

Sermon Transcript 1/14 What is the Destination? Joel Ebert

We're going to be in Ephesians chapter 4 today. Ephesians 4. So you know you're a true Wisconsinite if you walk outside today and you think to yourself, 'Oh, what a nice breeze.' If you don't think that, I don't know... I know you're seeing a lot of me today. When I looked at the service schedule and I saw that I was doing announcements and Scripture Memory and the sermon, I just figured it was a form of hazing. I'll get them back.

Okay, so Ephesians chapter 4. I want to talk today about a question I've been thinking about a lot in the past years, I've been praying through a lot in the past years, and the question is: What is the destination of the Christian life? What is the goal? If we were all going to reach the ultimate destination, where would that be? Where are we going? Where, as a pastor, should I take people? It's something that I've really wrestled with and prayed through, and the Scriptures have an answer for us to that question. And so, I'm going to read, I'm going to focus on verse 13 today, but I'm going to read starting from verse 1. Go ahead and stand with me as we read God's Word.

Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, 'When he ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that he also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is himself also he who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.

And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Dear Father, thank you for your Word. We thank you that it is powerful and effective in our lives. We thank you that it is sufficient for us for every work that we are to do as Christians. We thank you that you have called us as believers, you have chosen us, you have justified us, and you intend to glorify us and carry your salvation all the way through. God, help us to glean from your Word today and help it to give us life from the inside out. In Jesus' name, amen.

Go ahead and take a seat. So, I'm a part-time teacher. I teach students part-time at a school called Doic Christian Academy. And I would ask the students often, 'Why are you here? Why are you in school?' Because this is a question that students very often ask: 'Why am I learning this? What's the benefit? When am I ever going to use this?' And so, I ask them that question often just so that they can know what the answer is.

At first, they gave me answers like, 'To get a good job. We're in school so that I can graduate, go to a good school, get a good job, make money.' I mean, why wouldn't they give an answer like that? Those are the basic answers of people, and that's why they think that they're in school.

But now, after I've talked to them about it and I've trained them on this question of 'Why are you in school,' they always give the same response. And the answer is, 'To become all God made us for.' And that goal is bigger and more valuable than some of the futile efforts that we think of when we think about, 'Okay, why am I going to school? Why am I here in life?'

We do math so that we can think like God thinks. We do science so we can enjoy Him more fully and cause all things to conform to His will. So, I've trained them to think in terms of worship. That they're in school to worship God and to become more fully conformed to Him.

So just like I'm clear with my goal for my students, I want to be open to you as well for my goals for you all as a church. Because I want my goals to be the same as Christ's goals for us as a church. And certainly, other pastors have other less biblical, less worthwhile goals pursued than what Jesus really wants for His church.

And a lot of it has to do with popularity, becoming big, getting a beautiful building, making a name for ourselves, gaining a huge crowd. And sometimes it's put under the guise of wanting to make more disciples. And I remember when I was interviewing for one of the jobs for a church, throughout the interview it became clear that they didn't want me to preach anything that would be controversial, anything that would cause people to be uncomfortable and maybe not want to come back to the church.

And so, I tried to make clear to them in the interview that that's not going to get you what you want. It's actually going to take you in the opposite direction. If you want to keep people here and make more disciples, dumbing down the message is going to take you in the opposite direction that you want. It's not going to give you the results even that you're actually stating that you want.

So, we need to dig into what Jesus actually wants for us as a church, and it's very clearly stated here in Ephesians 4:13. But Paul mentions his goals elsewhere in the book of Ephesians. He talks a lot about the desires that he has for the people that he's writing to.

If you look back with me in Chapter 1, verse 18, he says, 'I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, in accordance with the working of the strength of His might.'

Paul wants them to understand their salvation so that their minds are transformed, and as a result, their lives are transformed to the glory of God. He mentions something very, very similar in Chapter 3, starting from verse 14. He says, 'For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on Earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.'

So, we see they're very, very similar. He wants them to be transformed from the inside. He wants their entire beings to be conformed to who God is. And it isn't only Paul; we can look elsewhere in Scripture to see that goal. For example, 2 Peter, Chapter 1, verse 4, says, 'For by these things He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.' He goes on to say in verse 8, 'If these qualities are yours and increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

So, there we see again the desire. The goal is for us to be conformed to who God is from the inside. I think Ephesians Chapter 4 is probably the clearest statement of the goal of Jesus for His church in all of

Scripture. He starts in verse 1 by saying that we are to walk worthy of the calling, walk worthy of our salvation. He goes on to describe our unity and urges us to be unified. He talks about the gifting that God has given us and what's the purpose of all that, starting in verse 12, 'For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man.'

So, the goal of Jesus for His church is full and total conformity to who Christ is, to His fullness. But this is not just true as individuals; it's not just an individual goal. It's also a corporate goal for the church. He wants us as individuals to be conformed to Christ, but He also wants us as a body to exhibit that unity and that maturity.

Notice here, there's an aspect of this that has to do with God. God is doing the work to perform this in us, and you can see this in Chapter 4, verse 23. He says, 'That you may be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.'

So, there's an aspect to this that God is doing the work. He is the one conforming us to the image of Christ. He is doing the transforming. On the other hand, there's an aspect of this that has to do with things that we do. Paul exhorts them to be renewed in the spirit of their mind and to put on the new self.

So, this conformity to who Christ is, this conformity to the character and nature of God, to share in His holiness, to share in His divine nature, is a work of God and a work of man, as we participate with Him in our sanctification.

I want to remind you that this really is the purpose of human existence. The purpose of human life is to worship our Creator. When people think of worship, they commonly understand it in a religious sense, going into a church building and performing spiritual acts. But worship is not limited to that. Everything we do is supposed to be an act of worship. God has given us life and breath, every good thing we have, and every good opportunity we have, all originating from God. We are to take all of that and give it back to Him in worship.

We are to reflect His truth in the way we think, His beauty in what we say and do, magnify His goodness in the things we make and create, and reflect His holiness in how we live. We are to enjoy Him in all things. Worship applies to everything, from our sexuality to how we entertain ourselves. It is all an enjoyment and a reflection of God's truth, goodness, beauty, holiness, and love. It all comes down to the attributes of God and us conforming ourselves to His attributes. That's what worship is.

Romans 1 says that we are to know Him, honor Him, and give Him thanks as the Creator. That's why God made the church. The church exists for the expressed purpose of worship. The church is exclusively made up of people who are true worshippers because only those who have been born again and given spiritual life are part of the church. All other human beings have been estranged from God because of their sinfulness, cut off from His life and goodness, and are under His judgment. Colossians 1:13 says, 'He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.'

Our failure to worship, our failure to worship God, is the main problem of human existence. Going back to Romans 1:21, it says, 'For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.'

So, this is the ultimate goal of the Christian life. The ultimate goal is the total and full offering of ourselves to God in worship and being totally and fully conformed to Him. This is the calling we have in Christ, and it is absolutely inspiring to think about the destination we have as Christians. This is what Jesus wants for us as a church and as individuals. This is Jesus's goal for us.

So, how is this goal described? It's described in verse 13 in terms of unity, maturity, and the fullness of Christ. Let's start with unity. If you look back at verse 13, it says, 'until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.' Unity is crucial to what it means to worship Him and to reach the destination of life in Christ.

Why is unity important? Let's turn to John 17. This is in the high priestly prayer of Jesus for His disciples. I'll start from verse 22. Jesus is praying to the Father, and He says, 'The glory which You have given Me, I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.'

Unity is vitally important to the Father and the Son in our salvation because God is one, and we are to be one as He is one. In Ephesians chapter 4, at the beginning of the chapter that I read to you, it says that we are supposed to have a diligence to preserve the unity of the bond of the Spirit and the bond of peace. Why? Because in verse 4, it says, 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.'

So, the unity we have is a reflection of who God is. It's a reflection of the God who has called us to salvation. The nature of our unity is not one of unison, where we all sing the same melody with the exact same notes. That's not the unity God has in mind for the church. It's more like harmony in a concert, a symphony. That's the nature of unity we have in Jesus.

And again, when Jesus makes us into His image, we will not be clones of Jesus. When we see Him and when we become like Him, we will not become identical, as in a clone of Christ. We're going to retain our individuality. We actually become more ourselves as we draw near to the One who made us. We worship God each of us worships God in a unique way. Each of us shows forth a particular angle of the glory of God that no one else can. And you see this in Ephesians chapter 4 as well when He talks about the unity with individual gifting, that yes, we have a unity in Christ, but we also have individual gifts. And you see that in verses 9-12.

So, how do we achieve that kind of unity? The kind of unity where we have individuality or individual gifts, and at the same time, we're achieving harmony and symphony with each other to the glory of God? How do you get a bunch of different people together and get them to sing in concert, get them to live in harmony? The church from the very beginning was meant to be composed of all sorts of different people from all sorts of different classes, all sorts of different walks of life, ethnicities, languages. That's the way it was designed from the very beginning.

How do you achieve unity with that kind of diversity? Well, what you don't do is achieve uniformity by some kind of force. Unity is not uniformity where we're all wearing the same clothes, thinking the exact same thoughts. Unity is a very valuable thing, and the world knows that. And so, when religious cults attract people, one of the attractions that they have is the unity that they have amongst themselves. And you'll hear that from various different cults, and they'll point to their gathering and they'll say, 'Look how unified we are, look how alike we all are.' That is uniformity, and they try to implement it by force. And it's obvious that it's artificial, and you can tell that there's just something off about this. This is not true unity; this is uniformity.

But unity is not achieved by that kind of artificial force. It's achieved as we worship. So, as we bring ourselves under God and as we offer our minds and hearts to Him, what happens? Our minds, our desires, our priorities are transformed into His desires and priorities. This is how we become able to lay down our own personal interests for those of others. We're seeing what's truly important to God, and we're conforming ourselves to that. We're seeing what's truly important to our King. Worship is how unity is achieved, not by force.

And we see this as an example. I think marriage is a really good example of this because a lot of the problems that we experience in marriage are not because of this particular issue because he does this or she does that. And the solution is not necessarily, 'You're going to practice this one thing, and this is what's going to fix your marriage.' Unity in marriage and oneness in marriage comes from worship. Because as we conform ourselves to who He is, and our minds and desires are transformed, as we behold His love and His grace, we can start to walk in that as well. And the individual particular problems that we face in marriage fade away when we're both worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

So, unity is all about worship. It's being conformed to the image of Christ. There's an individual component to this because you can't have unity unless each of us individually is conforming our hearts and minds to Christ. This is what makes unity possible. So, there's an individual component of unity, but there's also a corporate component of unity because you can't have unity unless you have several people to have unity with. When God gave us the command to be unified, this is a corporate command that we have to obey. And I see this in Grace Community Church. It's one of these areas where I delight in, and it's one of the things that drew my wife and me here in the first place: the fellowship around the Word of God, the fellowship around doing the will of God.

And this is what I would encourage you all to excel still more in this area and fellowship around the Word of God. I think we can excel in that as a church if we continue to practice hospitality amongst ourselves and open up our houses to each other, really get into each other's lives and bring the Word of God into each other's lives, bring our hardships and our questions and invite each other to tell us where it hurts. I think friendship is an area we can excel still more in this area of unity.

Being friends, sharing in the friendship with each other, not necessarily over a Bible study, but over normal things and just sharing normal friendship with each other. Small groups, I think, are an important part of this. And this is not a sermon plug for small groups, but I would encourage you, even if you're the type of person who doesn't normally go or isn't comfortable going to someone else's house. Small groups are a way that we are going to be able to foster that kind of unity, that kind of fellowship around the Word of God.

I think also action around the will of God in this church, we can just keep going and accelerate in that area, in missions. And I want to reiterate that because everyone is different, we should be doing that according to our own gifting. You praying through and discovering your area of gifting, your areas of passion, and taking action, doing the will of God in that sense, is a way that we grow together. Because as we go out and do the will of God together, as we go out and see God work and actually make accomplishments in His name, the Holy Spirit is going to do a work in us and knit us together in Christ. It's part of the way that the Holy Spirit works as we walk in Him and walk out the Word of God together.

So, unity is part of the ultimate goal of the church. It's part of the ultimate goal of your life as a Christian. It involves your total worship and being totally conformed to Christ. Let's look back at verse 13, the next part of the goal of the Christian life is maturity. And he says, 'Until we all attain to the unity of the faith,' and then he says, 'To a mature man.' So, why maturity? Well, Paul has in mind a flourishing of the church that is self-sustained. He wants them to be thriving of their own accord. He wants their spiritual prosperity, and he wants that prosperity to be secured.

A lot in Paul's letters, you can see and feel his concern for the people that he's writing to. And he doesn't want them to fall away. He's aware of all the different threats to their faith, and his desire is that they grow up into maturity and gain stability. So, God often uses plant imagery to describe His people. We're like plants in many ways, and I think the symbolism really works. We grow, we mature, we bear fruit. I think the image of a tree is really appropriate here when it comes to our maturity.

When there is a young plant, it is vulnerable. When a tree first comes up, it's small, vulnerable. I remember in our garden, we had this tree that I was really happy with. We got a Dawn Redwood, and it was a beautiful little sapling, and I was just so excited. We have a Dawn Redwood, even the name is

really attractive and beautiful. Well, the rabbits ate it. We planted some bushes alongside our house, the rabbits ate that. They started eating the bigger trees that we planted. Renae actually did most of the planting, and I think if I handed her a pellet gun, there would be blood, and you would see the light of war in her eyes.

So, young plants are vulnerable. But as plants grow, they're able to withstand more dangers. They gain stability as the roots go down and as the tree gets wider. You can see that in verse 14, he says, 'As a result, we're no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming.' But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, so that discernment, that wisdom brings us stability in Christ.

As we grow in Him, as we learn the difference between truth and error, as we learn where the Word of God comes to bear upon the falsehoods that we hear, as we learn to do battle spiritually like Jesus did with Satan, we take on that spiritual maturity with that experience. And of course, the Bible talks about those who, by reason of use, have their senses trained to discern between good and evil. It's part of our maturity.

So, there's a transfer from vulnerability to strength. And with maturity also comes beauty and fruitfulness. As you can hear in verse 12, the building up of the body of Christ, the building up of itself, you see that several times in Ephesians 4. More fullness, more usefulness, more character, more beauty. Many of Jesus's parables talk about plants growing up and bearing fruit. This is Jesus's desire for us, to grow up, to become mature in Him, to bear fruit.

Leaving the plant metaphor, it's a beautiful thing to watch children grow up and reach maturity. You can see their little personalities blossom, their interests deepen, to see them gain a sense of what is truly important, to see them gain a sense of responsibility. And when they're mature, they're able to do more as they grow in skill. So, that's what our maturity in Christ is. It's a growth into strength, stability, character, beauty, and fruitfulness. And this is Jesus's goal for us as the church and as individuals.

Again, the question is, how do we accomplish this? It's the same way as before. We offer ourselves to God in worship. And as we offer ourselves fully to God, our entire being, our entire heart, soul, mind, and strength, we find in Him everything we need to become all we were created for. He created us, and when we align ourselves to who He is and bring ourselves under Him, we find all the nourishment that we need to become fully human and become all we were meant to be. Psalm 1 says, 'But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law, he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.'

So, we draw our maturity from Him. As we align ourselves with Him and as we are conformed to His image, this is also individual and corporate. And you can see that in verse 16, he says, 'From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies.' And I want to back up and also mention in verse 13, he says, 'A mature man,' not 'mature men.' So, we're talking about one entity, the church, a mature man. Every joint in verse 16, every part, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Individually, each one of us is different. We have to grow and utilize our individual strengths and gifts. This comes best not from a personality assessment, not from the Enneagram, but from walking with God. Because as we draw near to Him in prayer, our individual desires for how to serve Him become apparent. And as we go out and obey Him, our desires and gifts are discovered and honed. So, there's an individual component to maturity. There's also a corporate component because as we come together, we strengthen each other. We cover for each other in the areas where we're lacking.

And for Grace Community Church, I think this is another one of those areas where I would tell you that I think we excel. In this, and I think we should just excel still more. We should set our sights higher and just

keep going more and more in this area. And I would say to all of you, don't rely on programs to do the work of God. Don't be afraid to start ministries. Go ahead and do it. Service to Christ should be organic.

And I want to say that this is not about the organization, right? I'm not saying come serve Grace Community Church. There's work for you to do here in this organization. We'll find a place for you. Rather, what I'm saying is we're coming together as the church to serve Christ. And so, if you have a desire or an interest, go do it and invite others into it. And we'll help disciple you in what you're doing.

So, we need to function truly as a body, not just a handful of people, not just a collection of individuals, but truly as a body. And this is an invitation. You guys have heard of the 80/20 rule, where 20% of the people do 80% of the work in pretty much every place you go and any corporate effort. But in Grace Community Church, we need to aim for 100% involvement in the work of Christ, where everybody is getting in giving their gifts and worshipping God fully in their own particular way.

And as an organization or as a corporate body, not for the organization, but for God, we are to be a kingdom offering ourselves as the whole kingdom to God in worship. And as we do that, we're going to grow and blossom into full, beautiful, strong maturity in Christ.

We look back at verse 13, the last part of this is fullness, in the fullness of Christ. He says, 'until we all attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' Why does it mention that? Because Christ is the basis. He's the foundation. He's the source. In verse 15, you see that He's the head of the body. And we just heard that in the hymn that we sang by Charles Wesley, 'Amazing Love.' That line in there, 'No condemnation now I dread, Jesus, and all in Him is mine. Alive in Him, my living Head.' I don't know about you, but always, as a kid, I thought that was a little bit gruesome of a picture. What it means is that He's just the source. He's the commander of the church. If we go off on our own, we're no longer worshipping Him.

When pastors bring their own vision and goals to the church, it's disastrous. And we've seen it happen many times because when you do that, you're cutting yourself off from the head. And in some animals, it might work for the head to be cut off, and some of the parts are still wiggling around. But for humans, it doesn't work like that. And that picture, by the way, was supposed to be gruesome.

In Jeremiah chapter 2, He says, 'For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.' There's no other life apart from Him. So, He is the object of our worship and the model to which we are being conformed. His truth is what our minds are conformed to. His goodness and beauty are what our affections are conformed to. His love is what our devotion is conformed to. His holiness is what our lives are conformed to.

And here at Grace Community Church, I love the fact that the Word of God is central. And we need to keep it central to all that we do and not deviate from it. And so, we can see this picture in the gospel itself when Christ gave Himself for us, that we who were severed from Him might be brought back to Him, that we might truly worship. We're justified in His righteousness. We are dead to sin in His death. We are alive in His resurrection. We are seated with Him in His authority. And we will share with Him in His glory. This was our destiny before we existed. He foreknew us. He called us. He justified us. And He intends to glorify us. Our union with Him is our salvation, our union with our head.

He has given Himself to us. In response, we are to offer ourselves completely to Him. And when we do that, we will reflect Him more and more into eternity. So, the goal of your Christian life, where you are headed, where you ought to be headed, is to bring yourself totally and fully under God so that your whole being resonates with His nature. The goal of the church is to bring ourselves all together under Him so that we, as a kingdom, will reflect His strength, His fruitfulness, and His beauty. This is what God wants for us, and He's been planning and working from before we existed to make it so. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you for the work that you've done in bringing about our salvation and bringing us together as the church. God, we know that you promised to bring it to full completion. We know that we will never reach perfection in this life, but we can excel more and more and reach forth under the things which are before and forget the things which are behind. We press on toward the goal, toward the prize, and take hold of that for which you have taken hold of us. And I pray that we would all do that together and as individuals. In Jesus' name, amen.