

Recall & React – Praise for a New You (Part 4)

Ephesians 1:3-14

I don't know what your regular exercise routine looks like but let me give you something to start training for. This particular race takes place in Hawaii so that's a good start. It's called the Epic5 challenge and it takes place in August of 2020 so there's time to start preparing. The Epic5 is a Triathlon. Maybe some of you have heard of a Triathlon before, but a Triathlon is a race that involves swimming, biking, and running. You swim 2.4 miles, bike 112 miles, and run a full marathon 26.2 miles, all consecutively.

What is unique about the Epic5 Challenge race in Hawaii is that you do a full Triathlon every day for 5 straight days with each race taking place on a different Hawaiian island. Obviously this is an extreme race that takes unbelievable amounts of endurance and perseverance to finish.

This morning I want to ask you a question not related to physical endurance but spiritual endurance. What makes you think that you will be able to remain faithful to the Lord? Why do you think you will make it to the end? Maybe this is a question that you have never considered before regarding your Christian life. But let me unsettle you a little bit this morning by reading Colossians 1:21-23 and showing you that it really does matter that you persevere in the faith. Verse 23 makes it quite clear that endurance matters.

Some of you might be thinking, well, "once saved, always saved." I understand the sentiment behind that statement, but it's phrased in a way that doesn't accurately reflect what the Bible teaches. "Once saved, always saved" seems to be teaching that you can make a profession of faith and say you believe in Christ and then it doesn't really matter what happens after that. Once you get the ticket to heaven you can sort of file it away and forget about it.

I'm not here this morning to tell you that you can lose your salvation. But I am here to think biblically about salvation and the importance of endurance and faithfulness to the Lord. 1 John 2:19 puts it like this. There will be those who claim Christ and do not finish the race and prove they were never really of Christ. They were professors and not possessors.

This might be terrifying to you this morning because you just don't feel strong enough to endure. Saying that you must remain faithful in the Christian life is like saying you have to run 5 Triathlons in 5 days on 5 different islands. It's hopeless. I don't want to terrify you this morning, I actually want to encourage you and the path to encouragement lies in doubting my own ability to endure but understanding the gift of grace God has given me to ensure that I will make it to the end.

So open your Bible to Ephesians 1:3-14 and we will see this last benefit of our new identity this morning from this one long sentence. Let me remind you of these benefits briefly. They all flow out of verse 3 which is the theme of this sentence.

1. We are Adopted into the Father's Family (vv. 4-6)

We are chose, adopted, and accepted into God's family as His children. We are united with Christ and as God sees His Beloved Son He sees us.

2. We are Redeemed by the Son's Work and for His Purposes (Vv. 7-12)

This adoption can only happen through the Son's work on our behalf. We are freed from sin by the forgiveness which comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. All of this is according to His grace and for His purpose, which is that everything would be summed up in Christ and under His authority. This brings us to our third and final benefit in verses 13-14.

3. We are Sealed by the Spirit Until We Arrive (vv. 13-14)

So far we have seen the Father act in eternity past to pre-destine us for adoption. We've seen the Son's work of redemption and forgiveness, something that took place two thousand years ago and of course shapes us today. But this third benefit focuses on the present experience of the believer. It's like we've seen God's perspective in choosing, adopting, redeeming, and forgiving and now we get the human perspective on salvation. What actually happened from our side?

Look at the beginning of verse 13. Of course, all of this happens in relationship to Jesus. He is not absent from our experience at all. Our experience of salvation is that we hear the word of truth.

You and I receive the redemption and forgiveness that comes through Christ by hearing the word of truth. Paul puts this quite clearly in Romans 10:14-17. This is

why I stand up and speak words every Sunday. It's not because I have a giant ego trip and really like talking. It's not because I am particularly smart. The goal of this is to make the word of God as clear as possible. Why? Because it is the word of truth.

You and I are flooded with worldviews that claim to be true but are false. The culture wants us to believe that the physical world is all there is. We are told that each person constructs his or her own personal morality. I must live "my truth" and that truth comes from my personal desires.

But Paul is saying here that the Word of God is the truth. This book is the accurate description of reality. It reveals who the creator of reality is and what He is doing in the world. But it's not just abstract truth. It's also incredibly good news. Look further into verse 13.

So, the word of truth is the gospel of your salvation. You know that the word "gospel" means good news. It's the good news report that speaks of salvation and ultimately brings salvation. It's good news because it testifies to the work God has done in Christ. The work of redemption and forgiveness. The gospel is good news because it frees us from our bondage to sin and self to live as we were designed to live.

Paul is saying here that this good news came to you and you heard it. Now, you may have heard this good news of deliverance hundreds of times, but there was a moment when something else happened in you. Look further in verse 13. You believed. Your heart and mind latched onto this message of deliverance and forgiveness and said, "Yes, that's right." But belief is not just mental agreement and acknowledgement that Jesus died on the cross. Biblical belief is the recognition that I am a sinner deserving of God's wrath and eternal punishment. It's the realization that I have lived life on my own terms and have rejected God through my actions and desires. To truly believe the message of salvation involves repentance of my sins.

Belief means saying, if the Bible is the word of truth then my circumstances are dire. I am enslaved to sin and I need freedom and that freedom only comes from having my sins paid for and wiped away. How can I have that? Through the one who took my place on the cross and was the ransom payment to God for sin.

And when we hear and believe the gospel something else happens. Look at the end of verse 13. This is the main idea in these two verses and that's reflected in this third benefit. We are sealed.

In 2015 at an Archeological excavation at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem they discovered a piece of clay with the seal of King Hezekiah pressed into it. The seal came from a ring that was pressed into the clay and showed a sun with two wings on it and bore the inscription, "Belonging to Hezekiah, Son of Ahaz King of Judah." When Hezekiah would press his ring into wax or clay and put his seal on a document or some other item it did two things. First, it showed that this item belongs to the King. The seal is a mark of identification and shows ownership and authority. Second, because the King owned the item, the item was to be protected. In other words, the seal communicated to anyone handling the item, if you destroy this document, the full weight and power of the King of Judah will come for you.

We are not sealed physically but with the Holy Spirit of promise. He's called this here because the OT looked forward to the inauguration of the New Covenant with the expectation that this would mean God's spirit indwelt His people. God's Spirit indwelling people would mean a new heart of flesh rather than a heart of stone. A heart with new desires and a heart bent toward obeying God. Listen to Ezekiel 36:26-27. This OT promise was repeated by Jesus in the NT. John 14:15-17.

So, what does the sealing of the Spirit functionally mean? For starters it means we are owned and protected by the God of the Universe. He has adopted us into His family and now He marks us with His own Holy Spirit as belonging to Him. But it's important that you realize that being marked and indwelt by the Spirit means a fundamental change in who you are. You cannot remain the same when you are sealed by the King.

Being sealed with the Spirit means the Spirit is at work in you. Listen to Ephesians 2:18-22. In this passage the Spirit does at least two main things. He binds us together with other believers. We are now one with one another and He builds us up. This doesn't just mean that He encourages us when times are tough. According to verses 21-22 we are being built into a holy temple by the Spirit. This means that the practical holiness and morality described in the book of Ephesians will be working itself out in your daily experience. In fact, Paul even says that

when you sin you are going against your new identity as one sealed with the Spirit. Listen to 4:30.

This fundamental change takes place by sealing because of what the seal indicates. Look at 1:14. This is a financial term that essentially describes a down payment. It's the first payment and signifies that more like it is to come. Verse 14 says that the Spirit is the down payment that we are God's inheritance. I don't think this is talking about something we will gain, but just like verse 11 it's saying that we are God's possession and the Spirit is the initial installment of God taking ownership of us.

Of course, when you talk about an initial payment you are looking toward the final payment. I have a 30 year mortgage that we are 2 ½ years into. I am living in between the first installment and the final payment. What is the final payment here? Look again at verse 14. I think it's better to translate this "until God redeems his possession." The word here is actually the same word used in verse 7 and it means redemption. God is always the one who redeems in the NT.

So, you've got an initial redemption and sealing with the Spirit and you've got a final redemption when we are brought into the presence of God and fully and finally freed from even the presence of sin.

What this verse is promising is that because you are sealed with the Spirit, God will keep you till the end. You will endure. He will sanctify you and grow you. I think 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 is a very clear explanation of what living in between these two redemptions looks like.

We're all groaning this morning. Life is hard. Money is in short supply. Politics is frustrating. Church people get on your nerves. Your body hurts. I want to tell you this morning that one of the most amazing benefits you have if you have heard the gospel and believed is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. He is the guarantee that God will uphold you and that you will persevere. Let Him do His work in you. As Ephesians 5:18 says, "Be filled with the Spirit." He will sustain.

When I'm thinking about these passages of Scripture and preparing to preach I often read different portions of books on the passage or subject at hand. This week I read the London Baptist Confession of Faith on the perseverance of true

believes in life and it was so helpful and worshipful that I just had to read it to you. I'll close with this:

"And though many storms and floods arise and beat against the saints, yet these things shall never be able to sweep them off the foundation and rock which they are fastened upon by faith. Even though, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sight and feeling of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, yet God is still the same, and they are sure to be kept by His power until their salvation is complete, when they shall enjoy the purchased possession which is theirs, for they are engraved upon the palm of His hands, and their names have been written in His Book of Life from all eternity." - London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689