

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

EPHESIANS 1-2

Last month Kathy and I vacationed near Sebastian, Florida - home of the Mel Fisher Treasure Museum.

Mel moved from California to Florida in 1963 to search for sunken treasure. His most famous discovery occurred in 1985, when he found the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, a treasure-laden Spanish galleon, bound for Madrid, that sunk in a storm off the Florida coast.

It was the largest underwater treasure find in history.

Today, you can visit the Sebastian museum and browse *the Atocha's* gold and silver treasure.

And in a sense, this is what we want to do this morning. We're going to comb through some treasure.

For that's how you should view Paul's letter to the Ephesians. **This book is a treasure chest!** It's full of the spiritual treasures that are available to us in Christ.

The book begins, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus..." I'm glad this letter was delivered to the Ephesians by a courier. If it had been sent by the post office it would've caused confusion.

What do you do with a letter that has two addresses?

Paul writes to believers who are "*in Ephesus*," and at the same time "*in Christ Jesus*." These believers were living simultaneously in two locations. Physically they were "*in Ephesus*" - but spiritually they were "*in Christ*."

And we also have two locations - two addresses. If Paul were writing to us today it would read, "to the saints who are in Lilburn, and faithful in Christ Jesus."

Paul greets the Ephesians, "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 with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ..." Wherever you're stationed physically you'll find the location to be limited.

Lilburn has no a beachfront, and if you like to snow sky - sorry! Physically speaking, every location has it's limitations, but not so with our spiritual address.

In Christ all God's blessings are available to us.

In Christ our lives butt up against another world. We're connected by the Holy Spirit to a spiritual realm where we can draw upon the love, and power, and presence, and peace, and joy of Almighty God.

This means the key to living the Christian life and overcoming sin - *is to avoid getting landlocked. Don't get tied down to what's tangible and temporal. We need to see ourselves not just in Lilburn, but in Christ.*

We need to stay focused on *who we are and what we have as a child of God. If we know who we are, we'll live like it. If we know what we have, we'll use it.*

For the rest of the chapter Paul takes us on a tour. He wants us acquainted with our blessings in Christ.

Our treasure begins in verse 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..."

Here's our first blessing... **we've been chosen.**

Out of the hordes of humanity who have walked this planet God picked you to be His child... This means you didn't just wander into God's family. Your conversion was no fluke. God had His eye on you before the foundation of the world. *Here's a mind blower - **Jesus went to the cross with you in mind!***

He continues verse 5, "having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself..."

It's true, in other passages the Bible teaches that our salvation depends on us choosing God - Acts 10:43 says of Jesus, "whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." But the Bible also tells us that when we do believe, we discover that God chose us first.

Someone said when we walk into heaven we'll look up and read a banner over the pearly gates that says, "Whosoever will may come!" - but after we've entered we'll look at the other side of the banner, and read the words, "Chosen before the foundation of the world."

And Paul adds that we've been predestined for "adoption." If you're in Christ, God has adopted you as His son or daughter! *And the adopted child has one big blessing! **He or she always knows they're wanted!***

An adopted child knows he's no accident - she's not a mistake. We weren't forced on a reluctant God. He cherishes us, and He's sacrificed to make us His own.

And here's why God adopted us, it's "according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace..." God chose you to show off His grace!

When I was saved everyone knew there's no way a Bozo like me deserved such favor - there's no way you or I did anything to earn salvation - it's given freely.

We're proof that God is full of grace and mercy!

And he continues, by His grace "He has made us accepted in the Beloved." There's no sweeter emotion than to feel accepted. To be granted full membership.

And "in Christ" we have been accepted into the most exclusive club in the universe - *the family of God*.

Also, "In Him (or in Christ) we have redemption..." The word "redemption" means "to buy back."

Remember the story of the gingerbread man.

As soon as he came out of the oven he popped up from the cookie sheet and began taunting the grandma who'd baked him. He shouted, "Run, run as fast as you can, but nobody can catch a gingerbread man."

And off he ran with the grandma at his heels.

She chased him through the city streets until she found him trying to hide in the window of the bakery.

She grabbed the gingerbread man, and was leaving when the baker said, "Wait, that'll be ten cents." The grandma pulled out a dime and handed it to the baker.

As she took him home, the sweet grandma held the gingerbread man to her chest, and whispered, "First I made

you, then I bought you - now, you're really mine."

And if you'll listen closely you'll hear the Spirit of God make the very same statement to you. *"First I made you, then I bought you, now you are really mine!"*

And note how we're redeemed, **"through His blood."** The shed blood of Jesus was our purchase price.

Joe Kerkofsky was America's blood donor champion.

Joe lost an arm when he was six, so when World War 2 broke out he was rejected for military service.

But Joe could give blood. Over his lifetime, Joe Kerkofsky gave 31 gallons, and saved countless lives. Remember the human body only holds 10-12 pints of blood, so Joe gave all he had more than 20 times.

Joe Kerkovsky was quoted, **"Giving blood makes you feel like you are contributing life itself. There's no more precious a gift than life. Money can't buy the joy of giving blood to help someone who needs it."**

And those words could've been taken right out of the mouth of our Lord Jesus. **Only one person has given more blood - and experienced greater joy from doing so than Joe Kerkofsky - and that's Jesus Christ.**

Millions have received life, and redemption by the blood of Jesus. As the hymn puts it, **"Would you be free from the burden of sin? Would you o'er evil a victory win? There's wonder-working power in the blood."**

Next Paul tells us that God redeemed us for **"the forgiveness of sins."** He purchased our rights, not to enslave

us and make us miserable - but to set us free!

God *redeems us to forgive us!*

There's a company in Michigan that posted a notice on its bulletin board... "Too err is human. To forgive is company policy!" And forgiveness is company policy in God's Kingdom. God is all about forgiveness.

In fact, the end of verse 6 tells us the extent of His forgiveness. It's "*according to the riches of His grace.*"

When I look at my bank account I can sometimes get depressed. *My bills exceed my balance.* But what if I were Bill Gates, Jr., and dad was paying my debts?

I could breathe a sigh of relief. *That Bill* has more than enough to cover *my bills...* And we need to realize that if we're in Christ, God is our Father, and He's paying our debts out of "*the riches of His grace.*"

That's why there's more than enough to cover me! He forgives us according to His riches, not our merit.

Verse 8 tells us God made His grace to "*abound (or spill over) toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself...*" In other words, this lavish grace was God's idea, and no one else's. It pleases Him to be this kind.

"*That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times...*" Or when *the time is right and the age is over.*

Then "*He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him.*" All history is headed for a grand climax. Everything will mesh "*in*

Christ,” and the redeemed of all ages will live forever together with our Lord Jesus.

Verse 11, “*In Him...*” And I hope it’s sinking in. *Where are our blessings found? Always “In Him... In Christ...”*

“*In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will...*”

Did you hear of the heirs who were eager to see the old man die and inherit his fortune. After his death, they gathered for the reading of the will. The lawyer started, “*I, John Jones, of sound mind and body, spent it all.*”

Don't worry that won't happen to us! God has for us an inheritance. His blessings are for *now and eternity*.

“*That we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation...*”

And note how the Ephesians were saved, they “*trusted.*” 2000 years later, people are saved the same way: *through grace - by faith - in Christ - for His glory.*

“*In whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise...*” In the ancient world a seal was a mark of ownership. *A merchant would plant his ring into hot wax, and the impression it left was the merchant’s mark. It denoted what belonged to him.*

Likewise the Holy Spirit is God’s mark of ownership.

The Holy Spirit’s power and influence in us is proof that we belong to God. Those who are “*in Christ*” are those who live

impacted by *the Spirit of Christ!*

The Holy Spirit is a big deal! Verse 14 says He's "the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."

The Greek word translated "guarantee" refers to a purchaser's "earnest money." The Holy Spirit is God's downpayment. He's the foretaste of the joys of heaven.

But the Greek word, "arrabon" has another meaning.

In modern Greece, it's the word for an engagement ring. In antiquity it referred to the dowry or bridal price.

A dowry was a financial pledge given by a man to the family of his bride-to-be. It proved the genuineness of his intentions to marry and support their daughter.

This makes for a beautiful picture when applied to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is our engagement ring - He's our promise from Jesus - our assurance - that He intends return and take us as His bride!

You and I have been given tremendous blessings in Christ Jesus, *but are we accessing those riches?*

It reminds me of Henrietta Green, or "Hetty" as she was called. She was the world's greatest miser.

When she died her estate valued \$95 million, yet she was so tight with her money she ate cold oatmeal each morning because she didn't want to pay to heat up her stove... The poor gal she was a very stingy woman!

And I'm afraid the church is full of Hetty Greens! Believers

don't utilize the blessings they've been given.

So what if there's wealth in the bank if you never draw it out. There are Christians who are spiritually starving while their pantry is stocked to the brim. In the rest of the chapter Paul prays a prayer designed to help us take advantage of our many blessings...

Verse 15, "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints..."

Notice what goes together - faith in Jesus and love for His people. E. Stanley Jones describes the change in his life the day he met Jesus, "When I was converted and rose from my knees, the first thing I wanted to do was put my arms around the world." Faith creates love.

Paul prayed, "(I) do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him..." The Bible teaches us about God, but that's where many Christians stop. *Knowing about God and knowing God are not the same experience.*

God wants us to sense His presence, be awed by His glory, warm ourselves by the fires of His love.

He wants us to encounter Him not only academically in Bible Study, but spiritually as we open up our hearts.

There's an old hymn that reads, "Beyond the sacred page, I seek Thee, Lord - My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word." *Beyond the sacred page* - Paul prays that God will reveal Himself to us personally and intimately.

He also prays, “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened...” *Not only that we'll know the truths of Scripture, but we'll have the insight to apply them.*

How many folks saw apples drop from trees before Isaac Newton deduced the law of gravity... James Watt wasn't the first person to see a kettle boil over. But from what he saw he invented the steam engine...

I've seen apples fall and steam rise, but that's all I saw. My understanding lacked the eyes to apply the truth in beneficial ways. We can't be this dense when it comes to spiritual blessings. *We need to apply them!*

And Paul lists three truths that should be applied...

“That you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places...” Here's what Paul asks God to help us apply: first, “*the hope of our calling.*” Second, “*the riches of His inheritance in the saints.*” Third, “*the exceeding greatness of His power.*”

First, realize **the hope of your calling.**

You're a child of God, an heir of the King. You're somebody! You don't need the fickle attention of *your friends - and this world* - if you're somebody in Christ!

Second, realize **God considers you His inheritance!**

We've mentioned God gives us an inheritance, but He too has an inheritance. *And guess what God longs for?* Hold onto your hat - **It's you!** You and I are what God treasures - to spend eternity with us. We are truly cherished by the one person who really matters.

Third, Paul prays they realize **the greatness of His power.** The same power that raised Christ from the dead and exalted Him to heaven is available to you!

Acknowledge your weakness and hold up your tin cup under God's spigot - until He fills it to overflowing!

In verse 21 Paul tells us that Jesus has been exalted **"Far above all principality and power and might and dominion..."** He's above the ranks of men and angels.

"And" above "every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come, and He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Jesus has authority over men and angels, time and eternity, and over all that goes on in His church. The head of the church is not the pastor, or the elders, or even the members - it's Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 2 is **a rags to riches story** *and the main character is you!* It describes how you grew up on the wrong side of the spiritual tracks, but in Christ you've overcome impossible odds to gain a glorious future...

The story begins, **"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins..."** Notice our problem wasn't that we

were maladjusted, or immature, or even sick - before we came to Jesus you and I were dead!

Death is separation. Physical death occurs when the spirit leaves the body. Spiritual death is our spirit separated from God. Spiritually speaking we were all stillborn. We've inherited the sin of the first man, Adam.

We're born in sin and isolated from the life of God.

Realize death has no degrees. A person is either dead or alive... And the same is true spiritually. They're either dead or not - *in Christ* or *apart from Christ*.

There are degrees to decay. *Did you about the musical composer who passed away? He's now de-composing.* And spiritual decay also comes in degrees.

Sin corrupts. It rots away our soul. Persist in certain habits and they harden your heart and sour your mind.

Some folks are less rotten than others, but everyone without Christ - even good people - are spiritually dead.

Paul continues his description of us before we came to Christ, **"in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience..."** Dead in sin, cut off from God - we fell under the influence of Satan and this wicked world.

"Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." Dead to God, sinners by nature, we sought fulfillment in sensual pleasure and material gain. *We were looking for*

love in all the wrong places.

We made **the age-old mistake of trying to meet a spiritual need with a physical thing or thrill.** Yet all our attempts only led to more and more emptiness.

Verse 4, **“But God...”** These are the two most comforting words in Scripture. God saw horrible plight.

He could've allowed us to have our way and stumble into eternity without Him, **“but God!”** God crashed our party. He loves us enough to intervene in our misery.

“But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...” Notice, God is rich in what we need most - *mercy!* It's been said, **“God's throne isn't made of marble, but of mercy.”** In fact, in the Bible, God's throne is called **“the mercyseat.”**

Imagine, God's throne - the place from where He rules - is the very place where wayward people find forgiveness and hope... *That tells us a lot about God!*

Once, an old man was on his deathbed, when a relative whispered, **“he's going to receive his reward.”**

The dying man heard it, and managed to utter, **“No! I'm going to receive mercy.”** Only a fool wants what's coming to him, what he deserves - *I want God's mercy!*

Paul explains that **“even when we were dead in trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...”** God made us alive with spiritual life. He jump started us by His Spirit.

Like a car thief hot-wiring a car. Jesus took hold of God's

wire in one hand, and your wire in the other hand, and arced a spark. He initiated a connection!

That's why it's said, "Fear not that your life will come to an end, but rather that it'll never have a beginning."

Real life only starts when you become alive to God.

And God has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus..."

Air Force One is the President's private 747. It has a protective thermonuclear shield, 19 TV monitors, 85 telephones, 7 lavatories. The President has his own stateroom, dressing room, office, dining room, *and all the peanuts, pretzels, and Bischoff cookies he wants.*

In the event of a nuclear war on Earth the President can lift-off on Air Force 1 and sit comfortably above it all... Likewise, God has us seated in heavenly places.

In Christ you have all that you need to sit comfortably and peacefully even when all hell breaks loose in the situations around you. You have an eternal perspective from which you can make the right calls here on Earth.

Ironically, the first step in the Christian life is not a *step* at all - it's a *sit!* **The first step is to learn to sit.**

Before we *do anything for God* we need to see *what God has done for us...* Before we *stand for God* first *sit with God.* Before we can impact our circumstances, we first need to rest in the midst of those circumstances.

I love verse 7 because it tells us what we're going to be doing for all eternity... **What we'll do in heaven...**

As a matter of fact, I've got a list. The Top Ten reasons to look forward to heaven... 10) You can begin the Lord's Prayer, 'Our Father, who art here...' 9) You can get an answer to the question, 'why?' 8) In heaven 'Touched By An Angel' isn't just a television rerun. 7) Soul music for eternity. 6) Real golden arches. 5) The great view. 4) 'No pain, no gain' becomes 'no pain, no pain'. 3) When you say, 'Oh God' you'll hear, 'What?' 2) Mansions with no mortgages. And the number one reason to look forward to heaven. "Totally fat free."

But here in verse 7 Paul gives us the real number one reason to look forward to heaven... "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

It'll take eternity for Jesus to explain His grace. He'll peel back layer after layer of His kindness toward us.

Here's a quote that's funny, but true, "Millions long for immortality who don't know what to do with themselves on a rainy Saturday afternoon." Eternity will be a long time... *will you be bored? How do you spend forever?* There's only one thing to keep us mesmerized for eternity - that's the grace and sacrifice of Jesus.

Many years ago our family was in the car headed home, and we were discussing how God gives out rewards in eternity. Zach has always been our little thinker. Even at seven years old he was a theologian.

He asked, "Dad, if we're going to have everything in heaven, what's left for God to give to us as a reward?"

That's a good question, and I was groping for an answer

when my silence was broken by Natalie. My sweet daughter answered for me. She told her brother, "*Zach, God will reward us with a hug and a kiss!*"

Could there be a greater reward? God will spend the ages to come showing us "His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ." He'll fill up eternity with hugs and kisses. Each day will be more thrilling than the last.

Verse 8, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith...*" What prompted God to *butt in* and save us?

Make no mistake about it - it had nothing to do with *our performance, our goodness, our righteous deeds, or noble heritage*. Paul declares, "*and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...*" It's prompted by grace, and flows from God's heart. It's a gift I receive.

Paul adds, "*not of works, lest anyone should boast.*"

If it were wages earned, then I could brag and take credit. Rather than abolish my pride, salvation would play right into its hands. *God is smarter than that...*

For me to be saved I have to humble myself - *admit I'm slacker*. All salvation costs any of us is our pride!

Then verse 10, "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*"

There's an old saying, "*Good works never make us fit for God, but God does make us fit for good works.*"

Like buying a used car, God accepts me "*as is,*" but He doesn't leave me that way. He works to refurbish my life. He

goes to work turning ugliness into beauty.

Paul says, "*we are (God's) workmanship,*" or His "*poema*" - *His poem*. We are God's special work of art. Our lives are the canvas on which God paints. On which He expresses His thoughts, and will, and heart.

Verse 11, "Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands..." In the OT, God distinguished Gentiles from Jews by an external, physical mark called circumcision. It highlighted that they were separate people groups.

And "at that time you (Gentiles) were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Since the promise of salvation was given to Israel and since Gentiles were alienated from Jews - the Gentiles had no hope.

Not because God was unwilling to be gracious, but outside of Israel the Gentiles had limited access to God. In that sense, *race was a barrier to grace*.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Realize Jews and Gentiles were as far apart as the North American Hunting Club and Peta. Jews were religious and principled - Gentiles were secular and pragmatic. The two groups had very little in common.

But when a Jew and a Gentile receives the free gift of Jesus the distance between them is erased.

The distinctions are abolished - instantly they're standing on common ground. They're *brought near!* Or literally "*compressed together.*" Through the blood of Jesus, people are united who had nothing in common.

Verse 14, "*For He Himself is our peace...*" Notice, Jesus doesn't give peace. "*He Himself is our peace!*"

It's His presence - *it's knowing He's near, holding His hand* - that's what brings about a sense of peace, and rest, and security. Don't pray for God's peace - pray that God will reveal in your life the presence of Jesus!

"Who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity (the source of friction and hostility), that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances..."

The Law of Moses was the culprit that kept Jews and Gentiles separated. Its customs and rituals created a different culture for Jews that made it difficult for them to relate to Gentiles, and for Gentiles to relate to Jews.

The myriad of distinctions created by the Law also produced a pride in the Jews, and a judgmental spirit.

But by replacing the Law with Jesus, God tore down the reasons for our division. The Law belonged to Jews, but Jesus belongs to both Jews and Gentiles.

The Law was exclusive to Jews. Jesus is inclusive.

And likewise for us... We're male and female - white and black - rich and poor - married and single - young and old - we too are as different as Jews and Gentiles.

And given the chance we'll find reasons over which to divide. **It's Jesus that makes us one!** He's the commonality that's greater than all of our differences.

And Jesus desires "to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace..." He doesn't want us to remain divided. Jesus died to make us one.

We've missed the point of Christianity if we separate into subcultures - black church and white church - or contemporary church and traditional church. The only division that exists is "in Christ" and "apart from Christ."

Verse 16, "And that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity." God makes us one by insisting we all come through the same door - *the cross of Jesus*.

"And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near." The Gospel is one size fits all! Its everyman's answer - Jew and Gentile - hipster and button-down - redneck and urban.

"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." The same Spirit dwells in each of us. There's not a Holy Spirit for *honkies*, and a Holy Spirit for *homeys*. It's the same Holy Spirit in all believers.

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God..." Once Gentiles were "*strangers*" to God's household. We lacked a passport to God's blessings. But now we've been adopted into the family. In fact, we've been born again.

And Jesus is building His house - the Church.

We're told in verse 20, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone..." The apostles and prophets played a special role in the early church. They established foundational doctrine and practice.

But Jesus is the cornerstone - the one load-bearing rock - on which everything rests. Many a church has learned the hard way - remove Him and it all crumbles.

And *in Christ* "the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." And today, Jesus continues to build.

Each of us, *you and me*, are stones in God's house.

Today, God is building a Temple. The church is that Temple. In the OT, the Temple in Jerusalem was God's dwelling place on the Earth. But today, God's Spirit hangs out in His Church. He wants to dwell among us!

Wouldn't it be cool if Calvary CSM got the reputation in our town, *as the place where you can find God?*