

Introduction: Pg. ____ The major questions of life: Why am I here? Where did I come from? Where are we going? What is wrong with the world? Here's another one: **Who am I?**

When you look in the mirror of your life, what do you see?

The beginning of the New Year is a time we all look in the mirror. For most this is true at least in the metaphorical sense: we look into the mirror of our lives to evaluate where we are and what we would like to see improved in the New year. But not only do most look in the mirror in a metaphorical sense, many take a look in the mirror in a literal sense as well. We use the New Year to take inventory of the kind of physical shape we are in and we make some fresh commitments toward positive change.

When is the last time you looked in the mirror? That should be an easy question (I hope). Here's a tougher question: When is the last time you looked in the mirror and did not like what you saw?

Remember, we're not simply talking physical appearance. Let me give you give you some other categories for consideration. When is the last time you were less than pleased with your image as it relates to your job? your performance at work? Your relationships? Your possessions?

FCF: If we are being honest, most of us would say there are times (perhaps even right now) when we struggle with our image. We believe that we fail to measure up in an areas we hold in high regard. And we fail to live up to the expectations of others. This can be absolutely crippling.

Here's the good news! We are not the sum of what are people think of us. We are not defined by what may or may not happen to us (get married, have a child, retire wealthy, etc). Our circumstances do not define us (Sickness, Comfort, etc.).

The Book of Ephesians is going to offer a revolutionary picture of the person who is IN CHRIST. The truth of God as it is unveiled in the Book of Ephesians holds immense power to help us redefine how God sees us and consequently how we should see ourselves. This morning I want us to consider our

“Our Identity IN CHRIST: Part 1” Ephesians 1:1-6

These verses are going to teach us that we should . . .

The Point: Praise God for our identity in Christ and live with great confidence.

Read 1-6:

I. Praise God for who we are IN CHRIST (1:1-3).

Paul was a missionary who took the good news about Jesus into the city of Ephesus. In his time there he saw God build a great church among them and this letter was written during one of Paul's imprisonments for proclaiming Christ.

We need to realize that he calls these Christians saints and most importantly for the theme he develops in Ephesians, he says they are IN CHRIST.

Look at his customary greeting in *verse 2*: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Ok, so let's get one thing straight. This is not Paul saying, “Hey, what's up. How you doing?” Let's work backwards:

- “Hey Ephesians, saints, people in Christ, people I love, people I wept over, people from whom I

didn't hold back one ounce of truth, here's some good news for you: you have been two magnificent gifts. Again, working backwards, we see that God has given peace. This does not refer to the absence of conflict or strife but the Hebrew concept of *shalom* which was a comprehensive view of flourishing as God intends for us to experience. (Expound), but this is a result of what?

- Grace: refers to the unbelievable gift of God that we do not deserve! Now, again. These are not throw away words for Paul. Peace, ah, no big deal! Grace, kinda nice. No! These are truths that bring realities that cause his heart to absolutely explode and the explosion comes in verses 3-14.
- Verses 3-14 is an eruption of praise! Paul would tell us these truths should get us infinitely more excited than Julian Edelman's WR Screen Touchdown Pass to Danny Amendola did for the Patriot faithful yesterday at Gillette Stadium, although we would all agree. That was *nice*.
 - Believe it or not, these 12 verses written by Paul are actually one sentence in the Greek language! 202 words if you're counting.
- They are so loaded with truth that we are going to cover them in 2 weeks. Today we will focus on vv. 3-6, but I want to read through verse 14 so you begin to feel the force of Paul's outburst of praise to God.

Read 3-14

- This is a word of praise! "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ."
- *Praise is a response to who God is and what he has done!*
 - When the Bible speaks of man blessing God, it refers to an ascription of praise to God. God you are worthy of recognition! What has God done?
 - He has blessed us. Do you see how Paul brilliantly uses a play on words? We praise God by blessing him, but he has blessed us.
 - When the Bible speaks of God blessing man, it refers to him providing his gracious gifts to us.
- Often we are tempted to thank God for the physical blessings of life.
 - Meal - say the "blessing."
 - Got a raise, got a nice gift at Xmas, "I've been blessed."
 - Got a good report at the doctor: that was such a blessing.
 - And let me tell you something: all of that is true! BUT think with me about this.
- The widow dwelling in the slums of India who is in Christ possesses everything because she possesses Christ.
- Our identity has completely changed.

How are these blessings described?

- "Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."
- These blessings are spiritual - "belonging to the Spirit of God" not just immaterial.
- These blessings are "in the heavenly places" - the realm of these spiritual realities - AND
- These blessings come "in Christ."
- And he has blessed us with "every spiritual blessing." Please memorize this verse!
- Basically, Paul sums up "everything that Christians have received through God's saving act in Christ."
- Not a little sprinkle. Not a little sip. Not a couple of drops. He has absolutely unloaded the fury of love upon us in Christ and it should overwhelm us.
- "Every spiritual blessing" = All that Christ accomplished for us through his life, death, and resurrection
- There is no way to begin to calculate how huge this is and yet Paul will take a quick stab in what follows in vv. 4ff, and here is the amazing news: they only begin to tell the story.

While Paul is praising God he is unfolding what is true for us because of Christ. He is talking about those

who have (look at verse 13) “heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him”

- Hear the Truth
- Believe in Jesus (understanding, acceptance, trust)
 - Not enough to say, that makes sense.
 - Not enough to say, yes, I believe that Jesus died for our sin
 - We must stake our lives entirely on who he is and what he has done. (CLAIIFY)

IF you are in Christ, look at what is true for you!

- **Stickman Picture**
- **IN CHRIST Picture**
- We’re going to call this the “You in Christ Box” (This gets me so hyped!)
 - **Blessed.**
 - **Chosen.**
 - **Predestined.**
 - **Adopted.**
 - **Blessed.**
 - **Redeemed.**
 - **Forgiven.**
 - **Lavished.**
 - **Brought In (on the mystery of his will).**
 - **United**
 - **Inherited**
 - **Sealed with the Spirit.**
 - **Given to the Praise of the Glory of God!**
 - What is this? ***Eternal Fireworks! Explosions of Grace that have detonated in our hearts!***
- This is true for you.
- This is your identity. And we should praise God for it!
- When you are discouraged, depressed, feel like you don’t measure up . . . This is who you are!

II. Praise God because we are recipients of his eternally planned grace (1:4).

Read v 4

- When it comes to our salvation, the two truths that ring louder and truer than all others are simply this. God is full of LOVE and God is full of GRACE.
- Now, we will see more about love in verse 5, but I want us to understand his love toward us must be full of grace because it is something we do not deserve.
- **All of our salvation is all of grace.**
- **Ephesians 2:8-9** could not be any more clear: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”**
- And this grace was no reactionary measure taken by God in response to the predicament of our sin. No, this grace was planned before the foundation of the world!
- Paul wants us to know the scope of God’s work in our salvation, so he ushers us back into the place where only God himself existed.
- It is difficult to wrap our minds around God’s eternity, his timelessness, his sovereignty over all things, his ability to see the end from the beginning and the beginning from the end.

- But this is how amazing grace is, because this is how amazing God is. Before you had faith to believe, God’s grace was at work. Not only that, God’s grace was at work before you were created, and God’s grace was at work before anything was created.
- Let your Mind be blown by the depths of God’s grace.
- Theologians refer to this as “election.” God’s electing love was step one in process of how God

brings us salvation.

- Wayne Grudem says: "Election is an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure."
- Now I must admit, there was a time in my life when this did not add up. It did not make sense. I really did not embrace it.
- If that is the case for you or if this teaching is brand new to you, here's my encouragement: Just keep reading the Bible and accept the Scriptures for what they say not what we may want them to say when we don't understand it all.
 - Waffle House Theology
 - Read the Bible with New eyes.
 - Acts 13:48 – "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed."
 - 1 Peter 1 is addressed "to God's elect."
 - Revelation 13:8 speaks of those who have their name written in the book of life before the foundation of the world.

What should this doctrine do?

- **Move us to humility_.**
 - Not dependent on our merit.
 - **Deuteronomy 7:6-8... says: "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you."**
 - Listen, it was *not* because we are lovely. Ephesians 2 is going to tell us how unlovely we are apart from grace. We were swinging deals on Satan's team, diametrically opposed to God, and spiritually dead. Our hearts did not beat for God. Our hearts beat for ourselves and our own sinful desires.
 - Some will charge God with injustice. As my evangelism
 - Speaking of evangelism, telling others about Jesus, this doctrine should also...
- **Move us to mission**
 - There are people God *will* save because of his sovereign grace. This motivates us to mission. It in no way hinders mission.
 - If God has elected people to eternal life
 - When Paul was under persecution in Corinth, God spoke to him and said: "**Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent . . . for I have many in this city who are my people.**" (Acts 18:9-10)
 - "**Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.**" 2 Timothy 2:10
 - 2015 Vision – "Love all people through communicating the gospel with humble boldness."
- **Move us to holiness.**
 - Purpose: holiness, "that we should be holy and blameless before him."
 - Grace is not an incentive to sin. I've had people come to me and say, "Tanner, salvation can't really be of grace because then we can live however we want. It doesn't really matter."
 - BUT grace experienced leads to a life given to reflect that grace. Having experienced the love of God in Christ, we want to love with his love, shine his light, serve like he served, forgive like he forgave. Grace changes us
- **Move us to praise.** This truth should ignite our heart with greater affection and praise to God
- There is mystery here. Deuteronomy 29:29 – "The secret things belong to the Lord our God." It is

not our job to figure out who is elect. It is our job to believe in Christ and share the gospel.

T: Paul continues with another reality that helps us understand the nature of God's eternally planned grace: the picture of adoption. Not only should we praise God for his eternally planned grace, we should also ...

III. Praise God because we are adopted into his family (1:5-6).

- In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons. Love is the driving force in the heart of God when it comes to our salvation.
- My man Octavius Winslow, **"If one perfection of God shines out in redemption with greater effulgence than any other, it is this. Love is the focus of all the rest . . . Justice may have demanded it, holiness may have required it, wisdom may have planned it, and power may have executed it, but love originated the whole, and was the moving cause in the heart of God; so that the salvation of the sinner is not so much a manifestation of the justice, or holiness, or wisdom, or power of God, as it is a display of His love."**

This is one of the reasons God has revealed himself as Father.

- He is personal and intimate. He is loving and caring. He is patient and kind.
- Do not project your personal experiences onto God. He is a good Father. No, he is the Perfect Father.

Michael Reeves says: God "is not some pumped up version of your dad." So good. We start in the wrong place when we look to earthly fathers and say, "Oh I could never conceive of God being Father." No, all earthly fathers are to reflect the one true, always loving, always caring, always protecting, always providing, always encouraging, never for a moment forsaking us, Father in heaven. Just because all earthly fathers are imperfect and some are horribly imperfect, does not mean that God is anything like us.

App: If God has adopted us, accepted us, and approved us, we no longer have to search in other places. Our worth is no longer determined by the opinion of others.

We can be so crippled by the Fear of Man and Opinions of Others

- Which then frees us to be bold.
- And it frees us to be confident (and we all want confidence)
- And it frees us to live for the pleasure of God.
 - But she didn't say "hi" to me.
 - But he didn't praise me for the job I did on that work.
 - What?! You have been adopted.

Why has God chosen? Why has he adopted? End of Verse 5: "according to the purpose of his will Some translations say: "according to his pleasure and will." Is this your view of God?

He does all things for his glory and takes pleasure in all he does

Conclusion:

Is there any reason for us to ever fail to find reason to praise God? No!

When we see our true identity and see ourselves as God sees, we are free to have great (God-given) CONFIDENCE and extend great praise to God.

Today is commitment Sunday. We've encouraged each person that is connected to our church to make three commitments in light of our 2015 Vision. In light of what Christ has done, these commitments should flow out of us in a spirit of gratitude, joy, and praise. Ultimately our commitments to love, build, and grow must be driven by a response of love and worship to God.

Share my three commitments . . .

Explain Reflection & Response Time!!