

“Beyond Blessed”
Grow Up Series, Part 1

Can you believe that there are only eight more Sundays until the end of the year? I was looking at the calendar and praying to see what the Lord would want me to preach on for not only this Sunday but for the remainder of the year. I felt very impressed to teach a series through the book of Ephesians. The Apostle Paul is such a champion in the faith. We all know that his epistle to the Philippians is remarkable in that it is full of rejoicing and joy, yet Paul wrote it from prison. Paul had endured torture, starvation, beatings, flogging, shipwreck, and more yet remained faithful and joyful. Many scholars call the letter to the Ephesians “The Queen of the Epistles.” Much like the book of Romans it is filled with great Theology and practical teaching.

Today, I am going to launch into a six-week teaching through the book of Ephesians. I have titled the series “Grow Up.” The title of this series is not a complaint. I am not frustrated at Christians and yelling at them to “grow up” like some kind of immature child. I say “grow up” because regardless of what life stage you are in or how long you have been a believer, we must all strive to grow in our faith and know the Lord better. Today specifically the title of this message is “Beyond Blessed.” This is not a sermon about wealth or prosperity in the physical sense. This is a message of all the riches we have in the finished work of Jesus.

In my opinion, the book of Ephesians is broken down into three main areas. Chapter 1-3 are about doctrine and Theology. It tells us all about who we are in Christ, what we have in Christ, and all the blessings/riches we have in God. Chapter 4-5 are all about putting that truth into practice and then chapter 6 is all about guarding what we have against spiritual warfare. As a preacher I struggle often with the balance of Theology and practice. My heart wants to teach sound doctrine but also make it clear enough that every Sunday you can walk away with something practical to apply in your life...right away. This is why I love the Apostle Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians. Paul here demonstrates that Theology *is* practical. But what I want us to come to understanding is that Paul’s sequence in his writing to the Ephesians is important. He first talks about who we are and what we have in Christ and *then* he goes into encouraging us to walk in right behavior. Believing comes before behaving.

Here is an example. This week Nikki and I will be preparing to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary. We are doing something we haven’t done in eighteen years...going on a cruise. Gabriel who is nineteen was only ten months old the last time we went on a cruise. I know there are several people in church here who have been on several cruises. Nikki and I haven’t been “cruise people” because we have never really been “money people” haha. Nikki’s home business has really allowed us to do things above and beyond and I am very grateful for it. Now, packing for a normal vacation is one thing. You don’t want to forget your phone charger, prescription medications, and other important things. But going on a cruise is a whole other ballgame. I am in charge of every building on this property 24/7 on top of running my household. I have to prepare to go to another country and be on the open sea with no cell phone reception or access to all my security cameras. So, not only do I need to prepare so that the vacation goes well, but I also need to prepare so that this place doesn’t fall apart when I am gone. The better prepared I am, the more peace and confidence I will have on the trip. The more equipped and prepared we are in our identity and knowledge of God, the more confidently we will live out His will in our lives.

Let's dive in to the first chapter of Ephesians. We are going to read all twenty-three verses in this chapter, and I will pause throughout to highlight a few things. If you have your Bibles go with me to Ephesians one beginning in verse one:

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

There are a couple things I want you to know about the letter to the Ephesians that are important. The first is that Paul had a good relationship with the Ephesians. In his third missionary trip, Paul spent a good three years with the Ephesians. During the days of the apostle Paul, the city of Ephesus was one of the four largest and most influential cities of the Roman Empire. It lay on the western coast of what is modern-day Turkey (then called "Asia Minor"). Though today its harbor is silted up, in Paul's day Ephesus was an important port city with a large harbor.

In a few of the commentaries I read about Ephesians 1 it noted that several early and important manuscripts of the Bible excluded "At Ephesus" in verse one. Some of the early manuscripts then would have said verse one as: "To the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus." Many scholars believe that Ephesians was written to more than just the Ephesians. It makes sense since many of Paul's epistles address certain people or certain congregations where Ephesians speaks generally and not to a specific problem.

Whether we are studying Romans, Philippians, or Ephesians one thing is certain, we have a lot we can learn from Paul. What a champion of the faith. Like Philippians and Colossians, Ephesians was written by Paul *from prison*. I don't know about you, but if you were to ask me a question when I was having a bad day and extremely frustrated, I might not be very cheery. Paul is writing from prison and is probably in horrible circumstances yet writes about our riches in Jesus. Although this wouldn't be the last time Paul would be in prison, it still shows the depth of Paul's character and devotion to the Lord. The threat was real. Paul could have faced death in this situation. So, let me ask you this: if you were on a hospital bed and the doctor said you have but days to live. You have a pen and paper to write to the ones closet to you. What parting advice and encouragement would you give them? What, at the end of your life, would be so important to pass on to the next generation? Paul could be killed at any moment, and he writes in Philippians to rejoice always.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love...

I have to pause here because verse three is so powerful, but I need to mention that in the original Greek, verses 3-14 are one really long sentence. It carries this one long thought. Verse three summarizes it saying that we have *every* spiritual blessing in heavenly places. Before you start a new job, before you get married, before you become a parent, before you face a health crisis...you have every spiritual blessing in Jesus. You are fully equipped before God calls you out into this world. Before you were even born the work of the cross was finished.

5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight...

I might have shared this testimony with you before. A pastor in California brought in a foster child at one point when his children were growing up. At one point the parents noticed that the foster child's room began to smell really bad. Upon investigation they discovered that the foster child was hoarding food in his room from dinner time and more. This poor child had to always fight for what he needed. He didn't know where his next meal was coming from. The pastor said to the boy, "As long as you are in this house, you will never have to worry about food. You will always have more than enough." It took a little while but eventually the foster child grew to trust them and realize food was not going to be an issue any longer.

Romans 8:15 tells us that when we accepted Jesus as Savior, we did not receive the spirit of slavery but a spirit of adoption in which we can cry out Abba Father. John 14:18 Jesus says, "I will not leave you as orphans..." You and I have been adopted by God the Father and our identity has changed to that of sons and daughters. We are co-heirs with Christ and blessed with every spiritual blessing.

I have learned one thing with working with the courts in the adoption process. When a child or adult is adopted legally, they need to give up their rights to the birth parents completely. This means any inheritance, legal rights, etc. Then that child can take on the new parent's rights and inheritance. When you gave your life to Jesus you need to understand that you gave up your rights to being an orphan lost in this world. You gave up the rights of belonging to the god of this world and you took the rights as a child of the Creator of the Universe. And God didn't just give us every spiritual blessing. It says here that we received all of this be the "riches of His grace that He lavished on us..." The word "lavished" in the Greek means, "to go above and beyond, to have an abundance of." Sometimes we endure discouragement because we forget all that has been given to us in Jesus.

9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

I personally believe that our inheritance is both for right now and in the future. What do I mean? Well, here in Ephesians 1:11 it says, "We have obtained an inheritance." Yet, in Colossians 3:23-24 it says that whatever we do we should do unto the Lord knowing that from the Lord we will receive an inheritance. I believe there is an inheritance to live out right now according to the

finished work of the cross. Today we can walk in forgiveness, healing, freedom, deliverance, and peace. Those are things we received from Jesus upon our salvation. But there are eternal rewards, the coming heaven where every tear will be wiped away in which is an inheritance for the future. Either way, we are richly blessed, and we must understand that we are not poor in the spirit. We have riches in Christ.

Not only have we been promised an inheritance, but we have knowledge of the will of God. Here it says we were given the “mystery” of the will of God. The Greek scholar A.T. Robinson said the Greek word “MUSTERION,” translated “mystery” here, means “something that could not be known by men except by divine revelation, but that, though once hidden, has now been revealed in Christ and is to be proclaimed so that all who have ears may hear it”

15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. – Ephesians 1 NASB1995

Paul was giving praise to God for how well they not only kept the faith but loved the saints. Now there is a true test of your love for God...you love others in the same way. That is real evidence of the love of God working in us. This is so important. Throughout our lives we are going to have people we love and people that cause us trouble. Whether these people are nice to us or hurt us...we must pray for them.

I love that Paul takes it to another level with the Ephesians. He commends them for their faith and the love they have for other people, but he then prays for a spirit of wisdom and revelation. The purpose of this spirit of wisdom/revelation is to fully comprehend the love of Christ. Essentially, they were doing very well in their faith and Paul wanted them to *grow even more* in their understanding of the love of God. What an encouragement for us. It doesn't matter how much Bible you know or how well you think you know the Lord. We cannot exhaust the knowledge of an infinite God.

Paul prayed that their eyes would be enlightened to see the hope of their calling. You and I are called to partner with God to see His will accomplished on earth. It is not an easy task to live as a Christian in this fallen world. It is not easy to live out our faith in a compromised culture. But this is exactly why Paul was stressing the importance of the knowledge of what we have been given in Christ. He didn't want us to just know of our calling but of “the riches of the glory of

His inheritance to the saints.” It is quite possible that Christians can live and fight without an understanding of all they have been given.

I have an amazing counselor I see on a regular basis. He is Pentecostal and loves the Lord with all his heart. A couple weeks ago I spoke a message on anxiety and then sure enough I started fighting some spiritual warfare in the specific area of anxiety. At nighttime I was having difficulty taking a deep breath and couldn't shut my mind off from worrying about petty little things. I asked my counselor for advice, and he gave me a whole packet of some things I could do in the moment when anxiety attacks. I knew of a few tools from being in therapy sessions with both Gabriel and Nikki. One tool I have always used is controlling my breathing. I take a large breath in, hold that breath for a few seconds, and then slowly let the breath out. It helps to slow down your rapid heart rate and various other things. I always knew about this tool and that it was good to know. But my counselor put it into a better perspective. He said the reason we do these physical exercises is to tell the brain that we are the ones in control. Something rose up inside me when he said that. I was like, “Ya, my spiritman is in control not the flesh!” So now whenever a spirit of dread and anxiety try to take over my soul, I pray, declare, and do something physical to tell my brain, “You are not in charge here buddy.” You need to know that you are in control. You need to know what you have in Christ. You need to know all the spiritual blessings you have so that you will not feel alone and empty handed when life gets crazy.