



## Corinth Missionary Baptist Church

*"The City of Faith"*

813 South Cherokee Road  
Social Circle, Georgia 30025



Dr. Constance Davenport  
Christian Education Director

# SPRING 2023

*MARCH 2023 – MAY 2023*

**Sis Tamara Franklin**  
Sunday School Superintendent

**Sis. Ruth Parks**  
Asst. Sunday School Superintendent

**Bishop William Davenport**  
Senior Pastor

Credits:

Jesus Is All Ministries

Lesson summaries by:

Renee Little, Willie Ferrell, & Montario Fletcher

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“Diligent study of these lessons will not only bless you spiritually, but also aid you in discovering God's plan for your own life.”

-John Alva Owston



**CORINTH**  
**MISSIONARY**  
**BAPTIST**  
**CHURCH**  
**ADULT**  
**SUNDAY SCHOOL**  
**CLASS**



# ADULT

## WINTER SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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*You can also follow the lesson by joining live each Sunday morning via our website:*

*<https://www.thecityoffaith.org/sundayschool>*



**Sunday, March 5, 2023**

## **Lesson 1 - "A Vision of New Life"**

**Devotional Reading:** Romans 6:1–14

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 37

**Lesson Text:** Ezekiel 37:1–14

### **Ezekiel 37:1–14**

*1 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, 2 And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. 4 Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. 5 Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: 6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. 8 And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. 9 Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. 11 Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. 12 Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13 And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, 14 And shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.*

### **LESSON AIMS**

**Facts:** to show what Ezekiel saw in the valley of dry bones.

**Principle:** to affirm that God can take what is dead and decaying and give new life through His Spirit.

**Application:** to realize that when we let God's Spirit into our lives, He gives us a new start.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The word dry means different things in different contexts. If we are told that something is “dry,” that may refer to infrequent rain, to a certain type of humor, or to a prohibition against the sale of alcoholic beverages.

If we speak of going through a dry time spiritually, however, the meaning is quickly grasped. Who hasn't had such a period, a time of discouragement when one's relationship with God seems to have grown stale? This can be brief, or it can grow deeper into a “dark night of the soul” experience, a time of depression without relief. These are dry times.

David hinted at having such a time in Psalm 63. That psalm relates his emotions while hiding in a wilderness area to escape an enemy. David wrote of his hiding places as a “dry and thirsty land” (Psalm 63:1). His life was at risk, and he had been driven away from his home. He longed to be back in Jerusalem to worship God in the sanctuary. Yet he met this dry time with a response that can teach us much. He did not wallow in discouragement but recalled that God had never abandoned him, that he had been in the shadow of God's protective wings (Psalm 63:7).

## LESSON BACKGROUND

**Time:** about 586 - 585 B.C.

**Place:** Babylon -The book of Ezekiel is known for its fabulous visual descriptions of the prophet's unique experiences.

The opening scene of the book is the incredible vision of the fiery four living creatures accompanied by the famous "wheel in the middle of a wheel." This has been interpreted variously as an ancient account of visitation by aliens in a flying saucer, a description of a gigantic, heavenly war chariot, even as a metaphor of the relationship between faith and grace ("big wheel run by faith, little wheel run by de grace of God"). The book ends with a colossal vision of the new temple (Ezekiel 40:2 and following). Many elements of the visions of Ezekiel reappear later in the Bible's final book, Revelation.

Ezekiel is also known for his experiences with the Spirit of God. At times, the Spirit seemed to possess him, causing him to stand and speak (see Ezekiel 2:2). At other times the Spirit transported Ezekiel to new locations. In one case the prophet experienced this as being lifted by the hair and flown cross-country from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8:3).

These profound visions and deep experiences of the Spirit intersect dramatically in chapter 37, the focus of today's lesson. Here, Ezekiel is transported (physically? spiritually?) to a place he has never been and does not recognize. It is a valley, but not a lush river valley of verdant pastures and crops. It is, rather, a valley characterized by an extreme lack of moisture and by death. It has no living residents, only piles of dry bones. This is the horrifying setting for one of the Bible's greatest one-chapter dramas: a vision that continues to give hope to those who find themselves "in a dry and thirsty" land (Ezekiel 19:13).

Today's lesson occurs in or after the year 586 BC, since Ezekiel and the exiles already had received the devastating news of Jerusalem's desolation (Ezekiel 33:21). In the aftermath of this emotional knockout blow, Ezekiel began to give prophesies of a more hopeful nature. He ended chapter 36 with a promise that the future land of Israel would be as fertile and green as "the garden of Eden" (Ezekiel 36:35). Then Ezekiel experienced a land as far from the ideal of

that garden as could be imagined, a true Death Valley.

## THE CHALLENGE OBSERVED

(Ezekiel 37:1-6)

### *1. How do we know that what Ezekiel saw was a vision, not a literal occurrence (Ezekiel 37:1)?*

Our passage this week was intended to convey hope to Israelites in captivity. The introductory statement to our text makes it clear that what is recorded was not a literal occurrence, but a vision. Ezekiel uses the expression "the hand of the Lord was upon me" to convey the impression that God has taken complete control of him (compare Ezekiel 1:3; 3:14, 22; 33:22; 40:1). Whether he feels excitement or dread at these times, he does not say. He apparently offers no resistance, and another visionary experience is under way. This one includes being transported to a locale of God's choosing, in the middle of a valley. This valley was unique in that it was covered with human bones, as if left from the carnage of some great battle.

### *2. What two facts impressed Ezekiel about the bones he saw (v. 2)?*

The Spirit of God led Ezekiel around the valley among these bones. One thing that impressed Ezekiel as he was led about was the sheer number of the bones - they were "very many" (v. 2). Evidently, they were scattered widely so that they covered the surface of the entire valley.

The other thing that impressed him was that the bones were very dry. Apparently, they had lain there for a long time. All flesh was gone from them, and no evidence of life remained. No thought of reviving them could possibly have entered Ezekiel's mind.

### *3. By what title did God call Ezekiel?*

What did this signify? God referred to Ezekiel by the title of "Son of man." This was God's usual designation for Ezekiel and occurs ninety-three times throughout the book. Though it can sometimes be used to depict a human being in his frailty, it can also stress the dignity of someone God calls to represent other human beings (Cooper, Ezekiel, Broadman &

Holman). This is its apparent connotation for Ezekiel (cf. 2:3, 6, 8)

#### ***4. What question did God ask Ezekiel? How did he answer?***

The Lord offers no explanation for the cause of the bone valley, and Ezekiel does not ask for one. Instead, God puts a question to the prophet: Can these bones live? The prophet might well have answered the question by saying that it was impossible, for by natural standards it surely was. Ezekiel, however, already has been through some extraordinary experiences via the hand of God. He therefore does not exhibit any impulse to say "of course not." Rather, he replied, "O Lord God, thou knowest." He lets the Lord proceed with the experience, for Ezekiel trusts God and knows that there is a lesson to be learned. Ezekiel's patience is rewarded, as God shows him that the situation isn't as hopeless as it looks. But before Ezekiel receives that revelation, he is asked to perform an act of faith (next verse).

#### ***5. In responding to God's question "can these bones live?" Ezekiel showed wisdom in allowing God to provide the answer. What can we learn from Ezekiel's example as we face life's (seemingly) hopeless situations?***

Ezekiel believed in God's power to do whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3), so he didn't jump to any conclusions. When we find ourselves discouraged with the way life is going, we should not automatically assume that we know how things will turn out. Instead, we can ask God for solutions to our problems, and He will give us the answers (James 1:5, 6). We remind ourselves that God can bring good out of the worst situations (Romans 8:28).

#### ***6. What was Ezekiel's role in the resurrection of the bones (v. 4)?***

The Lord answered the question He had posed for Ezekiel by giving him further instructions. He would include the prophet himself in demonstrating that these bones would indeed live again. He was to "prophesy upon these bones" (v. 4). This meant he was to proclaim over them God's life-giving word. He was to say to them what he would have said to any living audience: Hear the word of the Lord." But in doing so, he was also to recognize their utter inability to hear - "O ye dry bones."

Obviously, this required a miracle, and the miracle would come through the power of the divine words themselves. But the marvel is that God chose to use a human being as a spokesman to work this miracle. Truly His prophets were a privileged group! But this is not unlike what God still does through our Christian witness. He uses us to convey a life-giving message to spiritually dead people. The miracle of regeneration is wrought through the Word and the Spirit who inspired it (cf. Jas. 1:18; Titus 3:5).

#### ***7. What words was Ezekiel to speak to the bones (vs. 5, 6)?***

The words Ezekiel was to speak to the dry bones now are given. "Thus, saith the Lord God" conveys the authority and accuracy of the message. The restoration of life was not merely being promised by Ezekiel; it was being guaranteed by the Lord God Himself.

The message is simple: the dead will live. This is pictured as a reversal of the process of decay. The sinews will be reconstituted on the framework of the dry bones. These are the tendons and cartilages of the body. Other than the bones, these are the parts that resist decay the longest. Next, the flesh is to return. This is comprised of the muscles and internal organs of the body. Following that, the body will be recovered with protective skin. As the outer layer of any corpse, the skin is the first part to decompose.

The purpose for this miraculous restoration was so that "ye shall know that I am the Lord [Yahweh]" (Ezek. 37:6). Those restored to life would understand the nature of their covenant God—the eternally existing One, all-powerful, ever faithful, and lovingly concerned for His called people, even in their hopeless state.

It is worth noting that whenever God does a mighty work, He does so to call attention to Himself, for He alone deserves glory. He may make use of intermediaries such as prophets or preachers, but they are called to direct attention to Him, not themselves. God refuses to share His glory with anyone else (c.f. Isa. 42:8; 48:11; 1 Cor. 1:26-31; 3:5-7).

*To be continued...*

Lesson Summarized by Renee Little  
Jesus Is All Ministries



**NOTES:**



## Sunday, March 12, 2023

### Lesson 2 - "A Vision of New Life" Pt2

**Devotional Reading:** Romans 6:1–14

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 37

**Lesson Text:** Ezekiel 37:1–14

#### **Ezekiel 37:1–14**

*1 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, 2 And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. 4 Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. 5 Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: 6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. 8 And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. 9 Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. 11 Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. 12 Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13 And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, 14 And shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.*

#### **THE BONES RESURRECTED (Ezekiel 37:7-10)**

**8. By what stages did the Lord bring the bones back to life (vs. 7, 8)?**

Ezekiel prophesied as commanded, and the living word of God had an immediate and remarkable effect. "There was a noise, and behold a shaking." We are prone to forget that biblical visions are not just "video." They often contain an "audio" track. At this point Ezekiel just watches and listens. He sees the scattered bones reorder themselves and come into alignment. They make an enormous clatter as they reassemble, perhaps like a thousand xylophones played at once. The bones are not moving from some inner bone intelligence. It is obvious to the prophet that the hand of God is causing all this to happen.

Everything is reconstituted and the decay of the corpses is completely reversed (v. 8), but there everything stops. There is still no breath of life in them. It may seem to Ezekiel as if the old, dry field of battle has become simply a fresh site of carnage and death with newly dead bodies lying everywhere, ready to begin decaying again. There is one more act in God's drama of restoration, but it again requires that Ezekiel act in faith to God's command.

**9. What roles do God's word and His Spirit have in giving life (vs. 9,10)?**

Once reassembled, the bodies still lacked the breath of life. To overcome this fundamental deficiency, the Lord ordered Ezekiel to "prophesy unto the wind," calling for it to come from all directions to provide breath for the dead. The Hebrew word can be translated "wind," "breath," and "spirit." So this is a call for the spirit, or breath, of life to come and restore the dead to new life.

The four winds are probably symbolic of the fullness of the divine breath provided, which was not limited in any way. God Himself would orchestrate breathes into these bodies, just as He had done in the original creation of Adam (Gen. 2:7).

Ezekiel prophesied as directed, and the breath of life entered these prostrate bodies (Ezek. 37:10). As evidence of their new life, they stood on their feet. The valley that once had been covered with dry bones now accommodated "an exceeding great army." What a transformation! Those depicted as previously "slain" (v. 9) now lived again, ready to do battle where they once had fallen.

Let us remind ourselves that what Ezekiel saw was but a vision, not a historical event. But the very fact that God chose resurrection to illustrate how He would revive and restore Israel demonstrates the unlimited power inherent in His word.

Jesus later pictured a similar scene in which He would call forth from their graves all who had died. He claimed the same life-giving power His Father had (John 5:21), for He, like the Father, had "life in himself" (v. 26). He would grant this life spiritually to all who believed in Him (vs. 24,25). But He also foretold a future hour when "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth" (vs. 28,29). The righteous will rise to life, but the wicked to damnation.

#### **THE VISION INTERPRETED (Ezekiel 37:11-14)**

##### ***10. What did the bones in Ezekiel's vision represent (v. 11)?***

The Lord now gave Ezekiel the key to understanding the vision: "these bones are the whole house of Israel." Two facts predominate in this explanation. First, the vision was not portraying the bodily resurrection of individuals but the restoration of a national entity. Second, it portrayed the restoration of the whole nation, both Israel (Ephraim) and Judah. This second fact is further elaborated in the latter part of the chapter (vs. 15- 28).

The nation is portrayed as lamenting its present condition: "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost:

we are cut off for our parts" (Ezek. 37:11). The dryness of the bones indicates the length of time Israel experienced the loss of its national identity.

The Israelites were once a united body, but that body has been cut to pieces. Even the most optimistic among the Israelites has no rational basis for hope. Nothing in their present condition could have aroused hope for restoration.

##### ***11. What message for Israel's future was conveyed through the vision of the bones (v. 12)?***

Yet Israel is not dead or forgotten in God's eyes, He still has plans for the nation and intends that the nation be restored. To these exiles, Ezekiel was to prophesy a message of unbelievable encouragement. First, the Lord told them, "I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel." The Lord now changed the illustration from dry bones in a valley to corpses in graves. The graves may signify all the foreign lands into which they had been forced to go. There they had intermingled with their captors, and their national identity had been buried from human sight.

From these "graves" the Lord promised to bring them again into their own land (Ezek. 37:12; cf. 36:24). A partial fulfillment of this promise occurred under Zerubbabel and Ezra. However, Israel will reach its final destiny only when a greater dispersed number are restored - not from the Near East alone, but from all nations of the world.

##### ***12. What will Israel's restoration teach that nation about God (vs. 13, 14)?***

Again, God's ultimate purpose in doing this is not merely to reestablish Israel as a political entity; it is to glorify His own name (cf. Ezek. 36:22-24, 32). Twice He refers to Israel as "my people" (37:12-13), and He wants them to again recognize Him as their God. All the evidence for His identity will be there: "And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves... and brought you up out of your graves" (v. 13). In addition, He promised to put His Spirit in them to make them live, and to place them in their own land (v. 14). The physical restoration to

their land will be accompanied with a spiritual revival.

At that time God's people will recognize Him as the source of all their miraculous blessings. They would know without doubt that it had been spoken and performed by the Lord Himself. Although this passage was recorded to encourage Israel in captivity, it has much to teach us as well. Our sovereign God is not deterred by death - physical, national, or spiritual. His life-giving Spirit is at work today, breathing spiritual life into those who are dead in trespasses and sin. And He does it on the basis of a life-giving message. We, like Ezekiel, have the privilege of proclaiming it and then marveling as God uses it to transform lives.

### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

1. The hand of the Lord is always upon His children, accomplishing His purposes and plan (Ezek. 37:1-2).
2. Wise is the one who distinguishes between what he knows and what God knows (Ezek. 37:3; cf. Deut. 29:29).
3. A message's power is not in the messenger but in the promise and Person of God who sends it (Ezek. 37:4-6).
4. Those who obey God expect God to do as He has promised (vs. 7,8).
5. New life can come only by the will and work of God (vs. 9,10).
6. Nothing is so hopeless that God cannot intervene and rescue (Ezek. 37:11- 12; Matt. 19:26).
7. God's blessings should drive us to know, love, and serve Him (Ezek. 37:13-14).

### **CONCLUSION**

This week's lesson is a source of great hope for us. First, we have learned that God is there even in our most hopeless situations. Second, He has answers for us that work. Third, He answers by giving us the power of His Spirit living within us who will never leave us in any situation. When God's Holy Spirit comes to live within us, we too will experience His new life daily.

A great example of this is Fannie Crosby, who began life with personal tragedy. At age six months she was made blind as a result of incompetent treatment for an eye infection. When just a year old, her father died and left her mother as a 21-year-old widow with four

little children. Despite Fannie's disability and disadvantages, she grew to be a woman of strong faith. She excelled in music, learning to play several instruments and to sing. Yet tragedy continued to follow her. She married, but her only child died in infancy.

Fannie dedicated herself to writing songs and hymns that would praise God and touch lives. She wrote over 9,000 hymns in her lifetime, some of which are still sung in churches today. Yet we can imagine that there were dry times for this marvelous Christian woman too. Did she ever question why God had allowed her to lose her sight? Why had she been assigned the lot of poverty as a child? How could God let her only child die?

Fannie Crosby answers these sorts of questions many places in her songs. One such place is drawn from Exodus 33:22, but seems to fit the story of Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones too. In the song, "He Hideth My Soul," Fannie wrote, He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock, that shadows a dry, thirsty land. In this context, to hide means to protect. Even in the scorching, arid deserts of our lives, we are protected by God. There are people in our churches with many stories to tell of these desert experiences. How do we negotiate our way through the figurative valley of death? We do so only because we know that God is with us (Psalm 23:4). Otherwise, we are ultimately alone in the world, without hope of restoration (compare Ecclesiastes 12:1). When those days threaten, we can recall one of the greatest of Jesus' many promises to His followers: "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). He will never abandon us. He gives us hope day by day, a hope that brings life from death.

### **PRAYER**

O God, we are so often parched and dry. Our souls falter. Sometimes doubts creep in. It seems that evil is winning and our efforts to serve You are ineffective. Give us a new empowerment from Your Spirit, a spiritual downpour for the soul. May our doubt be transformed into faith. May we, like the dry bones, hear Your Word and be encouraged. We pray this in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

God defeats the dry times.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

Next week's lesson is "The Water of Life" and will show us the source of true healing in the picture of a flowing river that comes straight from the presence of God Himself – a river that will never run dry. Study Ezekiel 47:1-12.

*Lesson Summarized by Renee Little  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

**NOTES:**



## Sunday, March 19, 2023

### Lesson 3 - "The Water of Life"

Lesson Text: Ezekiel 47:1-12

Background Scripture: Ezekiel 47:1-12

Devotional Reading: John 4:7-15

#### Ezekiel 47:1–12

*1 Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under, from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar. 2 Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the outer gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. 3 And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles. 4 Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. 5 Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over. 6 And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. 7 Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. 9 And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh. 10 And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it from Engedi even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. 11 But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt. 12 And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.*

#### LESSON AIMS

**Facts:** to show us the facts about the river of healing that flows from God.

**Principle:** to affirm that all who drink of the water of life will receive complete healing from God.

**Application:** to show that when we turn to God's provision of the water of life, we will be healed.

#### INTRODUCTION

The Dead Sea, on the border between modern Israel and Jordan, is a place featuring a couple of world records. It is the lowest spot on earth, about 1,350 feet below the level of the nearby Mediterranean Sea. It is also one of the saltiest natural bodies of water on earth, estimated to be between 5 and 10 times saltier than normal sea water.

The Dead Sea has no outlet, and its water level is maintained by evaporation—and the arid location of the Dead Sea allows a lot of evaporation. Its high concentration of salt and minerals does not permit plants or fish to live within it, thus its name Dead Sea.

Today's lesson looks prophetically at a vision in which a mighty freshwater stream flows out of the temple in Jerusalem eastward to the Dead Sea. The result is that a life-giving, tree-lined river is created that brings the Dead Sea to life and allows it to be teeming with fish.

Does the Dead Sea remind you of anything in your life? Do you have personal areas that are "dead zones," where all the life seems to have been sucked out? Maybe you have relationships that are toxic and joy-killing. Today's lesson is about spiritual refreshment and renewal. Our application is that Ezekiel's vision of a renewed Dead Sea can help us understand the renewal of our personal dead seas.



## LESSON BACKGROUND

Travelers to Israel today come away impressed with the centrality of water in the nation's life. It is a key issue in modern Israel's foreign and domestic policies, and ingenious methods have been devised to sustain the nation's agriculture and provide water for a growing city population.

Archaeological remains bear witness to the importance of water in ancient Israel as well. The Israelites did not irrigate their lands. They depended on seasonal rains, melting snow from the Lebanon Mountains, and springs in the hill country. Every sizable town had a reservoir, or cistern, to catch and conserve rainwater. Cities created ingenious shafts and tunnels to protect their water supply from enemy attack.

All of this makes this week's lesson especially significant. In a vision of the future, Ezekiel was shown a water supply of highest quality and unfailing quantity. It is a fitting symbol of the material and spiritual blessings of Messiah's reign.

## THE DIVINE SOURCE OF THE WATER (Ezekiel 47:1-2)

### *1. Where was Ezekiel when he first saw the flow of water? Where did it originate? (Ezekiel 47:1)*

Today's text is part of a larger picture in which important details of the future messianic reign were revealed to Ezekiel. First, the prophet saw the temple (Ezek. 40:1 – 42:20). This was followed by the return of God's glory (Ezek. 43:1-12) and the restored worship (43:13 – 46:24). Then comes today's passage on the water of life (47:1-12) and a description of the newly divided land and the city.

"Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house" (Ezek. 47:1). These words connect our text with the previous of the temple and its worship. The man who brought Ezekiel to the door was an angel who had already guided him through the temple (40:1-3). The door that is mentioned was the entrance to the temple building, which faced east (47:1; cf. 41:2-3). There the prophet observed that water was flowing out from under the threshold, originating in the presence of God.

### *2. How great was the volume of water when Ezekiel first saw it? (v. 2)*

To show Ezekiel where it flowed from there, his angelic guide took him out the north gate, since the eastern gate had been closed (cf. 44:1-3). He then led him around to the "utter [outer] gate by the way that looketh eastward" (47:2) on the eastern edge of the courtyard.

Once again, he saw the water flowing from the right (south) side of the gate. The verb translated "ran out" literally means "trickled" or "rippled." The significance of this verb is that the word suggests that the water was a small stream as it left the temple, but the waters multiplied in volume. This reminds us that God often uses small things and miraculously multiply them so that man can only give glory to God.

## THE INCREASING DEPTH OF THE WATER (Ezekiel 47:3-5)

### *3. Assuming changed contours of Israel's land in the future, in what directions will the waters flow?*

The supernatural creation of the stream now becomes evident. The angelic guide led Ezekiel out of Jerusalem to show him the direction and depth of the water. Though we do not know the exact direction of the stream since we do not know whether southern Palestine's topology in the future will remain the same as it is today or if it will be supernaturally altered.

Assuming the changed contours of Israel, Zechariah declares that His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which will then split in two. Half of the mountain will move to the north and half to the south, creating a valley in between (Zechariah 14:4). In this case half of the waters will flow southeastward through this valley into the Dead Sea. The other half will flow west into the Mediterranean (v. 8).

### *4. How far did the water flow before it became a river? (vs. 3-5)*

The angel enabled Ezekiel to experience this ever-deepening stream. Every thousand cubits (or about 1,500 feet), the water became wider and deeper (cf. v. 3-5). In about a mile and a third, the water was so



deep he could swim in it, but it was too wide for him to cross it. We must note that this miraculous river did not have any feeder streams feeding into it, which testifies of God's omnipotent power.

***5. What are some spiritual lessons we can learn from this vision?***

This prophetic vision will be fulfilled literally in future Israel, but it also has many spiritual applications. For example, it aptly portrays the progressive way God has revealed Himself and extended His blessings to mankind. It started small with the vision to Abraham and the other patriarchs. He broadened and deepened His stream of truths to Israel through His prophets. Eventually, in Christ, it has become a mighty river of blessing to humanity that none can fathom.

This vision also reminds us generally that all good gifts come from God Himself (cf. Jas. 1:17) and that He will infinitely multiply them for the trusting worshipper. Foremost among these gifts is eternal life (v. 18), which Jesus elsewhere likened to living water (John 4:10-14) and likened with the ministry of the Spirit (7:37-39). How tragic that many refuse this water, failing to acknowledge its divine source!

**THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF THE LIVING RIVER (Ezekiel 47:6-12)**

***6. How will the river of life change vegetation around it? (vs. 6-7)***

Instead of taking Ezekiel any further along the river, the angel wanted Ezekiel to look at the effects of the water on the things it touched. While addressing Ezekiel as "son of man" (a chosen and endowed representative of humanity before God), he asked, "Hast thou seen this?" This was an invitation to ponder the marvel of what he had seen. But it also prepared him for the great wonders he was about to see.

While the angel led Ezekiel along the banks of the river, the prophet saw plenty of trees on both sides of the river. The contents of the river transformed the vegetation on both sides. The normally brown, barren lands of the lower Jordan Valley were now covered with a veritable forest of trees. We later learn that these trees were always green and bore fruit

profusely. All of this was possible only because of the life-giving flow from God's throne.

***7. What is the Dead Sea like? How will it be changed? (v. 8)***

"The sea" that is the destination of the living river is the Dead Sea, also called the salt sea in the Bible (example: Genesis 14:3). As mentioned earlier, the Dead Sea is 5 to 10 times saltier than normal ocean water. This means that the river would need to pump in 5 to 10 times as much water as the sea originally contained just to bring its salt concentration down to that of the ocean.

But this is not what Ezekiel intends us to understand. The Dead Sea, the deadest body of water on the face of the earth, is being "healed" through the gracious power of God. There is no natural explanation for this, because it can be understood only as a miracle.

***8. If God can heal "the deadest body of water on the face of the earth," what can He do to heal you? What has He already done? How can you be a source of healing to others?***

Even after we become Christians and have our sins forgiven, we still have painful areas of our lives that need to be healed because of damage done. In some of these areas we have been the victims; in other areas we have been the perpetrators. Whether it's the long-term effects of childhood abuse, the pain of damaged relationships, or the consequences of our sins, we all need God's healing touch on our lives.

Remembering that God loves us unconditionally is a good beginning place. This knowledge gives us the courage to bring our problems to Him for His healing grace. Often, God provides healing help through the church in the form of support groups, counselors, and biblical teaching. By sharing how we have been healed, we can encourage others to believe that change is possible.

***9. What change will the transformation of the Dead Sea bring about? How can we apply this change to our lives today? (vs. 9-11)***

The healing of the Dead Sea will mean that an abundance of fish will swim in the sea. Then fishing

will become a popular occupation from “En-gedi” (v. 10) to Eneglaim (an unknown region) where their nets will enclose fish of many species. We can also interpret verses 9-11 as, 1) viewing ourselves as the fishermen, 2) Jesus as the living water, and 3) our “nets” as spreading the gospel to catch souls (“a very great multitude of fish”) for Christ, “for they shall be healed.”

Notice that the muddy places and marshes are not connected to the living water, “therefore shall not be healed” (v. 11). The point is that one must be near the River of Life to gain its benefits. Without this miraculous flow of fresh water, the sea will remain its old, salty self.

#### ***10. What characteristics will trees along the river have? (v. 12)***

Since the water is life giving, the leaves on the trees will also be life-giving. First, there will be numerous trees on both sides of the river. Second, they will be productive and long-lasting. The leaves will not fade and the trees will bear fruit according to his months (c.f. Psalm 1:3).

Finally, the trees will produce more than enough fruit to sustain human life. In addition, the leaves on the trees will have medical properties that will be life sustaining as well. Ezekiel’s account of the life giving river is very similar to John’s description of the same river in Revelation 22:1-2.

#### ***11. What can we do to restart the water of life flowing through us and out to others?***

While Jesus says that His followers will be a source of “rivers of living water,” we occasionally may wonder how, if we feel that our lives are all dried up. Remember: the only way that living water can flow within us and outward from us is by being connected to the source, which is Jesus (John 4:10). The further we are from Him in our daily walk, the more likely we are to see the joy evaporate from our lives.

We can stay connected to Jesus by allowing His Holy Spirit, who indwells us, to have His way with us. When we shut ourselves off from the Holy Spirit by ignoring Bible study, neglecting prayer, and indulging in sinful behavior, we will begin to dry up spiritually. We need to seek the Spirit’s help so we can enjoy life “more abundantly” (John 10:10).

## **CONCLUSION**

The personal water bottle is everywhere today, carried by some people everywhere they go. It is even common to see water bottles in many worship services, either among the congregants or being sipped by worship leaders and others up front. Although some people carry water as more of a fashion accessory, this widespread phenomenon also reflects increased respect for health values of drinking plenty of pure water.

When He attended the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, Jesus proclaimed, “He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Jesus was not quoting a single, particular Old Testament passage, but the general message derived from several passages, including our lesson text for today. The apostle John goes on to explain, “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive” (John 7:39).

This means that we can enjoy right now the benefits of the spiritual refreshment that come from the Holy Spirit. He can right now break down the spiritual barriers that keep us from having complete fellowship with our creator. He can reverse all the life-killing areas of ourselves, transforming us into the likeness of God’s Son, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Holy Spirit brings joy, peace, and comfort to the most troubled soul.

## **PRAYER**

Lord God, we have a thirst for Your Spirit. We need our souls to be refreshed by Your sweet water of life. May the waters of Your living river flood us, cleanse us, and sustain us every day, even as we look forward to being in Your presence for all eternity. We pray in the name of the one who promised us living water, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Seek God’s living water; accept no substitutes.

## **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK’S LESSON**

In the next few weeks, we explore the pathway of suffering unto death. We see how Jesus paid a costly price so that we might have this new life.

*Lesson Summarized by Montario Fletcher  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

**NOTES:**



## Sunday, March 26, 2023

### Lesson 4 - "Suffering unto Death"

**Devotional Reading:** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

**Background Scripture:** Luke 23

**Printed Text:** Luke 23:32-46

#### Luke 23:32-46

*32 And there were also two others, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. 33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. 34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. 35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. 36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, 37 And saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself. 38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. 42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. 44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. 46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.*

**Facts:** to explain the details that relate to the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus.

**Principle:** to show that the pathway to new life is through the cross of Jesus.

**Application:** to show that all who put their faith in what Christ has done will find new life.

#### INTRODUCTION

Our next three lessons, taken from Ezekiel, are focused on the promise of new life. Each lesson considered aspects of God's blessing that still await fulfillment in the age when the Messiah will return to rule the world.

Of course, none of these promises can be fulfilled apart from the accomplishments of His first coming. Therefore, the lessons are historical in nature. We will explore New Testament texts that record Jesus' death and resurrection, as well as the spread of His life-giving message by chosen witnesses.

Ironically, this path to new life had to begin with His descent into death – a death Jesus did not deserve, since He is the Source and the Giver of life. But He endured the cross, with all its indignities, as the Substitute for every sinner. Apparently, none of those observing His death understood this. But one guilty criminal by His side, got a glimpse of His true identity and begged for His mercy.

#### LESSON BACKGROUND

**Time:** A.D. 30 **Place:** Calvary (Golgotha) After more than three years of public ministry, Jesus returned once again to Jerusalem, but this time to die. After the Passover feast, Jesus departed to a quiet place to pray. That was interrupted when Judas, one of His close followers, betrayed Him.

Jesus was brought before a succession of authorities: the Jewish elders, Pilate, Herod, and then Pilate again. Pilate was certain that Jesus was innocent. To satisfy the people, however, Pilate offered to flog and release Jesus. The chief priests, leaders, and people refused this verdict. Instead, they demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus and release Barabbas - a man charged with murder and revolt. The pressure was so intense that Pilate eventually relented and granted the request.

Jesus had every reason to be bitter. He stood abandoned by His closest friends, falsely accused by the people He came to save, and unjustly sentenced to death by Roman officials. If ever God's people deserved wrath, if ever the ruling powers deserved to be smitten, it was right then. But Jesus did not respond in kind. As we pay careful attention to His response, we learn the superior power of the cross.

This week's lesson focuses on the death of Christ. New life was made possible by His suffering unto death on the cross. There was no other way for us to have new life than through this historic event two thousand years ago.

#### **JESUS' SUFFERING BEGUN (Luke 23:32-34)**

##### ***1. Why did Luke state that Jesus was crucified with criminals? (Luke 23:32)***

Our lesson begins at the point when Jesus arrived at the place of His execution. He had endured unjust trials before religious and civil authorities. He had been turned over to the inflamed mob by a weak Pontius Pilate, who repeatedly declared that He was innocent. He had been abused by Roman soldiers and jeered by onlookers as He walked to Calvary.

Now, as Luke 23:32 recounts the crucifixion, we learn that "there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death." "Malefactor" is a general word for a criminal, or lawbreaker. From Matthew and Mark, we learn that these men were thieves. Luke's mention of them here in his narrative stresses that Jesus was executed as a criminal and was thus willing to take His place among the lowest of mankind (cf. Isa. 53:12; Luke 22:37).

The innocent, holy one of God is placed between two genuine criminals, as if He were one of them. This

fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah, who said that God's suffering servant would be "numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). That prophecy can be taken in a general sense, as Jesus is treated as criminals are treated. In a particular sense, Jesus is placed right alongside criminals literally.

##### ***2. Why did the Gospel writers not dwell on the physical details of Jesus' crucifixion? (v. 33)***

Luke does not describe the process of crucifixion. He merely states that "there they crucified him" (23:33). The readers of that day were familiar with crucifixion and knew what it entailed. None of the gruesome details are included. For our part, we depend on nonbiblical accounts and archaeological evidence from Jesus' day in addition to the Gospels to grasp the full impact of crucifixion. One account depicts a man with forearms nailed to a crossbeam, with buttocks supported by a small shelf. He is turned sideways with knees bent so a large nail can be driven through both heels into the vertical beam.

But Luke and the other gospel writers did not give any of the details concerning the process of crucifixion. In fact, none of the Gospels dwell on the physical agony Jesus endured on the cross. They have a different purpose - to relate what it cost Him to bear the sins of all mankind.

##### ***3. What were Jesus' first words after being placed on the cross? (v. 34a)***

Once on the cross, Jesus doesn't command legions of angels to rescue Him from pending death (Matthew 26:53). He doesn't call on God to rain judgment down on His false accusers. He doesn't even plead His innocence before onlookers or vow to avenge Himself. Instead, He asks God to "forgive."

Jesus' first words after being placed on the cross were a prayer for the forgiveness of His enemies. He may have included in this all who had a part in His death — most remarkably, the Jewish officials who so hated Him. But how could He say, "They know not what they do"?

Surely they had all the evidence that Jesus was their Messiah, yet they deliberately rejected it and concocted false accusations to condemn Him. In this

they knew exactly what they were doing. But they had an even deeper ignorance of God's program and Jesus' place in it (cf. Matt. 11:25), and the apostles, like their Lord, later attributed their hatred of Jesus to this (Acts 3:13-17; 13:27).

Perhaps this is why Luke appears to intentionally leave open the identity of those for whom Jesus requests forgiveness. That may signify that the request for forgiveness is open to the thieves, the betrayers, the deniers, the accusers, and the crucifiers. It remains open for us.

Jesus' request for the Father's forgiveness is certainly an expression of grace. Forgiveness is possible because Jesus is dying on a cross to pay sin's penalty. This is God's way of putting an end to the hostility between himself and humanity. Jesus is absorbing all the hostility that the powers of this world can throw at Him, but more importantly He is absorbing the wrath of God. In doing so, Jesus deprives human hatred and violence of their power. Hatred and violence thrive on bitterness and retaliation, but they wilt before nonretaliatory love and grace. This, of course, is what Jesus has been teaching throughout His ministry (Matthew 5:21, 22, 38-48; 18:21, 22; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:27-37; etc.). See Stephen's reaction on being stoned (Acts 7:60).

Jesus' request for the Father's forgiveness on "them" raises an important question: Did the Father honor Jesus' request and actually forgive "them"? We may answer with a confident yes if they repented. But that's a big if because God conditions His forgiveness on human repentance. Always.

***4. What are some areas you have been wronged by others in which you should work toward forgiveness instead of revenge? How will you go about doing this?***

Revenge is not an option for the Christian (see Romans 12:19). At the cross Jesus demonstrated that forgiveness is available to all. But we would often prefer to get even or to seethe in anger and bitterness.

Everyone has been injured by another in some way. It may be harsh words exchanged between spouses. It may be impatience demonstrated by parents to their children. Sometimes the hurts go much deeper. It may be that others have stolen from us; they might even have taken the life of a loved one. Having the attitude Jesus had is not easy, and it is not something we can do in our own strength. But the strength of the Holy Spirit is available.

#### ***5. Who cast lots for Jesus' clothing? Why? (v. 34b)***

When criminals were crucified, their executioners had the privilege of taking their clothing. Thus, the four soldiers by Jesus' cross divided His garments among themselves. But according to John 19:23-24, they discovered that His outer garment was seamless; to tear it into four parts would ruin it. So they cast lots for ownership of it. This act was a direct fulfillment of prophecy (Ps. 22:18; John 19:24).

*To be continued...*

*Lesson Summarized by Renee Little  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

## NOTES:





## Sunday, April 2, 2023

### Lesson 5 - "Suffering unto Death" (*Continued*)

**Devotional Reading:** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

**Background Scripture:** Luke 23

**Printed Text:** Luke 23:32-46

#### **Luke 23:32-46**

*32 And there were also two others, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. 33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. 34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. 35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. 36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, 37 And saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself. 38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. 42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. 44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. 46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.*

**Facts:** to explain the details that relate to the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus.

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#### **JESUS' SUFFERING COMPOUNDED (Luke 23:35-38)**

**6. What were the attitudes of the crowds and the Jewish leaders who stood by Jesus' cross? (v. 35)**

Luke pictures the crowd standing by curiously, observing the crucifixion as a kind of entertainment. But the people were anything but passive. Both Matthew and Mark point out that those who passed by (in addition to the chief priests) insulted and taunted Jesus (Matt. 27:39-43; Mark 15:29-32).

In this they were merely following the lead of their rulers, who "derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God" (Luke 23:35). Knowing Jesus' reputation as a miracle worker who delivered many from their ailments, they challenged Him to deliver Himself. Only this, they felt, could prove that He was the Messiah (cf. Ps. 22:8) who came to save humanity back to God. Seeing Him apparently powerless emboldened them to taunt Him.

In Matthew's account, (Matt. 27:42) the Pharisees who watched Christ die said, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." And they were right; He couldn't do both, so He chose to save you. Today will you accept His offer of salvation? 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

**7. What was on the inscription over Jesus' head? Why did the Jewish leaders dislike it? (vs. 36-38)**



The Roman soldiers could not resist joining the revelry. They were induced to mock Jesus by the inscription over His head stating the charge against Him: "The King of the Jews." The soldiers considered it hilarious that anyone should challenge Rome's authority over the Jews by claiming to be their king. Crucifixion seemed to them a fitting fate for such a pathetic rebel. He could make good His claim, they said, only by saving Himself from the cross.

The superscription itself is reported variously by the Gospel writers. Based on a composite of what they record, it probably read, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews." But the heart of it reported by all is "the king of the Jews." This charge was written in the three languages most commonly used in Palestine - Greek, Latin, and Hebrew (John 19:19-20). Thus, all who passed by could read it.

This, indeed, was one of the charges the Jewish leaders had brought against Jesus (Luke 23:1-3). But now that it was displayed publicly, they felt insulted. Jewish leaders did not want it to even be hinted that Jesus was their king. So they asked Pilate to change it to say that He claimed to be their king. Pilate refused (John 19:19-22). He had compromised with them enough, and he would have the last word. The offensive superscription remained, and with it the Romans' implied sarcasm: "This is what happens to a Jewish king!"

#### **JESUS' SUFFERING APPRECIATED (Luke 23:39-43)**

##### ***8. What was the reaction of the two criminals crucified with Jesus? (vs. 39-40)***

Luke now focuses on the two criminals crucified with Jesus. Whereas Matthew and Mark simply record that the thieves also ridiculed Jesus (Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32), Luke notes a distinction between the two.

The first criminal, venting the bitterness of his soul in his hour of death, parroted the taunts of the Jewish officials. "If thou be Christ," he said, "save thyself and us" (Luke 23:39). Jesus' verbal response to this man is the same as His response to Herod: nothing. Of course, Jesus' nonverbal response is also the same: suffering crucifixion on their behalf.

The other criminal cannot remain silent. He acknowledges his and the other man's guilt as well as Jesus' innocence (vs. 40,41). In so doing, he becomes an example to us. When the world mocks our Lord, we must correct the impious speech. We cannot force people to discipline their tongues, but we can expose the error of their speech and provide a truthful alternative.

Whatever the reasons, this thief concluded not only that Jesus was unjustly crucified but also that He was Israel's Messiah. It is clear from his request that he knew Jesus had a kingdom to rule over (v. 42). He was expressing to Jesus his desire to be part of it.

The depth of this man's insight is remarkable. Concerning himself, he understood that he was unworthy and deserved only to be cast off by God.

##### ***9. How did Jesus answer the second thief's request? (v. 43)***

This second thief exhibited the first recorded expression of confidence in the power of Christ over death. Until the resurrected Jesus shows himself to the disciples, they fail to see how His death can be anything but the end of the kingdom He has been proclaiming.

But with great faith this humble criminal somehow sees Jesus' death as the doorway to the kingdom. The thief requested that Jesus remember him when He came into His kingdom. But concerning Jesus, he understood that He was the divine Messiah whom death could not keep from His royal destiny. He further understood that this King could share His kingdom with anyone He wished, and he trusted His grace to include even a condemned criminal. The implied meaning of his request to be remembered is "Think of me with favor" (cf. Neh. 5:19).

The penitent sinner's prayer in the midst of shrill mockery must have refreshed Jesus' spirit. After all, this was the reason He was suffering. So, while He offered no response to the thief who taunted Him, He reassured the other one warmly, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Jesus honored the fledgling faith of the contrite criminal.

Many lessons could be drawn from this remarkable incident, but perhaps the most striking is the extent of God's grace. The dying thief had done nothing - and in that moment could do nothing - to earn God's favor. Yet Jesus, knowing his trusting heart, received him gladly. Ironically, He had also prayed for the forgiveness of His mockers, but He could do nothing for them because they had hardened hearts of unbelief.

Salvation is still by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9), for all are unworthy of God's favor. He offers it to all, but only those who admit their unworthiness will enjoy its blessings.

### **JESUS' SUFFERING CONCLUDED (Luke 23:44-46)**

#### **10. What supernatural signs accompanied Jesus' crucifixion? (vs. 44-45)**

Luke now focuses on the depths of Jesus' suffering and its conclusion. The three hours from the sixth (12:00 noon) to the ninth (3:00 P.M.) were marked by unusual phenomena. First, "there was a darkness over all the earth . . . and the sun was darkened." God was testifying of the spiritual darkness of the hour. The three hours of darkness is literal, as the reference to the sun makes clear. The prophets spoke of God's times of judgment as times of darkness (cf. Joel 2:1-2, 10; Amos 8:9; Zeph. 1:14-15), and on this day His judgment for the world's sins fell on His Son. No wonder Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46)!

Another sign accompanied the unnatural darkness—"the veil of the temple was rent in the midst" (Luke 23:45). Although there were several veils in the temple, this one was the huge, heavy veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (see Exodus 26:31-35). Divine power ripped this curtain "from the top to the bottom" (Matt. 27:51). The Most Holy Place is entered only once a year, by the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:2, 29, 34). On this day, the sins of Israel are atoned for so that Israel can have a clean slate before God.

The tearing of this curtain seems to indicate how Christ's death reconciles God and humans with the result that the temple no longer serves this purpose.

Hebrews 9 and 10 supports this interpretation. This signified that when Jesus died, the barrier between God and men was removed. Jesus' sacrifice opened the way into God's presence (cf. Heb. 9:7-12; 10:19-20). It also signaled the ending of the shadows of Old Testament ritual and their fulfillment in Christ (9:24-10:18).

#### **11. What was Jesus' final cry from the cross? (v. 46)**

Before dying, Jesus musters enough energy for one final cry that is surely heard by all nearby. Jesus' final words from the cross were a cry of triumph as well as a prayer: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." On the surface it seems as if He is simply surrendering His life to God. But the words He cries come from Psalm 31:5, "*Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.*"

The theme of this psalm is the confidence of the righteous and afflicted that salvation is in God's hands alone, that God delivers the righteous from their enemies, and that God will repay those who exalt themselves. So, while surrendering His spirit to God, Jesus is simultaneously claiming the type of victory that accompanies such surrender.

It is also worth noting that Jesus "gives up" His life. He doesn't try to fight off death, only to ultimately lose. He faces death and submits to it on His own terms. Death will serve Him in His plan. Jesus' early surrender also means that the Roman practice of dragging out the crucifixion as long as possible, as a statement of their power and authority, will not work with Jesus. (We recall that Pilate is surprised at Jesus' relatively quick death; Mark 15:44). Rome does not take Jesus' life - He gives it.

### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

1. Although wrongly treated, Jesus still set the perfect example of forgiveness (Luke 23:32-34).
2. The spiritually blind cannot understand the spiritual workings of God (Luke 23:35-37; 1 Cor. 2:14).
3. God sometimes reveals truth in unlikely ways and through unlikely means (Luke 23:38; cf. Num. 22:21-31).
4. The unrepentant sinner makes demands of God; the truly repentant, recognizing his unworthiness, only makes requests (Luke 23:39-42).

5. No true repentance ever goes unforgiven by Jesus (Luke 23:43; 1 John 1:9).

6. Jesus and His Father are always in control (Luke 23:44-46).

### **CONCLUSION**

In dying on the cross, Jesus submitted to the will of the Father, overcame sin and death, and provided a model for us (Philippians 2:5-11). We will not change the course of world history the way Jesus did, but we may participate in the change He brought about. We will do so by imitating both the way He lived and the way He faced death.

Jesus beckoned His followers to take up their crosses and follow Him (Luke 9:23; 14:27). At that time, they did not understand the full meaning of this invitation. It became clearer after Jesus was raised from the dead and showed himself to them. We can forgive one another numerous times because God gave His only Son in order to forgive us. We can accept the torturing of our bodies and the plundering of our possessions because this life and its treasures are not our ultimate hope. We can acknowledge with the apostle Paul in Galatians 6:14 that through Christ's cross the world has been crucified to us and we have been crucified to it.

These are great reminders for us Christians, especially during this Easter season. We tend to focus on Jesus' victory over death and the grave and forget the events of the days leading up to that first Easter. Easter cannot be truly meaningful without paying attention to the suffering of our Lord that brought us that Easter victory. Our lesson this week helps us put this in focus so that we truly understand that there can be no Easter without the cross.

### **PRAYER**

Father God, we thank You for the cross. Give us the same mind as Jesus who emptied himself of heavenly glory, who humbly accepted death on a cross, and who has been exalted to the highest place of glory. Teach us to walk in His steps so that we may truly live both now and forevermore, in Jesus' name, amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Take up your cross and follow Him.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

Next week's lesson is "Resurrected to New Life" (Resurrection Sunday). We will see that because Jesus rose again, we can experience new life too. Study Luke 24:1-12.

*Lesson Summarized by Renee Little  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

## NOTES:



## Sunday, April 9, 2023

### Lesson 6 – “Resurrected to New Life”

Lesson Text: Luke 24:1-12

Background Scripture: 24:1-12

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12-16

#### Luke 24:1–12

*1 Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. 3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: 5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, 7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. 8 And they remembered his words, 9 And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. 11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. 12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.*

#### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Retell Luke’s account of the women’s experience on resurrection morning.

2. Compare and contrast the various levels of belief of those first told of the resurrection with the varying levels of faith expressed.

3. Plan to discuss with an unbeliever the facts of Jesus’ resurrection.

#### INTRODUCTION

It is funny how the human mind remembers. Friends and family will sometimes tell us stories of events we participated in firsthand only a few years back, but we may have absolutely no recollection of them. Then we may hear an old song on the radio that we haven’t heard in years and, instantly, every word of the lyrics comes back to mind. I imagine some of this has to do with the level at which the original context affected us.

Forgetfulness takes several forms. Some forgetfulness is harmless and some is harmful. Some is accidental and some is intentional. Does it surprise us that Jesus’ followers all seemed to have forgotten that He foretold His suffering, death, and resurrection? How could they forget something so crucial? And what do we learn from the different ways they responded to the news of this life-changing event when reminded?

#### LESSON BACKGROUND

In Luke 9:20, Peter was the first disciple to confess Jesus as Messiah (or Christ). Jesus responded by warning that He was to suffer, die, and rise on the third day. Shortly thereafter, following a crowd-dazzling healing display, Jesus impressed upon His followers that He would be betrayed. But they didn’t grasp what He was saying (9:44, 45). Jesus later alluded to being killed in Jerusalem (13:33). He also told the disciples that He had to suffer and face rejection (17:25).

As the time of His death drew closer, Jesus repeated these predictions. He was to be handed over, mocked, beaten, and killed, but would rise on the third day (18:31–33). Still His disciples did not grasp what He was saying.

Jesus gave His disciples several opportunities to expect His death and recognize it for what it was: a temporary stop on the path to resurrection. But they did not comprehend. Indeed, they could not because it had been concealed from them (Luke 9:45; 18:34). In God's infinite wisdom, He planted a seed within them that was to bear fruit only after Christ's resurrection. Our text today records how Jesus' closest followers first responded to the news of that resurrection.

The events that transpired before it are familiar to long-time Christians. Jesus was betrayed by Judas and handed over to Jewish authorities. They subsequently handed Him over to Roman authorities. Pilate gave in to the crowd's wish that the innocent man Jesus be crucified. Since it was the day before the Sabbath, Jesus' body was removed quickly from the cross and placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Then on the third day the unbelievable happened.

### **EMPTY TOMB (LUKE 24:1-3)**

#### ***1. Why did the women desire to anoint Jesus' body on the day after the Sabbath? (v. 1)***

The first day of the week is of course Sunday. Jesus was crucified and died two days previously, on Friday. Since Saturday was the Sabbath, it would not have been appropriate to anoint Christ's body with spices on that day. Pious Jews are careful to avoid all forms of work on the Sabbath (Luke 23:56). Coming into contact with a dead body, especially on a "high" Sabbath (John 19:31), creates problems of ceremonial uncleanness (Numbers 19:11).

So, the body had been taken off the cross and hastily placed in a tomb to await final burial preparations during the evening prior to the Sabbath (Luke 23:50-53). Luke 23:54–56 tells us that the women who followed Jesus from Galilee (referred to as they) take it upon themselves to prepare the spices the day of Christ's death and then wait until the first day of the week, after the Sabbath, to administer them.

The time of day (very early in the morning) shows us how eager the women are to complete this task. Psalm 30:5 says "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." God is about to dry the tears of all Jesus' followers and change the course of world history.

#### ***2. What caught the women's attention as they approached the tomb? (vs. 2-3)***

Once the Sabbath passed, the women went to the tomb to anoint the Savior's human body. When they arrived at the temple, the women saw that the stone was rolled away from the tomb's entrance. Mark 16:3 tells us that the women wonder who will roll the stone away so they can gain entrance to the sepulchre. When they see that the stone is already moved, they may be both relieved and startled. Who has done this, and why? Perhaps the women think that Joseph of Arimathea has courteously spared them the burden of trying to roll back the heavy stone. After all, the grave site does belong to him, and he has taken a keen interest in providing for Jesus' burial (Luke 23:50–53).

If the women are not disturbed by the moved stone, the fact that the body is missing certainly alarms them (24:3)! What thoughts flash through their minds? Have they come to the wrong tomb? Not a chance! These same women personally had followed Joseph to the grave and witnessed the location of Jesus' lifeless body (Luke 23:55). Have Jesus' enemies stolen His body in order to subject it to further disgrace? One can only imagine the rush of mixed thoughts that come over the women. But they do not wonder for long.

### **HEAVENLY MESSENGERS (LUKE 24:4-8)**

#### ***3. How did the women react to the presence of two angels? (vs. 4-5)***

God quickly supplies an answer through two men who are clad in shining garments. They are later identified as angels (Luke 24:23). The women respond to the awe-inspiring presence of angels as any of us would if approached by heavenly messengers: the women are terrified, bowing their faces to the ground in respect. The angels respond just as in Acts 1:11: they greet Jesus' followers with



a question. In Acts, angels ask why His followers are staring up into Heaven; here, angels ask why these women are looking for their living Savior among the dead.

***4. The prospect that Jesus could be alive is certainly inviting. But what do the messengers mean by their question in verse 5? (vs. 6-7)***

Those words can be interpreted in more than one way. So, the messengers quickly clarify. They remind the women of Christ's prediction of both His death and resurrection (Luke 9:22; 18:31–33).

Jesus had known all along what would take place, and He had told His followers as much. Yet His followers do not remember. It is as if God wanted Jesus' followers to hear the predictions for the purpose of later recollection as a testimony of God's control over these events.

It is also important to note the language the angels use to describe what happened to Jesus. *He ... is risen* is the language of resurrection. The kind of resurrection at issue is not just any kind of postmortem existence. It certainly does not mean that Jesus' spirit mystically departed His body to take on a new bodiless form (Luke 24:39). It does not mean merely that the disciples will feel Jesus to be alive in their hearts. Rather, it means that God has raised Jesus bodily.

***5. What was a time when you didn't find Christ as you expected to find Him? How do you remain open to admitting and adjusting your wrong expectations?***

Many deserted Jesus during His earthly ministry because He was not the kind of Messiah they expected (John 6:66). The women expected to find the body of Jesus, and when they did not, they were confused. The apostles did not expect to find Jesus alive after the crucifixion, so they prepared for a life

without Him. Today people create their own expectations about Jesus that don't match up with the Bible.

We may be guilty of trying to force Jesus into our ideas of what He should be doing in our lives or in the world. When He does not fit those expectations, too often He is forsaken. Yet His ways are not our ways. We naturally expect to find Him in our church gatherings, but surprisingly we also may find Him in our workplace as we have opportunities to live out our faith in everyday life.

*To be continued...*

*Lesson Summarized by Montario Fletcher  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

## NOTES:





## Sunday, April 16, 2023

### Lesson 7 – “Resurrected to New Life” (Continued)

**Lesson Text:** Luke 24:1-12

**Background Scripture:** 24:1-12

**Devotional Reading:** 1 Corinthians 15:12-16

#### Luke 3:7–18

*7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. 12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. 14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. 15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; 16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: 17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. 18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people..*

#### Luke 24:1–12

1 Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. 3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: 5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, 7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. 8 And they remembered his words, 9 And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. 11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. 12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

#### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Retell Luke’s account of the women’s experience on resurrection morning.
2. Compare and contrast the various levels of belief of those first told of the resurrection with the varying levels of faith expressed.
3. Plan to discuss with an unbeliever the facts of Jesus’ resurrection.

**6. What factors caused the women to now remember Jesus' prophecies? (v. 8)**

With the angel's words of clarification, it all begins to make sense. What the disciples had never caught on to during Jesus' ministry, the women finally begin to grasp. Jesus' suffering and death have been intentional, as is His resurrection. These are deliberate parts of God's plan.

This passage teaches us an important lesson about instruction and memory. Words don't always hit home when first heard. They may be recalled and recognized as being true only after being fulfilled. Parents know this all too well! Although they are not divinely inspired prophets, parents know from experience how a certain course of action their child is about to take is bound to turn out. The parent warns the child, but the warning "goes in one ear and out the other." The child goes ahead, suffers, and then hears the parent say, "I told you that would happen. You should have listened."

But one cannot recall what one has not heard. So, it is important that Christians continually proclaim the good news of Christ to the lost. They may not immediately respond favorably to our message, but as life deals its ups and downs, they may be able to discern God's hand at work, if they have been told already of a God who loves them enough to work in their lives. For similar reasons, parents continue to raise even their most rebellious children in the Lord. They hope with tears that later in life their own prodigals will someday recognize and submit to the gospel truths that they heard long before.

**RELAYED MESSAGE (Luke 24:9-12)**

**7. What did the angels command the women to do? (v. 9)**

The angels told the women to tell the disciples and the rest of the followers about the Good News of Jesus' resurrection. The eleven disciples are the first to hear the relayed news. There are only eleven because Judas has taken his own life (Matthew 27:3-10). In his Gospel, Luke does not tell us of Judas's suicide, but he alludes to it in Acts when the apostles select another to take his place (Acts 1:12-26).

The eleven are not alone. There are other followers (the rest) with them or very close by. One wonders what they are all doing together (see John 20:19). Are they trying to regroup, trying to figure out how to put their lives back in order, having previously turned them upside down to follow Jesus? Or are they praying to God for some bit of guidance about what to do next? Jesus' ministry has been too powerful among them simply to believe it could end just like that.

Whatever their thoughts and activities, one suspects that they should be the most receptive group to the women's testimony. Jesus had told the disciples personally that He was to die and rise again.

**8. Who was the first woman Luke mentions at the tomb, and why was she special? (v. 10)**

Here we are given the names of the first witnesses to Christ's resurrection. Some believe that God intentionally chose to entrust the message of Christ's resurrection to women first. This idea is in keeping with Luke's presentation of God's high regard for those whom the first-century world does not esteem highly. Women, children, foreigners, and social outcasts often play important roles in Luke's Gospel account.

Luke mentions Mary Magdalene first. She was one of the Galilean women who accompanied Jesus and ministered to Him and His disciples (8:2-3). He had delivered her from a severe case of demon possession. She had been among those who stood by Jesus' cross and observed where He was buried, and now she was a witness of His resurrection.

Identifying Mary, the mother of James, is more difficult since there are several women named Mary in the New Testament. This particular Mary is also identified as the mother of Joses (Matthew 27:56, 61; 28:1), and we know that Jesus had brothers named James and Joses (Matthew 13:55). Thus, one logical guess is that this Mary is Jesus' mother.

**9. How did the apostles respond to the news of Jesus' resurrection? (vs. 11-12)**

At first, the women's testimony failed to convince the apostles of Jesus' resurrection. To them, their

words appeared to be “idle tales.” Jesus had honored these believing women by appearing to them first and entrusting them to share the good news. However, in the male-dominant culture, even the apostles would not take the women’s words at face value. “They believed them not.”

However, Peter decided to go see for himself whether the tomb was empty. He, along with John (cf. John 20:3), ran to the tomb. Stooping down, he looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there. It was evident that no robbers had stolen the body, for everything appeared neat and orderly (vs. 6-7). But Jesus’ body was missing. Our text ends with Peter wondering whether Jesus had actually risen. Later in Scripture, Peter would see Jesus for himself (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).

Even when Jesus later reveals himself to disciples in person, they express doubt, wondering if He is a ghost (Luke 24:36–43). It is not until they touch Him with their hands that they truly believe. Even so, Jesus will pronounce blessing on all who believe reliable testimony about Him, although that testimony be secondhand (John 20:29).

## CONCLUSION

Today’s lesson reveals a critical time for “the eleven” because they, as we, were in a position of relying on secondhand testimony. Of course, they go on to see Jesus firsthand, which placed them in a different position from ours. During this brief but critical window—the time between getting secondhand and firsthand testimony—we see some variation in response to testimony of Christ’s resurrection. Some thought others to be peddling tall tales. Some tested the claims. At least one believed after conducting a test without actually having seen the risen Jesus (John 20:8). Another absolutely refused to believe without firsthand evidence (John 20:25).

Despite the variety of initial responses, all of Jesus’ followers ultimately believed His resurrection. Today, Jesus does not stand among us physically to invite us to touch His nail-scarred hands as He did with Thomas. But God has left us with plenty of other evidence to create belief.

So let us not be discouraged by the variety of responses we receive to the gospel message. Let us not give up persistently proclaiming Christ to all people regardless of how they initially respond to us. Equally important, let us live with integrity and joy the new life Christ’s resurrection has made possible for us. For Christ is indeed risen!

## PRAYER

Father in Heaven, may we not keep Your plan to ourselves. May we offer it boldly to all whom we meet. Let us not be intimidated by appearances or status. Let us not be discouraged by rejection or ridicule. Forsaking worldly praise, let us do Your will, knowing that the Lord of resurrection life is also Lord of the harvest. Through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, Amen.

## THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Live and proclaim Christ’s resurrection.

## ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Once we have experienced the resurrection in our lives, have put our faith in Christ and received the new life, we become an integral part of God’s family. Our lesson next week helps us explore how good God has been to us. Study Ephesians 1:3–14, “New Family in Christ.”

*Lesson Summarized by Montario Fletcher  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

## NOTES:



## Sunday, April 23, 2023

### Lesson 8 – “New Family in Christ”

Lesson Text: Ephesians 1:3–14

Background Scripture: Ephesians 1:1–14

Devotional Reading: Exodus 19:1–8

#### Ephesians 1:3–14

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: 4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. 7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; 8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; 9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him. 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: 12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. 13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

#### LESSON AIMS

**Facts:** to show how good God has been to us because He has made us part of a new family in Christ.

**Principle:** to show that all who put their faith in Christ can be part of this wonderful new family.

**Application:** to show that when we put our faith in Christ, we too can become an integral part of God's family.

#### INTRODUCTION

A friend of ours once gave her adopted daughter a little plaque with the inscription, “You grew in my heart, not in my womb.” This tender sentiment reflects the fact that couples who cannot have children biologically often pursue adoption. In our culture, raising children is perceived to be an important life experience and (in theory at least) a source of joy, thus the desirability of adoption.

The ancient Romans of the Apostle Paul's time also practiced adoption, but usually for a very different reason. According to Roman law, a father's property could pass only to his legitimate heir, who was expected to continue the household and the family name. Men who had no children would therefore often adopt a son, sometimes a liberated slave, to stand as their heirs. The adopted son may already have reached adulthood by the time of the adoption.

Those adopted for this purpose severed ties with their former families in order to be able to receive their new father's name and property upon his death. Of course, they were also expected to submit to their new father and live in a way that would honor him as repayment for his generosity. Being chosen to be an heir and elevated from slavery thus carried both privileges and responsibilities. In our passage today, Paul uses the legal principles behind the concepts of adoption and redemption to illustrate our experience of God's grace, and helps us look at the family of God with all its rights and privileges when we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 60 Place: from Rome Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus is known for its teachings on unity in the church (Ephesians 2:11–22; 4:1–6), spiritual



gifts (4:7–16), Christian living (4:17– 5:21), marriage and family relationships (5:22–6:9), and the armor of God (6:10– 18). Many readers prefer to focus on these more practical passages, while avoiding the difficult and controversial teachings on grace, works, and predestination in the first two chapters.

Yet Paul's ethical instructions are based on the principle stated at 5:1: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children." Christians, in other words, are to act a certain way because we have been adopted into God's household as His children; we must live in a way that protects the family name. Following this logic, Paul opens Ephesians with an extended theoretical discussion of our adoption as God's heirs. In so doing, Paul emphasizes God's grace and our need to respond to that grace through lives of service.

## **THE SOURCE OF FAMILY BLESSINGS (Ephesians 1:3-6)**

### ***1. What are God's spiritual blessings? When do we receive them in heavenly places? (v. 3)***

After greeting his readers and extending to them his apostolic blessing, Paul began to remind them of their spiritual blessings in Christ. The source of these blessings is the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," to whom Paul extended praise. He called these blessings "spiritual," distinguishing them from temporal blessings. They are said to be "in heavenly places," or simply "the heavenlies." This is a reference to the celestial realms, distinguished from the realm of the earth, the temporal, and the corruptible (cf. 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). The value of these blessings thus transcends our mortal existence and cannot be changed or corrupted.

The Greek tense of "hath blessed" in Ephesians 1:3 indicates that God's bestowal of these blessings is an accomplished fact. We need not wait for them; we received them when we received Christ. Thus, they are said to be "in Christ." To receive Him by faith is to receive everything God has for us (cf. Rom. 8:32).

### ***2. When were we chosen in Christ? What was God's purpose in choosing us? (v. 4)***

Paul now shifts his vantage point from the time of our conversion to eternity past— "before the foundation of the world." It was then that God laid out His plan for redemption and glorification, and He included us in it. What a humbling truth! Before we were created, God, fully aware of our sinfulness, chose us to be in His family through union with His Son.

Paul borrows the notion of being chosen or "elect" from the story of faithful Abraham, who became the father of God's people. Before the coming of Christ, "election" into God's chosen people was grounded in physical descent from Abraham.

Now, however, we are chosen on the basis of faith in Christ, regardless of our ethnic or religious background (Galatians 3:28, 29). The phrase before the foundation of the world naturally makes us think of the time before Genesis 1:1; the general idea is that of "always." God always has planned for people to come to Him through Christ, a plan that the Ephesians (and we) have seen fulfilled personally. The purpose for God's choice was to make us holy and blameless before Him. He did not choose us just to save us from hell but to make us like Himself. The first adjective refers to the fact that we are set apart unto Him; the second speaks of the sin and guilt removed by Christ's sacrifice. We know, of course, that learning to behave like God is a gradual process that will be completed only by entering the life to come. But He set the process in motion in eternity past, and we are progressing in it even now.

The last goal of God's choice is our adoption. The phrase "in love" (Eph. 1:4) should probably go with verse 5. It was in love that God predestinated us to adoption. "Predestinated," or "foreordained," emphasizes the final goal for which He chose us— "the adoption of children." This word, literally, is "son-placing." It refers to the custom of bestowing on the son in a family all the privileges and responsibilities of adulthood. It is not the same as our practice of adoption today.

### ***3. What does Paul mean when he says God has adopted us? (v. 5)***

Paul used this concept spiritually several times in his writings. It is the act by which God places a believing

sinner in His family with all the privileges of a full-grown son. This means we can be on intimate terms with Him (Gal. 4:4-7) and are joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14-17).

The basis on which God chose us and foreordained us to the privileges of sonship is "the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:5). He did not choose us because He foresaw some good in us; He simply willed to extend His grace to us. We cannot comprehend His reasons; He has chosen to keep them hidden. He wants us to respond by trusting His sovereign goodness and wisdom. He also wants us to humble ourselves in light of our unworthiness.

Paul therefore compares their experience with an adoption. An adopted son is not related physically to his father in the same way as a natural child, but according to Roman law adopted children enjoy the same legal rights and privileges as other members of the family. Similarly, anyone who accepts Christ becomes one of His elect children, regardless of background or previous lifestyle.

Verses 4, 5 raise two further points that will become important later in the letter. First, verse 4 emphasizes the implications of our new status as adopted children: we are to be holy and blameless, like our new heavenly Father. Our lifestyle must reflect the fact that we are now members of God's household. Second, verse 5 indicates that God did not choose and adopt us because we deserved it, but rather because it pleased Him to do so. We cannot earn the right to become members of God's family. All the credit belongs to Him; indeed, the credit can fall only to God, since our salvation was worked out before the foundation of the world, long before we were even born.

#### ***4. To which of His characteristics does God wish to bring praise and glory by saving us? (v. 6a)***

The word *to* at the beginning of verse 6 indicates the result or, perhaps better, the intended purpose of our adoption. Ultimately, our salvation brings praise and glory to God; it does so because it demonstrates how very gracious He is.

For Paul, the word *grace* summarizes God's unmerited love for sinners, especially as revealed by Jesus' death

on the cross. The phrase translated *made us accepted* is actually based on the verb form of the word for *grace*. The original Greek text literally says, "the glory of his grace with which he graced us." The last part of the verse stresses the source of this gracious blessing: Jesus Christ.

God's purpose for bestowing all spiritual blessings on us is "the praise of the glory of his grace." This expression emphasizes the superlative importance of God's grace. It is the most glorious theme one can imagine when considering how He extended it to His sinful creatures. He will receive praise for it throughout all time and eternity. Redeemed humans will continually thank Him for it, and astonished angels will always marvel at its wise design (cf. 3:10).

#### ***5. Who is the beloved One in whom we are accepted? (v. 6b)***

Through this grace, God "hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6). The phrase *accepted in the beloved* builds on the reference to adoption in verse 5. Jesus, as God's beloved Son, bears full rights to His father's estate. As the heir of all things, Jesus secures our relationship with God under the umbrella of His own rights and privileges.

The verb translated "made us accepted" is based on the same root as the Greek word for "grace." So, it could be translated "has graced us." God has bestowed His grace "in the beloved," an obvious reference to Christ. He has always been His Father's beloved (cf. Mark 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:17); and when we are "in Him," we too are favored with God's love.

The Father thus has chosen us to be in His family, partaking of the same love and privileges He bestows on His Son, Jesus Christ. He has done this to make us holy and thus bring praise to His glorious grace.

*To be continued...*

*Lesson Summarized by Renee Little  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

**NOTES:**





## Sunday, April 23, 2023

### Lesson 9 – “New Family in Christ” (Continued)

Lesson Text: Ephesians 1:3–14

Background Scripture: Ephesians 1:1–14

Devotional Reading: Exodus 19:1–8

#### Ephesians 1:3–14

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: 4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. 7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; 8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; 9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him. 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: 12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. 13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

#### LESSON AIMS

**Facts:** to show how good God has been to us because He has made us part of a new family in Christ.

**Principle:** to show that all who put their faith in Christ can be part of this wonderful new family.

**Application:** to show that when we put our faith in Christ, we too can become an integral part of God's family.

#### THE MEDIATOR OF FAMILY BLESSINGS (Ephesians 1:7-12)

**6. What is redemption? From what have we been redeemed? (vs. 7)**

Paul now shifts his emphasis from the Father to the Son, through whose mediation heavenly blessings have come to us. "In whom" refers back to Christ, the beloved One. We receive God's grace through Him because He has provided "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." In the Greco-Roman world, redemption is an economic term, with similarities to the way we refer to redeeming stocks, bonds, or coupons today. Redemption is the process of making payment for the freedom of a slave; the cash paid is referred to as a ransom, similar to the way we refer to the ransom money that kidnappers require for the lives of their victims.

"Redemption" in the Bible means a release obtained by payment of a ransom. In the Old Testament, if a Hebrew was in slavery and he could not pay the required price of freedom, a kinsman could redeem him (Lev. 25:48). Similarly, Christ became human so that He could pay our ransom and free us from sin's bondage. The price He paid for our freedom was His own blood (cf. Rom. 3:24-25; I Pet. 1:18-19). With this redemptive freedom has come "the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7). "Sins" here is more precisely translated "transgressions." God erased from His accounts all our offenses against His holy standards. With the payment of the ransom comes our release from His legal sentence of condemnation.

In many ways, this verse sums up Paul's thinking about salvation. Previously, we were slaves to sin, unable to free ourselves. God, however, paid the ransom for our liberty by giving His Son's life on the cross. But God does not demand that we pay Him back. He expects us neither to pay for our own sin debt nor to pay for the work Christ did to pay our sin debt. Rather, God forgave any debt we may owe Him. He adopts us into His family and makes us heirs of His wealth. Recognition of this fact should motivate us to trust His judgment and to serve Him with all our strength.

***7. How is God's grace different from the grace we show one another? (vs. 7-8)***

God did all this according to the riches of His grace. Again, Paul extolled the virtues of God's grace—the bestowal of His favor on undeserving sinners. Here he emphasized its inexhaustible supply. We may extend grace to one another for a season, but we lack its riches, and it is soon exhausted. But grace pours forth endlessly from God. Since His reservoir is infinite, more grace is always available—even when, to our shame, we squander it.

The next clause, "wherein he hath abounded to us" (Eph. 1:8), refers back to God's grace. Since its supply is boundless, God is not sparing in distributing it. He pours it forth lavishly on those who need it. As stated elsewhere, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Our immense need is met by His superabundant supply.

The terms *wisdom* and *prudence* probably refer not so much to the quality of God's actions as they do to the effect of His grace in our lives. Wisdom is spiritual insight, the new understanding of God that we gain when we experience His grace and come to know Him as our liberator and adopted Father. If wisdom refers to the content of our knowledge of God, prudence means that God has given us the ability to put that information into practice. Thus, God's grace is not simply something we know about—not just a doctrine that can be described and discussed—but is rather a fact of our experience that should be evident in the way we live.

***8. What is the "mystery" that Paul speaks of? (vs. 9-10)***

A "mystery" as found in the New Testament refers to a previously hidden truth that God has now unveiled to those spiritually qualified to understand it. Paul used this term to describe various aspects of truth now disclosed through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:27). Paul often uses the word mystery to refer to the gospel, God's eternal plan for salvation (examples: Romans 11:25; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 2:2). This plan was mysterious in the sense that it was hidden throughout the Old Testament period, when God's people expected to receive salvation by being born into the Jewish nation, keeping the Law of Moses, and offering animal sacrifices.

No one in that era could have predicted that God was planning all along to send His Son as the ultimate sacrifice. Now, however, the fullness of the story has been made public by the death of Jesus on the cross and by Paul's miraculous call to preach the gospel to Gentiles.

Here Paul emphasizes in strong terms God's free will in formulating, revealing, and fulfilling this mystery. It is the mystery of "his will" and "good pleasure" which He "purposed in himself" (Eph. 1:9). He was under no obligation, and He took counsel with no one else. The truth Paul would presently describe originated solely in the mind of God. This revealed mystery is of grand, cosmic scope. It concerns "the dispensation of the fulness of times" (v. 10). "Dispensation" means "stewardship"; it deals with how God will dispense with the times of man when brought to completion on this earth.

This is not "the fulness of the time" (Gal. 4:4) when Christ came the first time. Rather, this phrase looks forward to the time when the ages have run their course and fulfilled God's purpose. Then everything in heaven and on earth will be unified in Christ, who will be Ruler over all (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25-28; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:19-20). Jesus' work on the cross provided the basis not only for individual salvation but also for the redemption of the entire universe.

***9. How do we know our inheritance in Christ is secure? (vs. 11-12)***

As God's sons, we have full rights to a spiritual inheritance (cf. v. 5). We were predestined to be mature sons of God, and this maturity includes an inheritance. He also again insists on the sovereignty of God's grace: God gives the inheritance "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

This amazing statement asserts that everything that occurs somehow contributes to the accomplishment of the plan He has determined. He is constantly working out an eternal plan, and even those things that appear to contradict it are made to support it (cf. Rom. 8:28). Our inheritance in Christ is thus secure, and its bestowal depends on God's grace, not our merits.

Paul clarified this as he stated the purpose of Christ's mediation —"that we should be to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:12). God has willed and worked His redemptive plan from beginning to end, and He deserves any credit that comes from our changed lives. Our merits intermingled with His grace would rob Him of His glory (Gal. 2:21; Eph. 2:8-9).

The phrase "who first trusted in Christ" (Eph. 1:12) reveals that "we" refers primarily to Jewish believers, for they were the first to trust Christ. "Ye also" in verse 13 then refers to Gentile Christians in Ephesus who heard the gospel later. Both have become the spiritual body of Christ, heirs of the same blessings (cf. 2:11-23).

### **THE GUARANTEE OF FAMILY BLESSINGS (Ephesians 1:13-14)**

#### ***10. What is the Spirit's role in guaranteeing our salvation? (vs. 13-14)***

Speaking now to his Gentile readers, Paul said that "the word of truth," which came from God, the source of all truth, had wrought a spiritual deliverance in their lives and made them children of God. When they believed this message, they were sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit who had been promised to all believers. The Spirit is here called a seal. In ancient times a cylinder or ring was used to impress a seal on one's property to confirm ownership. So, the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is the sign of God's possession of us. The Spirit was promised by Christ (cf. John 14:16-17; Acts 1:4). His

presence in our lives is a promise that God will fulfill the work He began in us.

An "earnest" (Eph. 1:13) is a down payment— not just a pledge of more to come but an actual part of the payment. We have not yet received most of our inheritance, but we know that God will eventually give it in full because He has given us the Spirit. The guarantee looks forward to the time when our redemption will be complete, when we will have new bodies and be separated from all sin (cf. Rom. 8:23). Every aspect of the Triune God's redemptive work is designed to bring glory to Him alone. And that is where it belongs.

### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

1. When correctly considered, God's blessings should always elicit our praise (Ephesians 1:3).
2. From the beginning of time, God planned and provided for our salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, for His own glory and our good (vs. 4-6).
3. The great cost of our salvation, our Savior's lifeblood, should cause us to highly value it (vs. 7-8).
4. Be assured that God's design and desire for all the earth will be ultimately fulfilled in Christ (vs. 9-10).
5. Christ is our hope; because He lives, we too shall live (vs. 11-12).
6. The believer's sealing by the Holy Spirit guarantees final redemption from sin (vs. 13-14).

### **CONCLUSION**

As Christians we know that we have experienced God's grace, and we also understand that He has brought us into His family. We also hope to live with Him in Heaven someday. But in the meantime, we face numerous temptations and go through periods of doubt. In such times the promise may seem very, very far away. For this reason, God gives us His Spirit both as proof that better things are coming and for the strength and confidence to finish the course. If we do, we will one day learn that our most profound spiritual experiences in this life were only a down payment on something much, much greater.

In our lesson, two sets of images that Paul has used throughout the passage (adoption and redemption) come together. The word earnest means "down payment": our experience of the Holy Spirit is God's deposit on the eternal life we will enjoy. At the same

time, we are God's purchased possession, paid for with the blood of His Son.

The timing of redemption may refer to our death or to the second coming of Christ; either way, Paul is thinking of the time when God's investment will pay off in eternal fellowship with His children. Meanwhile, we should prepare ourselves to be in His presence by living pure and holy lives that will bring praise to Him.

### **PRAYER**

Father God, help us remember two things: the price You paid for us and what You expect in return. We know that we can do nothing to save ourselves. Give us the strength to live as redeemed people. As You do this for us, please extend Your grace to others who do not know You, and help us to spread the message of Your love. In Jesus' name, amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Christians are God's children, heirs to all that He owns.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

Next week's lesson is "New Life in Christ" and shows how new life in Christ comes by faith because it is God's gift to us. Study Ephesians 2:1-22.

*Lesson Summarized by Renee Little  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

## NOTES:



## Sunday, May 10, 2023

### Lesson 10 - "New Life in Christ"

Lesson Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Background Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-22

Devotional Reading: Psalm 86:1-13

#### **Ephesians 2:1-10**

*1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

#### **LESSON AIMS**

Facts: to describe our life without Jesus and what Christ has done for us.

Principle: to show that new life comes only through the gift of our Lord Jesus on the cross.

Application: to show that all who turn unto Jesus and receive His gift of salvation can experience new life.

#### **INTRODUCTION - "I don't Need Your Charity"**

I was brought up in a lower-middle class, blue-collar neighborhood where most people worked in trades or heavy industry. My grandfather was a construction worker who had grown up on a farm and left school after the eighth grade; he retired as vice president of

a major company through sheer hard work and determination. My father worked two jobs, serving as a firefighter and running his own remodeling business on off days.

Many times, I saw families in my neighborhood suffer because the parents refused to accept aid from anyone. Through this upbringing, I learned to take pride in hard work and, especially, to avoid taking charity or welfare. This attitude in many ways reflects the American definition of success: taking care of yourself and never admitting that you need help.

This same spirit of self-sufficiency and independence can be found in American religion. Many American Christians feel very little responsibility for fellow believers. They may also often feel (at least subconsciously) that they must prove their worth to God by doing good deeds. The apostle Paul characterized his own religious life similarly in Philippians 3:4-6, noting that he once took great pride in his Jewish heritage, membership in the sect of the Pharisees, and strict obedience to the Old Testament. Indeed, he asserted that he was "blameless" in keeping the Law of Moses.

But Paul's sudden and dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19) started him down a path of thinking differently. That new thinking eventually was written down in a series of letters. A key issue in those letters is Paul's conclusion that we cannot earn our salvation.

All people, even the most righteous, are saved only by God's grace. That means that He does what we cannot do so that we may be acceptable to Him. In our passage for today, Paul makes this point by noting that God did not save us when we were good



people, but rather when we were sinners. Good works become possible only because of what He did for us. Recognizing this fact, we should respond to His mercy through loyal service.

### **Lesson Background**

Ephesus was one of the best known cities in the ancient world. Its fame came not only from its size and commercial importance, but also and particularly from Ephesian religious culture. One of the largest temple complexes of the day—in fact, one of the so-called “seven wonders of the ancient world”—was located there. It was dedicated to Artemis, the goddess of the wilderness and fertility. Ephesus was also a world center of occult practices and black arts (compare Acts 19:19).

When Paul first arrived in Ephesus in about AD 54, he spent three months teaching in local synagogues, but some became hardened, and believed not. Eventually, Paul left, and established a school in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8,9). The Ephesian church eventually was threatened by pressures from local trade unions. They feared a loss of profit, since Paul’s preaching against idolatry was so effective that it jeopardized sales of articles that bore the image of Artemis (Acts 19:23–27).

Thus, the various elements of Ephesian culture presented special challenges and opportunities to the apostle Paul when he visited the city on his third missionary journey. In view of their deeply pagan background, Paul wanted the Ephesian Christians to understand two points clearly: (1) God had completely forgiven the sins of their previous lifestyle, and (2) God expected them to produce good works as expressions of redemption. Our passage for today covers both topics.

### **OUR PREVIOUS CONDITION (Ephesians 2:1-3)**

#### ***1. What connection exists between Christ’s resurrection and the new spiritual life we have in Him? (v. 1)***

Paul paints a glorious picture of the spiritual blessings provided by the Triune God in Ephesians 1. Paul offered a prayer for his readers’ spiritual enlightenment (vs. 15- 23). He prayed that they might understand the hope that accompany

ed their calling, the richness of their inheritance, and the greatness of God’s power manifested to believers. The prime example of this power is the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ.

Paul opens this section of Ephesians by equating life without Christ with spiritual death. This means that our conversion is a kind of resurrection. Dead probably refers here both to our alienation from God and to the actual physical consequences of our sin. This concept is developed more fully in Romans 6, where Paul stresses that “the wages of sin is death” (6:23; see also Colossians 2:13). Yet the Christian has been quickened, meaning “made alive.” While Christians expect to live eternally in Heaven after death, in a very real sense we are already experiencing eternal life through our relationship with God in this world right now.

#### ***2. In what ways were we walking “according to the course of this world” (v. 2)?***

Paul has just described the Ephesians as having been dead in their sins. In verses 2, 3 he clarifies exactly what he means by offering a concise summary of their former, pagan lifestyle. The word walk can be used as a figure of speech for one’s lifestyle. With this figure Paul suggests that nonbelievers are following the lead of two forces that continually steer them away from God.

First, they follow the course of this world. While the biblical authors insist that God created the earth and everything in it, they also characterize the world as evil, materialistic, and hostile to Him (see John 1:10; Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:15). The world is evil because the entire human social system is focused on power, personal pleasure, and success at the expense of others. This is a self-centered, as opposed to God-centered, system.

Second, and more specifically, worldly people are driven along by the prince of the power of the air. This unusual title obviously refers to the devil, but scholars are divided on why Paul would refer to Satan as ruler of the air. The most likely explanation is that Paul is referring to the pagan religious systems that the Ephesians formerly accepted.



Today we generally think of God living above the earth while demons are trapped in Hell down below. But most ancient people believe that the earth is at the bottom of a cosmic ladder, with evil spirits and minor deities just above us and the more powerful gods on a higher plane yet. By calling Satan prince of the air, Paul thus acknowledges his influence, but also stresses that his authority is far below that of the true God, who dwells in the highest Heaven.

In any case, Paul is less concerned with Satan's domain than with his impact on people's lives. While many nonbelievers would not attribute their actions to any supernatural influence, Paul makes clear that their lives are heavily influenced by the devil. There are no innocent bystanders: one is either alive in faith or dead in sin, either a servant of God or a slave of the devil.

### ***3. In what ways did our flesh control us before coming to Christ (v. 3)?***

As in chapter 1, the word "we" probably refers to Jewish Christians such as Paul himself. It takes little effort to prove that pagans live lives fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. But Paul everywhere emphasizes that even "good" Jews are children of wrath before coming to Christ.

Of course, Jews believe in and worship the true God, not idols and demons. But this fact does not stop them from breaking God's law and pursuing self-gratification. The phrase lusts of our flesh, refers to things that we do because they feel good to our bodies, even though we know that God disapproves of them: getting drunk, engaging in sexual immorality, etc.

Paul also admits that he too was once enslaved to the desires of the mind, a likely reference to the more intellectual sins: covetousness, pride, etc. Those who do such things show that they are alienated from God and deserving of punishment. (Remember that the word conversation in the King James Version means "way of living.")

### ***4. Which sins cause you the most trouble: those of the flesh or those of the mind? How have you grown spiritually in being able to triumph over these trouble spots?***

Sin may be classified in various ways. Paul's two-sphere classification is foundational. Sins of the flesh are more obvious to ourselves and outsiders; these kinds of sins therefore are potentially easier for us to take action against. Sins of the mind do not always result in obvious visible behaviors. The mind is a place where others cannot see into (but God can). It is a place about which we often delude ourselves.

The two often interact, as sin in one area leads to sin in the other. For example, lustful thoughts (sin of the mind) can lead to adultery (sin of the flesh). Working the other way around, what a person gains through theft (sin of the flesh) can lead to even greater covetousness (sin of the mind). If we focus on triumphing over the sins of the mind first, then the sins of the flesh have the potential of disappearing entirely.

*To be continued...*

## NOTES:



## Sunday, May 10, 2023

### Lesson 11 - "New Life in Christ" (Continued)

Lesson Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Background Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-22

Devotional Reading: Psalm 86:1-13

#### **Ephesians 2:1-10**

*1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*

#### **Lesson Aims**

Facts: to describe our life without Jesus and what Christ has done for us.

Principle: to show that new life comes only through the gift of our Lord Jesus on the cross.

Application: to show that all who turn unto Jesus and receive His gift of salvation can experience new life.

#### **OUR PRESENT CONDITION (Ephesians 2:4-7)**

**5. What have God's mercy and love done for sinners? (vs. 4,5)**

The story that begins in verses 2, 3 could have ended with the fire and brimstone of eternal damnation.

Every person of every religious background is guilty of sins of the body and the mind. A righteous God is justified in repaying such rebelliousness with eternal death.

Genesis 7 ends with a worldwide flood that nearly wipes out the human race. But this time things work out differently: God decides to forgive us. Paul can offer only two explanations for this remarkable twist in the plot, and neither of them has anything to do with our efforts. First, God is rich in mercy, a phrase that stresses His willingness to forego the punishment we deserve. Second, God's mercy is driven by the simple fact that He loves us, even when we do not love Him.

Both the reason for and the expression of God's love are indicated in the phrase with Christ. Christ's death on the cross secures our salvation; His resurrection from the tomb also brings our spirits to life. Thus, for the first time people are able to come to God fully forgiven after years of seeking fulfillment in false religions and pleasures of the flesh. It almost goes without saying by this point in Paul's argument that our salvation is the result of God's grace, not our own merit.

**6. What present position do we have in God's sight? (v. 6)**

At the end of chapter 1, Paul speaks of Christ's ascension to Heaven and exaltation after His resurrection. There He sat down at God's right hand to rule the universe (Ephesians 1:20-23; see Philippians 2:8-11). Now Paul says that Christ not only redeemed us and brought us back to life, He also raised us together so that we may share in His glorious reign.

Notably, these words refer not only to our eternal reward in Heaven, but also to our status as believers now, at the present time. Not only has God forgiven us, He has also raised us up with and through His Son. See also Colossians 2:12 for other features associated with being “raised.”

We were seated with Christ in the heavenliness the moment we received Him by faith. This means we no longer have to be dominated by Satan and his demons. Since we are in Christ, we are far above Satan and his demons’ authority. We can claim this spiritual authority by faith.

### ***7. What will God’s grace do for us in the future? (v. 7)***

Since we are raised us up with and through Christ Jesus, “in the ages to come” we will enter the full experience of the position we enjoy now in God’s sight. The redemption and forgiveness we already have are according to the riches of His grace (cf. 1:7). But one day He will come and show us the exceeding riches of His grace, and His kindness towards us. Jesus will be displayed in infinite new ways.

Let us then pause to wonder at the glorious position God has given us in His Son. From being objects of His wrath, we have become objects of his mercy and love. From spiritual death, we have been raised to spiritual life. From satanic bondage in the world, we have passed to exaltation with Christ in the heavenlies. And from certain doom, we have been delivered to safety and receive the surpassing riches of God’s grace.

Further, God has done all this not only for our own benefit, but also and primarily so that He can demonstrate His graciousness to all creation. The fact of our salvation reveals His nature as a loving and merciful God.

## **THE MEANS OF TRANSFORMATION (EPHESIANS 2:8-10)**

### ***8. How is even our faith part of the Gift of God? (v. 8)***

Up to this point in the chapter, Paul has used fairly grandiose language to describe God’s love and our

salvation. The Ephesians have lived out the ultimate “rags to riches” story, going from ignorant slaves to exalted children of God. But, lest this lead to spiritual arrogance, Paul proceeds to stress two critical points.

First, our salvation is a product of God’s grace, not of anything we have done or could do. It is, in fact, categorically impossible for any person to be saved by works (see v. 9, next). Second, salvation, being a gift, is not something we can take for granted. The fact that God did all the work to bring us back to life doesn’t mean that we can kick back and relax. Quite the opposite! Verse 10 (below) stresses that we are saved for the purpose of works for Christ.

The phrase through faith indicates the premier means by which we are saved, the way that God’s grace comes to us. (The parallel passage Colossians 2:12 adds the important dimension of baptism.) Jesus’ death on the cross was a public act, a fact of history. But, sadly, not everyone receives forgiveness through His sacrifice. God’s grace becomes relevant to us as we believe in Him. This means believing not only that God exists, as Paul believed when he was still a Jewish sinner (v. 3), but also believing to the point that we have faith in Christ as our only way of salvation. Faith is not a meritorious act, but the indispensable channel through which man receives God’s free gift. The gift to which Paul refers is the forgiveness that we enjoy once faith allows us to receive God’s grace.

### ***9. Why can’t just being a good person, who does good things for people, get us into heaven? (v. 9)***

This verse completes and underscores the thought of verse 8. We do not receive grace because we have done good works (Romans 3:28; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5). If salvation could come by works, then people could boast about their salvation. Of course, God would not be impressed by any such boasting (1 Corinthians 1:29).

If we were to boast of any part of our salvation, it would cease to accomplish what God would intended—to bring praise to the glory of His grace (cf. Eph. 1:6, 12; 2:7). Heaven would be a place of ceaseless boasting. God worked out His salvation so that this would never happen.

Humility is important. We may be tempted to criticize the lifestyles of worldly friends and relatives, but let us not forget that we did nothing to merit God's favor ourselves. A proper understanding of who we were and what God has done should instead make us feel deep appreciation to Him and a deep sorrow for those who are lost.

### ***10. Why do good works then? (v. 10)***

Once we are saved, good works are not optional. Verse 10 tells us that "we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works." This further shows us that our works cannot be a part of our salvation. We are saved to do good works. Works cannot save us. Neither do we need to try to earn our salvation after we receive Christ. "Salvation is a gift from God. Service is our gift to God." Another way of saying it is: Works never produce salvation, but salvation always produces good works. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation. Jesus paid the price for mankind.

Now Paul extends that thought to stress that God also ordained long ago that we are to live in a way that reflects our status as His children.

### ***11. What feelings are appropriate and inappropriate for accompanying our good works?***

How have you grown spiritually in this regard? The Holy Spirit not only convicts us concerning sin, but also concerning righteousness (John 16:8). Conviction is an emotional response (compare Acts 2:37), thus we should not expect our good works to be accompanied by no feelings whatsoever. The good deeds of the first-century believers were accompanied by "gladness" (Acts 2:44–46) and "joy" (2 Corinthians 8:2).

Then as now, there was/is to be no feeling of "now this person owes me one." Also, failing to do what we know we ought to do should bring us feelings of guilt (compare James 4:17).

### **CONCLUSION**

Christians may be plagued with doubts about their salvation. "Trying hard, never sure" is the way such self-doubt has been described. When we reflect on our past lives and our ongoing sinfulness, we don't seem to be making the grade. Indeed, if God evaluated our performance in the same way that our employers do, we might have been cut a long time ago.

This approach to faith, which reflects the spirit and ethic of a Western marketplace, typically generates two responses, which often work together in something of a vicious cycle. First, we may try to do good deeds to prove that we are worthy of God's love and mercy; second, when we inevitably fail to be perfect, we feel guilty and ashamed. These feelings of guilt will lead us either to try even harder or to give up. This cycle of effort/failure/guilt leads to depression and burnout. It never leads to genuine biblical faith.

The apostle Paul had lived in a cycle something like this before becoming a Christian. Perhaps for this reason he stressed God's grace again and again. The work necessary for us to become members in God's family has been done on the cross; it has nothing to do with anything we have done or could do. Of course, God expects us to do what is right, but we do this as an expression of our salvation, not as merit points toward it.

So, whenever we begin to feel guilty, insecure, or burned out, we need to pause and ask why. Are we focusing on our own (in)abilities? If so, the cure is to recall that God has called us to Him through His Son, not through our own efforts. The cross puts an end to self-doubt.

### **PRAYER**

Father, we understand that the Bible says You love us. Help us to know this love in our hearts. Please take away our feelings of guilt so that we can focus entirely on Your infinite grace. Give us a real desire to serve You, not just because we have to but because we know that You have made us for this reason. Give us also compassion toward those who do not know You and opportunities to help them learn of the wonderful grace we have received. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Meditate on God's grace.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

In our lesson next week, we will see how we can partake of the promises of God through His revelation of Jesus Christ to us. Study Ephesians 3:1–13.

*Have a Blessed Mother's Day!*

*Lesson Summarized by Montario Fletcher  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

**NOTES:**



## Sunday, May 21, 2023

### Lesson 12 - "New Revelation in Christ"

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 40:1–11

Background Scripture: Ephesians 3:1–13

Lesson Text: Ephesians 3:1–13

#### Ephesians 3:1–13

*1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: 3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words; 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ,) 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel. 7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. 8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: 10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: 12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. 13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

#### LESSON AIMS

**Facts:** to learn how God has revealed His plan through His Holy Spirit and how Paul was privileged to share in that plan.

**Principle:** to show that God's plan includes everyone in the world.

**Application:** to show that new revelation in Christ comes to all His children, for we are all partakers of the same promise.

#### INTRODUCTION

When you hear the word mystery, what comes to mind? Sherlock Holmes? Masterpiece Theater? When biblical writers speak of mystery, they do not refer to a fictional story. Rather, they use the word mystery much the same way we would use the word secret. Thus, when they speak of revealing a mystery, they intend to reveal a secret to you.

In New Testament times, the Greeks were known for their mystery religions. These were pagan cults that claimed to have secret knowledge of the spirit world. The initiation rites were bizarre. Like kids in a tree house saying, "You can't come in unless you tell us the secret password," members of the cult were those who had the secret knowledge that (supposedly) gained a person the best kind of afterlife. In our passage today, Paul uses the terminology of those cults to highlight God's mystery—the revealed secret—that Paul was called to preach. But unlike those mystery religions, God's revealed secret is available to all, not just to a select few. Also, unlike those mystery religions, mere possession of certain knowledge isn't enough; it has to be put into practice.

#### LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 60      Place: from Rome

We take for granted the fact that a person can become a Christian without converting to Judaism. But that fact wasn't always so clear. In the very earliest days of the church, most Christians were Jews first. The common thought in those earliest days was that Christianity was a variation of Judaism or was a Jewish sect (Acts 24:5, 14).



After all, didn't Jesus Christ come to be the Jewish Messiah, to save God's people from their sins? Jesus made it clear that His message was to go "to the ends of the earth," but many assumed that those wanting to become Christians would have to become Jews first, toeing the line with regard to the Law of Moses. To think of becoming a Christian without becoming a Jew was like someone wanting to become a Kentuckian without becoming an American citizen.

In a vision to Peter in Acts 10, God revealed that Gentiles were not to be considered "unclean." The gospel was open to the Gentiles without their having to convert to Judaism. But many in the early church objected to this radical idea. The issue was so hotly debated that the Jerusalem church held a special council just to resolve this issue (Acts 15; compare Galatians 2).

After a long discussion, the apostles confirmed that a Gentile did not have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. The intervention of the Holy Spirit and the courage of the apostles to be obedient to God's call ensured that Christianity would not be a mere sect of Judaism.

By the time that Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, around A.D. 63, the famous Jerusalem Council was more than a decade in the past. The thinking of the church had matured on the issue discussed there. Even so, there was more yet to be said!

## **THE RECEPTION OF THE REVELATION- Ephesians 3:1-3**

### ***1. In what sense was Paul the prisoner of Christ for the Gentiles? (v. 1)***

In Ephesians 3:1, Paul called himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He found himself imprisoned at Rome for the sake of Christ, but it was also for the sake of the Gentiles. Paul had a special apostolic calling to the Gentiles, and it was this that engendered the Jewish hostility that led to his imprisonment. After the Jewish people attacked Paul in Jerusalem, his case came before Roman tribunals, where he eventually appealed to the emperor. This is why he was at Rome.

Paul is in prison because of his commitment to take Christ to the Gentiles. The details of this imprisonment can be found beginning in Acts 21:27 through the end of that book. Acts 22:21, 22 especially reveals the anger of Paul's opponents regarding his mission to the Gentiles. Yet Paul calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Does Paul believe that his prison warden is Jesus? In essence, yes! (See also Ephesians 4:1.)

We might be more likely to see Paul's prison warden as the devil, not Jesus. But Paul consistently submitted to the situations in his life as if God had put him there. Paul saw that even the "evil" of imprisonment could be used by God for good.

### ***2. What special stewardship had God entrusted to Paul? (v. 2)***

*Dispensation* is a word we don't use much in everyday speech. We may think of something being dispensed, administered, or managed. Paul is saying, "You know about this particular assignment that God, by His grace, gave me to manage." This thought can cause us to reflect on the things God has entrusted to our own stewardship. The word things may bring to mind material objects such as food, clothing, and money. But have you ever thought that you have information that God wants you to manage?

Mature Christians understand God's grace, God's truth, and God's promises in ways that others don't understand. God has given you that information not just for your own benefit but for the benefit of others: perhaps your children, your coworker, or your neighbor. We have information that has been revealed to us through God's Word, and God expects us to be good stewards of what we know.

For Paul, the dispensation of the grace of God is clear and dramatic. There is no question regarding what he is a steward of: it is that God's salvation is available to Gentile as well as Jew.

### ***3. What mystery was Paul called on to reveal? (v. 3)***

The apostle now expanded on the stewardship entrusted to him. It involved God's revelation of a mystery to him. As previously noted, "mystery" refers to some truth that previously had been hidden

in God's mind but now had been opened to the understanding of Spirit-taught believers.

Paul had briefly written to these readers before about this mystery. He may have alluded to it in a previous letter, but more probably he was referring to passing statements he had made in this letter. For example, in Ephesians 1:9-10, he spoke of God's plan to draw all things together under the headship of Christ. And in 2:11-22 he revealed more specifically His plan to make Jews and Gentiles one in Christ.

By reading these statements, Paul said, his readers could perceive his understanding in the mystery regarding Christ. Christ is the central feature of all the previously hidden revelation that now is disclosed. Aspects of this revelation may have differing emphases, but the Person and work of Christ unify all of them. Paul's insight, of course, was not his own. It did not come to Paul by research or by rationalization, but by revelation (Gal. 1:11-12).

### **THE NATURE OF THE REVELATION-Eph. 3:4-6**

#### ***4. To whom did God make His revelation? (vs. 4-5)***

For the Ephesians to understand this “mystery of Christ” is Paul’s goal. Part of this understanding includes the realization that the mystery has not been revealed only to Paul, but it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. We may review Acts 10:9–20, where God first reveals the secret of the inclusion of the Gentiles to Peter.

Up until that time, God’s revelation was frequent and partial, now it is full and final. Then there were faint gleams of light in types and symbols, now there is a clear and complete revelation, “by the Spirit.” The

Holy Spirit is the agent of inspiration and illumination (John 14:26; 16:12-15).

#### ***5. How does Paul describe the Gentiles' status in the church? (v. 6)***

The revealed mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles can be equal with Jews. The two can be united together to make up the church. Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the same promise—without having to become Jews first! Everything available to Jews in Christ is available to Gentiles too. The Gentiles are not second-class citizens of the church. Jews and Gentiles should be treating one another as brothers and sisters in Christ (see Galatians 3:26–29).

To recognize that we are all one in Christ is vital. This does not mean that we promote tolerance to the point of accepting sinful behavior. Being one in Christ means, rather, that distinctions with regard to race, culture, and economic status are irrelevant. The church should be leading the charge in genuine racial reconciliation in the way she models the interactions of her members. Christians are all one in Christ. Are you seeking to love members of the body of Christ no matter what their racial background? Consider the language that you use in describing those of another race: Do you stereotype or demean others by your labels? Look at a list of your friends: Does it include people from other races and socioeconomic backgrounds?

*To be continued...*

*Lesson Summarized by Renee Little  
Jesus Is All Ministries*

## NOTES:



## Sunday, May 28, 2023

### Lesson 13 - "New Revelation in Christ" (*Continued*)

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 40:1–11

Background Scripture: Ephesians 3:1–13

Lesson Text: Ephesians 3:1–13

#### **Ephesians 3:1–13**

*1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:*

*3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words; 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ,) 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel. 7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.*

*8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: 10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,*

*11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: 12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. 13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

#### **LESSON AIMS**

**Facts:** to learn how God has revealed His plan through His Holy Spirit and how Paul was privileged to share in that plan.

**Principle:** to show that God's plan includes everyone in the world.

**Application:** to show that new revelation in Christ comes to all His children, for we are all partakers of the same promise.

#### **THE PREACHING OF THE REVELATION-Eph. 3:7-9**

**6. How did Paul compare himself with other saints? Why? (vs. 7-8)**

Of this revealed mystery Paul was made a minister, chosen to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 22:21; Gal. 2:7-9). He recognized that he did not deserve this ministry and did not have an innate ability to carry it out. He had received it "according to the gift of the grace of God" (Eph. 3:7).

It took divine grace to transform Paul from a blasphemer into a saint, from a Pharisee into an apostle, and from a persecutor of Christians into a preacher of Christ. Then, it took divine power and authority to enable Paul to function as a minister of God.

Paul's wonder that he should be chosen for this ministry is evident in the words "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints" (v. 8). Paul carried throughout life a profound sense of unworthiness. He saw himself as the "least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9) and the chief of all sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) because he had persecuted the church before his

conversion. This is why he had such a deep appreciation for God's grace.

The "unsearchable riches of Christ" conveys the message of wealth beyond description which God provides for all men in the person and work of Christ. It is a vast and measureless resource, this love and grace of God.

***7. In what ways do you consider yourself to be an unlikely servant of the gospel? How does this speak of God's grace toward you?***

Paul certainly understood the unusual nature of his ministry of the gospel! The irony of a former murderer of Christians being engaged in making more followers of Christ was not lost on him. When we considered our own shortcomings and wrongdoings, we also are unlikely servants, and it is only through the grace of God that we are privileged to share in God's plans. God has often used unlikely people to bring about His purposes. He used a man with halting speech to lead a nation (Moses; Exodus 4:10). He used the eighth-born son of a shepherd to fell a giant and rule a kingdom (David; 1 Samuel 16:8–12). He used unschooled men to articulate gospel truth (Peter and John; Acts 4:13). And today, He uses each of us! Paul correctly understood that "it wasn't about him." Rather, it was about God's power to accomplish His will through whomever He chose – then and now.

***8. What was the nature of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles? (v. 9)***

This is Paul's purpose in preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. He would cause all men to see by turning the light on. Paul was aiming at spiritual enlightenment and spiritual apprehension. "Fellowship of the mystery" meant the stewardship of worldwide proclamation of Christ and His gospel. It was fitting that this plan would be

unfolded at just the right time, for it came from the One "who created all things." As the material world came from God, so did His redemptive plan.

**THE PURPOSE FOR THE  
REVELATION-Eph. 3:10-13**

***9. How does God display His wisdom to angelic powers? (vs. 10-11)***

The phrase principalities and powers in heavenly places refers to the angelic hierarchy. Evidence for the existence of a hierarchy among angels is seen in the term archangel in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Jude 9. The fact that angels now have information that they did not have before indicates that angels are not all-knowing (omniscient).

This mystery—that the Gentiles are to have equal access to the eternal God—has been kept hidden even from the angels. When the secret was revealed, the angels learned something about God's manifold wisdom. The angels already knew of God's power and beauty: they had seen God create the universe (Job 38:4–7). They knew of God's intelligence and character: they have watched Him create people and deal with humans for thousands of years. But they had not understood this part of the extent of His wisdom until His plan of grace and redemption unfolded (see Romans 11:33). But how will the angels see this wisdom? It is through the church.

Here is a reminder that our lives (and the corporate life of the church) are on display not only to the surrounding world but also to the angels. As they observe, do they always see the multifaceted wisdom of God being worked out? Our great mission in this life is to know Christ and to make Him known. The church is God's instrument to make known the grace of God "in Christ Jesus our Lord."

***10. On what basis do we have boldness and access to God? (v. 12)***

"We have boldness" implies freedom of speech. We can approach God in Jesus' righteousness and authority. In Him we also have "access." This word indicates that all barriers to God have been removed and we are introduced into His presence by Christ. Therefore, we approach "with confidence." This word speaks of our frame of mind as we enter God's presence. We come not in fear but in assurance that He will accept us.

All of this is ours through faith in Christ. Although it might seem possible that this verse is referring to Christ's faith, it is actually a reference to the One in whom our faith is placed. Only by trusting Him and the redemption He has purchased for us can we enter the presence of God.

***11. How did Paul tell his readers to respond to his imprisonment? (v. 13)***

Paul's readers may have been tempted to lose heart because of his imprisonment. If the Ephesians were discouraged about Paul's situation, he told them not to be. His trials and tribulations were for their glory. What a great perspective on suffering! Paul was not bitter or angry about all the pain he endured. The fact that he was willing to undergo his persecutions showed the Ephesians how much he believed what he preached.

We humans will try to avoid even brief periods of minor irritation. Suffering often surprises us. We take pills to try to wipe out pain as quickly as possible. When we can't see any point to our pain, we get angry. Yet Paul embraced his suffering as glorious because he trusted God to make good out of it—not necessarily for Paul, but for others (Philippians 1:12).

If we adopt the values of a self-absorbed culture, we may ignore the benefits to others or glory to God that our suffering can bring. When you understand what God is calling you to do and are submissive to it, you can withstand great suffering. You can see the glory in it even when it doesn't seem to benefit you personally.

God called Paul to suffer greatly (Acts 9:16). God may not call us to suffer in just the same way Paul did, but we do have our crosses to bear (Mark 8:34). Suffering for Christ will come to each of us in some way. Paul's suffering was for the glory of his beloved Ephesians. When that happens, God ultimately is the one glorified. When we understand our calling, we can withstand great suffering and see the glory in it—not for ourselves, but for those we try to reach and ultimately for God Himself.

**PRACTICAL POINTS**

1. Biblical truth was revealed by God to His chosen messengers in His own time and on His own terms (Eph. 3:1-2; cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21).
2. When we are studying Scripture, we need to know that God's truth was revealed over time, not all at once (Eph. 3:3-6).
3. Any true and effective service for God must be empowered by God and must be done with humility (vs. 7-8).
4. God's workings are not always known at the moment (v. 9).
5. God will reveal His eternal plan and purposes in His time and in His way (vs. 10-11).
6. Suffering for Christ is nothing to be ashamed of; rather, it is something to glory in (Eph. 3:12-13; cf. 1 Pet. 3:14).

**CONCLUSION**

This week we have seen the wonder of God's plan for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. God has now made plain what was once a



mystery when He opened the doors of heaven through the cross for all people and gave to us that task of telling the world.

Paul was willing to go to great lengths—even endure great suffering—so that as many people as possible could be told the secret: God’s grace is available to everyone. It doesn’t matter what country you were born in, what race you are, how poor you are, whether you are tall or short, fat or skinny, male or female. The God of the universe sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for your sins, and He wants to have a relationship with you. Are you willing to do what may be awkward or uncomfortable, to suffer a little or a lot, in order to communicate to those who may be different from you that Jesus loves them?

#### **PRAYER**

Father, we confess that at times we have been proud. Sometimes we have considered our fellow human beings who are created in Your image as less valuable because of various reasons. Please forgive us and remind us to

love others as You have loved us. We pray for the opportunity and courage to express Your love to others and to tell them of the free gift of Your grace that is available to all people who will put their faith in Your Son Jesus Christ. In His name (Jesus) we pray. Amen.

#### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Make sure God’s revealed secret remains revealed.

#### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK’S LESSON**

Next week’s lesson is “New Life in the Home.” We will see how the new life in Christ applies to our domestic situations. Study Ephesians 5:21 - 6:4.

*Lesson Summarized by Renee Little  
Jesus Is All Ministries*



## NOTES:

## NOTES:

## NOTES:



**Jesus Is All Ministries**

Lesson summaries by:

Montario Fletcher

Deloris H. Washington

Willie Ferrell

Renee Little

Montario Fletcher

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