

Ephesians 1:1-14,

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ Jesus with every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to the 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. 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 put our hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, you believed in Him and were sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.*

That's only going to take us about four years to get through! It's an amazing thing. I believe very much that unless the Holy Spirit teaches you, we're wasting our time here.

We're going to look at Ephesians 1:1, only.

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.*

I mean, that is a verse that you and I run over to get to the good stuff, right? But we're going to spend some time looking at eight of those words. Eight words within that verse that you could fly over, but we're going to swim in them.

One of the natural questions you might ask yourself is, who is Paul? The simple story is Paul was a Jew, who grew up in Tarsus. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He tells us in Philippians chapter three, who he was, but in Acts chapter seven, he stands around when Stephen - one of the early church deacons - is stoned to death for being a follower of Jesus Christ. Paul stands there at his murder, holding the garments of those who threw the stones at Stephen. Paul in Acts chapter nine is pursuing followers of Jesus Christ to capture them, and take them back to Jerusalem so they will be stoned. You think times are tough now? So Paul is chasing after, seeking out those who are followers of Jesus, and he's capturing them, taking them back to Jerusalem, and on his way, he encounters the living Jesus who reveals Himself to him on the road to Damascus. As a result of that experience, Paul - whose name then was Saul - is transformed from the inside out. And it's in that encounter with the living Christ, the resurrected Christ, that he becomes a messenger of Jesus. But I want you to know that Paul described himself in 1 Timothy 1:15 as *the chief of sinners*. He was the worst of the worst. You think you're bad? He was worse than you. If I think I'm bad, he's worse than me. He is the chief sinner of sinners. So what's the application for me? If God can take the chief sinner and turn him into somebody, he can take Bill Muir and do the same. There are times in my life when I look at my behavior, when I look at my thoughts, when I look at my values, when I look at who I am, and after 50 years of being a follower of Jesus, still find myself making wrong choices, there's a part of me that says, I am unworthy. I should not be doing this. I am reminded then that Paul, the chief of sinners, a murderer of followers of Christ, who was at Steven's death, found forgiveness. In fact, Paul gives us good counsel in Philippians chapter three.

*Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of Christ Jesus.*

So when I encounter Paul, when I re read this, I discover God still redeemed him. And if he redeemed Paul, he can redeem me. We all live with a past. We all hurt people and we've all been hurt. Some of us have pasts that we're still ashamed of. We've never told anybody, or if we told them, we only told them half the story, not the whole story. I don't know what your addiction is. I don't know what your story is. I don't know how many times you've been married. I don't know if you've ever embezzled. I don't know if you've ever killed anybody. I don't know if you've ever been in prison, but I will tell you this, like Paul, God forgives you and we should celebrate that.

Satan is described as the deceiver who becomes the accuser. The very one who deceives us into making wrong choices, once we make those wrong choices, is the accuser of us. Paul and I discovered, I will not be silenced by my past. I will speak clearly with my eyes focused on Jesus, who is the author and the perfecter of my faith.

And then he says, an apostle of Christ Jesus. The word would be a sent out one, a commissioned one. It's a normal term. We tend to think of it as religious, but it was used of a ship that carried cargo from one port to another. So apostle is a messenger who takes some information from one location to another. He is set out. He is commissioned. And therefore, you have this impression, this strong impression, that what Paul is saying is, **as an apostle my job is to declare God's truths, the words of Jesus in a lost world. I am to reflect Him and who He is.** And so when I look at my own life, I have to ask myself am I an apostle, am I a messenger? Am I carrying in my life the salt and light and hope of Jesus Christ in a dark, dark world? Do I believe that there is something for me to do now? Do I believe that life is all about just this? Or that there's something divine and missional in my life? Am I a missionary or a

mission field? Because I will be one or the other. And so Paul says, I am an apostle of, and then he says, Christ Jesus, not Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not Jesus's last name! Christ means Messiah. The Messiah was the anointed one, the deliverer. And the reason that the term Messiah or Christ was the anointed one is before any king or prophet or preacher in the Old Testament was placed into a position they would anoint his head with oil. So Paul says, Jesus is the Messiah. He is the deliverer. He is the savior. He is the king who will come and establish His kingdom. And when I look at that verse and when I look at that word Christ, I recognize that Christ must be my Messiah for me and not the United States. Christ must be my Messiah, not the government of the United States. Christ must be my deliverer, not somebody else. And so the sense of where Paul put his hope, he declares from the beginning, is in Christ the Messiah, the anointed one, the one who will establish His kingdom, whose kingdom I am to seek first.

Then he uses the word **Jesus**. There was nothing special about the name, Jesus. You would hear it all the time. It was as common as Joe. Or Bob. He's establishing the humility of Jesus Christ.

**If Jesus came today, His name might have been John or Bob or Jim.**

**Were He here today, it is doubtful He would distance Himself with a lofty name like Reverend Holiness Angelic Divinity III. No, when God chose the name His Son would carry, He chose a human name.<sup>4</sup> He chose a name so typical that it would appear two or three times on any given class roll.**

**"The Word became flesh," John said, in other words.**

**He was touchable, approachable, reachable. And, what's more, He was ordinary. If He were here today, you probably wouldn't notice Him as He walked through a shopping mall. He wouldn't turn heads by the clothes He wore or the jewelry He flashed.**

**“Just call me Jesus,” you can almost hear Him say.**

**He was the kind of fellow you’d invite to watch the Rams-Giants game at your house. He’d wrestle on the floor with your kids, doze on your couch, and cook steaks on your grill. He’d laugh at your jokes and tell a few of His own. And when you spoke, He’d listen to you as if He had all the time in eternity.**

**And one thing’s for sure, you’d invite Him back. ~ Max Lucado.**

Jesus comes to earth as a human being so that Bill would walk with him. That Bill would find in his faith journey one who would be willing to walk with me no matter where I was.

On the way here I passed a raccoon that had been run over on 238. And I thought to myself, is that what life is all about without a God? Are we just simply raccoons darting across 238 hoping we're not going to get hit? Is that the sum total of it? Is there no meaning, no purpose in life by which to live? And so Paul wants to establish to us very clearly that God has a desire. He has meaning. There is something very special in God's will, but there's two deep truths for me in this thing called the will of God: one truth for me is this, to discover that when Paul wrote this letter, he wrote it from prison. He was a prisoner. He's suffering. Even in the center of God's will, I will experience suffering and pain. I often think the center of God's will should be simple happiness, self-absorbedness, and comfort. And yet when Paul says, *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God*, that will for Paul's life was that he would experience suffering and trials. It is easy in my life to look at my trials like they are my problem. And as soon as I encounter one, you know what? My first instinct is, **what did I do? Oh boy, what did I do wrong to deserve this?!** And the answer is, I may not have done anything wrong. And so if you're in the center of God's will, and you're experiencing struggles and pain and trials, it may be that you have done nothing wrong, because Paul had done nothing wrong.

Viktor Frankl wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*. In it, he tried to describe the Holocaust. And how does one find meaning in the Holocaust? In short, a man who has a **why** can live with any **how**. Most of us don't know what's going on behind the curtain, but we know the one who is designing the will. We know that He has a plan, that He is sovereign, that He is in control, that He brings purpose and meaning. Because of that, I can find a sense of peace that somewhere along the way, I will discover why this has happened.

And so that phrase, *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*, takes on a deep meaning. And then he goes on and he says, *to the saints* - notice that: to the saints, plural. You know who he's referring to here? He's referring to the believers in the city of Ephesus. He is referring to those Christians, those followers who attend the church in Ephesus. Now what is the application for me? Many are going to find this hard to believe (my wife doesn't believe it): I'm a saint. I am a saint! I am not a saint like some churches who have statues of dead people in the corner, collecting dust. I am a living saint, and the word **saint** simply means **to be set apart**. I have been set apart for what? For God's glory. The moment you accepted Jesus, we do not try to increase our own goodness, our righteousness to a standard by which we get declared or titled saints, but the moment we put our faith in Jesus and absorbed His righteousness and gave up our unrighteousness, God gave us the status of sainthood. You are declared saints. You are a holy temple. You are a place where the Spirit of God indwells. Paul is saying that all of us are going through life, and we need to recognize that we are saints, that God has set us apart. And so when I come to that word, I have to stop for a moment and say, what's the condition of my temple? We are the temple of God. I mean, you can have a temple and not be holy. You can defile a temple. I have to look at my temple and ask if I defiled it? What's in me? And so when I look at that word **saints**, I ask myself, have I been set apart, holy, to be used by God, so he can use my life to change your world, because that's exactly what He wants to do. He's already declared that's who I am. And that's who you are. Do not let the evil one tell you your status is sinner. Your status is sainthood. God

has set you apart and given your life meaning and purpose that you can reflect in your dark world, wherever that is: in your workplace, in your neighborhood, in your home, He has put you there to radiate His glory.

**Ephesus.** What's the power there for me? Paul wrote to real people in a real city. These people lived physical lives. I've been to Ephesus. It's in Asia Minor. It was a city of many temples. In fact, most temples had priestesses, which were nothing more than prostitutes. One temple was across the street from the library, which was interesting, because men would go to the library, but there was a tunnel under the road to the temple. If you think that our culture is harder to live the Christian life than in Ephesus, you don't understand Ephesus! It was a harbor community. It had more temples than we have churches. It was decadent. It was sensual. It was seductive. It was consumed by sex and entertainment. It had an amphitheater that could hold 80,000 people. This is a town with 250,000 people, and 80 of them could be in the theater at the same time. They were engaged in entertainment.

What is the hope for me? This:

*To the saints who are in Medford.*

God is in my life. God is engaged in my world. God is in this church, this gathering, this room. God knows my address. God understands my physical world. God isn't a God that's only interested when I'm having devotions or reading the Bible or going to a Bible study. He is as engaged in that world as He is when I go golfing or swimming or go out for dinner. The beauty of that word **Ephesus** is that God recognized my humanity along with my spirituality. And if you think that God somehow isn't interested in the secular, you don't understand God. He created the world. He created your human body. Psalm 139: He weaved you in your mother's womb. The beautiful hope that I have is God is involved in my world. I don't come here to find God. He lives in my house. He lives in your house. He's engaged in your

world, whatever your dream, whatever your address is, draw a line through Ephesus, and put your address there.

I used to fly all the time when I lived in Chicago. When you approached O'Hare Airport at night, which I normally did, you spent 20 minutes over the city before you landed. And it was a city filled with lights. You flew and you looked and you thought, we gotta be there at some point ... I would look out at the lights and I would look out at the homes and I would look out at the roofs and I would wonder: what stories are going on right here? Who's being beaten? What child is being neglected? What couple is having a dinner? What couple is for the first time having good communication? What couple has just received a terrible phone call from a relative? What stories are in all of these, these hundreds of thousands of homes that I could only see the rooftops of? God sees in the house. God sees in my house. God is engaged in my life. He's engaged in your life. And so don't run past Ephesus without realizing that God is as concerned about your physicality as He is your spirituality.

He's not surprised what's going on in Medford. He's not surprised by the COVID. He's not surprised by any of this. And there's some peace and rest that I can experience that life isn't out of control because He's addressing us in a real world with real pain and real sorrow. He acknowledges that and He enters that part of our story.

But go on: *to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful*. We tend to think of faith as binary. I have it, or I don't have it. But that's true.

Romans 14:1, *for those who are weak in faith*.

2 Thessalonians 1, *whose faith is growing*.

Jesus says, *oh, you of little faith*.

One of the mistakes that you and I can make in our pilgrimage is not to recognize that part of my journey. One of the reasons I come to church, go to Bible studies, involved in a life group, is that I will grow this faith. Your faith can grow. Your faith can strengthen. Your faith can shrink. Your faith can get weak. Your faith can get big. Your faith can get little. And so I have to ask myself the question, what's the condition of my faith?

Am I growing it? Am I nurturing it? Am I trying to make something of it? You know where this takes me? When Jesus is at the end, He will look at us and we will want Him to say, *well done, my good and faithful servant*. That's a beautiful phrase. Well done, good and faithful servant. You know why that's beautiful? Because all of us have a different faith story. We're not all called to be the same thing. We don't all get the same gifts. We all have different stories. And in the end, what we need to do is to be simply faithful to our story, because in the end, Jesus isn't going to say, *greatly done, excellent guy*. I just want Him to say, *well done, good and faithful servant*.

If God's called me to be a doorkeeper, don't stoop to be a king, Bill.

I'm always saddened when I talk to Christians in the marketplace, and I say to them, 'What do you do?' And they say to me, 'I'm **just** a plumber.' 'I'm **just** an electrician.' 'I'm **just** a clerk.' And I think, oh, you missed it. You missed it! There's no **just a** in the kingdom of God. If God's called you to be a clerk, be the best faithful clerk you can be. So that in the end, He will say, *well done, my good and faithful servant*. If he's called you to pump gas, be the best pumper of gas you can be, because you want him to say, *well done, my good and faithful servant*. The beauty of it is you don't have to live anybody else's story, because if you're trying to live somebody else's story, my question to you is: who's living your story?

*In Christ Jesus.* Earlier in verse one at the beginning, he says *of Christ Jesus.* Here he says, *in Christ Jesus.* We could spend a lot of time on this. I'm going to say it as simple as I can. What Paul is establishing is that when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we were placed in him. It's a phrase that occurs, I think 160 times in the New Testament. We are in Christ. He places us in Him. You are placed in Jesus. Bill Muir is in Jesus. So what is the application to that? Where's the power in that? Here's the power. When God looks down on Bill, he does not see Bill, He sees Jesus, because I'm in Jesus.

You, when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, acquired His righteousness and you were placed in Jesus. Do you see the power of all of this? We dwell in two places simultaneously. We are seated, we're going to find, in the heavenlies at the right hand of the Father. He has elevated us to a position whereby we are in the heavenlies. And yet we live out on planet earth. God sees me in both places. But when Paul says, *to the faithful who are in Christ Jesus,* there's this just beautiful, beautiful word. It's a phrase that I can rest in because God sees Jesus. I'm in Jesus. That truth can revolutionize your life and make it much easier for you to go into the presence of God, not with your head down, but like a child, running up and climbing onto his lap and calling him Daddy. Why? Because you're righteous. No, not on your own righteousness, but you are righteous in Christ. You have a freedom to come into His presence. He invited you.

Which of these eight words were for you? What's the truth for you today?

Is it to forget the past and put your eyes on Jesus? Is it to discover what your mission is in life? Is it to understand that Jesus wants to be intimately involved in your life 24/7? Is it that God has a will for your life, a design for it, a purpose in it? Is it to discover that God wants you to be set apart and holy, to be a radiance of His glory in a dark world? To be salt and light and hope and love and grace and peace and mercy and kindness?

