

EPHESIANS

blessed to be a blessing

WEEK FIVE

Ephesians 3.20-21

Do you remember the Incredible Hulk? He was just an ordinary dude...until his anger was aroused. When this happened, his shirt-popping muscles would grow to super-human size and his pants-splitting quads would propel him to fight against the injustices in the world. The green transformation was an indication that this was not going to be an ordinary day for an ordinary man.

Sometimes we need images like this to help us get a hand-hold on the power that is active in us when we commit our ways to the Lord. It is through this power that God can do super-amazing things. Yet, we must not be tempted to view this passage from our limited perspectives. God's mission is to bring justice, healing, mercy, and restoration to this world and to strengthen, encourage, and grow His Church. It is for Him and His will and His purposes that this power within us is continually activated. It just so happens that His greater good is also our greater good! And, we will find that the more we allow God into our lives and remain in Him by surrendering our hearts more fully to Him, giving Him our full attention, the more His desires become our desires.

God's righteous anger and love are inextricably stirred in this world, and He has fully committed Himself to 'righting' the things that are wrong or in need of revival! It is for this purpose that we can ask confidently for Him to 'bring it,' while we dedicate our lives and trust to Him! Do you sense a particular injustice in the world? Are you desperate to reconcile a relationship or have a situation redeemed? Is God showing you people who need the touch of a loving Savior? Is there an endeavor you've been wanting to pursue which you believe aligns with God's heart? And, does this endeavor seem well-beyond your capabilities? Awesome. You're on the right track! God is capable of delivering amazing results which greatly exceed all imagined boundaries; He can turn painful or ordinary or heartbreaking into jaw-dropping, unimaginable awe-some. Behold! I think I hear the sound of ripping clothes.

Ephesians 4.1

We've hit a transition point in our study of Ephesians (the word 'therefore' is what tips it off for us). Paul has been encouraging us with the deep truths of our faith because it is so important to be reminded of all that we have in Christ. Do we sit back now and bask in the glory and grace of our relationship which swells above all manner of pleasure or promise that could possibly be given here on earth? Yes!...and, no. Yes, because marinating in these truths feeds a relationship that is of utmost importance, and God can continue to bring meaning and purpose and deepen the intimacy of this relationship as we do. So celebrate and marinate!

The stage curtain is just now opening though. Our salvation by grace may have occurred at one point in time, but it is meant to continue to feed us inwardly and propel us forward into healing, growth, and change into Christlikeness. Grappling to understand some of these truths and how they find meaning in our lives can be like a wrestling match with God. But, God loves a good match and always, always wants to lead us on into greater goodness, clarity, and purpose.

For the rest of our 10-week study, we will spend quite a bit of time putting flesh on these truths...just like Jesus did. We will answer the question, 'how do we conduct ourselves now that we have been given the greatest gift of all time?' Because with this immense privilege comes responsibility. Don't fade out on me now. This is where the adventure begins. I love the original word used in these passages for 'live' and 'conduct' because it means 'to walk around.' We will be challenged to become aware of how we are walking around in life – in our relationships, in our vocation, and in our attitudes, hearts, and character. Take this day (and every day you're given) to allow God to penetrate your heart with His over-pouring love, and ask Him to make you more aware of how this love translates into action! We are truly blessed...to be a blessing!

Ephesians 4.1 to 2

Paul is describing the quality with which we are to be living out our calling (i.e., imitating Christ by making peace and bringing restoration to the broken areas of this world). Every one of us who is in Christ has this calling, which is greater than the sum of our lives. Knowing that this calling transcends our lives and by the in-pouring of massive amounts of grace (Amen!) make living out Ephesians 4.2 do-able. How are we to be "humble and gentle" or "long-suffering and patient" unless we look to and draw strength from the One who is more powerful and able than us? The One who is large-and-in-charge has an eye to our situation, whatever it may be. Are we being offended or criticized? Betrayed, disregarded, or misunderstood? Have we experienced a great disappointment? He is present (hallelujah!) and actively reversing the wrongs of this world, to be sure. He is calling us to operate in life from a view of this greater priority and purpose.

So, the next time we feel deflated from someone else's comments or treatment of us or frustrated by the sheer wrongness of things, desperately pray that God infiltrate your mind and heart with His presence. We are wired to care about relationship and things that are broken. When things go wrong, then, they can bring us down emotionally, physically, and spiritually. But while we're down there, roll over to look heavenward, where the power that comes from above enables us to see our problems peripherally and see Him centrally. We must seek Him in all this because knowing how to handle ourselves in Christlike fashion is no easy task (!), and another level of action may be required if abuse or safety issues are involved. These passages are not calling us to be doormats or take abuse. They are calling us to gain our conviction from a perspective that may be outside our own, and from this perspective, our spirit may be strengthened, thus allowing a more Christlike response to our situation.

Ephesians 4.3-6

Who knew prepositions could be so important? Verse 6 states that there is "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." God's fatherhood and supremacy are universal. And, His presence pervades everything. One of the biggest rewards of being in Christ on this side of heaven is an experience of His palpable presence. We sing about it a lot: joy, peace, love, hope, strength – these are all insights given to our spirits that testify to His presence, and they are given to the people who make up His Church (2 Chronicles 16.9). These facts about His nature - His universal fatherhood, kingship, and presence - form the basis of the existence of the Church and the reason by which we must guard its unity.

We have learned that God has formed one, integrated body with His Church by making peace between Jew and Gentile – no longer is there reason for hostility between God and people and amongst people. The Triune God – Father, Christ, and Spirit – is the originator, centerpiece, and adhesive for the Church's unity, and this passage urges us to maintain that unity as a top priority. What we do as a Church (worship Him, proclaim His truths through word and deed, seek His healing) should not be hampered by anything that splits us for selfish reasons. God's unity in the Trinity should be replicated by our unity in the Church. Oneness and diversity can and does definitely exist in the Godhead and in the Church, and Scripture teaches that our unity shows the world the truths of Christ and the love He has for us (John 17.22-23). Simple, yet significant.

The other side of this truth can be scary to look at, however. Division, whether visible or in our hearts, can show our disbelief in One God, thus undermining the message of the Church that is meant for the world. Let us ask God to make us aware of how we can focus our hearts and attitudes and behaviors on maintaining the unity in the Church. Ask Him to take away anything that could possibly hamper these efforts. May our hearts, speech, and lives be honoring to the people and body God died to save, protect, and grow. We cannot underestimate the power of the good gifts He gives to His Church to heal the world.

Ephesians 4.7-10

Have you given much thought to your life's purpose? God has. If you have said 'yes' to Christ, then you have at least one gift He has given you to share with others. Many have been given several gifts. These gifts are something that makes you unique in the body of Christ, and you have them because many in the world desperately need what your gifts can bring to their lives. Likewise, others have been given spiritual gifts which are also needed in the world, including possibly by you. These gifts together perfectly complement the work that God wills to do for the benefit of everyone and everything. These gifts are not natural talents or skills, so that no one can boast. We have not given cause or cost to receive them; they have been graced to us. As we are His possession, bought back from captivity from certain death, Christ freely gave gifts to equip us for a purpose for our lives. We not only have freedom, we now have purpose.

Ok, now we have to think really big here: on a microcosm level right now, each of us who make up the Church, by serving with our diverse gifts in a unified way, are displaying to the universe God's plan to bring all things together in Him. Imagine it! A definable movement toward unity and harmony unlike ever before...all because God submitted Himself to earthly authorities and powers and then was raised to ultimate authority over everything forever and graced us with His Spirit and gifts to accomplish all of this. Yes, you fit in this big picture. Read Ephesians 4.11, Romans 12.6-8, and 1 Corinthians 12.8-10 this weekend, and ask God where He has uniquely gifted you. You will be happy to know that your gifting will also fit perfectly with how He has designed you in your personal style and the things you deeply care about in this world!