

Ephesians 1:7-12
(Isaiah 44:21-23; Luke 1:68-75)
“What the Son Has Done”

Introduction

We are studying one of the great sentences of the Bible, a sentence of over two hundred words, neatly translated into short sentences and paragraphs of comprehensible English, but in Paul's Greek, an ecstatic verbal explosion of praise to God for what he has done to redeem his people and to undo the destructive effects of our rebellion and sin. As we have noted, there is a clear, three-fold structure within the sentence, as Paul gives praise in turn to the Father, Son and Spirit, ending each section by ascribing glory to the Lord (see 1:6, 12 & 14).

We turn, this morning, to the middle section, which focuses on the work of God's Son and the reason that we should worship and serve him with gratitude and wonder. Once again, Paul describes three areas where Christ's work should be life transforming for those who have received him, and then applies it, as he did in the first section, in a call to mission and worship.

May I simply ask you at the outset whether you are yet resting in what Christ has done for you, and whether your experience of his grace has spurred you on in a new direction, as you seek to learn of him and follow him on a journey that leads to life and joy and peace – and more than we could now begin to imagine or request? Don't let the greatest issues of existence pass you by, while you give your precious life to things that are passing away and that one-day won't matter to you at all. I am inviting you to begin to know and embrace what you have longed for all your life, though you did not realize its source.

Body

- 1. In Christ, we have redemption and forgiveness: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us” (1:7-8).**

In Christ, we are redeemed through his blood:

Redemption refers to being purchased out of bondage or slavery. Our problem is this: we don't just have certain tendencies toward bad behavior. We are, by nature, worshippers of self and seek to bend all things – other people, circumstances, nature, and even God – to accomplish our purposes and satisfy our desires. We are born in rebellion against God, enslaved to self, and so we are in bondage to sin and death. Beyond that, our best efforts may

improve our attitude and outward behavior by dealing with the symptoms of sin, but cannot deal with and heal the disease itself.

What would we be willing to sacrifice in order to free from slavery, not family or friends, but enemies? The gospel is good news precisely because God has redeemed us from bondage through the sacrifice of his Son. Paul puts it this way in his letter to the church in Rome: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." ... And, "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Romans 5:8-10). As the lovely hymn celebrating our redemption asks, "What wondrous love is this, O my soul?"

In Christ, we are forgiven according to the riches of his grace lavished upon us:

In freeing us from sin's power and penalty, he also freed us from guilt and shame by forgiving us. Paul can hardly find words adequate to express his wonder at this: "according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us." God does not eek out a little grace to those who somehow prevail in their pleas. The words meagerly and miserly can never be applied to God. His grace and mercy are beyond all measure. Two thousand years have not sufficed for composing songs and sermons extolling his grace, and for those who are his, each day brings a fresh apprehension of the height and depth and length and breadth of his love.

Are you still walking around consumed with guilt and shame, fearful of discovery? Or – even worse – are you walking around thinking that you are *not* in desperate need of his grace? In either case, you need the gospel of Christ. And every day of our lives we will continue to need the gospel, because "it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). If you believe this, then receive it and rest in his grace. If you do not, then you are in a far more desperate situation than you realize, for you neither know how badly broken you are, nor how full and free is the remedy God offers those who seek him.

- 2. In Christ, we have wisdom and insight: The "riches of his grace" have been "lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (1:8-10).**

In Christ, we have wisdom:

Wisdom is greater than mere knowledge. It is the ability to apply knowledge to the circumstances of life in order to achieve a desired end. A very intelligent person who knows many useful things may still make shipwreck

of his life if he lacks wisdom. There is such a thing as a very smart fool. Better to have great wisdom than great intelligence, because all of one's learning is only useful in life to the degree that it is wisely applied. And the Bible tells us that wisdom is God's gift to his children, if only we use it for his ends (James 1:5-8). Otherwise, we will return to folly.

This wisdom is needed precisely because God has given his people knowledge of his purposes, personal knowledge of his Son through his Spirit, and knowledge of his Word, which must be prayerfully studied and humbly interpreted and applied. Without wisdom, much of this is for naught. But with wisdom, the knowledge God gives is life transforming.

In Christ, we have insight:

And so, it follows quite logically that Paul would remind us that God has given us insight into his plan that lies at the heart of the meaning of human history. This great question of meaning that lies at the heart of religious quests of all kinds has been revealed in God's Word, and it is this: "to unite all things in him [that is, in Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10). What does that mean?

We live in a world that is badly broken. Families are at war, husbands and wives, parents and children. Communities are at war, neighbor against neighbor. Nations are at war, and within nations, various groups and parties are at war. And we are at war with this good earth that God gave to us as a home, and which we have despoiled and plundered and polluted in our quest for short-term profit and pleasure. Jesus Christ came into the world in order to reconcile us to God and to one another, and to reconcile us to the entire cosmos, the environment in which we live and move and have our being. That is why Paul, in his Romans letter, wrote,

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Romans 8:20-22).

Our redemption is cosmic in scope. God's plan is that all that he has made, and that our sin and rebellion has broken, will be made whole again in Jesus Christ. We should live in that hope and labor to show those around us in word and deed something of what that will be like. We are to be the presence of the future, giving pictures, in the way we relate to one another, of God's plan for the ages. That is why I so often say that we are called to live in such a

way that those who know us will have reason to believe that the gospel is true.

3. In Christ, we have a glorious inheritance: “In him we have obtained an inheritance” (1:11).

In Christ, we have a present inheritance:

I need not say much here, because we have already noted this inheritance. Paul brings it up over and over again in this first chapter. It includes both present and future blessings. Presently, we have – as we have seen – new life even now in Christ, with the Holy Spirit as the down payment of all that will be ours in the age to come. Even now we are in Christ, and we have “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.” We are free to follow Christ in a joyful, hopeful life of gratitude and obedience. We know God’s plan for human history.

In Christ, we have a future inheritance:

But we also have an inheritance that reaches into eternity and surpasses all that we could now imagine. Paul writes, later in this chapter, “that you may know the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (1:18). We have glimpses given us of what is coming, but also the assurance that it will surpass all that we have so fervently sought this side of the coming glory.

The great Puritan theologian, John Owen, captured the thought in his exposition of Jesus’ healing of a blind man. Jesus touched the man’s eyes and asked, “Do you see anything?” The man replied, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” Then Jesus touched his eyes again and when the man opened them, “his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly” (Mark 8:22-26). Owen wrote, “The first touch was grace. The second touch is glory.” However great, however wonderful, our present inheritance of grace, we wait for the second touch, and that will be joy unspeakable and full of glory.

4. That inheritance embraces a two-fold purpose: “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory” (1:11-12).

We are chosen and blessed for the mission of God.

Once again, just as in his exposition of what the Father has done for us (1:3-6), Paul ends this second section, a section devoted to the Son’s ministry to us, with the two-fold purpose of our inheritance: mission and worship. No

matter how we earn a living, no matter our age or health or unique set of gifts and life-experience, whoever we are, if we are in Christ then we are to be on mission with him.

The mission of reconciling the world to the Father, of reconciling people to one another and to the world around them, has been entrusted to us now. We pursue this mission in different ways, depending on our gifts and circumstances. But the mission of God to unite all things in Christ should never be far from our mind as we pursue our life together with family and friends and those we work and play along side. It gives eternal value to all we do, even to what might otherwise seem the most mundane, menial and meaningless tasks.

We are chosen and blessed for the worship of God.

And we are to live “for the praise of his glory,” even as Paul said that he and those who “were the first to hope in Christ might live for the praise of his glory” (1:12). This is a major theme in Paul’s letters. Later in this letter, he commends, “giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (5:20). He wrote in his Colossian letter, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). And to the Corinthians, he wrote, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

What we do together here on the Lord’s Day is to prepare and equip us to live lives of worship and praise. Once again, that is what turns even the otherwise menial and meaningless tasks to acts of worship and praise that delight us and our Father in heaven.

Conclusion

What of you? Does any of this make sense? Does it strike a deep cord in your heart, or does it seem like a foreign language, an incomprehensible message that does not resonate in the deepest places of your life? I am not asking whether I have spoken eloquently, for I have not. I’m asking whether Paul’s words find an echo and an affirmation in your heart and mind.

If it comes to you as truth to be embraced, then embrace it! Pursue the things that align with God’s purposes in human – and even cosmic – history. Seek the things that make for peace in the confidence that in Christ you have been redeemed, forgiven, enlightened and empowered for loving service of God and other people.

If this is a mystery to you still undisclosed, then I plead with you to confess that to the Lord and to ask him to give you what you most need – his Spirit, who alone can

give you the gift of faith and understanding. If you cry out to him in truth, he will hear your prayer – he has promised to do so (Romans 10:13). He will send his Spirit (Luke 11:13) to grant you faith to trust in Jesus for forgiveness of sin and will empower you for a new beginning to life.

Whoever you are, whatever you have done, life can begin again, if you cast yourself upon God's grace, for he is more willing to save and make new than we are to surrender ourselves to him. Stop running from love and from all you most deeply need and desire, for in him alone are all of the riches of glory.

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