

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH  
September 13, 2020  
Heaven on Earth\_ Ephesians 2 - Stamped  
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Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. It's more than a prayer. It is our mission. It is our vision. When we bless those who curse us, heaven invades earth. When we care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, heaven, invades earth. When we exercise faith, hope and love; when we act justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly, heaven invades earth. Welcome to week two of heaven on earth. We are walking through the book of Ephesians verse by verse and we're doing it day by day as we make this shift to daily church. You can sign up for the NCC daily or download our new NCC app. Either way, the only ceiling on your intimacy with God and your impact on the world is daily spiritual disciplines. [NCC.re/daily](https://ncc.re/daily)

Last week we looked at the salutation verse one and two of Ephesians. Paul begins each of his 13 epistles with two words - grace and peace. We find ourselves stuck in this COVID crisis. We've got racial tension, political polarization, throw in some cancel culture, and we need an extra measure of grace right about now. As Christ followers, we are called to stand in that gap as grace givers and peacemakers and I might add truth tellers, and tone setters. And so we're going to pick up where we left off last week.

The rest of chapter one is a poem and a prayer. Now we're going to save the prayer for NCC daily, but I want to parse this poem. Now, it wasn't until the 16th century that chapters and verses were added to our Bibles by a French printer and scholar named Robert Estienne, who thought it would be a lot easier to navigate the Bible that way and it is. But sometimes those manmade divisions create false dichotomies, and we compartmentalize scripture in a way that the original writers never intended. And so we think of this poem as 11 verses, but in the original language, it's one sentence - 201 words. It's the longest sentence in the Bible. And I might add, I think one of the most significant sentences in all of Scripture, if you read this the right way, you will never see yourself the same way again. Ready or not here we go verse three.

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."*

Now, last weekend, a horse named Authentic won the hundred and 46 running of the Kentucky Derby. But the real winner I think was a guy named Bob Weihe. In 1947, his mom took him to his first Kentucky Derby he was nine years old hasn't missed a Kentucky Derby since. 82 years old, but that 73 year streak was in jeopardy because Churchill Downs decided that they would run the race without fans in the stands. George Hall to the rescue. George Hall is the principal owner of a horse named Max Player who by the way, happened to finish fifth in the race and he wanted to help Bob keep his streak alive. So what did he do? He offered Bob an ownership stake in his horse. Are you kidding me?

Unbelievable. No longer a fan, now, as a shareholder, he could watch the Run for the Roses; check this out, in the owner's box - a whole different deal. I think some of us, we feel like and act like and think like, we're fans. No, no, no, no, we are shareholders. We are joint heirs with Christ. And that makes all the difference in the world. No matter how many promises God has made they are yes, in Christ. No matter how many blessings God has bestowed they belong to you.

I want you to think of this poem as a puzzle. And I'm going to share seven pieces this weekend. Each piece reveals a different dimension of who we are in Christ. I think the key to the whole thing is the last two words of verse three and you'll see it on the screen circled. The apostle Paul employs these two words "in Christ", 164 times in his 13 epistles, 36 times in the book of Ephesians, more than any other letter. And it is the key that unlocks our identity in chapter one, our destiny in chapter two and our authority in chapter three. We are blessed in the heavenly realm, with every spiritual blessing in Christ but I want to make these first person possessive.

If you're taking notes, you can jot this down. I am blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Now, if you reverse engineer blessing all the way back to its biblical origin, what you discover is that before original sin, there was original blessing. That sequence is incredibly significant because if you get it wrong, the entire algorithm is off. You relate to God for the wrong reasons. The very first thing that God does after creating us in His image is to bless us. Please hear this blessing is God's most ancient instinct. God wants to bless you beyond your ability to ask or imagine. God has blessings in categories that we cannot even conceive of and all those blessings belong to us. How and why, and where? You know the answer - in Christ. What do we do with that? Well, we are blessed to bless. It's the Abrahamic covenant. Now in Orthodox Judaism you would pronounce 100 blessings per day. And so let me just make a simple application. Count your blessings, and then flip those blessings for someone else.

Verse four, *"Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ (there it is again) to be holy and blameless in his eyes."*

Now, let me add two more pieces to this puzzle. Are you ready? I was chosen before the beginning of time and I am blameless in the eyes of God. Now when my daughter Summer was a little girl, we had a little deal where I would often say to her, if all the little girls in the world were lined up in a single file line, and I could only choose one to be my daughter, I would choose you. Well, last fall, my little girl walked down an aisle and got married, and I got to pronounce a blessing. So here's what I did. I said if all the little boys in the world were lined up in a single file line, and I could only choose one to be my son-in-law, we would choose you. We love Summer. We love Austin. And there's something about that choosing that is so powerful. You are chosen by God before the beginning of time.

Now, if you're taking notes, I want you to jot this down and I'll explain it. Identity issues are theology issues. A. W. Tozer said what comes to mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you. All of us are theologians. The only question - are we good ones or bad ones? We've got to

make sure that our theology is shaping our identity, not the other way around. Guilt issues are a misunderstanding of God's grace. Control issues are a misinterpretation of God's sovereignty. Anger issues are a misjudgment of God's mercy. Pride issues are a miscalculation of God's transcendence. Fear issues are a missed appropriation of God's love. And trust issues are a misapprehension of God's goodness. Identity issues are theology issues.

Now we are T-minus two months until the election. So many of you work in the political arena, we honor you. This is a challenging season. We also know that for many of you, it's not just an election; your job is on the line. We love you. We are praying for you. And all of us, I believe, have a civic duty to exercise our rights and responsibilities as citizens of this country. And I might add, that I think our civic duty starts with civility. Can I give you a definition? I think civility is public grace in the public square. And there's not quite enough of that going around right now. And we'll talk a lot more about it when we get to chapter four. And so we have a civic duty as citizens of this country, but our primary citizenship is in this thing called the kingdom of God. Our primary identity is not found in our political affiliation or our socio economic status or our ethnicity or our sexuality. So, I'll pick on politics. If you find your primary identity in a political ideology, that ideology is idolatry. And my concern is this, I love you but my concern is this; some of us get more fired up about our political opinions than our biblical beliefs. I think some of us are more evangelistic when it comes to our ideology than our theology. And that is not going to get us where we need to go. We need to make sure that our theology is shaping our identity.

*Verse five, "He predestined us for adoption with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely bestowed on us in the beloved."*

Last year, Lora and I had the joy and privilege of witnessing an adoption ceremony, it was so beautiful, it was so meaningful. And I can't help but think about that moment when I read this passage. Now Paul is writing actually as a Roman citizen. In ancient Rome, parents had the option of disowning their biological children. Pretty crazy. But if a child was adopted, they could not be disowned. It was a privileged position. They received a new name, a new identity, their debt was canceled. And their inheritance wasn't activated when their parents died; the inheritance was activated upon their adoption.

Here's the fourth piece of this puzzle. I am adopted by the Heavenly Father. Now, there is a vertical dimension to adoption, but there is also a horizontal dimension. If God is my father, that makes us brothers and sisters, and that changes the way that we relate to one another. 59 one another's in the Bible, love one another, pray for one another, bear one another's burdens, spur one another on towards love and good deeds. You cannot get where God wants you to go by yourself. It's so critical that we are in community right now.

Now, I'm not sure who said this, but I think it's true; you will become the average of the five people you spend the most time with. Isn't that interesting? For better or for worse, identity is shaped by

community. Discipleship is more caught than taught. There is an osmosis that happens when we are in community. And so can I tell you what Lora and I are praying right now. We dropped our son Josiah offer his freshman year at South Eastern. Man, one of our consistent prayers is God just give him a few friends. Just give them a few friends that can stretch his faith that can challenge him where he needs to be challenged, that can love him no matter what. Give him a few friends, give him a community because it's going to be so critical in who he becomes.

Now this fall we kick off our fall semester with in person and online small groups. We want to grow smaller and smaller as we grow larger and larger as a church. And so would you check out our groups, you'll see the link.

This week, Dee Jackson, shared a story about someone in her small group who never said anything. And I want to say this; you don't have to say anything. Okay, that's okay. And all of us have different personality types, but it was curious that after many months had never said a single word. And Dee figured that she might be a little introverted. And by the way, both of them gave me permission to share this story I wouldn't otherwise. And one, day Dee is praying. And I think we need to do some listening prayer for the people around us. We need to hear from God and then speak prophetically into their lives. And so one day Dee is praying for this friend for this woman. And she feels like the Lord says, tell her that I love her voice, and I want to hear more of it.

Here's the back-story many years ago, someone that she loved, told her that they didn't like the sound of her voice. In fact, told her that they hated her voice and something happened that day. Shame set in it took root and she was afraid of using her voice in public. And Dee felt a little nervous, felt a little foolish; you always do when God gives you a prophetic word for someone. But she had the courage to say that I love your voice, I want to hear more of it. And in that moment God healed her and set her free. Check this out, she is using her voice to speak and to teach, she has found her voice. And she said this, it's crazy, my throat feels free. That part of her identity doesn't become reality, without community. And so we are the priesthood of believers. We are the company of prophets. That's what a small group is.

Verse seven, *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us."*

Here's the fifth piece of this puzzle, I am redeemed by the blood of Christ. Now that word redeemed is an accounting term, and it means to buy back. In a free market economy the value of something is determined by what someone else is willing to pay for it. Your value was determined at Calvary's cross. You are worth the cross to Christ and that's why you are invaluable and irreplaceable.

Now I love the way Paul says this in II Corinthians 5:21. *"God made him who had no sin to be sin become for us, so that we might become the righteousness of Christ."*

Something happens simultaneously, the moment we put our faith in Christ. I want to tell you what it is. All of our sin, everything we've done wrong, it is transferred to Christ's account, and it's paid in full. But that's only half of the story, you've got to flip that coin because the righteousness of Christ everything that he has done right is transferred to our account. And then God the Father says, why don't we call it even? What? That is the good news, that is the gospel. I owed a debt I could not pay; he paid a debt he could not owe.

We're about to celebrate communion. And I think in that moment, the bread and the cup represent something that is so sacred. We are not redeemed with gold or silver but with the precious blood of Christ.

Alright, let me go to verse 13, here we go. *"You also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."*

Alright, let me add the last two pieces to this puzzle. I am sealed by the Holy Spirit and I am stamped with the image of God. You've got the entire Trinity represented in this poem. We're adopted by the father, we're redeemed by the son and now we're sealed by the Holy Spirit. Come on, how does that feel to be tripled, teamed by God Himself?

Now I love this word in the Greek, not easy to pronounce, but so powerful - sphragizó. It means sealed or stamped. And it refers to an ancient king that would take a signet ring on his finger and press it into hot wax. And by doing so it would authenticate ownership. It was proof of authenticity. And so what God says is watch this, I'm going to seal you with my Holy Spirit. And not only sealed, but stamped with the image of God.

Now, a few minutes ago, I said that identity issues, are theology issues, but let me flip that coin. I think identity issues are also idolatry issues. So in the beginning, God created us in his image, we have been creating God in our image ever since it's called anthropomorphism. And what you end up with is a God who walks and talks and looks and thinks and acts an awful lot like you. And so, instead of becoming the mirror image of God, God becomes the mirror image of us and what you end up with is God in the hands of angry people. Now an idol is anything we value or trust or worship above and beyond God? I think we tend to think of ancient idols like the statue of Artemis that I referenced last week. But listen, most idolatry issues, they're identity issues.

You know what, I have a theory I wrote about it about 10 years ago a book called 'Soul Print'. And it's counterintuitive, but I think the more you have going for you, the more potential you have for identity issues. We think that it's what's wrong with us are the mistakes we've made that are going to kind of mess us up. No, I think the challenge is, the better you look, the more money you have, the more degrees behind your name, the nicer house, the faster car, you know, whatever it is for you, the more you have

going for you there's a tendency there's even a temptation to find your identity in whatever that thing is instead of finding your full identity in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, when I was a kid, our family frequented this restaurant called White Fence Farm. Amazing chicken, which meant you had to wait a long time and I think they knew that so they put all these crazy mirrors in the lobby, I think to keep the kids entertained and it worked. I remember, you know, standing in front of these curved mirrors and you would do all kinds of you know, you would do your thing I feel like doing like a little, I don't know what but you know, these curved mirrors, these crazy mirrors would distort your image in all kinds of crazy ways. We have some crazy mirrors in our culture. If you aren't careful, culture will try to name you and tame you and label you. Culture will try to make you in its image and conform you to its idols. That's why Paul says do not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Well, how do we do that? Well, it can't be based on approval ratings and opinion polls that I know for sure. Listen, it's seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness. It's caring less and less about what people think. It's caring more and more about what our Heavenly Father thinks. It's living according to our biblical convictions, and loving those who do not. And if that puts me on the wrong side of history, so be it. I want to make sure that I'm on the right side of eternity.

Now, let me put this puzzle together. If you are someplace where you can say this out loud, I want you to hear yourself, say this. Now some of you may need to say it 17 times some of you may need to say that 1700 times, okay? You have to say it and pray it and sing it until you believe it. You have to own it until it owns you. So here we go. Are you ready?

I am blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. I was chosen before the beginning of time. I am blameless in the eyes of God. I am adopted by the Heavenly Father. I am redeemed by the blood of Christ. I am sealed by the Holy Spirit, and I am stamped with the image of God in Jesus name, amen.

I want to close with this, in Luke's Gospel, there's a story about a woman with the issue of blood. Her illness has become her identity. And I get it for more than 40 years I was asthmatic. It was part of my identity. Listen, it's so easy to let a doctor's diagnosis become how we think about ourselves. It's so easy to let what's wrong with us define us. And so this woman had sought out all the help she can find 12 years, spent every last dime, and somehow crowd surfs her way and touches the hem of Jesus' garment. You remember what happens? He says, "Someone touched me". And you gotta love this. The disciples do some contact tracing, right? They try to figure out like, I mean, there's a lot of people here Jesus, but Jesus said, "No, no, no, healing power went out from me". And they find this woman. And I think it's the only place I'm aware of where Jesus calls someone, daughter. He says, "Daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace." She is no longer the woman with an issue of blood. She is the daughter of Almighty God.

Marianne Bird was born in Brooklyn, New York, August 1928. She was born with a severe cleft palate, 17 surgeries. She wasn't able to blow up a balloon, wasn't able to drink from a drinking fountain. Worst of all, teased by her classmates. Way back when a hundred years ago, teachers used to do a hearing test with their students. The student would come up to the teacher's desk teacher would say something and this student would have to repeat it back and if they did, they would pass the test. Well, Marianne Bird was deaf in one ear as well. It was her least favorite day of the year, until the day that Miss Leonard gave the test. Looking back on that moment, many, many years later, Marianne Bird said, "I waited for those words that God must have put into her mouth those seven words that changed my life." Miss Leonard leaned across the desk, and whispered in Marianne Bird's good ear, "I wish you were my little girl." God's been whispering those words since the day you were born. To as many as have received him, to them he gave the power to become children of God.

If you feel a stirring in your spirit, I'm going to tell you what it is. It's the Spirit of God. It's the spirit of adoption. It's a God who loves you and says, I want to adopt you into my family. If that's you today, and you're at our online campus, would you just raise your hand right now? We want to pray with you and pray for you. And I'm going to tell you what happens. The Bible says that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents. This is your moment he is whispering those words. All you have to do is receive that gift that is freely offered to you. And when you do, I want to be the first one to say, "Welcome to the family."

I want to invite our worship team to come as we prepare to celebrate communion. And if you want to grab some elements and listen, I know we're all over the place. And so it could be a cracker or a cookie. It could be a piece of toast or maybe even french toast but find something okay, an element that represents the body and then find something to drink. You know, we often use grape juice, but its okay to use something else. Would you grab those elements? And would you prepare yourself right now? I can't imagine a better way to take a step of faith some of you for the first time than to celebrate communion today. And so you grab those elements, our team is going to lead us. And here's the deal we're not just going to sing it we're going to declare it. You're going to love this song. I am chosen not forsaken I am who you say I am. Here we go.