

"Setting Our Hope"

July 11, 2021

Ephesians 1: 3-14

³ 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, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

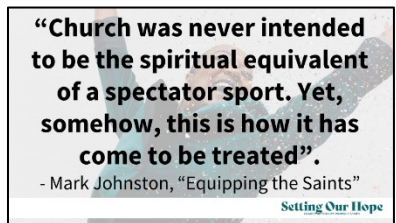


Welcome to our new worship series, "Geared Up for Life"! During this series we will cover the "why" of the Christian faith for three weeks and then will delve into the "how to" for the remaining four weeks of this series.

Today's message is called "Setting Our Hope" and the focus will be to set our hope on Christ - the driving force that moves us out of despair into joy, out of self into relationship, out of the church walls into the world to live that hope out loud. As we turn to Ephesians 1 today, let us train our minds and hearts on joy, on relationship, and on living hope out loud in the world. As we do so, let us begin with a word of prayer...



"Church was never intended to be the spiritual equivalent of a spectator sport. Yet, somehow, this is how it has come to be treated". This quote comes from



an article about the book of Ephesians by a pastor names Mark Johnston. I know, some of you are thinking, "Amen", and some of you are squirming a bit. Such is life and such it will be during this series. In his letter to the churches in and around Ephesus Paul was writing to spur the churches and the members on to action, to mission, to service. In his article, Johnston connects the churches of Paul's day to the church today as he writes these words:

"Quite the opposite from being a spiritual theatre intended for the entertainment of the saints, church is actually a spiritual bootcamp where they are to be equipped for service and prepared for cosmic warfare. This is precisely what Paul tells the Ephesians whose churches were coming unstuck because of misperceptions over what church was meant to be and how its spiritual leaders were meant to discharge their calling as servants of the risen Lord".

The churches in and around Ephesus had grown comfortable, they had become spectators. They had become a bit soft on the whole idea of being the church out there in the world. So, the letter to the Ephesians is about gearing up, about making sure that our faith is not just an internal thing, not just a head thing. It is about living out the faith. It is about setting our hope on Jesus Christ. But living out our faith can begin with a simple celebration. It is good to be blessed. It is good to be adopted, to belong. It is good to remind ourselves that we are not alone, that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. As we begin this morning, turn with me to Ephesians 1. If you are at home, grab your Bible. If you are in church, open your Bible or app on your phone or grab a Bible from underneath a chair. We start in verse three.



Paul begins this circular letter with some good news. As each church received and read the letter, they would first be lifted up and encouraged in their faith. Hear again the hope found in Ephesians 1, verses three through five:

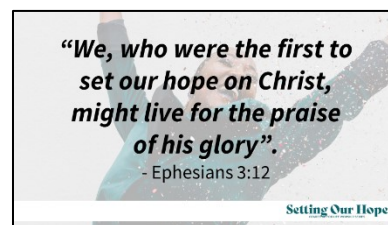
"³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will".

Do you hear the good news? We are blessed. We are chosen. We are destined to be a part of God's family. What words of hope! What words of encouragement!

Church, do you believe this good news? You are blessed, you are chosen, you are destined to be a part of God's family. This is certainly part of the "why" we are people of faith. And the good news does not stop there. Look at verse seven. In Christ we have *"redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of trespasses"*. We do not have to remain dead in our sin, caught up in the shame of our trespasses. No, according to the *"riches of his grace that he lavished on us"* – that's from verses seven and eight – we are made new again, holy and perfect in his sight. In Christ we find forgiveness and redemption. That is what we are about to participate in and celebrate today at the communion table.

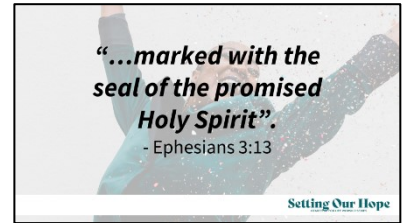
That's great news, isn't it? But it gets better. In verses nine and ten, Paul reminds them and us that God has *"made known the mystery of his will... in the fullness of time, to gather all things up to him"*. Not only are we freed from our sins, but we are promised an eternity in heaven. Yes, my friends, Jesus Christ is good news for the world, and he is good news for you and for me. Whoo-hoo! Right? Let's celebrate and rejoice and then go home and have lunch and then a nap. Whoo-hoo... Well, not exactly. If we celebrate that we are blessed and chosen and forgiven and redeemed and part of the family and then we go home and back to our own little worlds, then we are spectators, not participants; we are selfish, not generous; we are inwardly focused, not outwardly concerned. These are the reasons that Paul wrote this letter to the church. It is why we must still read and study the letter to the Ephesians today. If we are to be the church that Christ intends us to be, if we are to bring joy to the despair of the world, if we are to live in relationship instead of unto self, if we are to bring the hope of Jesus Christ outside the walls of this community of faith and out into the world, then we must get to verse twelve.

Read it here with me: *"We, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory"*. What do you think it means to 'live for the praise of his glory'? Yes, it is amazing to know and believe that we are blessed, chosen, part of God's family. Yes, it is amazing to know and believe that we are forgiven and redeemed, that we are promised eternal life. Our faith brings us joy. We hope in Christ. It is wonderful to hear these proclamations. But think of the joy it would be – and in fact is – to proclaim this good news to others.

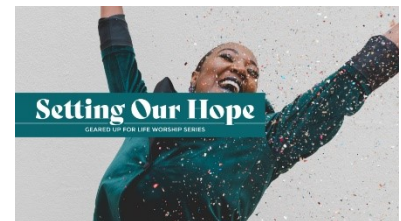


Let me ask you a question: do you love a good campfire? I sure do! But what fun is it to sit around a campfire all by yourself? A good campfire is a community event. It only brings joy when shared with others. In a similar way, to live for the praise of Christ's glory means to proclaim the good news to the world. God's intent, I do not believe, when Paul speaks of *"gathering up all things"*, is to just gather up those of us sitting in church on a Sunday morning. Or even to gather up those who profess Jesus as Lord and Savior. I do not believe that God's circle of love is that limited. In fact, I do not believe that it is limited at all. God's intent is to redeem and restore all people to himself – to bless and welcome all people into the fellowship of believers. Living for the praise of his glory means that we are an active and purposeful part of building the kingdom of God here on earth. It means that we are to open wide the arms of grace-filled faith and to become adopters instead of adoptees, to become participants instead of spectators. In a practical sense, if you were enjoying a campfire with some family and friends and saw your neighbor looking over from across the fence – wouldn't you make them a participant instead of allowing them to remain a spectator?

Does this idea of flinging wide the arms of grace seem like a big task? Does it feel challenging to think about living all of our lives *"for the praise of his glory"*? If so, turn with me to verse thirteen. Right there it tells us that once we believed, we were *"marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit"*. As we navigate this journey of faith, as we seek to proclaim the good news, we have the Holy Spirit with us. This is not a "if you are good and eat your vegetables then..." promise. It is a you have the presence alive with you, you are indwelt with the Holy Spirit right now and always promise. We can lean into the Holy Spirit. We can trust in the guidance and protection of the Holy Spirit. We can live our hope out loud in the world knowing that the Spirit surrounds us and goes with us as we seek to live out and proclaim the good news of adoption and blessing and welcome.



As we gather to worship and to praise God, we are tangible evidence of the power of community and the power of faith. As we make it our choice to set our hope on Christ, we become a part of the community of faith. Yes, you are a part of the community of faith. As we continue to journey together through the letter to the Ephesians, we will clarify our purpose as the body of Christ and to understand our individual roles in developing and building the kingdom of God here on earth. Woven throughout the letter are the truths that we are blessed, adopted, made to live for the praise of Christ's glory. When we each make the choice to participate in the community of faith then we commit to offering to God our witness and praise as we seek to engage a hurting world with the healing, wholeness, and peace that Christ alone gives.



In writing to the churches in and around Ephesus, Paul clearly understood the need for the community to develop authentic relationships rooted in love both within the body of believers and with the larger community – the world. That’s what happens when we gather around the fire pit, around the communion table, or around any table for that matter. Being the body of Christ was necessary for the ministry, but it was also an imperative. Unity was God’s purpose for the church in spreading the good news. The communities of faith needed to come together not to be a social club, not to be part of a spectator sport, but to fulfill God’s will. The fullness of a life lived in and for Christ is best realized when practiced in and with community. You are invited to be a part of this community of faith. Whether you are sitting here this morning, whether you are watching from home right now, whether you watch this message at some later point in time – you are invited to be an active participant in this body of believers seeking to transform the world around us.

You’ve has some time to think about this participant thing. Last week Mike asked us, no, he challenged us to pray about where God wants to use your talents. He challenged us to throw all of our excuses at God. That is what Paul does to the churches in and around Ephesus too. He challenged them to bring joy and community and hope to the world around them. You’ve had some time to consider Mike’s challenge. Please don’t make me corner you. Towards the end of his message Mike reminded us of the hope we have in Jesus – of that mansion prepared for those who love him. He invited us to ponder this question: Lord, how can I be your friend today? I’d like to extend that this morning. Lord, how can we be your friend and our neighbor’s friend? We can be a friend to God and to neighbor by setting our hope on Jesus Christ.

My friends, when we set our hope on Christ, he becomes the purpose behind our living. Christ becomes the driving force that moves us from despair to joy, from self into relationship, from inside the church walls and out into the world. We as a church set our hope on Christ; now let us live that hope each day. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When you consider the spectator-participant spectrum, where are you right now concerning your faith? What could you do this week to move closer to the participant end of the spectrum?
- 2) *Pray*. When have you felt nudged to gather others around the table or fire pit or patio? Seek Holy Spirit guidance to facilitate that gathering.
- 3) *Study*. Read Ephesians 2: 1-10. How does this passage further set your hope on Christ? How does it encourage and challenge you to "*live for the praise of his glory*"?