

Born Identity
Born for Christ, Ephesians 1: 1-23
September 24-25, 2005 | Cam Huxford, Senior Pastor

Let me ask you a question: Would you rather have everything money can buy...or everything money can't buy? Which would make you the most rich?

Now, that's one of those questions that we'd generally like to rephrase before we answer it.

Kind of like the guy who was asked: would you rather be poor and happy or rich and miserable? He answered: could I be really well off and moderately depressed? Is there a middle ground here?

Well, back to the question: would you rather have everything money can buy...or everything money can't buy? I think we'd all like to ask: is it possible to have some of both? And the good new is that I think you can.

This weekend, we're ramping up a series of messages that will take us through the book of Ephesians. This book talks about what it means to be truly rich.

Ephesians was written to the Christians who lived in Ephesus...which was one of the most wealthy cities in the ancient world.

In fact, Ephesus was considered the "bank of Asia" partly because that city was the location of the Temple of Artemis.

Image - http://ce.eng.usf.edu/pharos/wonders/Gallery/artemis_color.jpg

Now friends, this building was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world! It was a beautiful, architectural masterpiece that was built in the city of Ephesus in what we now call Turkey. **[Satelite image if possible...or three successive google/earth images]** This temple was the world headquarters of the worship of Artemis.

Now, Artemis was the goddess of hunting, nature and fertility. This was one of those "mother nature" cults like new age religions today.

Almost all of the ancient false religions were fertility cults that were based on myths that aligned with the seasonal changes of the earth: spring...harvest...winter...like that. We

tend to think that kind of pantheistic “earth worship” is a new arrival on the faith scene...but it’s not.

Now, in ancient Ephesus, this association with Artemis was part of their identity. They were proud of that temple...and saw their identity as inextricably connected to that religion.

And, because of their belief that Artemis was the patron goddess of Ephesus...the city’s economy was tied to the worship of Artemis.

In fact, when Christianity began to get a toe hold in Ephesus...it affected the economy and there was some serious blow back from those who profited from the whole Artemis worship thing. Artemis meant money to a lot of people.

In addition, the Temple of Artemis, was where many of the most wealthy people kept their money. It was believed that the temple was protected by Artemis...consequently, they believed that temple was the safest place for their wealth. So, vast amounts of privately owned gold were on deposit inside that temple.

Friends, the people of Ephesus were economically minded. In fact, on Paul’s first visit to Ephesus, he was almost killed because of the economic upheaval that was caused by his preaching. The story is in Acts 19.

He was so effectively teaching that there was only one God and His Son was Jesus Christ...the one who had come to earth, died for our sins and rose on the third day as a historical fact! No mythology...fact! Jesus had been seen by thousands of people and Paul himself!

Well, so many people began to follow Christ that people quit buying idols of Artemis. And the silversmiths and jewelers became so alarmed that they might lose their living that they rioted!

You know what I dream. I dream of the day that our church is like that.

- I dream of the day when our church is so effective that the liquor stores in Savannah feel a crunch because so many people are looking to Jesus instead of alcohol for comfort and support.
- I dream of the day when drug dealers think of our church as their worst nightmare...because their business is drying up because of our recovery ministries.

- I dream of the day when abortion clinics can't afford to stay in business because the church has been so effective in teaching on sexual purity and the sanctity of life.
- I dream of the day when casinos and strip clubs and places like that just want to riot because their customer streams are drying up...so effective has the church become at building moral and relational integrity.
- I dream of the day when divorce lawyers have to diversify their practices because there's just not enough divorce business to sustain them...because the church has been so effective at teaching people how to build strong marriages and repair wounded marriages that divorce rates just drop off the chart.

I know this is just a dream...but listen, chasing that dream is why we launched Live Oak Christian Church...and LateChurch downtown...and why we'll be launching our first regional campus in February.

Listen, if our church had the courage and the will to expand our ministry impact to 10 times what it is today...then one out of every ten people you meet in Savannah would be a part of our life-giving church...with a life-changing connection with Jesus...and that should make a difference in all of those areas.

Well, that was Paul's dream...and it came true. And if you look at the churches in Asia that John writes to in the first three chapters of Revelation...**[map image]**
<http://www.ntimages.com/Turkey-i-map.htm> many are in a radius around the church in Ephesus.

I think they were all planted by that ministry to penetrate and permeate that region with the good news about Jesus. Which, again, is why our church is committed to starting new churches here in New Orleans and Bluffton and Savannah...and Banja Luka, Bosnia and Albany, New Zealand and Damoh, India!

Now, Paul knows how economics had dominated the mindset of the people of that region...so one of the themes of this book is the riches that we have in Christ!

Paul is going to write to these people and to us about things of incredible value that money cannot buy. But they are ours "in Christ."

Now, that phrase "in Christ" is going to be used a lot in this book...6 times in the first chapter! And friends, this is one of the first clues to the unique identity that every Christ follower has "in Christ."

[PP: put these up on the screen one after another]

vs 1 “faithful *in Christ*”

vs 3 “We have every spiritual blessing *in Christ*.”

vs 4 “he chose us *in him* before the creation of the world.”

Vs 7-8 “*In him* we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”

vs 9 “He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed *in Christ*.”

Vs 11 “*In him* we were also chosen.”

Vs 12 “We were the first to hope *in Christ*.”

Vs 13 “You also were included *in Christ* when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked *in him* with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

vs 19-20 We have access to “his incomparably great power for us who believe...*in Christ*.”

Friends, over the next few weeks, we’re going to learn some really good news...counterintuitive news about **our born identity as followers of Jesus.**

That identity **is not based on the works we do or the gifts we give or the heritage from which we descend.** (performance or possessions or pedigree) **Our identity is based on our position “in Christ.”**

That’s important because all of the riches that we can inherit from God come to us “in Christ.” Over the next few weeks...you’re going to realize that if you are in Christ, you are a rich person...and you’re going to get richer every day for the rest of your life!

So, let’s dig in. Now, before we do, I want to encourage you to bring your bibles with you each week. If you don’t have a bible...look on with someone nearby who does. If you don’t have a bible...why don’t you stop by the Source afterwards and get one.

This book starts out like almost any ancient letter...the opposite of how we write today. The writer would sign the letter at the beginning rather than the end.

[Leave this up until *]**

**¹"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:**

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

Now friends, no kidding, if we were in a small group bible study...we could spend an hour trying to unpack those three verses.

- Who was Paul? His story is written in the book of Acts...in fact, the last two thirds of the book of Acts is the story of how Paul crossed over from being extremely negative about Jesus and Christianity to being the greatest supporter of Jesus and Christianity.

Acts tells us about how Paul's life changed for the better as he became a player in the Kingdom of God. Fascinating...you owe it to yourself to read it.

- What is an Apostle...one who is "sent out." That's a person on a special mission. Sent out by God for a special, specific purpose.
- Who are the Saints in Ephesus? We know who the saints are...right? Of course, a saint is a 900 year old dead Catholic...right? Not according to the Bible.

As you can see...Paul calls the Christians in Ephesus saints. In fact, the word "saint" is never used in the singular form in the Bible...always in the plural...saints. And it's used 9 times in this book...and every time it's referring to someone who is alive!

[*]**

The word "saint" means "holy one." And if you are a follower of Jesus...that's what you are...that's your born identity! You may not be living like it...yet...but that's the identity you were born with when you were born again.

Saints are people just like us who are faithful to Jesus Christ.

Now friends, in this first chapter of Ephesians, Paul talks about the riches that we have because of our identity as saints “in Christ.” Let’s keep the Bible open and unpack this a little bit.

And let me say that I’m going to try to unpack most of this first chapter today...and that’s very ambitious.

You know, sometimes, when we study the Scriptures, it’s like flying a helicopter. We stop over a passage and hover for a while...or just land there and explore it carefully.

Today, think of this message as if we were flying over the most beautiful landscape in the world in an airplane.

We’re going to cover a lot of ground...and see a lot of beauty...and we’re going to take the time to circle a few things...but we’re going to be moving fast over a lot of ground.

So buckle up...here we go! Our first pass is going to be right over the top of a massive peak.

First, Paul teaches us that

I You’re Rich...You have a Father who Chooses You!

[Donna, can you make the words in the following verses become italicized when I say them on the power point? I’d like both verses on the screen at the same time if possible]

⁴For *he chose us* in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love ⁵*he predestined us* to be adopted as his sons (and daughters) through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

[Donna, can you make the following circles and lines happen on the power point?]

Now, in my Bible, I’ve circled the word “chose” in verse 4 and “predestined” in v. 5 and drawn a line between them to make sure I connect those ideas when I read this passage.

I would also encourage you to circle the phrases “through Jesus Christ” in v. 5 and “in the One he loves” in v. 6 and draw a line back to the circle around “he predestined us” in v. 5. These ideas are all connected.

These are pretty big ideas...huge ideas that unfortunately have been interpreted in all kinds of ways over the years. But here’s the take home:

· **God chooses us! [PP only]**

That’s the good news! God chose you! Now, if you came here today with the misconception that if there is a God...He’s pretty ticked off with you...then look at me...you’ve been wrong before and you’re wrong now.

God is not some angry tyrant in Heaven whose ticked off because of your sin and looking forward to stiff arming you into Hell some day.

That may be the way your daddy or momma was or your football coach...but that’s not your Father in heaven!

Your Father in Heaven loves you...and chooses you! He’s for you and because of that...He has a plan to make things right between you and Him.

They might not be right today...but they can be and that would be His choice. There’s more good news....

· **God chooses us and predestines us to be saved “in Christ.”**

Listen, God loves us so much that before He created the world...He had already worked out a plan in his mind for us to be forgiven of our sins and adopted into His family.

He predestined this rescue plan for all of us before the foundation of the world.

God predestined a plan by which everyone who would accept Jesus as their forgiver and leader would receive eternal life.

The word predestination is only used four times in the bible...twice in Ephesians 1 and twice in Romans 8. All four times it refers to God’s plan to save everyone who will come to Him through Jesus.

This concept of predestination has caused a lot of angst in the world as people have mistakenly interpreted it to mean that some people are pre-selected by God for bad things.

Some are pre-destined to be saved and some are pre-destined to be lost...pre-selected for exclusion from God's grace. Like God has already voted some people off the island. No!

The Bible does not teach that anyone is specifically predestined or pre-selected to be lost in the sense that salvation is inaccessible to them.

That is a misunderstanding of the doctrine of predestination. The bible teaches that God knows who will be saved and who will not...but His desire is for everyone to be saved!

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

II Peter 3: 9

Here's the phrase that helped me understand this: **God has predestined the plan, not the man!**

And friends, this is good news. The only people in this world who are selected to be lost...are those who reject Jesus. Because He is the predestined plan of God for the salvation of the world.

· **God chooses us to “be” to the praise of His glory.**

Now this is an interesting idea.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been *predestined* according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might *be* for the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1: 11-12

[Donna, when I say predestined and be italicize those words on PP.]

God's predestined [**circle predestined**] plan is that we would find a life-changing connection with Jesus...and that the changes that Jesus makes in our lives would become [**circle “be” and connect with a line to “predestined”**] a platform from which He would receive praise and glory.

Friend, in the mind of God, you are predestined to become the kind of person through whom He is going to be praised in this world.

I know what some of you are thinking...Cam, I'm no saint! If you're a Christian...yes you are!

You may not be living like it yet...but that's the predestined plan of God for your life! If you let Him have his way in your life...when people get to know you...they're going to be drawn to the Lord.

Now, let's see what those changes would look like...which brings us to the second big idea in this chapter

II You're Rich...You have a Lord who Blesses You!

Now friends, God not only expects you to live a life that brings Him praise and glory...at work and home and school and where ever. He also provides you with the resources to pull that off!

First of all, in Christ, He gives us

[Italicize as I say the words...leave this note up until the next note]

· **A New Vision ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world *to be holy and blameless in his sight.***

Friends, when we become followers of Jesus, when we choose to follow the One who chose us...God sees us differently.

The root idea of the word holy is "to cut." It means that you cut ties with an old life and old ways of thinking...and now, in Christ, you're something different.

Now, that difference begins with a decision in your mind...but gradually permeates everything about you.

The idea of blamelessness in v.4 is not that we eventually become perfect...but rather that we're consistently trying to live as who we are: children of God and followers of Jesus.

Did you know that the Bible never refers to a Christian as a "sinner?" It talks about the fact that we sin...and what to do....

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

I John 1: 9

But the NT never refers to a follower of Jesus as a sinner...that is no longer our identity...and that's not how God sees us.

He sees us, believe it or not, as holy, blameless members of his family. And listen, one of the things that happens as you grow in Christ...is that you begin to see yourself the way God sees you!

You see yourself as a saint. And I'm not talking about some pastey, dour doufas either. I'm talking about a saint like the author of this book...a strong, joyful, powerful force for God in this world.

The kind of godly man that other men want to be...the kind of woman that other women would envy in the healthiest sense of that word.

That's God's vision for your life...and if you walk with Him long enough...it will become your vision as well!

· **A New Family** ⁵ ***he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.***

Listen, you may have been alone all your life...but when you become a follower of Jesus, in Christ, you have a family!

You've been adopted into God's family...and that makes you part of our family as well. And if you're not a part of one of our small groups yet...you're missing out on what it means to be “in Christ.”

· **A New Standing** ⁷ ***In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.***

We've already talked about this...in Christ you're forgiven of the past...redeemed by the riches of God's grace.

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

II Corinthians 5: 17-18

That means that when we receive this new identity in Christ...we walk across the room to pass what we've found on to others.

- **A New Understanding** ***⁹He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure.***

Listen, God's will may be mysterious to some, but if you're following Christ, most everything you need to know about the will of God is right here in His word.

Finally, we have

- **A New Power** ***¹³you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.***

Friends, here's the power source for the new life that comes with our new, born identity. When we give our lives to Jesus, he marks us as his own possession by giving us His Holy Spirit.

In v.14 when he talks about a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance...that's the real estate concept of earnest money. You know, where you put down some money that guarantees that you're serious about what you're doing.

Well, that's who **the Holy Spirit is**. He is **the presence of God in the life of every Christ follower who reminds us that we belong to God and empowers us to live like it!**

And you know, every now and then you meet someone who pulls it off...and God gets the praise and glory that he deserves...and it's a beautiful thing.

At the end of this chapter, Paul writes about his prayers for these Ephesian Christians.

¹⁵“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”

Ephesians 1: 15-16

And then he goes on to pray for them...that all the power of Jesus will be evident in their lives.

And you know, it's tempting to think...oh, that's the Bible...that's not really relevant to me. Don't believe it.

Because one day you'll see someone who

- lives every day to the praise and glory of God...and
- you're going to be impressed by the peace and power and joy in their life...and
- you'll want to be just like them.

And the good news is...you can be!

In his book, Rumors of Another World, Philip Yancey tells an amazing story of some folks who chose to “be” to the praise of His glory in South Africa.

When Nelson Mandela was released from prison after twenty-seven years of wrongful imprisonment and was elected president of South Africa, he asked his jailer to join him on the inauguration platform.

It was, for him, a ministry of reconciliation. He had received forgiveness from Jesus...and he wanted to pass that gift on to others.

He then appointed Archbishop Desmond Tutu to head an official government panel that they called: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Mandela hoped to defuse the natural pattern of revenge that he had seen in so many countries where one oppressed race or tribe took control from another.

For the next two-and-a-half years, South Africans listened to reports of atrocities coming out of the TRC meetings.

The rules were simple: if a white policeman or army officer voluntarily faced his accusers, confessed his crime, and fully acknowledged his guilt, he could not be tried and punished for that crime.

Hard-liners grumbled about the obvious injustice of letting criminals go free, but Mandela insisted that the country need healing even more than it needed justice.

At one hearing, a policeman name van de Broek recounted an incident when he and other officer shot an eighteen-year-old boy and brutally burned the body in order to destroy the evidence.

Eight years later van de Broek returned to the same house and seized the boy's father. The wife was forced to watch as policemen bound her husband on a woodpile, poured gasoline over his body, and ignited it.

The courtroom grew hushed as the elderly woman who had lost first her son and then her husband was given a chance to respond. What do you want from Mr. van de Broek?' the judge asked.

She said she wanted van de Broek to go to the place where they burned her husband's body and gather up the dust so she could give him a decent burial. His head down, the policeman nodded agreement.

Then she added a further request, Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give.

- Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him.
- And I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him too. I would like to embrace him so he can know my forgiveness is real.'

Spontaneously, some in the courtroom began singing 'Amazing Grace' as the elderly woman made her way to the witness stand, but van de Broek did not hear the hymn. He had passed out, overwhelmed.

Justice was not done in South Africa that day, nor in the entire country during months of agonizing procedures by the TRC. Something beyond justice took place.

The author of the book of Ephesians once wrote:

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Romans 12: 21

Nelson Mandela, that nameless little woman...both found the power of God's Holy Spirit within them to forgive and overcome evil by choosing to be to the praise of His glory.

Now, let me give you your homework: Read this chapter every day this week until these concepts soak deeply into your mind and heart.

Underline what the Holy Spirit makes stand out to you each day...It may be different each day!

Pray about what you underline...**As you read God's word, pray that the Holy Spirit will make what you read with your eyes to become real in your life every day.**