

Redemption and Forgiveness

Ephesians 1:7-10

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Scripture readings prior to the sermon:

Exodus 1:1-11; 6:1-8; Psalms 130

Sometimes, when a preacher steps into the pulpit to explain the Scriptures, he must labor over the text: digging and clawing to draw out of its depths the glories of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, like a miner who is after precious gems hidden deep in the crust of the Earth.

Today's text is not one of those texts. With today's text, the Gospel is front-and-center.

Of course, this type of text brings with it its own challenges...

In the case of the difficult texts – the ones that require the digging and the clawing – the preacher, perhaps, is challenged to make sure the Gospel is not lost when the text itself is – how shall we say it – very “practical,” lest the church fall into some form of pragmatism or even legalism. Or, perhaps the text before us is from the Old Testament, and the challenge is to see Christ and the Gospel in the types and shadows of God's interacting with the Patriarchs (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, etc.) or with the nation of Israel. In each of these cases, there are precious nuggets of truth and glory to be mined, and mined they should be! And we who sit under these teachings should appreciate the work that goes into the digging and the clawing...

Today's text is decidedly not one of those texts.

The challenge set before us this morning is to take such a Gospel-centered text and to plumb the depths of common “Christian” words...words like: redemption, and forgiveness, and grace. So, this is what we're off to do with the Lord's help...and as is fitting a gathering of Christian people: with the Cross of Jesus Christ in our sights.

The sermon text for this morning is from Paul's epistle – or letter – to the church at Ephesus, chapter 1. Here at Abiding Grace Church, this is where we've been since our birth as a church, and I imagine where we'll be for a few more months. Pastor Mike has faithfully brought us through the first six verses, and I have been blessed by the Elders to be given verses 7 through 10 this morning. Let's read the text together – I'm going to read from verse 3 to set the context, but then we'll focus in beginning with verse 7:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. (Verse 7) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Let's pray... [PRAY]

So, for those of you taking notes on the backs of your bulletin, this morning's message is going to come in four major sections. First, we will discuss *The Nature of Man and His Need for Redemption*; then we will discuss *The Forgiveness of Our Trespasses*; we will move next to *The Blood of Christ and the Grace of God*; and finally we will prepare ourselves for the Lord's Supper as we meditate on *The Mystery of God's Will to Unite All Things in Christ*.

Before we dive in, let's look again at v. 3 here in Ephesians 1:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...

As we are about five or six weeks into this sermon series on Ephesians, I wanted to give you a bit of my perspective on what's happening in this epistle, especially in chapters 1 through 3. Paul writes in verse 3 that we Believers have been blessed "in Christ with every spiritual blessing..." What does he mean by that? What are these blessings that God has poured out on us through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of His only begotten Son?

Well, they come to us in these first three chapters of Ephesians in rapid-fire succession. For you summer sports enthusiasts, have in your mind a wave-runner – a jet ski – that is flying across the surface of the water...but this isn't calm water! No, it's water that's just turbulent enough to give you those one-to-two-foot wave crests, and that jet ski is barely touching the crests of those waves so that it looks like that jet skier is almost floating...barely touching the surface! Perhaps he's traveling at 30...40...even 50 miles per hour, and the thrill of the ride is such that this rider is beaming with joy and excitement and anticipation over the next wave that's coming. Or...

Winter is upon us, and for you winter sports enthusiasts, picture a downhill skier who is taking on a run of moguls. And from one mogul to the next, she is just skimming the top of each snow mound as the hill and the mounds are flying by, and she's gaining speed. The 2014 Winter Olympics are just a few weeks away, and you may catch a glimpse of the mogul runs in Sochi. And what you'll see is some of the world's best skiers: heads down, poles tucked, knees bent... Their gazes are fixed on the finish line...and the glory that awaits them there.

This is how we as a church should be approaching these first three chapters of Ephesians. Like the jet skier in summer, we should be absolutely thrilled – beaming with joy and excitement and anticipation – as these spiritual blessings are expounded upon from this pulpit week after week! Pastor Mike has already blessed us these past weeks by proclaiming the great truths of: our union with Christ, how we have been called by the

will of God, our adoption into the family of God, and how we – all of us who believe – are saints: holy ones, set apart for God and His perfect purposes! Like the Olympic skier, bounding from one spiritual blessing to the next, we should be fixing our eyes on the prize – the upward call of Christ Jesus on our lives – and the glory that awaits us when we finally see Him face to face!

Look at them all! Follow along with me (if you can)!

- Verse 4: He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world!
- Verse 4: We shall be holy and blameless before God!
- Verse 5: He has adopted us into His divine family! (Skip down to...)
- Verse 11: We have an inheritance that awaits us!
- Verse 13: That inheritance is sealed and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us!
- Verse 17: We have a spirit of wisdom and revelation and knowledge of God!
- Verse 19: We have the immeasurable greatness of God's power on our side!
- Verse 22: Christ, our Savior, is our Head over the Church! (And more than that...)
- Verse 22 also says that we have nothing to fear because everything has been placed under His feet – which means He's the boss!
- Chapter 2, verse 4: Paul says that our God is rich in mercy and that He loved us with a great love even while we were dead in our trespasses and sins!
- Chapter 2, verse 5: God has made us who were spiritually dead, spiritually alive!
- Verse 6: We have been raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly places! (Are you feeling the crests of these waves yet?)
- Verse 8: We have been saved by grace through faith – O, what a gift He has given!
- Verse 10: He has given us work to do – that we might not waste our lives! And more than that, He has already prepared it all beforehand – all we have to do is walk in it!

- Verses 12 and 13: He has called us Gentiles – who were so far from God for so many ages – He has called us and brought us near to Him through the Cross of Christ!
- Verse 14: He has given us peace: peace with Himself, and peace with each other within the Church, the Body of Christ!
- Verse 18: Through Christ, we now have access to the Father! (Right now, right here – if you are washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, you can have unlimited and unhindered access to One True God of the Universe, did you know that?)
- Verse 19: As Pastor Mike preached two weeks ago, one of the greatest spiritual blessings we have is that we are members of a new household: the household of God. (Look around! This is your family, brothers and sisters!)
- And verse 22 says that we – brothers and sisters in Christ – are being built together into a dwelling place for God Himself! (I'm not done, you downhill skiers!)
- Chapter 3, verse 6: God has made known to us a mystery that was hidden for ages past...and what is the mystery? The mystery is that through the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the World – both Gentiles and Jews are the people of God, heirs of all of these blessings!
- Skip down to verse 16: We are strengthened by the Holy Spirit!
- Verse 17: Christ dwells in our hearts through faith!
- Verses 17 through 19: We are rooted and grounded in the love of Christ – a love that has infinite depth and breadth and height and length – a love whose magnitude surpasses all knowledge!
- And if all of this isn't enough – Paul tells us in chapter 3, verse 20, that God, our Father, is able to do all this and more...more than we can ask or think or imagine!

Oh, to you, O God, be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen!

By the way, all of that was just introduction... I hope you are settled in now!

Let's go back to chapter 1, beginning in verse seven:

In Him (that is, in Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

First, let's consider...

The Nature of Man and His Need for Redemption

If you were fortunate enough to be here at Abiding Grace Church last week, you heard Pastor Mike speak rather extensively on our connection to our first parents: Adam and Eve. (If you were not here, I commend last week's sermon to you, which you can find either at our website www.abidinggracechurch.com, or at our SermonAudio page.) In that sermon, Pastor Mike talked about the creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God – with no inherent predisposition toward sin – and how they sinned against God anyway by eating the fruit of the Forbidden Tree. And Pastor Mike pointed out that even though the Bible says that Adam was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26), in Genesis 5:3, the Bible says that Seth – the son of Adam and Eve – was made in Adam's image and likeness. These are not theological nits we are picking here; these details and distinctions are essential in helping us to understand what Fallen human beings are by nature. Adam: created in God's image and likeness. Seth – Adam's descendant – the Bible says – was conceived and born in Adam's image and likeness...with Adam's Fallen, sinful nature! You – and I – like Seth – descendants of Adam – are also conceived and born with Adam's Fallen, sinful nature. This is the testimony of the entirety of the Scriptures...now, what does it mean?

One place we might go is not very far from Ephesians 1... In Ephesians 2:1-3 – the very next chapter. Paul says:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air (who is Satan), the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Sounds pretty bad, right? Dead in trespasses and sins. Following Satan. Sons of disobedience. By nature...children of wrath.

To set up our text today, allow me to briefly visit one additional text that will give us a glimpse into human nature apart from Christ. From the book of Romans, chapter 6, beginning with verse 16, this same Apostle Paul writes (I will add emphasis to make a point):

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness... For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Now, Paul is talking to Believers here, and he is reminding them of what they were prior to their salvation, in no uncertain terms: slaves of sin, slaves to impurity, slaves to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness. Slaves, slaves, slaves...this is what men are! The nicest, most “righteous” person you know is a slave apart from Christ – you need to know that!

Now, I ask you...what does a slave need?

Back to Ephesians 1:7 – it’s simple: a slave needs to be freed, to be released from his bondage – a slave needs redemption! Not only that, but know this: A slave cannot free himself; a slave needs someone – a

redeemer – to come along and to purchase him out of his slavery and to grant him freedom! The Greek word here in verse 7 literally means: “ransom,” or “ransom away.” You know what a ransom is, right? A ransom is a price paid to provide release for something or someone who is being held captive. We have already established that human beings are born as slaves to sin; and a slave needs a ransom, a payment. And more than that, he needs someone to come along and do it – to pay the ransom, to pay the price – on his behalf!

Earlier this hour, Brother Scott read a little bit of the Old Testament story of the Israelites who had been enslaved by the Egyptians. I hope that you know the story...if you don't – or if you need to be reminded of the details – I would implore you to go and read the first few chapters of the book of Exodus. Genesis...Exodus – the second book of the Bible.

In Exodus 6:5-6, God says – through Moses – to the enslaved Israelites:

“I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.” Say therefore to the people of Israel, “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.”

Do you see it? Do you see that the Israelites are utterly powerless on their own to free themselves from the bondage of Pharaoh and the Egyptians? God says, “I will bring you out... I will deliver you from slavery... I will redeem you!” And if you know the story, you know that is exactly what God did: out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and eventually into the Promised Land. This is what God does; this is who God is – He is a Redeemer of slaves!

But how does He do it? (We'll come back to the how in a few minutes... First, let's consider...)

The Forgiveness of Our Trespases

Paul, here in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 7, follows on the heels of “redemption” with, “the forgiveness of our trespases.” Look again:

In Him (that is, in Christ) we have redemption... the forgiveness of our trespases...

First, what is a trespass? And while we’re at it – since we’ve been talking about it – what is sin? The truth is that both of these terms: “trespass” and “sin,” mean similar things. In essence, they are both a violation. A violation of what? A violation of God: His Law, His glory. When we sin – or commit a trespass – against God – when we lie, when we steal, when we cheat, when we hate, when we’re lazy, when we use foul language, when we treasure our cars or our jobs or our children or our wives or our husbands above God, we demonstrate to God that He is not worthy of our obedience and that we desire our own glory over and above His. This was the essence of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden – a violation of God’s one clear and direct command – and this is the essence of every single sin that has ever been committed. R. C. Sproul says, “Sin is cosmic treason.” And treason, as we all know, is punishable by...? That’s right: death. A little further on in Romans chapter 6, Paul writes: “*The wages of sin is death.*” Any questions?

Sinners deserve death.

But what about those who have been redeemed by God? Whose ransom price has been paid? What about their sins? Look again, verse 7:

In Him (that is, in Christ) we have redemption... the forgiveness of our trespases...

Do you see that? This is Good News, friends – this is the Gospel! When God buys you, He owns you. And when He buys you, He buys all of your debt, too! Our sin debt – which we cannot hope to pay even in a million years by our own so-called “righteousness” – gets paid for and cancelled! But how? But how?

By forgiveness!

Did you know that forgiveness is also a slavery-type word? It means simply to cast away, or to release (as in a prisoner), or to cancel (as in a debt). When I forgive you – truly forgive you – what I am in essence saying is that whatever wrong you have done to me...it's GONE! Where? I don't know where...just NOT HERE! In one place in the Bible, God describes forgiveness as taking our sins against Him and placing them as far as the east is from the west. How far is that?! So far that it cannot be measured! In another place, the Bible says that God will cast the sins of those whom He has redeemed into the depths of the sea, where no one can go, and those sins will never be seen again!

Do you see, friend, that you are in need of both redemption and forgiveness? As slaves to sin by nature, human beings apart from Christ – all they ever do is sin. Slaves need redemption; sins need to be forgiven. It's really a very simple concept. Offensive? Perhaps... True? Yes. Simple? Indeed. Every single one of us – Adam's descendants – is in dire need of redemption and forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a word we use often, and quite frankly, we know – if we're honest – that forgiveness is not an easy thing to do. And lest you think that forgiveness was easy for God, let's spend a few moments meditating on...

The Blood of Christ and the Grace of God

We have already established that sins and trespasses – which we have all committed time and time and time again – are acts of cosmic treason against God, and that treason is punishable by death.

Romans 6:23, the Bible tells us: "*The wages of sin is death.*"

Death.

Did you know that there wasn't always...death? In the first two chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1 and 2, God gives to us an account of how He created the universe and the Earth and the plants and animals and human beings. And at the end of it all, He declares it – all of it – to be "very good." No death. And we know this to be true, because in Romans chapter 5, the Apostle Paul tells us that "*sin came into the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin...*"

Adam...sin...death. And not just “death as a kind-of logical consequence of sin,” but death as a punishment for sin. Genesis 2:15-17:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

This a warning from God to Adam – and to us: obey, and live! Sin, and die!

Well, Adam sinned... Did Adam die?

Yes...and yes...and no...

First, yes: Adam died spiritually, and as we have already touched upon, this spiritual deadness – this slavery to sin – is passed on to us from Adam by nature.

Second, yes again. Eventually – after 930 years – Adam did, in fact, die. (Genesis 5:5)

But, let’s say you’re new to the Bible, and you’ve never read Genesis chapter 2 before, and you come upon God’s warning to Adam: God says, “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” I mean, let’s be honest: you assume that if Adam eats from this Forbidden Tree, he’s going to – BAM! – drop over dead, right? But it doesn’t happen! And we should be so thankful that it doesn’t – this is our hope!

Instead, at the end of Genesis 3 after Adam and Eve have sinned against God by eating the Forbidden Fruit, God kills... God kills an animal and provides a covering for their shame, which comes as a result of their sin. God provides a substitute...and He kills it so that Adam can live!

A bloody substitute – this is the cost of forgiveness, friends! Look again at Ephesians 1:7:

In Him (that is, in Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses...

This is not the simple prick of a finger! Paul is saying that in order for sinners like you and me to be redeemed – to be set free from our slavery to sin – and to be forgiven of our countless trespasses, the Divine Son of God – yes, Jesus Christ – had to die as our bloody Substitute! And God had to pour out His righteous wrath against our sin on Jesus! Yes, friends, God had to kill Him!

And apart from the blood of the Son of God being credited to your account, there is no redemption! There is no forgiveness! There is only slavery and then death and judgment!

Do I need to be more plain?

And if you are here today, redeemed and forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ, please be encouraged – really, truly encouraged – by the knowledge that you didn't deserve it, either...

Look again at verse 7 and into 8:

In Him (that is, in Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us...

You know, some theologians define grace as “unmerited favor.” That's not wrong, but in my opinion...it's not exactly right, either. Unmerited favor might imply that I am a neutral party. But I tell you that medicine is not strong enough for a clear presentation of the Gospel: I was not neutral, I was a sinner, a slave, an enemy of the One True God, and when He lavished His grace upon me through the precious blood of His Son and my King, Jesus Christ, not only did I not merit it, but I deserved its very opposite: condemnation and death. No, friends, grace is ill-merited favor; it is granted to sinners like you and me, as a free gift, when we deserve nothing but death...and then judgment...and then eternal death forever! This is the Gospel!

A couple of final thoughts as we wrap up...

At this point, you should be saying to me, “Brother Steve: What should I do with all of this? How do I apply these incredible truths to my life?” That is a great question!

First, there are likely some within the sound of my voice who are not Christians. If this is you, please know that you are welcome here at Abiding Grace Church, and please know that I am so glad that you have made it this far through this sermon!

Perhaps you are playing around the edges of Christianity – playing a little “church” here and there, you know? – but you have never truly acknowledged your morally decrepit state before, you have never repented – or done a spiritual U-turn away from your sin, you have never renounced your belief that someday God will let you into Heaven based on your own personal good works, and you have never placed your whole faith and trust in the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross on your behalf.

Perhaps you think this whole thing is totally bunk. I don’t know.

Either way, know this: There is a God, and He has revealed Himself to human beings through His inspired word – the Bible – and through the living Word, His Son Jesus Christ. And this God has appointed a day when all men and women will stand before Him to give an account for the things they’ve done in this life. And know this: Unless you have a perfect righteousness – a perfect righteousness – you will be condemned and cast into Hell for all eternity with no hope of escape.

Earlier in this service, Brother Scott read Psalm 130. Is this your cry today?

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

If you, O LORD, should mark [sins], O Lord, who could stand?

(The answer to this rhetorical question is: No one.)

But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

The command to the Unbeliever is to cry out to God: repent of your sin and hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with Him is plentiful redemption! And He will redeem you from all your trespasses and sins!

If you are a Christian, this should be your response:

- First, thanksgiving: Acknowledge (again) today that there is nothing good in you that has not been given to you through the merits of Christ, and that everything that you have: your redemption, the forgiveness of your trespasses – every spiritual blessing that is yours in the heavenly places – has come to you as a precious gift flowing from the Cross of Jesus Christ.
- Second, forgiveness: Let me ask you...are you withholding forgiveness from someone – anyone – this very moment? Are you harboring a root of bitterness in your soul toward another person? Stop it! Jesus Himself has told us, “*...if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*” Will you call Jesus a liar today, and expect His forgiveness while you withhold it from someone else? Have you been forgiven of all of your sins, yet you will not grant forgiveness to those who have sinned against you? Brothers and sisters, this should not be! Right here, right now: grant forgiveness to those who have wronged you. Forgive freely and fully, even as you have been forgiven through the precious blood of the Son of God shed for you!
- Third, evangelism: Go...go and tell everyone you can that redemption and forgiveness are possible through the Cross of Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ – and it is the best News in the entire universe. And we have the tremendous privilege of being bearers of this incredible News to a world enslaved by sin and to people who are one breath short of eternal death.

Let's pray... [PRAY]

As we prepare to celebrate Communion, let us briefly meditate on...

The Mystery of God's Will to Unite All Things in Christ

We are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper now, as we do every week here at Abiding Grace Church. (Would those who are going to distribute the elements please come on up and do so? Please note that there is both a wafer – under the cellophane – and juice – under the foil.)

Although we focused for most of the morning on verse 7 of Ephesians chapter 1, I don't want to lose verses 8 through 10:

...in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

The fullness of time. The fullness of time...what does that mean?

Well, in First Corinthians chapter 11, Paul is talking about the Lord's Supper, which we are about to celebrate, and he tells us that as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim (in the present) the Lord's death (in the past) until He comes (in the future).

Friends, I want you to understand something: There are three important days that you need to know about...

First, in the fullness of time – or, rather, when the time was juuust right according to God's perfect plan – God hung His Son on a Cross and poured out His righteous wrath upon Him for the sins of men. You should always remember that great Day, and this meal that we are about to share is a continual reminder for us of the great and bloody sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for His people.

Second, in the fulness of time – when the time is juuust right – this same Jesus who was crucified will return from Heaven to redeem – yes, redeem, to rescue – the entire Creation and to sit in judgment over every man and woman who has ever lived. Brothers and sisters, you should be

living your life in anticipation of that great Day: in fear and trembling, and in the joy of knowing that – if you are in Christ – there is nothing but grace for you in the presence of our great King!

The third great day is...today. My prayer is that for some people within the sound of my voice, today is a day of salvation: of redemption, and forgiveness of sins.

I note here that this Supper is a meal for Believers in Jesus Christ, just like the spiritual blessings in Ephesians 1 through 3 are for those who are in Christ. This is the mystery that Paul is talking about in verse 8: That the divine Son of God would become a man, and die a substitutionary death for men who could not save themselves, and at the end of this Age, this same Jesus will unite all things – things in heaven and things on earth – under Himself as His reign is established forever and ever. Come, Lord Jesus!

So, if you have repented of your sin and placed your whole faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your perfect, bloody Substitute, and you are anxiously awaiting His return when His rule and reign over all things is finally and visibly established, then you are most welcome to join us in this memorial Meal.

Brothers and sisters, let's eat and drink together. AMEN.