your primary treasure. And maybe you've been trying that for years and you're feeling like giving up hope. Remember Paul, who was Saul. Remember that in Christ there is this radical change, radical forgiveness, radical joy!

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, it says:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

God did that with Saul. God does that with people today. Don't give up on yourself, your pursuit of God. Don't give up in praying for those who don't know Jesus – such an encouragement for us.

God's grace is through Jesus:

Just a little side note here before we go on to the second great truth in this. There is a lie that is out there today that says: if I am passionate enough, if I believe something enough, God will be gracious and bring me to heaven anyway even if it's not Jesus. The Bible is very clear. Jesus, in John 14 says:

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus meant it when He said it. And Saul – Paul – is an example of that. Don't ever believe the lie that God's grace extends beyond Jesus. The wealth of God

is Jesus. And you see this passionate Paul has become a Christian because of his faith in Jesus Christ – not because of his passion and zeal before Christ.

God gave him a task:

A secondary note in this is that God gave this man, Saul who became Paul through His grace, a task. In our text, it says:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

In other words, God's will was, God's sovereign will which we are going to study in Ephesians Chapter 1, is this amazing thing. God's will was to give Paul a task. The task for Paul was to be an apostle. Now an apostle just literally means in the Greek "a sent one" or "a messenger". But in the case of Paul, it's also not just something he is doing, it's a title as well as a description. He is one of the apostles, one of the 12. He has been specially commissioned by God to give leadership to the people of God – to give scripture to us.

If we were analyzing the history of the church and we asked the question: who has had the most impact on the church? Paul would be in the top two or three - an amazing man. God gave Paul a task and this task was incredible because Paul wasn't worthy of the task. Paul had persecuted the church and killed precious children of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Paul was not worthy to be an apostle or even to be a servant of God. He was not capable.

We're going to read later in 2 Corinthians 12 and in other places that he was weak, that he had an illness of some sort or some sort of thorn in the flesh, that he wasn't a great speaker, he was short we think given some things that were said, and ugly - not very charismatic in the attraction meaning of the word. But God chose him to do incredible things in the history of Christianity, and to impact eternity in incredible ways. I think to impact us as he was inspired by the Spirit of God in writing the book of Ephesians.

Called by God:

I think that reminds us that everyone who has been changed by God has also been called by God. Let me put that in an easier way. If you are here this morning and you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour – He has a job for you to do. And sometimes the easy answer for us is: well, I'm not worthy, you don't know what my life was like before I came to Jesus! And my answer is: I don't have to know that. I know about Paul. You see, God has a job for you and you might say: well I am not worthy and I am not capable. And my answer to you would be: well, of course you're not! God's called you to be a part of shaping eternity! You're not capable of that! Neither was Paul. But God has a job for you. God has a job for me. It's not about our worthiness or our capabilities. It's about serving the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords as ambassadors for Him, of reaching out with the gospel of Christ, and about serving the church, His bride.

In fact, it's my belief that every person that calls Cloverdale Baptist Church home should be involved in ministry at Cloverdale Baptist Church. And if you're not, not only will you suffer, but we will suffer. Ephesians 4:16.

¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

One of the great lies of the modern church is that it's the leaders who do the work or the 10/90 principle or the 20/80 principle, depending on the health of the church. God wants a 100% church where everyone is pulling in the direction of bringing glory to His name and changing eternity with its people.

This simple call:

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

Called though unworthy:

I want you to put your name in there if you are a Christian and I want you to say something like: Rob, a pastor for Christ Jesus by the will of God. Or whatever it is that you think He has called you to do, because He **has** called you to be in ministry - to be in ministry here, serving the body, building it up. And again, remember, it's not about your worthiness. You cannot be worthy outside of Jesus and in Jesus **everyone** is worthy. It's not about how good you are. Look ahead to Ephesians 3 Verse 8:

⁷I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. (You notice where he is resting?) ⁸Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

God has a job for you in this place for His glory and the good of this church. I said earlier I believe that if we take this seriously, we will be different as individuals – because of this incredible book. I also believe that we will become mature, not lacking anything as a church.

So here is the question for you – we will apply it as we go and we will apply it at the end. The question for you is: have you been impacted by the grace of God. And if so, where are you serving? Where are you helping us become all that God desires us to be?

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints in Ephesus,^[a] the faithful^[b] in Christ Jesus:

God's people declared and described:

The second thing this text does for us is it declares and describes God's people – declaring that they are saints and then describing them as the faithful in Christ

Jesus. We said this last week, but the word Ephesus is not in all the books of our oldest manuscripts – perhaps it should be there, perhaps not. But we could reword this as: to the saints in Cloverdale, the faithful in Christ Jesus. This is the inspired word of God and it's declaring something about the followers of Jesus and then it's describing them. The declaration – we're called saints – really means literally "holy ones" - those set apart and consecrated. Kent Hughes adds the word was descriptive of what had happened in their hearts. And what happens in the hearts of every believer.

James Montgomery Boyce says this: "Every Christian is a saint and every saint is a Christian. Moreover, every true Christian is in some sense separated from the world. It does not mean that we are taken out of the world – that is not the way God operates – but it does mean that we are removed from it in the sense of not really belonging to the world any longer. If we are truly Christians, we have a new nature, a new set of loyalties, and a new agenda. We belong to a different kingdom. We have been declared righteous, justified, holy, children of God." Isn't that amazing?

Do you know that if you belong to Jesus, you're a saint? And you know, as a culture, we kind of set aside that we have these saints, right. We're talking right now whether a nun from Calcutta should be a saint or not, and it depends on her works. And no one wants to compare ourselves to her. She was an amazing woman who did incredible works. And if you compare me to her, I know on the scale where I end up! But here's the wonderful news: I'm in Christ! You see what's amazing about this? You know, we kind of esteem the saints on earth when in reality we should be esteeming the joy of being in Christ, set apart, holy, and justified by His precious gift on the cross of Jesus Christ, declared righteous, holy children of God. Did you know that? It's amazing! That's a declaration.

Saved by grace:

Secondly, here we are described as faithful in Christ Jesus. In the New Testament this probably means living your life faithfully and continuing on in the faith. Here in the context, it refers to both, saying: you're faithful to Jesus and you're carrying on in the faith and it's by His grace, by His declaration.

You know, there's a lie that's out there and the lie goes something like this – when you come to Jesus, you come just as you are, and you come in grace and His grace saves you. And that's amazing. But now - we've got a job for you to do – you've got to earn your salvation. That's false! The Bible teaches that His grace changes us, His grace keeps us faithful. Yes, believe. Yes, pursue God with all of your might. But He holds us true.

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, for we are God's workmanship

Notice it looks back. We're saved by grace. It looks ahead. We are kept by grace.

created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It's amazing! I love the little term here: **In** Christ Jesus - this declaration, this description – **In** Christ. I love what John Staunton says about this: "To be in Christ is to be personally and vitally united to Christ as branches are to the vine and members to the body and thereby also to Christ's people. For it is impossible to be part of the body without being related to both the head and the members."

Much of what the epistle later develops is already here in bud. According to the New Testament and especially in Paul, to be a Christian is in essence to be **IN** Christ, one with Him and with His people. It's an incredible reality. By the way, there's tremendous value in this. I would say to you that I am anti self-esteem. In other words, I don't want to walk around here and say to you that you're a good person and you have good things in you and we need to find those good things and blossom them. Although, there might be some truth in that – there's a tremendous lie. I am a Christ esteemed person. What I mean by that is – **IN** Christ there is tremendous value, tremendous worthiness. You are called a saint, you are described as faithful in Christ Jesus and God has a plan for you - and for us, as we unite together for the glory of God. Isn't that amazing!

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints in Ephesus,^[a] the faithful^[b] in Christ Jesus:

Grace and peace:

And then there's this tremendous greeting:

²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I've entitled this: God's blessing – the source and sign. Grace and peace - very standard greeting in the Roman world. What Paul does, he changes it a little bit, and he gives it significant spiritual meaning. Grace and peace are from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It's incredible in this that we can see that God desires a relationship with us and then offers us a way, unworthy though we are, to know Him as our Lord and our Saviour. Grace is God's undeserved favour – it's getting something we don't deserve. I think if we understand it in a biblical way it's the richest word in any language, if defined as God's grace.

One scholar that I like defines it like this: "Grace is the free unmerited unexpected love of God and all the benefits, delights and comforts which flow from it." It means that while we are sinners and enemies, we have been treated as sons and heirs. God's love is amazing!

You see what I mean that this book, if we truly grasp the riches of it, will change everything about us?

Paul – he was Saul! Never give up in praying for someone. Never give up on yourself and your pursuit of God. Yes, you are a sinner. Yes, the person you are praying for is far from God, but God specializes in grace.

An apostle of Christ Jesus – you have a job to do, if you're a Christian. It's tremendous. It's also a little scary because if we believe what the Bible says in a positive way, we also need to believe what it says in a negative way. And that means if you don't use your gift, we will not be mature. We will be unhealthy. Which means, and I tremble as I say this, that Cloverdale Baptist Church is not as healthy as God wants us to be because still we have many people who come Sunday after Sunday, and don't serve. Maybe because they feel unworthy or maybe because they feel they have nothing to offer. But you see that Paul was used of God and there's really no excuse - only joyful pursuit.

And then grace and peace, peace – this wonderful relationship with God – we were at war with God in our souls. There was this gap that every culture has known – this gap between us and God and we try to fill it with things or false religions or treasures from earth. Then God says I want to give you peace with me through Jesus Christ, the Lord who died on the cross in our place. And we celebrate at Christmas, but really focused on Easter, and then the risen Lord, who is even here with us now. So many of us miss out because we hold back from God - God wants all of us so that in all things He might receive the glory. Are you experiencing peace?

Peace:

The second wish – the second blessing? Peace inside, peace externally – Jesus has paid the price and we can experience peace with him at all times. Not because we deserve, not because we're perfect, but because Jesus died for our sins.

This morning, there are so many rich implications. The main one that I would like us to take from this passage is that God wants us to get to the place in our lives where Jesus is our greatest treasure. Where we would joyfully sacrifice and break everything else because we are so satisfied in Him that our relationship with Him is more important than anything and everything else.

Applications:

But we need to get specific because for that to be applied there needs to be changes in our lives and constant growth. So I have about seven applications. We'll move fairly quickly through them and we'll close in the rich celebration of communion.

Application No. 1 – I would like you to remember to continue to read this book – to stay in Ephesians Chapter 1 maybe if that's how much you read, but to try to get through the book once a week - just once a week for the next year or so that this book will become a rich friend. There's so much that is here, so much that we will try to plumb but not even begin to get the depth of what God has for us and wants from us. Read the book once a week over the next few months or years as we study. Try to memorize Chapter 1. When I say memorize – just read it over and over again one verse at a time to the praise of God's glorious grace.

Experience internally some wonderful things this morning. When I say experience - God commands an emotional response. We used to believe the lie that there's a train that is pulling us along. And at the front of the train – you've probably seen this diagram – we have intellect and following intellect is the will and following the will is the emotions. And there's some truth to this train. But God commands emotions. He wants you to experience and has given you the power to experience peace - with God and yourself! If you're here and you don't know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour – He wants you to have peace and fullness of joy. He wants you to have that by coming to know him as Lord and Saviour. He wants you to have that because He came to Earth – we celebrate that at Christmas – He came because we were sinners. He came to seek and to save the lost – those who don't know Him. He came to pay the price on the cross for all sin.

His death is efficient – only for those who believe. And so when we say He came to pay the penalty for all sin we're saying it's sufficient for all sin but it's efficient for only those who believe. So this morning, if you're here and you don't have peace with God – whether you've been in the church your whole life, or maybe God just brought you here this morning on a snowy day – for this one message - believe in Jesus. Believe that He purchased your forgiveness on the cross by shedding his blood. Trust in Him and experience. If you are a believer, rest in his forgiveness! Yes, there's a fight for holiness – this book is going to take us there – but we need to fight for holiness **from** peace, not **for** peace. Experience with God.

Secondly, experience joy in who God has declared you to be and His work in you now – you are a saint – He is making you faithful in Christ Jesus. There needs to be a joy in our lives because God has declared us to be this!

And then we need to worship – we need to worship the greatness of who God is and what God has done. Then we need to share the gospel with someone who is impossible – someone like Saul - although he is long with Jesus. In fact, may I encourage you – this season is a great time to do it – to find someone who doesn't know Jesus that you're close to and share the gospel with them again – the joy of forgiveness, the joy of Jesus. Bring them to some of the events that we're having here. Maybe the children's play, or maybe to the Christmas eve

service, or something we're doing where the gospel will be shared. Because the spirit of God is stronger than the most zealous of men or women.

Lastly. Find a role to play in the church. I mean now is the time. Find a role to play. We have tremendous needs as a church. We're growing and that's wonderful – but as we grow, we want to grow healthy as well as numerically. And the Bible says that means that we need people to come and to serve. For example, we need a nursery coordinator – that's a tremendous ministry to children. And children are valued by Jesus and so children are valued by Cloverdale Baptist Church. And so we need someone who is willing to say: you know we are double servicing and so I will focus on one of those times with children and I'll pour my life into them and I'll pray for them. We have a number of people already doing that, but we need more! Maybe it's youth ministry, maybe it's a prayer team that we're going to put together for Sunday mornings, maybe it's ... I don't know. But if you're not serving at Cloverdale Baptist Church, not only are you missing out on treasure – we are. And we'll be unhealthy. So may I encourage you and challenge you to get involved.

Ephesians 1 is a chapter about God and if you see God for who He is and respond in humble worship, you will never be the same. Neither will Cloverdale Baptist Church. Let's pray.

Father, it's our longing to please You. It's our deep desire to know You more. As we turn in a book like this to read of the wealth of Your grace and to see someone You changed and transformed, would You use that to give us hope. Hope that You are an amazing God, hope that we can trust in You for our own forgiveness and for Your power reaching out and touching the lives of others. Would You bring conviction for those here who don't know You or for those who know You but are not serving you, so that we would become joyful and healthy as we continue to grow in Your grace. We praise You for grace and peace, for we acknowledge that they are from you. We celebrate their richness in worship and adoration of You. In Jesus' name. Amen.