

The Free Gift Part 2
Ephesians 2:11-19

Romans 6:1-14
Romans 6:15-23
Responsive Psalm 16

This morning we will be picking back up in verse 11, of chapter 2 Paul shifts a bit here in this passage this morning. Throughout this letter so far he has been writing to the Ephesians he has been reminding them of where they stand in Christ, and how they got there. Praising God for the revelation of the mystery of his will in them, praising God for his work in them as he says, in chapter 1, "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

As we talked about a few weeks ago, the love for God, and for the saints flows from the gift of faith which we have been given. You can not have one without the other, for as Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians, Faith, without love is dead. You can not have love, that is the true love mentioned here without faith, and you can't have faith, that is true faith without this love. These two things are an inseparable truth in the life of those in Christ. It is not possible for us who have received this great gift of mercy to not likewise show mercy, for in this receiving of the mercy of God, we are born a-new and become vessels of his love, recipients of his grace, and children of the most high God.

When we went through the book of Roman's earlier this year we talked a lot about being recipients of this grace and mercy of God, in that Letter Paul calls all those who have received this gift, as adopted children of God. And just as children are born with the traits of their parents, so to are we in the new birth in Christ given new traits of our father, love and mercy, the same thing that defines God, should be found in his children as well. That is why faith and love go hand in hand. Faith and belief in God is not merely some cold calculating understanding of God's existence, or his commands and ordinances, but it is a knowing of his love for us, that while we were yet sinners he sent his Son to pay that price so that we may be reconciled, brought near to him.

This is the reality in which Paul is reminding those who would read this letter, That God has such love, that he poured out his grace and mercy upon us, that he adopted us to be his children, not just his followers, he didn't call us to merely be his subjects, but he called us to be his children, to share in his inheritance, which is a seat near the throne of the all mighty sovereign God. We are the recipients of every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And even though we can only speculate on what that truly is, for I don't think we can actually grasp the full glories of this blessing we have been given, it does not change the reality that we have been given it, and we will one day know as Paul says, the height, the depth, and the breadth of God's love toward us. We can only see in shadows now, we get glimpses of it in our lives, and we can see it reflected in the lives of his children, but it is only a reflection and a glimpse of what is one day to be fully realized.

All who are in Christ know and understand they are sinners, we all know and understand we fall short of this glory of God, and that each and every day we need the mercy and grace of God in forgiveness of our sins, but one day I believe we will see the full scope of what God has saved us from, when we see him in all his glory, and we truly see ourselves for who we are, we will bow down and worship at his feet for his grace and his mercy, that he would save us not because of ourselves, but despite ourselves.

That day, when this corrupted body of flesh dies and we are united with him in heaven, there will be such peace, and such joy our souls now can only dream of that expression. We will see, and will know the grace of God in its full measure, and we will see and know the mercies he has bestowed upon us, and we will see with what great love he has given, and by what great sacrifice it came. But that doesn't mean we just simply wait for that day, no, we strive to know more, to understand God more, to see him more, and rest in him more. That is why Paul prayed at the end of chapter 1, that the readers eyes of understanding being enlightened, might know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

As we walk in this christian life, we are to grow more and more in the grace and understanding of God, and the sufferings, and temptations, and trials we endure here in this flesh, in this body largely play a role in that, for they are our daily, constant reminders of who we are, and that we need a savior for we can not do this on our own, every day we need the mercy of God, because every day in some way we fall short of who, or what we should be, and without God's mercy, without his forgiveness, we would still be lost. But he promises that his forgiveness is that of separation of our sin as far as the east is from the west, that is they shall never touch. When God looks upon us, his children he does not condemn, but he rejoices, for he no longer looks upon our sin, but he sees the blood of his Son that was shed for the remission of that sin, and he is a proud father who forgives and embraces his children.

Again we don't fully understand the height, or depth of this love, or the power of his grace to its fullest, but there will be a day when we see him face to face and we will know the depth of his mercy, the height of his love, and the breadth of his grace. But until that day, we are to strive to live as ones called by God, to live as ones worthy of that calling, to put aside our sin and walk in the spirit in which we have been given. I think that is why Paul in his text here that we are looking at this morning is reminding the Ephesians where they came from. Let us go ahead and read our text, starting in verse 11 reading to verse 18, in chapter 2. (read Ephesians 2:11-18) In light of all that Paul had said about the adoption, about salvation in Christ, and his work he has done on our behalf Paul says, remember where you came from. In many ways I think this can be a good practice, because we can sometimes tend to beat ourselves up for current sins or struggles, forgetting what God has truly saved us from. We are no longer vessels of wrath, with the expectation of punishment, but are instead beloved children who have a merciful and forgiving father.

The point here is that all are made one in Christ, at one time there was a stark separation between Jew and Gentile, if you were not a Jew, you were considered unclean, a pagan, and lost in your sins not having access to the promises that were given to Abraham, and Moses. But in Christ all of that changed, for through Christ all have access, both Jews and Gentiles to these promises, which were not intended to be given through ritual, but the ritual was given to point to the deliverer of these promises, Jesus Christ. So Paul is saying here, remember you who were once Gentiles in the flesh, you were outcasts, pagans, lost with no hope. Yet, by the blood of Christ in salvation you have been made alive in him and have become an inheritor of all these promises. In the letter to the Roman's Paul goes into much detail about this very thing, showing that the promise never came through lineage or ritual, but that it was always intended to be delivered through Christ, for even Abraham looked forward to that day, and understood by faith, the coming Messiah, and was justified and is found righteous before God.

It has little to do with his lineage, or with ritual, and everything to do with God who called Abraham out of his homeland, it had everything to do with God who promised Abraham an offspring, an heir, in whom would bless the whole world, and by that one, whose offspring would be innumerable. Abraham understood this one, this promised one, to be the Messiah to come, who would reconcile his people to God. And it is in this identity that Paul tells his readers they are partakers of. Circumcision, nor uncircumcision makes little difference in God's world, for it was never about the act in the flesh, but rather the work of God upon the heart. God's work of salvation has never been fulfilled by ritual or rites or traditions, again as Paul argued in Romans, Abraham was saved before the law, before circumcision, before all of those rights and rituals that have become for some the means of salvation. The sign has been mistaken as the substance, when it was in fact all given to point to something greater, something better, which is Christ.

So though the Ephesians were “cut off” from the common wealth of Israel, considered unclean by those who considered themselves clean, considered ungodly by those who self righteously considered themselves Godly, that is not the true reality, for all who are in Christ are saved, and such rites and rituals have no bearing upon the salvation of mankind. The message of the gospel is this, The Jew, who looks to lineage and ritual, is lost without Christ, and the Gentile pagan, who looks to other Gods, is lost without Christ. Your background, your lineage, or ancestry, and your actions have no bearing on your standing before God. It is only by God's declaration through Christ that any are made righteous. What was it Paul said, the Jews seek a sign, and the Greeks seek wisdom, but God sent his son, as a baby, a stumbling block to those who were looking for a warrior king to reestablish their physical dynasty, and foolishness to those proclaiming to be wise. So that no man may boast, except by God, who is the author and finisher of our faith.

And that is what Christ had done, the promised one, the offspring of Abraham, in due time came in the likeness of man, dwelt among men, and died. But his death was a death to sin, a death that conquered death, for in 3 days he rose again to proclaim God's finished work. God's salvation plan which had begun after the fall of Adam, which was foretold through the prophets, and was pointed to by the rituals and traditions has come and fulfilled God's plan to reconcile mankind to himself, and it is through Christ that everyone must come to be found right before God. There is no other way, the only way to God is through his Son, who as verse 15 says, “abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two making peace.” Christ's death on the cross was for all peoples, throughout all time, he did not die only for the Jews, nor did he die only to bring the gentiles in, but from the 2, in his death he has made one for all must look to him for salvation.

Again if we go look at last weeks passage, God designed it this way, salvation, redemption, justification which is only found in Christ was deliberate, intentional and a part of God's design from the start. As Paul wrote in verse 8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” The singular nature of salvation, that is the realities of salvation being found in Christ, and Christ alone is part of God's design and purpose so that there is nothing in mankind that we can find to brag about, because arrogance, pride, and boasting seem to be a big part of the human experience, and God removed all of that when it comes to salvation. So that we can only boast in what Christ has done, not of ourselves, but in the gift we have been given.

And this is true no matter your lineage, your background, or your economic status, all need Christ for it is only through him that we have access to the father. The Jews believed that it was their lineage, and laws that justified them before God, but as Paul pointed out in his letter to the Romans, Abraham was justified before all of those things, justification must come through something else otherwise he would not have been able to be justified, therefore, by faith he was justified, by faith he was found righteous before God, looking to the Messiah to come, just as we by faith look to the Messiah who has already come. That faith is one in the same, all pointing to Christ, and as Paul wrote to the Galatians,, all those who are of the faith of Abraham are his true descendants. God does not and never has saved his people by the keeping of rites and rituals, the salvation of God is an internal new birth, not an external reformation. And in that new birth, we are a new creation, born a new, created for good works in which God prepared before hand that we should walk in them.

Our good works do not justify us before God, but our justification through Christ produces in us good works as we reflect the attributes and attitude of our Father, and of his Son, Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits, grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles. So every tree that bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree can not produce bad fruit nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you shall know them by their fruits.” Simply because those who are in Christ reflect the realities of that truth, by our new nature we reflect the attributes of our father. The outward actions reflect the inward reality. And again, this has been deliberately designed by God, so that all glory goes to him. There is nothing good in us, except the Son, and it is only by him, and through him that we have been reconciled to God. For as Paul says in verse 14, “For he himself is our peace, who has made both one, that is Jews and Gentiles, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.” Christ's death on the cross took down the wall of separation that was between God and man. In Adam's sin, mankind was separated from God, an impenetrable wall arose cutting off access to him for the sin which entered through Adam caused a spiritual death, a separation from God that can only be reconciled by God.

So, he sent his son to accomplish just that, to tear down the barrier of separation, so that we may see God, through his Son that was sent, so that we may know God through his Son that was sent, and so that we may be redeemed by the sacrifice of the Son was sent. Without Christ, you are still yet lost in your sins, without Christ there is still yet an impenetrable wall between you and God. So, we all need Christ, and we all need the work that he has done to reconcile us to God. Whether Jew or Gentile, whether slave or free, whether rich or poor, all need Christ, and God has made out of many, one body. through Christ that is holy and without blame. In Christ is the forgiveness of sins, the reconciliation to God, and the hope of the everlasting promises. Verse 15, “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.”

There was not peace between the Jew and the Gentile, but through Christ there can now be peace since in him both are made one, that is by his death we have become brothers and sisters in Christ, verse 16. “that he might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And he came and preached peace o you who were far off and to those who were near.” The Gospel of Christ is for all peoples, for those who were far, and for those who were near. The Gentiles didn't have the ordinances of God, they didn't have the covenants and the promises that all pointed to the Messiah. They were far off, outside, unaware.

But those who were near, that is the Jews, were blinded by the signs making them the substance and purpose. But God has since revealed the fulfillment of those signs in his Son, which has been revealed to those on the outside, and through Christ we now, both Jew and Gentile have access to God, and have become one nation, a people of God. Verse 18”For through him we both have access by one spirit. Now, therefore you who were strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. This is our hope, and this is the promise, that all those who are in Christ will be united together in the promised land, in the heavenly places, in the very presence of God the father. So again the call goes out, repent and believe, lay aside your sin and rebellion and follow him. For it is only in him we can find peace with God, and it is only in him that we find peace in this life knowing and believing he has overcome this world, and has conquered death so that we who were once far off, may be brought near and live as his people.