

I. Introduction

- A. In yourself, you are poorer than you think. In Christ, you are richer than you think.
- B. In you, there is brokenness. There is depression, anger, frustration, selfishness, fear. In Christ, there is the life of your dreams: Love, joy, grace, and peace.
- C. You picked a very good day to come to church today. You are in on the beginning of something. Week one... As part of our year long journey into discipleship, we're going to wrap our minds and hearts around those two ways, starting today.
- D. The Bible describes them for us in the New Testament book of Ephesians. This is one of my all time favorite books in the whole Bible. You cannot dig into this book without being changed. Thirty years ago, when I was a children's and youth pastor in Chicago, I conducted an Awana leaders' Bible study. We studied the book of Ephesians. I encountered God in this book. And I encountered myself too. I'm excited because I think you will too.
- E. Let's get right into this amazing book.

II. Ephesians

- A. *1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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 should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:1-6, NKJV).*
- B. It will help if we know a little bit about the people this book was written for. Ephesians is a letter, an epistle. The writer names himself in the first word. His name is Paul, the greatest church planter and missionary of the early church.
- C. He spent three years in the city of Ephesus. There, he led many people to faith in Christ. He organized them into what became one of the greatest churches of those days.
- D. Years later, he writes them a letter, and here it is.

III. Ephesus

- A. Ephesus was a busy, bustling city—maybe a quarter of a million people—multi-ethnic, multi-racial, a city of the Roman Empire.
- B. The people were religiously pluralistic. They were pretty tolerant of just about any religion, and they had plenty to choose from.
- C. The main religion in town was dedicated to the goddess Diana, also called Artemis. Her nickname was Artemis of the Ephesians.
- D. In South America today, and this isn't directly about Ephesians yet, but in South America today, you can find one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World. It is a colossal statue called Christ the Redeemer, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- E. Over 2,000,000 tourists come to Rio every year to see Christ the Redeemer. It's big business.
- F. So was Artemis in ancient Ephesus. Her temple was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. Its columns stood over 60 feet high, and ancient writers heralded the Temple to Artemis as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
- G. She had a gigantic statue in her honor. Twice every week, a procession was held in honor of the goddess, Artemis. Her priests and followers paraded her statues, marching from the glorious temple, through the whole city, out the gate, back in another gate, and back to the temple.
- H. Artemis was big business.

IV. St Paul

- A. In fact, when Paul traveled to Ephesus to make disciples and plant churches, it was the followers of Artemis who started a riot that made him leave the city.
 - 1. *23 But about that time, serious trouble developed in Ephesus concerning the Way [Christ-followers]. 24 It began with Demetrius, a silversmith who had a large business manufacturing silver shrines of the Greek goddess Artemis. He kept many craftsmen busy. 25 He called the craftsmen together, along with others employed in related trades, and addressed them as follows: "Gentlemen, you know that our wealth comes from this business. 26 As you have seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods aren't gods at all. And this is happening not only here in Ephesus but throughout the entire province! 27 Of course, I'm not just talking about the loss of public respect for our business. I'm also concerned that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its influence and that Artemis—this magnificent goddess worshiped throughout the province of Asia and all around the world—will be robbed of her prestige!" 28 At this their anger boiled, and they began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:23-28, NLT).*
- B. You see, the gospel of Jesus turns everything upside down. The gospel of Jesus doesn't let the powers of darkness rule people's lives. The gospel is good news of liberation from bondage of every sort, and it doesn't matter if the power that stands in the way is called Artemis, or addiction, or selfishness, or poverty, or greed.
- C. Jesus can put them all out of business.
- D. The influence of the Artemis cult spread into every area of life for the Ephesians. The main bank in town was her temple. Coins had her image on them. They held Olympic-style games called the Artemisia in honor of the goddess.
- E. If you swore your allegiance to Artemis, she was a good god to you. She wielded power over heaven, earth, and even the underworld.
- F. On that giant statue, the signs of the zodiac were displayed prominently around her neck as a necklace.
- G. All of this defined the everyday lives of the people of Ephesus. How they ate, how they did business, how they worshipped, and how they saw themselves—Artemis owned them.
- H. And here's where we start unwrapping the big lesson for today.

V. Forces Beyond Your Control

- A. The people of Ephesus saw themselves as victims of forces beyond their control.
- B. What forces?
 - 1. The stars: They believed their fate hinged on the constellations they were born under. So Artemis wore the signs of the zodiac, because she was bigger.

2. Nature. Volcanoes. Hurricanes. Floods. Fire. Wild animals.
 3. Evil spirits: Spirits of vengeance—grudges and slights from generations ago could still be avenged through curses and evil spirits. The Ephesians were big on magic and sorcery.
 4. Rival nations: Threatening to take over, and to reduce the populace to slavery.
 5. Fate: Three goddesses called the Fates spun out each person's destiny on a thread. One goddess spun the thread, one goddess measured the thread, and one goddess cut the thread. You lived and died at the mercy of the fates.
 6. The gods: Up and down the avenues of Ephesus, the streets were lined with idols. Each god had a piece of the action. Each god needed to be fed and propitiated and satisfied.
- C. These people were small. These people were powerless. These people were specks of dust in the cosmic spiritual machinery. Their only hope was to ally themselves with one of the heavy hitters like Artemis, and to pay so much to her that she protected their city and to some measure blessed their lives.
- D. So what about you?
- E. Have you ever felt small? Have you ever felt powerless? Have you ever felt like a speck of dust, lost in a gigantic cosmic machinery that doesn't care one bit about you?
- F. How different are we today from the Ephesian people so long ago? Not much at all.
- G. You might not see yourself as a victim of the stars, or of idols, but there's something there.
- H. What force dominates your life?
1. Could it be father who abused you
 2. The mother who abandoned you
 3. The career that didn't work out for you and never will.
 4. How about an illness, a deformity, a handicap
 - a) What dominates you today?
 5. A bankruptcy, a lost business, a lost dream
 6. A scandal, crime, violence, drug dealing, gangs
 7. A death you can't get over
 - a) What dominates you today?
 8. Maybe an addiction, alcohol owns you, meth, pot, gambling, sex addiction, porn
 9. For some, religion rules you—the attempt to please God by your own efforts and your own strength.
 - a) There are two ways—the self-way and the Christ-way.
- I. We swim in an ocean of brokenness today: fatherlessness, deep wounds, fear, and loneliness.
- J. We are like David, and over there's Goliath—a giant.
 1. The economic crisis. The credit card crisis. The housing crisis. The debt crisis. The unwed mother crisis. The divorce crisis. The racial crisis. The drug crisis. The unemployment crisis.
- K. Hulking giants and then there is you.
- L. Standing against these giants, who are you?
- M. Why do you matter?
- N. You come into the world, you play your part, you vanish away, and nobody notices. Is that it?
- O. Who are you? Why are you here? What is your true identity, your true nature and calling? In the great scheme of things, why does it matter that you exist at all?
- P. These are the questions we ask today, and these are the same questions the people of ancient Ephesus were asking two millennia ago. We're not that different, are we?
- Q. So into all this cultural confusion, religious confusion, emotional confusion, psychological confusion and spiritual confusion, comes this message:
 1. God blessed you (v. 3).
 2. God chose you (v. 4).
 3. God adopted you (v. 5).
 4. God accepted you (v. 6).
- R. No matter what other people say, no matter what happens to you, this is who you are. This is truth. This is your real identity, your real nature, the real you.
- S. Let's take these one by one, real fast, and we'll be done.

VI. Ephesians

- A. God blessed you, v. 3
1. Sometimes I think we should get rid of the word "bless" from our vocabulary. Nobody knows what it means anymore.
 2. Here's what bless means:
 - a) To bless means to pour out good stuff on a person, especially when that person hasn't earned it and doesn't deserve it.
 3. That's what bless means. The second part of that definition makes the difference between blessing and reward.
 4. God is not first and foremost in the business of rewarding people. He's in the business of blessing people, and the difference is astronomical. God does not reward good people. God blesses non-good people, and half of you don't believe that most of the time.
 5. For the ancient Ephesians, this was good news. Their whole lives were spent trying to impress Artemis, trying to be worthy enough for her to bless their crops and their business and their families. It was a relentless effort, always another sacrifice, always another pay off, always another processional through the city after the priests.
 6. And then comes Paul, pointing to Christ, who doesn't reward behavior, but blesses the non-behavior called faith.
 7. Some of us treat prayer like a good-luck charm. Or Bible reading like a lucky rabbit's foot. Oh, if I pray and keep my nose clean, God will answer my prayer, and I'll win the lottery.
 8. God blesses because God is generous, not because you are worthy.

9. And even on your bad days, and even on your horrible days, and even when you feel like you don't count and nobody cares, and nothing is worth it, and life doesn't make sense. And especially on those days when you blow it and you do that thing you said you wouldn't do—even then—this is true about you: **YOU ARE A BLESSED PERSON BECAUSE YOU HAVE JESUS CHRIST IN YOUR LIFE.**
 10. On the day God saved you, God blessed you. God poured out good stuff on you that will last you every day for the rest of your life.
 11. That means that the follower of Jesus Christ is in a class all your own. You are not living for blessing, but from blessing. You don't serve God to make Him bless you; you serve Him because He's blessed you. That makes all the difference.
 12. Do you know what the book of Ephesians is mostly about?
 13. It is about **IDENTITY FORMATION**. Helping you see who you really are.
 14. You are not unlucky. You are not damaged goods. You are not a worthless pound of flesh to be used and tossed aside. You are not a victim. You are not a sinner any more. You are not an addict. You are not an alcoholic. You might act that way, but it's not the deepest truth about you.
 15. You are a blessed brother or sister in the family of God, a joint heir with the King of kings and Lord of lords and this identity is the foundation of all healing and deliverance in your life.
 16. God blessed you.
- B. God chose you, v. 4
1. Remember high school gym when we chose up teams for basketball?
 2. I wasn't chosen last, but close to it. What a horrible moment if you were the last person, and the heartless coach said, you, go on that team.
 3. Of all the billions of people who have lived and ever will live, God chose you. God picked you. Not last. Not next to last. He chose you early on, before the foundation of the world.
 4. Bible experts call this election, or divine election.
 5. And notice how He chose you: He chose you in Christ.
 6. This is another layer of identity formation. You are in Christ, and that means His identity gets blanketed over your identity, without sucking out your personality.
 7. You are you, but you with Christ added. Christ's status, Christ's powers, Christ's authorities, Christ's checkbook, Christ's possessions, Christ's rights and privileges.
 8. God sees you this way because God sees truth, and if you have Jesus, the truth is you are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.
 9. God chose you. And He knew all about you when He made that choice. How cool is that? There is nothing in your past, present, or future that could make God reject you.
 10. It also means this: God chose you before you ever performed for Him. That would be like winning American Idol before you ever sang a note. All performance anxiety melts in the face of divine election, God chose you, before the foundation of the world.
- C. God adopted you, v. 5.
1. *Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will (Ephesians 1:5, NKJV).*
 2. Today, 24 million children are growing up in a home without their biological father. In the African American community, it is two out of every three children.
 3. Until a loving father answers the question: Who am I? For a child, that child feels like an incomplete book. That gap drives people crazy. It takes a father or a surrogate father to complete the puzzle of identity in our souls.
 4. Do you understand me?
 5. I want to ask a question, but I don't want you to get in trouble. So if your family comes to church here, and the wrong answer gets you into trouble, just raise your hand when I ask my question, and don't worry about it. Here's my request:
 - a) If you did NOT have a warm, nurturing relationship with your father as you grew up, raise your hand.
 6. You know, 30, 40, 50 years ago, you might have grown up in a dysfunctional family, but at least you grew up in a functional culture.
 7. Today, we have dysfunctional families and a dysfunctional culture. All the pressure tilts the wrong way.
 8. The root of deep brokenness is in a sense fatherlessness. This is what so many of us feel today, just like the Ephesians long ago.
 9. And what does Paul tell them?
 10. God adopted you. God became to you the caring, loving, present, nurturing, identity-building father you've always dreamed of.
 11. In this, God is radically different from every other God. The signs of the zodiac don't rock you to sleep at night. Idols of wood and stone can't do that either. And nobody would ever accuse evil spirits and demons of caring about you and nurturing your spirit deep inside.
 12. And along comes God. He adopts you as a son or daughter and He does this because of all that Christ has done for you on the Cross.
 13. So what if the world is against you; God is your father, and He is for you. So what if there are dark forces arrayed against your soul. Your Father sees, and He's going to fight for you with Calvary's love, all the way to victory.
 14. You are not alone. You are not abandoned. You are not forsaken. You are not rejected.
 15. You are a child of God. If adoption is about anything, it is about **BELONGING**, where God as Father occupies center stage in His family.
 16. You have a Father, and He loves you and knows you and calls you out of the world's brokenness into wholeness and healing and deliverance. God adopts you.

- D. God accepts you, v. 6.
1. *To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6, NKJV).*
 2. Your wife might not accept you. Your husband might not accept you. Your dad, your mom, your step dad, your peers, your kids, your friends—maybe nobody on earth accepts you.
 3. Maybe you don't even accept yourself.
 4. But God does. He has made you accepted in the Beloved One, Christ.
 5. He adores you. He is satisfied with you. If you belong to Christ, then you have nothing left to prove—nothing to perform. Nothing you need to give.
 6. He accepts you because He sees you as you really are, even though you don't see yourself that way yet.
 7. He accepts you because He sees you radiating the character and love of Christ. He sees reality, not potentiality, but reality, and on the basis of that reality in Christ, God embraces you just as the Father embraced the prodigal son coming home.
 - a) Don't listen to the voices in your head that put you down.
 - b) Don't listen to the voice that speaks self-destruction.
 - c) Don't listen to the voice that speaks quitting or giving up.
 - d) Don't listen to the voice that speaks condemnation.
 - e) Don't listen to the voice that says "this is how you will always be, it's just your fate to be messed up."
 8. Don't listen to the voice that says you are destined by the stars for bad luck, or bad karma or bad anything.
 9. You are graced to the max in Christ: Accepted. Acceptable. A recipient of all the goodness of God, now and forever.
 10. That is who you are in Christ.
 11. Don't believe the devil's lies when he tells you different.

VII. Conclusion

- A. In yourself, you are poorer than you think. In Christ, you are richer than you think.
- B. In you, there is brokenness. There is depression, anger, frustration, selfishness, fear. In Christ, there is the life of your dreams: Love, joy, grace, and peace. Your life is not and has never been in the hand of blind forces beyond anyone's control.
- C. Nor has your life been in the hands of spirits or gods you can manipulate or change.
- D. Your life is in the hands of a loving, gracious, giving, self-sacrificing, all-powerful, all-wise, sovereign, good, benevolent, King of the Universe.
- E. He knows you are broken.
- F. And today, He wants to begin putting the pieces back together. He wants to reconstruct your broken heart.
- G. Over these weeks, we will see how.