

Well hey, open your bibles this morning if you would to the book of Ephesians. What a great beginning we had to our series last week and I'm so looking forward to continuing on this morning and in the Sundays to come. Somebody asked me how many weeks we're going to be in Ephesians. My answer was "Honestly, I have no idea - we haven't put an ending date to it." We will break in December for some Christmas celebration and teaching but we'll be back at it in January and we're going to just keep going through Ephesians until we get done - I hope that's okay - but I can't wait to see what God has for us in this amazing letter from Paul to the church at Ephesus. We've entitled our series "The Truth, The Way, The Life - A Study in the Book of Ephesians".

And if you would, in honor of God's word, would you stand and let me read to you this morning, Ephesians Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2 - Ephesians, Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2, where it says: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God," - "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Pray with me, would you: Father God, we simply come before You this morning here in this moment and we pray, God, we beg You, please to unleash Your Spirit and Your Word and the life-transforming, heart transforming work that they alone can do. God, we want to be changed; we want to be a people who, in relationship with Your Son, are molded and shaped into His very image and we know, God, that we are in and of ourselves, incapable and unable to do that and we know, God, that it is Your Spirit and it is Your truth that forms us and shapes us and molds us. So do that today, we pray, as we continue in this study, this great truth from Ephesians that paints this picture of our salvation and what we can do with it in the days to come. Please, God, be with us and be honored by our time today, in Your Son's name we pray, Amen. Amen. You can be seated.

Hey! I want to point something out to you before we jump in any further this morning. I want to take you right back to verse 1 - would you look there with me? Ephesians 1: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the" - who? Say it out loud, please. "to the saints." Say it again - to the who? "to the saints." Often times, this word comes with a number of different preconceived notions of what it means to be a saint. I would suspect most of you, when you hear this phrase, - and again - he writes to the "saints" at Ephesus but we know as we've grown accustomed to studying God's word, that we make application here to us as well, so really he's writing not only to the saints at Ephesus but to the saints of Blackhawk. So I say to you, are you a saint? Do you view yourself as a saint? Do you understand yourself to be a saint? And often times the preconceived notions leads us to say "No, I'm not a saint", 'cause we think "saints" are these pristine and pure and kind of nicely packaged, you know, with a bow and everything's just like it's supposed to be, and we know that's not us so we say, "No, I'm not a saint."

Well, I want you to understand this morning - really important that you understand as we jump into this study - he writes to saints and a saint is somebody ,who by virtue of the very definition of the word, **a saint**, my friends, **is someone who is set apart**. I want you to write this down. **A saint is one who is set apart; a saint is one who is separate; a saint is one who is distinctly different** from the context within which he or she lives. Did you hear that? You see, a saint is unique and a saint is one who, because of his or her relationship with Jesus Christ - and because of what God has done in him, in her, they are able to, they are - it's made possible because of what God has done for them, to live in their context - wherever that might be. And what's so cool about this is that last week, we spent the entire morning helping you understand what the context was. And, my friends, the context for these people wasn't pretty, was it? It was a debauched and immoral and illicit culture filled with unspeakable acts, barbaric pagan worship and illicit, immoral stuff going on in the great Temple of Diana. And in the midst of that culture and that city - with all of that as a backdrop - he says, he writes "to the saints" who are separate, set apart, distinct. You with me? And he writes to you and me; he writes to you and me and he calls you - if you know Him - He calls you saint, because what's assumed is that in your relationship with His Son, if you have that, what's assumed is that's how you're living - that when they look at you, when they watch your family, when they see you at work in the cubicle, when they watch you on the ball field, when they see the way you conduct yourselves in the everyday of your life - were assuming that you are

different, that you're distinct. Are you separated from them, this culture and this context that God's put you in? No! Literally, physically, geographically, no. God's word, in fact, tells us we're to be in but not of and we can be in and not of, and we can live lives, by virtue of the choices we make, that set us apart and make us what? Saints!

It's amazing. Recently, I had this lesson taught to me all over again by my own son. And I told you a few weeks ago about the visit we took up to East Lansing - it was his official visit - and we told you about some of the things that we experienced but I didn't tell you about this - it was an incredible experience for both my wife and I just to thank God and to see the growth and progress in our own son's life.

You know, the first night we were up there - and I knew it was coming - I didn't say anything to her - I should have. It kind of caught her by surprise but the first night we were up there, we were all out to dinner - coaches and team, and recruits and the whole nine yards - and after dinner, the team takes the recruits and they go out for the night. And they came over and said good-bye at the tables and Russell gave us a hug and a kiss and he kind of winked at us and off he went out for the night. And we went back to the hotel and he had a room there at the hotel with us - this was just right next to ours - and they told us we would see him in the morning. That's kind of a weird deal, you know, first time out, but we believed in our hearts that, you know, he would do his best and so we went to bed and tried to sleep and woke up early and he comes rolling in 8:30, all dressed and showered - big smile on his face. "Well hey, bud - how'd it go?" And he said "Aw, it went great." Big smile. He sits down at the end of our bed and he says, "Here's how it went." And he says, "We got to where we were going" and he said, "Dad and mom, it was packed, over a hundred students. It was a huge party. And it was all going on and the music was thumpin' and the guys and gals are there", and these guys that he was with just pulled him aside and not with a high heavy handed pressure type of thing - they just pulled him aside and said, "Hey, what do you want to do? This is your weekend. What do you want to do tonight?" And they said, "Do you want to get drunk? Do you want to get some girls?" And he said, "Man", he said, "I just" - he said - "It was amazing, it was like in that moment, all of a sudden everything I had been thinking about and all the prayers we've been praying about, how I would respond, and all the stuff you guys and Blackhawk Church and Blackhawk Christian School had taught me, it was like it all came together in this one moment." And he said, "I just - with all the calmness - I couldn't believe it - I just looked at them and said, 'No, not really.'" And they said, "Well, what do you want to do?" And he said, "That kind of caught me by surprise and so I'm thinking about what I want to do and all I could think about was all the, you know, fun things, dad and mom, all the fun things we always did." And I thought "Oh my gosh - he asked them to play rough house!" (Congregation laughter) And he said, "I just asked them if they liked to play cards! And they said, 'Yeah, we love to play cards!' So we played cards - he said "We played cards 'till two in the morning. It was great!" And they took him to the hotel and he went upstairs, put his key in the door and went to bed. And I say that to you because in that moment there - and he's no different than you - and you don't have to be at East Lansing. This happens to you and this happens to me every day: We get opportunities in this world of ours, in this context that we're in - in office cubicles and ball-fields, and grocery stores, and times with our families - we get opportunities to be "saints" - separate, in but not of, unique, distinct - and I don't know how he'll do on that in the days to come - I'm certainly grateful for his choice that night but I know this, you and I have an opportunity to live out this great salvation that God has given us and Paul, right from the get-go says, "Hey, separate ones; hey distinct ones, hey, different ones" - right there in the shadows of Diana, I'm writing to you, set apart and holy ones."

I'm convinced the question to ask is "Do I look more like Christ or more like the culture?" And you should ask yourself that question today: Do you look more like Him in the choices and the values that you hold on to or do you look more like culture?

Well, last week as we began our study of the book of Ephesians, we saw the apostle Paul beginning to speak life-giving truth into the hearts and lives of young believers, this young church that was surrounded by and inundated with so much - the very same challenges and temptations that you and I face today. Idolatry - idolatry was everywhere. Idolatry was everywhere and the

blessings - we talked about the blessings that these people were so hungry for and the blessings of idolatry in the city of Ephesus - pleasure and fulfillment and joy - was available to all. Ephesus was filled with - you can write these things in - Ephesus was filled with wealth and resources, immorality and illicit activity, black-magic and the occult, pagan worship and all there was to experience at the great Temple of Diana.

And my friends, it's all of this that Paul has in mind as he comes to Ephesians 1. And as he comes to Ephesians 1 - I love this - he throws this doctrinal, practical, counter-punch, right into the mix! It's as if he's saying, "Hang on, my friends, living in the shadow of Diana - hang on. You want to talk about blessings; you want to talk about real, lasting, eternal, meaningful blessings; real joy, real peace, real pleasure? Then read - then read this", he says. "Read this! Ephesians 1 to 3 - The first three chapters that describe and explain the truth about the blessing of your faith, the blessing - the truth about your salvation and all that comes with it - everything that comes with your salvation", - he says, "It's right here."

Understand the truth about your salvation and all that comes with it - three chapters - 1 to 3 - about your position, your standing, what God has done in you as He's placed you in the family of God, and then three chapters, Ephesians 4, 5 and 6, about THE WAY, the way you live out that faith; three chapters about practicing in the day to day of life - on college campuses, in your home and in your workplace; and in your marriage, and with your parenting; and as an employer, and as an employee - and the 4, 5 and 6 list goes on and on - I can't wait for us to get there. The practicing of your faith, based upon your position in the family of God, and when you understand and embrace THIS TRUTH, and when THE WAY you live reflects it, then that's THE LIFE! Oh, my friends, THAT IS THE LIFE - THAT'S living like you never imagined you could. That's living the way God designed you to live - THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE.

And here's the great reminder, Church. Here is the great reminder: All that stuff that you wrote on those cards three weeks ago, many of you were here, - all the stuff you wrote on those cards and all the idolatrous sin so many of you courageously confessed, publicly, right here in this room, two weeks ago, none of it will ever lead you - right? None of it will ever lead you to that life, the life that deep down in your soul you long to live. The only thing that will ever bring you the life is the truth and the way and all of that is found only in one Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who said in **John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Me."** And **Ephesians** is this incredible letter where **we see** again and again and again - especially here at the beginning - about **the blessings of being in Christ - in Christ.**

The Blessings of our Faith: Let's get started - what do you say? Let's look at the truth, the blessings of our faith. And as we make our way through verses 3 to 14, and I hope you'll read verses 3 to 14 several times - you should do that this week. You should read Ephesians 1:3-14 several times this week and as you make your way through those verses, you'll see as it relates to your salvation, you'll see past blessings.

A friend, a friend pointed this out to me this week - you'll see **past blessings** that have to do **with God the Father** - hope you'll write this down - verses 3 to 6 - you'll see **present blessings** that have to do **with God the Son**, and you'll see **future blessings - the blessings of our faith** - past, present and future blessings, which have to do **with God the Holy Spirit**, verses 12 to 14. So, let's jump in this morning, what do you say!

Past blessing number one. Let's look at the blessings of our faith as delineated by Paul to the Church at Ephesus to the saints who are set apart.

Number One: Past Blessing - We Were Chosen

There you go, write that down. Past blessing number one - this having to do with the work of God the Father in the work of salvation - we were chosen. There's three things I want you to see about God's choosing of His people - you ready? Three things I want you to write down about God's

standing against the fence. And I remember, even as a young man when I came to Christ at the age of 20, how amazing it was. You know, I had gone through some things at that point with my own father - I'm so grateful that God has graciously allowed he and I to just work those things out over the years. He and I are in this really good relationship these days, but in those days, you know, I had never been picked and then as a young adult, I felt a little abandoned, wishing I would have gotten picked over other options he had. That didn't work out. It was a great truth to come to terms with, that God had picked me and that I was on a team - His team; His Kingdom team. It was incredible, life-giving truth. Who picked? God picked. Where? Before the foundations of the world based on nothing you and I ever did or could have done. For what reason?

Number Three: The third thing I want you to see about God's choosing - **The Purpose**. Oh, this is big, my friends - don't miss this. The purpose, the scripture teaches us right here in the text, right there in Ephesians 1. It says that the purpose of His choosing - let's just read it together. Go back there - Ephesians 1: It says - verse 4: "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be" - there it is - I want everybody to say it out loud - GO! "holy and blameless" - one more time - "holy and blameless before Him." See, this is my - you don't even have - you have no idea how significant that is. We read that and so many times you and I read that and we think, "Oh, that's what we're going to be." No. It's not what the text says. What the text says is that when you came to faith in Him; when He actually called you before the foundations of the world - scratch that - before the foundations of the world, when He chose you - **in choosing you He made you in relationship with His Son**. When that time would come, "He made you holy and blameless". You not will be - YOU ARE! You are! In position, before God, because of the work of Christ, you are - YOU - holy, set apart, and righteous and blameless, with integrity. You are holy and blameless. This is your position.

I was just thinking about this. I just started to, in the last couple of days I just started to kind of play this out. Stay with me here. I started to think about the first three chapters and how it sets us up for the next three chapters and on this "He made you before the foundations of the world - when He chose you holy and blameless" - I went on, I just kind of kept going to 2 - I went to 2 - go to 2. Gosh, go to 2:5: "even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together" - look at 6: "and raised us up". He's done this. See, this has transpired. You've been raised up with Him. Ephesians 2:6: You've been "raised up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." You were chosen - you were chosen to be, because He made you holy and blameless. He set you up "in the heavenly places" with Christ. This is where you sit; this is your reality. You are in Christ, with Him, in the heavenlies.

3 - 3:17. 3:17 says "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted" - look at that - "rooted and grounded in love." You've been chosen to be holy and blameless; you're set apart into the heavenlies with Christ; you're "rooted and grounded in love." - all of that going into your position, allowing you to take your pick. I mean, just start going through 4, 5 and 6, allowing you to love your wife like Christ loved the church - Ephesians 5. Allowing you to - go to Ephesians - look at Ephesians 5:3: Allowing you, because of your position, because you were chosen to be holy and blameless, you were chosen to be seated in the heavenlies; you were chosen to be grounded in love and not selfish and so, in 5:3: "but immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among" - say it out loud - "saints." In some translations, it says there shouldn't even be a hint - not even a hint of immorality. I said, "How can I do that?" You can't! You can't! CHRIST DID. CHRIST CAN - YOU'RE IN CHRIST - completely transformed, made new; chosen before the foundations of the world to be holy and blameless so you get to, now, by the Spirit of God and the Person of Christ, you and I get to choose that - to not have there be a hint - to not have any immorality or impurity, even named, among us.

See, all high and lofty stuff, that when we read about we go "Oh my goodness; that sounds so right. I could never -". You're right. But your position and what God has done allows you to make choices; allows you to practice these blessings of our faith. Anybody encouraged by that? Say "Amen". I sure am. I sure am.

Past Blessing Number 2: Not a lot of time here; I'll just introduce this. Past Blessing Number 1, we were chosen. **Past Blessing Number 2 - We were adopted** - we were adopted. What an amazing thing it is to have the gift - you know, the blessing that God allows to some to have kids. Nothing like it in the world - it's great! What an amazing spiritual correlation there is to be equally - hear me - be equally - special blessing - of being adopted. Anybody in the room adopted? Raise your hands high. Amazing. Anybody in the room ever adopted someone? Yeah. Cool! Thanks. So interesting. Not enough time this morning to get into it - so amazing to read about it.

Again, a friend pointed me in this direction. In those days - you might just want to jot a few of these things down: In those days, the father - you understand this - in that culture, the father had complete power. The power was with the man; the power was with the husband; the power was with the father; all authority rested with the father. Hear the terminology. All authority rested with the father; the father did all the adopting. In the adoption process in that day, the entire process was coordinated by, engaged in by the father - not the mother, not the family, not the grandparents - the father was the one and it was only the father who was involved in the process of adopting a child. All the authority rested with the father. The father was the one who was engaged in the entire process and when adopted, a child was by the father, and by virtue of the edict, the child was released from any debt. The child was released from any penalty or any previous relationships, family ties or personal connections, and given full, given full heir - h-e-i-r - heir status; given full heir status with his or her new father.

Ephesians 1:5: "He predestined us to" - what? Say it out loud. "adoption." He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world and He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to" - what? According to merit? According to what you were worth? According to how hard? No. "According" - look at that - "to the kind intention of His will." How amazing was this - to these dear people who read this letter in that culture and how amazing is it to you and me today.

Okay, now listen. We're going to keep going in this passage. Having fun so far? Yeah? I am. But I'm going to tell you this. We're going to stop next week, just for a Sunday, because I've had enough conversations with people; I've had enough wrestling with this in my own mind and heart; been wrestling with it for years - I don't think I'll ever stop wrestling with it and by no means am I saying in any way, shape or form, that next week's going to solve all this for me or you but - I feel like that God's kind of leading me and I think God would want for you and I to just take some time and think about the implications that are there in this issue of choice. See, because a lot of you were thinking about this - you know, I'm thinking about it. We didn't really get into it - the text itself doesn't demand that we get into it - but the implications, the implications are so obvious.

If He chose us and in His choosing of us we have been redeemed and saved; if He chose us and those whom He chooses are His, and those who are His go to heaven. And if you are of the persuasion - if you are of the conviction - that probably not everybody in the world goes to where? - heaven - then it just goes to reason, then there were those who didn't get chosen, and that if He predetermined - if He predetermined that I was going to be able to be with Him in heaven based on nothing I did, then those who didn't get chosen end up going to hell, based on nothing they did, which is where a lot of us go in our thinking, is what I'm saying. That, my friends, that's dangerous. There are some things there that I think we need to consider and there are camps - you know - in theological circles, that are "camps" - there are people who believe certain things; there are Calvinists; there are those of a Reformed nature who really are very devoted and have a huge conviction about this Doctrine of Election and how God chose and some He chose and some He didn't and the realities of that are hard to wrestle with but that's the way it is - and there are others in different camps who believe that God, that the atonement of Christ was for everybody - some choose it and some don't. Choice is kind of lifted up here; providence and sovereignty are lifted up here. And you know, I just, I keep reading and I keep thinking and I keep looking at that and you know me. I AM NOT - I feel no obligation to you to explain God to you and I feel no pressure to make all this make sense. It is confusing - after 22 years I still don't get it - but I feel today, more than ever before, that I don't have to. But there's some things I think we should talk about; there's some truth I think we should be made aware of - AND - I'll just give you a little teaser - there is

really a third camp, if you will, a third way of looking at this issue that I want to show you next week that I think has some merit and I think can really encourage us in our further study of this great doctrine of election and salvation. So come back next week and we're going to talk about that and do our best to make our way through it.

Would you stand? Let me close us in a word of prayer. Father in heaven, we're grateful for the time we've had together this morning. We've gathered to encounter You and, O God, we have encountered You in Your truth; we have encountered You in our worship. God, we've encountered You in the fellowship that we get to experience here in this room with other brothers and sisters who are doing our best, with Your help, God, to follow Your Son. God, thank You for those who have come today that are still considering what it would look like and what it would be like to fully surrender their hearts and lives to Your Son. O God, I pray that the blessings of our faith, the truth about what has transpired in salvation, O we pray that it would encourage them toward Your Son; that it would move them toward faith.

Father, we thank You for the chance to go now, many of us, willing and ready to go and serve this neighborhood. We're thankful, God, for the chance to just simply be a blessing to the many, many people that You've surrounded us with. May we do that - may we go in an effort to enlarge Your reach and God, may You be with us as we do. Thank you for this family, God, and bring us back together again next week if that be Your will, and the opportunity to again gather and be encouraged, in Your Son's name we pray. Everybody agreed and said "Amen".