

**SERIES: Reach for the P.E.A.K., Week 1 (Slide #1)**

**TITLE: Are We Not Blessed?**

**TEXT: Ephesians 1:1-14**

**DATE: June 14, 2009**

## I. INTRODUCTION.

A. Soooo, how goes the journey?

1. Today marks day seven of our summer journey as together we Reach for the P.E.A.K., practicing discipleship together.
2. If you were not with us last week, you might be saying, what's Reach for the P.E.A.K.? Glad you asked. Together as a church we are practicing discipleship principles that can be easily remembered through the use of an acronym: P.E.A.K.: **(Slide #2)**
  - a. P = Prayer and fasting. We are called to pray a minimum of 15 minutes/day and fast one meal per week.
  - b. E = Evangelism. We are called to target one person or family that needs to discover Christ - or rediscover Christ - inviting them to find Jesus and a church family that can love them. We are further called to lift up someone who is down through compassion.
  - c. A = Abiding in God's Word. Together we are reading the same passages of scripture - this week Ephesians 1:1-14 - and memorizing a selected passage together - this week Eph. 1:7-8.
  - d. K = Koinonia/Christian Fellowship. Our goal is to do Christian Fellowship things: attend church regularly, pay our tithe, get to know the body of Christ, get to know someone new, talk about things that matter, etc.
3. Before turning to our exciting passage for the week, can I encourage you to do something throughout the summer: take time to share what you are learning and to share prayer concerns. This week I received several posts by e-mail telling me what you are learning and where you need prayer. That's exciting. As I have been saying in my responses: Thanks for "koinonia-ing" with me.

B. All that being said, let's turn to the word. I don't know about you, but I'm thinking that it can't get any better than this. Paul begins his book to the Ephesians with a bang, does he not?

1. Normally when people write letters they kinda build up over time – lay a foundation and then come to some point.
2. Paul dispenses with the norm; he jumps in with both feet if you will, exploding out of the starting gate with powerful words that should thrill us and move us to our core.
3. It would be an understatement to say that Paul is in a good mood. No, Paul is in a great mood, filled with awe and wonder as he thinks about the gospel that has overtaken him.

C. **(Slide #3)** But note this: what makes Paul's words even more impacting is the setting in which they are written.

1. Paul is not sitting out in a field somewhere beside his favorite tree with a cool breeze and the chirping of birds and the chatter of squirrels surrounding him.
2. Paul is not sitting beside a quiet stream or beside the sea while the water sings out a song of tranquility.
3. Whatever spot sounds like the one where you go and just sigh because of its relaxing effect, Paul is in none of those places.
4. As Paul writes, he is sitting in a prison – in chains because of his faith.

- D. Hear this important word: Paul in this letter demonstrates a truth that is important to grasp: **(Slide #4)** Our standing with Christ and our cause for celebration is not conditioned upon our circumstances, it is condition upon our standing with God.
1. Paul modeled something extremely important to grasp: the redeemed cannot be imprisoned!!! Or should I put it this way: the redeemed should not allow themselves to be imprisoned.
  2. Paul throughout his ministry life had plenty of reasons why he could have acted like a prisoner: he could have yielded to the prison of persecution, the prison of pain, the prison of threats - even death threats, the prison of discouragement or despair, and, of course, the prison with bars.
  3. Paul, just like us, could offer many valid reasons why he should surrender to despair and embrace the life of imprisonment, but Paul refused to go there.
  4. The words of Jesus vision rang true to Paul: Jesus. . .sets the captive/the imprisoned free.
- E. As we have together read the words of Paul this week, my hope and prayer is that for each of us we have been caught up in Paul's words of praise – Paul's words of higher perspective and truth – and been set free from any earthly prisons that would try to take our joy away.
1. Paul's word to the Ephesians and to us is first of all this: Refuse to submit to the prisons of this world.
  2. Paul's words in light of his setting models for us a possibility that is exciting: as a believer, rescued and redeemed by Christ, filled with God in the form of His Holy Spirit, I can be more than a conqueror in all circumstances of life.
- F. Why, well read with me again the reason why we can be more than conquerors – **READ TEXT. (Slide #5)**
- G. Well, I have only one problem this morning and it's this: how is it humanly possible to sum up all of this in one sermon? That's a good problem.
1. Well, it can't be done, and thus the reason for your reading it every day.
  2. But what I can do is organize Paul's words in a way that will perhaps help us remember them.
- H. The theme of today based upon Paul's words is BLESSING. Let us look at blessing from three different angles based upon Paul's words.

## II. **(Slide #6) THE SONG OF THE BLESSED - verse 3**

- A. Having written the traditional words of introduction to his letter – stating the authorship, who the letter is written to, and the offering of grace and peace – Paul begins with a verses that becomes the foundation for the rest of his letter.
- B. Paul does not build a case and then draw a conclusion; Paul instead states a conclusion and then proves its validity throughout the rest of the letter.
- C. But I want us to think about it this way: Paul, as he writes, is not arguing, HE'S SINGING.
1. In Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians Paul is debating objectors to the faith and his language is somewhat combative.
  2. Not so here. Paul is not arguing or trying to convince anyone; He's singing, He's worshipping, He's celebrating, He's rejoicing.
  3. If we read Ephesians for the purpose of debating it, then we've missed the point of Ephesians, because Paul's hope is that we'll just sing with him.
  4. Maxie Dunham, former president of Asbury Theological Seminary, says it so well: **(Slide #7)** *“The first three chapters of Ephesians form an almost continuous prayer, giving the entire letter the sound*

*of music. Though in prison, Paul's spirit is ecstatic.*" I like that!

5. Here's the point: If we are reading Ephesians for the sake of debate, then we're missing it.
  6. I'm certain that Paul in heaven – if he can see what all is going on down here – is shaking his head in wonder considering the fact that right after reading verse 3 where Paul explodes in praise, immediately the church has taken the next verse and made it into a two-hundred year war over what it means to be "chosen."
- D. Paul's words to us would be: **(Slide #8)** Won't you just sing with me. Join me in celebration. Embrace the song of the blessed.
- E. And what is Paul's song?
1. Simply put it is this: that everything good, everything that brings us joy, everything that gives to us life, everything that sets us free irregardless of life circumstances – all blessings – have one source only: GOD.
  2. I love Paul's words: **(Slide #9)** ***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.***"
  3. If one can write standing up, Paul did it. If one can write running around a prison cell waving a hanky, Paul did it. These words are stand up and shout words: WE HAVE IN OUR GOD ONE WHO IS THE SOURCE OF ALL BLESSINGS. HALLELUJAH!!
  4. I have to believe the doxology was based upon Ephesians 1:3 because it sings what Paul sings: *Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*
  5. That's what Paul is singing: Grab hold of what is true: WE ARE THE BLESSED PEOPLE OF GOD.
- F. Listen folks, if you get nothing else out of this sermon then get this: No matter what your circumstances are in life, no matter what your conditions in life, no matter what your economic, social, physical, psychological position in life – none of it matters for the redeemed. These earthly things do not hold us but rather that which is from the heavenlies. Here is the higher truth: WE ARE BLESSED!
- G. Perhaps the tune and words to that song have grown faint for some here this morning and so the first call is to hear and sing the song of the blessed again.
- H. In case it may seem hard to sing the song, let me tell you why we should sing. Paul adds verses to the chorus as we continue to read on, telling us of just some of the blessings that come from the heavens.

### III. **(Slide #10) THE SMORGASBORD OF BLESSINGS – verses 4-14**

#### A. **(Slide #11) We have been chosen. . . .**

1. Having read verse 3, Paul moves on to prove his point – that we are blessed – and his next four words are enough to cause us to stop, think and be emotionally moved for hours: ***"For He chose us..."***
2. I was talking to someone just this week about the John Calvin's theology of predestination – that God chooses who will be saved – and I heard an amazing story.
  - a. The story is of one who was raised in the church - a church like ours - but throughout his younger years was ignored by parents who were too busy doing God's work to care the way they should for their son.
  - b. When it came time to chose his own faith, he chose to change theologically from a Wesleyan to a Calvinist for this main reason: Having been left out for so many years, he just wanted to be CHOSEN.

3. Folks, let's all be honest: there's not a person in this room who does not feel at some level exactly like this man: we all want to be chosen, to belong, to be claimed, to be loved.
  4. But let me tell you something else: you don't have to be a Calvinist to love verse 4, because verse four does not belong to Calvinists or Wesleyans or Lutherans or anyone else. Verse 4 is not found in a theology book, it's found in the Bible.
  5. And here's what verse four says: He chose us!!!!
  6. There seems to be a call by Paul that moves us to take those words and personalize them and say with wonder: HE CHOSE ME!!!
  7. To everyone sitting in this room this morning, to everyone listening on the radio, to everyone who will read this on our web page, to anyone who will listen, hear this word of truth: You are blessed because God loves you so much that HE HAS CHOSEN YOU to be His with all of it's blessings.
    - a. The choice is not exclusive – He chose the world.
    - b. But the choice is personal – He chose me.
    - c. The impact is significant: I can belong to God, not because I found Him but because He chose me and has pursued me all of my life.
  8. All of us are of one mind here today, I have to believe. WE ALL NEED TO KNOW THAT WE ARE CHOSEN, WE ARE LOVED, WE BELONG. But Paul's words take it to the highest level, ***“For HE chose us in HIM. . .”*** God points his finger in the direction of every person listening to this sermon today and says the words that cause a song: I CHOSE YOU!!!!
  9. If that were not enough, track with me what God chose for you and me. . . .
- B. (Slide #12) We have been chosen to be made holy and blameless in His sight.**
1. Such a declaration seems beyond reach, and it is if we try to achieve it with our own human efforts, but that is not what verse 4 says: For He chose us in Him . . . TO BE MADE holy and blameless in His sight.
  2. As Paul puts it so well in 1 Thess. 5:23-24 - ***“May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. THE ONE WHO CALLS YOU IS FAITHFUL AND HE WILL DO IT.”***
  3. To be made holy – it is something that happens not by human effort but by God's work.
    - a. It is He who sets us aside for His holy purpose.
    - b. It is He who cleanses us and sanctifies us.
    - c. He has chosen us to become like Him, not by our own efforts but by God's will
  4. To be made blameless – we cannot earn that for only the Righteous Judge can declare one blameless.
    - a. It is God who wills that we be declared free of guilt.
    - b. God can do that, you know? He can say: you are no longer guilty. Hallelujah!
- C. (Slide #13) We have been chosen to become the sons and daughters of God.**
1. For all of us a really good way to respond to such a declaration is WOW!
  2. Honestly, I have to say that my life has been pretty good from the beginning and I'll tell you why: Because I am the son of Eugene and Elaine Lain.
    - a. When I was born, I was born into a home of a man and a woman who loved Jesus and shared that love with me all the years of my life growing up.
    - b. When I was born, I was born into a home of parents who understood what it means to follow in the will of God and the result was blessing - no so much financial, but in every other way.
    - c. When I was born, I was born into a home where I could experience love, protection, encouragement, discipline, and so much more.

- d. Sonship, when the home is good, is a blessed thing. I know not all of you share that experience.
3. But let me tell you, whether raised in a good home or not, Paul says something much greater that can be for all of us: **We have been chosen to become the sons and daughters of God.**
  4. Can we hear the wonder of those words? Do we understand the miracle of such a choice? Do we have any idea of the ramifications of sonship?
    - a. As sons and daughters of God we are ones who are under the care of the greatest love the world has ever known.
    - b. As sons and daughters of God we have access to all the riches of our Heavenly Father, and they are bountiful beyond imagination.
    - c. As sons and daughters of God, we can go to God at any time with a question, and He knows every answer. . . and every answer is perfect.
    - d. As sons and daughters of God, we take on the character of our Father, and His character is perfect and noble.
    - e. I could go on, but I don't have forever in this sermon.
  5. God chose us to be His as sons and daughters. Hallelujah.
- D. **(Slide #14) We have been chosen for redemption.**
1. The word redeem simple define is “to buy back” or “to return to the original owner.”
  2. God paid a redemption fee – a buy back fee – so that all who have fallen into sin (that’s everyone) could be return to their original owner.
  3. We know the price, don’t we. Our memory verse for the week says it clearly, “In Him we have redemption through His blood” - Jesus blood shed on a cross.
  4. Hear this: when God chose us to belong to Him, He did not steal us, He bought us!!! The purchase price was way too high. But God paid it in full through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.
  5. We are the redeemed – bought and paid for by the Redeemer. Hallelujah.
- E. **(Slide #15) We have been chosen to be forgiven.**
1. Included in the redemption was forgiveness.
  2. Has the impact of divine forgiveness crossed you minds lately. Think about this: Because of Christ’s redemptive price on the cross, the moment you and I say the words, “forgive me for EVERYTHING I’ve ever done,” without hesitation God wipes clean every sin ever committed and remembers it no more.
  3. When we look in the eyes of a person whom we have offended and say, please forgive me, if the person is gracious they will say, “I forgive you,” but in their eyes there can be a little twinkle that says, “I forgive you, but I’ve not forgotten,” especially if your offense was great.
  4. Consider this: When Jesus says you are forgiven, you can look into His eyes and thee is not remnant or memory of any sin ever committed. It’s gone.
  5. We have been chosen to be forgiven – all sins gone along with it’s guilt. I say Hallelujah!!
- F. **(Slide #16) We have been chosen to be transformed into ones who will reflect Christ in a way that brings Him praise.**
1. Quickly, our text tells us that because of the transforming power of God, we can be transformed into someone who makes God proud and brings honor to His name.
  2. As a son, there are not greater words uttered by my parents than, “I’m proud of you.”
  3. Not only does it feel good, but deep inside you also know that your actions have brought honor to the name of your parents.

4. Our text tells us that because of the transforming grace of God, we are changed into ones who make God proud and elevate His status in the world. Hallelujah.
- G. **(Slide #17) We have been chosen to spend the rest of eternity in heaven.**
  1. Well, we can't miss this.
  2. Simply and yet powerfully put, God's choice does not have a limit. God's redemption does not have a warrantee that can be define in earthly time.
  3. As God's chosen people, we are offered a lifetime warrantee, and the lifetime is not our lifetime, but God's, and He is eternal.
  4. Our inheritance is final and eternal redemption. Hallelujah!
- H. Well folks, just like when we go to a smorgasbord or a buffet, usually the end result is that we walk out saying things like, "I'm stuffed" or "I ate too much."
  1. Do you get that feeling this morning.
  2. Are we collective stuffed by the wonder of God's blessed choice.
  3. He chose us to be holy and blameless, to be His sons/daughters, to be redeemed and forgiven, to be His source of pride, to be guaranteed eternity in heaven.
- I. Do we now understand Paul's explosion in *verse 3: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with EVERY spiritual blessing in Christ."*
- J. I'm stuffed, how about you?
- K. Well, just like when we're at a buffet, stuffed or not, you have to have dessert. The dessert is this. . .

#### IV. **(Slide #18) THE SOURCE OF BLESSINGS – verses 1-14**

- A. Consider this thought with me: As great as the blessing are just listed, I hope you're with me in feeling this way: "I don't want just the blessings, I want the Blesser!!"
  1. It's not enough for me to receive the package of blessings in the mail but never meet or have relationship with the person who is doing the blessing.
  2. Well, folks, God feels the same way.
- B. The blessings listed her have a source, and that source is a triune Godhead who does all these things out of relationship. And all three of the trinity agree:
- C. **(Slide #19)** We are blessed because of the Choice of God Our Father who loves us more than the world.
- D. **(Slide #20)** We are blessed because of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God, who was willing to pay whatever price required to own us.
- E. **(Slide #21)** We are blessed because of The Holy Spirit who is willing to abide in us, sealing our redemption and guiding us to the eternal reward in heaven.
- F. Friends, listen, Paul is rejoicing in this text because not only do we get the blessing, we get the Blesser - a relationship with the Three-in-one who is the source of all good things.
- G. Ohhh, I need that. Don't you. I need a loving Father, a crucified and resurrected Savior, and an abiding Spirit. I need a relationship with HIM. And God wants a relationship with us even more. PTL.

#### V. **(Slide #22) THE SERIOUS CALL TO THE BLESSED**

- A. Well, what a joy to dine on the wonderful words of Paul, but let us not leave this place without a clear understanding of our responsibility in all of this.
- B. Let me illustrate with a personal story:
  1. The year was 1982 and I was living on a farm in Felicity, OH with my good friend Mark Lail.
  2. That summer Mark and I worked as security guards at the Moscow Nuclear Power Plant that was

being constructed at the time and also helping bring in the hay and straw on the farm.

3. It was a good summer, but it was summer that was one of the most important in my life.
  4. You see, all during that summer there was something in my heart that controlled my thoughts quite a bit, and it was this: there was a girl I had met two years earlier and she was becoming my world. I loved her and in my heart there was this realization that I wanted her to be my forever partner.
  5. One day I went to a jewelry store and found there a diamond ring that I thought was perfect, made the down payment and set the rest up on payments and walked out with an engagement ring.
  6. A few weeks later, I looked into the eyes of the girl I had come to love and said those words, "Will you marry me?"
  7. In essence, this is what had taken place: in my heart and in my actions I CHOSE Nancy to be my wife - a wanted her to know my choice.
  8. But listen, even though I chose her to be my wife, that didn't mean she would be. My choice did not require a certain answer, even though I sure hoped she would say yes.
  9. Without any other details for now, suffice it to say that in the end, Nancy looked back into my eyes and said YES!
  10. About 15 months later the yes was changed to an "I DO."
  11. Every day since October 1, 1983 Nancy and I have decided that we will remain together forever.
  12. I kinda look at it this way: in the "yes" and "I do," I got not only the blessing of becoming Nancy's husband, but I got the source of blessing as well - Nancy became my "til death do us part" wife.
- C. Ephesians 1:1-14 is so exciting to read, but let's be clear: **(Slide #23)** just because God chose us and wants to bless us does not mean it will happen. WE MUST CHOSE TO ACCEPT THE BLESSINGS AND THE BLESSER.
1. Do we accept God's choice that we be holy and blameless?
  2. Do we accept sonship/daughtership?
  3. Do we accept Christ Purchase/redemption and forgiveness?
  4. Do we accept the calling to live a life that will honor God?
  5. Do we accept the prize of heaven.
  6. And then in the end, do we accept the love of God the father, the redemption of God the Son, and the abiding presence of God the Holy Spirit?
- D. No one is forcing us to receive God and all His blessings. We must chose to accept Him.
- E. So here's the closing question: **(Slide #24)** DO YOU CHOSE TO ACCEPT GOD AND HIS BLESSINGS?
- F. If so, then your "yes" or "I do" activates the words of Eph. 1:1-14 in you. It's your call!