

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. Last week I launched a new sermon series on the Letter to the Ephesians, entitled, "**Becoming What We Believe**." If you weren't here last week and want to get caught up, you can visit our website to listen to the audio, or you can read the full, written manuscript of the sermon.

Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus reminds us that the message concerning Jesus is a message about God and us; it's a message about *choice* and *change*. God *chooses* us, He moves towards us, because we couldn't move towards Him. He embraces us, forgives us, and then begins to *change* us.

And while God's choice precedes our own, our *choice* is critical too; before us is a vast array of choices about how we will live. Ephesians reminds us that we cannot "become a new creature without acting like one,"<sup>1</sup> and this becoming is shaped both by the *changes* Jesus initiates and the *choices* we make to align ourselves to Him.

I have entitled this series "**Becoming What We Believe**" because the letter to the Ephesians is relentless when it comes to holding what we believe and how we behave together. Our thoughts have the power to shape our identity—all of us become what we believe.

**illus:** I want to begin this morning by telling you the story of Hetty Green. Hetty was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1834. Hetty inherited a number of substantial sums of money that she began to invest. By the time of her death, Hetty was the richest woman in America, with a net worth of \$2-3 billion by today's

standards. In spite of this fact, Hetty is most often remembered as "*America's Greatest Miser*".

Her stinginess was legendary. It is said that she owned only one black dress and one set of undergarments—she only got new ones, after the old ones had been worn out. She instructed those laundering her dress to wash only the dirtiest part (the hem) in order to save money on soap.

It is said that in order to save money, she refused to turn on the heat or use hot water. She ate oatmeal cold, because of the cost to heat it. It is also said that Hetty once spent half a night searching her carriage for a lost stamp that was worth two cents. Here's one final story—at one point her son injured his leg and needed to see a doctor. But Hetty spent such a long time looking for a free clinic, by the time he received treatment, his leg needed to be amputated.

It's sad, isn't it? Hetty chose to live a miserly life. She had great wealth and yet she lived with a poverty mentality. Why would anyone do such a thing?

Ephesians 1:3 says that God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. In Ephesians 1:18, Paul prays that we might know riches of God's glorious inheritance in Jesus Christ. We are promised that God's supply is more than able to meet all of our needs. And yet, many live lives of quiet desperation. Perhaps we are more like Hetty than we'd like to admit. This morning, as we look at Ephesians 1:3-14, we are going to explore God's glorious plan and the riches that are ours **in** Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Terry C. Muck, *NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, 11.

At this time, let me encourage you to open your Bible, paper or electronic, to Ephesians 1:3-14; that's page \_\_\_\_\_ in the Blue Bible. **Read.**

*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. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

*7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

*11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.”*

Before I get into the heart of this text, I want to offer 3 brief observations.

**First**, this text has an inherent trinitarian shape. I said last week that in every letter Paul wrote, his primary concern was to answer the question, “*Who is God?*” The New Testament consistently points to the threefold revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is three and yet one; and this is seen most clearly in how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit collaborate.

Biblically speaking, all things are initiated by the Father, accomplished through the Son, and applied to us by the Holy Spirit. This trinitarian pattern is born out in our text this morning; each member of the Trinity is involved in the work of salvation. The Father initiates salvation (**He chooses-vs. 4**), the Son accomplishes salvation (**He redeems-vs. 7**), and the Spirit applies salvation (**He seals-vs. 13**).

**Second**, while our text has an inherent trinitarian pattern, Jesus stands at the centre of Paul's hymn of praise. I said last week that Paul's use of the expression “in Christ,” is central to his theology. He uses this expression, or similar variants, 164 times in 13 letters. In Ephesians alone, Paul uses this phrase 36 times. In Ephesians 1:3-14, this phrase is repeated 9 times.

As we make our way through the text, we shall see that while the Father is the One who receives the praise, it is praise for what He has accomplished **in Christ**. And that brings me to the last observation.

**Third**, we completely miss Paul's intent for this text if we are not, in the end, led to worship. What Paul does is set our own individual stories within the cosmic story that God is writing in history—it's only as we understand God's glorious plan that we can find meaning and purpose in our own story. In the original Greek language, our

text is one long run-on-sentence; it's Paul's hymn of praise for the Father's glorious, saving, work through Jesus.

The very nature of these words call for exuberant worship. We are invited to revel in the fact that we have been invited into God's family—we are invited to canon ball into the ocean of God's love. Any reading of this text that does any less, does it an injustice.

So let's turn our attention to this hymn, beginning in vs. 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.*"

Vs. 3 functions like a topic sentence, setting the stage for all that follows. God the Father has poured out every blessing of the Spirit on those who are in Christ, and verses 4-14 explore the breadth and depth of these blessings. In the time remaining, I'm going to make my way through Paul's hymn of praise, naming each blessing—as I do, allow your heart to be drawn to worship. Here's the first...

**1. First, in Christ we are chosen (vs. 4).** It's nice to be chosen, isn't it?

Choosing someone or something implies that there are a number of available options—we could choose someone or something else. And do you know what is bound up in our choosing? **Love.** More often than not, our choices reveal who, and what, we love.

So let me ask you, *does this same truth apply to God?* Does God have the freedom to choose? I suppose what I'm really asking is whether God is stuck with us, or whether He's chosen us—there is a

world of difference between the two. Perhaps you've always thought of yourself as being an albatross around God's neck. *God must not have a choice, because if He did, He never would have chosen me.*

What does God's word tell us? Vs. 4-5, "[The Father] **chose us in** [Christ] *before the creation of the world...* *In love* [the Father] *predestined* [**chose**] *us...in accordance with his pleasure and will*".

Before God made the world, He loved us and freely chose us; there was no gritting of teeth or twisting of arms. God chose you both because you bring Him pleasure, and, because your life is a part of His glorious plan. I wonder, *what difference would it make if we believed that this was true?* In Christ we are chosen.

**2. Second, in Christ we are adopted (vs. 5).** Let's look at verse 5 again, "In love [the Father] predestined [**chose**] us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ". The use of the word "adoption" is unique to Paul; he's the only one who employs it in the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Vs. 4 says that God the Father chose us in Christ; vs. 5 tells us what we have been chosen for—to be His sons and daughters.

**illus:** I can remember the night that I received a call from our adoption agency, telling us that we had just been matched with a little girl from Thailand. They sent us an email that contained a few details about Anna's family history, along with a few pictures. We opened the email with awe and wonder; had a new daughter—not by blood, but by choice!

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<sup>2</sup> Paul mentions adoption is mentioned five times: Romans 8:15, 23; Romans 9:4; Galatians 4:5; and Ephesians 1:5.

In Roman society, when a son was adopted, he moved into the family home, he was given the family name, any outstanding debts were paid in full, and he stood in line to receive his father's inheritance.<sup>3</sup> An adopted son or daughter had the same legal position as a natural born child—they were “*real*” sons/daughters.

The same is true of us. Jesus is God's Son by nature, the rest of us have been adopted into His family. And the love we enter into is the love that the Father has for Jesus the Son. Not that the Father loves the Son and now also loves us, but that the Father loves us in the Son; we are loved to the same degree as Jesus.

The question is, *what difference would it make if we believed that this was true?* Maybe we'd stop trying to earn God's favour—we'd realize that already we are loved beyond measure, and God isn't going to change His mind about us.

All of us have felt the pain of rejection. Companies reject employees and employees companies. Friends reject friends. Husbands reject wives and wives reject husbands. Parents reject children and children parents. To a person, we seek the security of a rejection-free-relationship. Only one such relationship exists—we have been chosen by God, and adopted into His forever-family.

**3. Third, in Christ we are redeemed and forgiven (vs. 7-8).** Paul writes, “*In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.*”

Redemption expresses the heart of God—though we are captive to sin, and thoroughly broken, He seeks us still. To redeem is to purchase something or someone that would otherwise be lost, imprisoned, or destroyed. Jesus offered His life as a payment that releases us from our captivity.

He reached out to us when we were unable to reach out to Him—when we were lost, imprisoned, and bound for destruction, He purchased us our pardon; we have been forgiven and set free. To speak of the “*riches of God's grace*” is to speak of abundance—His mercy, forgiveness, and love is overflowing in measure. He is not the God of *just enough*; there is no end to His supply.

The question is, *what difference would it make if we believed that this was true?* Perhaps we wouldn't allow ourselves to wallow in guilt and shame—we would run to Jesus for the forgiveness that has already been paid for. Perhaps we would walk in the freedom that God intended for us. In Christ we are redeemed and forgiven.

**4. Fourth, in Christ we are included in God's new people (vs. 12-13).** Ephesians speaks not only about new life in Jesus, but about God's new, giant, family—the Church. When we are ushered into relationship with the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit, we are bound together: Asians, Africans, Europeans, Russians, Kiwis, Aussies, North and South Americans—male and female, young and old, rich and poor. We're going to talk a lot more about this in the coming weeks.

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Lyall, *Roman Law in the Writings of Paul--Adoption*, 83.

**5. Finally, in Christ we have been sealed for eternity.**

No one gives like God gives, and the best gift He gives is the gift of Himself. The Father gave the Son, the Son gave up His life, and the Spirit gives us the gift of Himself—He comes to indwell us, God's own empowering presence. Because of the Spirit's presence within, we can know peace in the midst of conflict, joy in the face of difficulty, strength in midst of weakness, wisdom in the face of complexity. The Holy Spirit lives to remind us that we are loved by God. Praise God for the Holy Spirit!

In vs. 13-14 Paul writes, "*When you believed, you were marked in [Christ] with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession*". The Spirit is described as being both a seal and a deposit.

In ancient times, official letters were marked with a seal before they were sent. When a recipient received the letter and saw the seal—the mark of the sender was recognized and the authenticity of the letter was confirmed.

How do we know we have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, and grafted into God's new family? We have sealed, we have been marked with God's Indwelling Presence, the promised Holy Spirit. The Spirit's presence is the sure sign that we belong to God.

And Paul goes on to talk about the Spirit functioning like a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance. Paul is drawing upon a business metaphor that still makes sense today. When you sell your house, the

buyer must hand over a downpayment—it's the first instalment, guaranteeing what is yet to come.

The Holy Spirit's presence in you, in me, in the Church, is God's guarantee that He will make good on all of His promises. What we currently experience only in part—the love of God, our adoption as children, redemption, and forgiveness—we will one day know in fullness. What we experience now, will be even better than—the rest is still coming. The question is, *what difference would it make if we believed that this was true?*

When we first put our faith in Jesus, we are filled with the Holy Spirit. But this one time filling is to be followed with many subsequent fillings. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul writes, "Don't [be controlled] by wine because it will ruin your life, instead, go on being filled with the Holy Spirit." Perhaps today you sense a need for fresh touch of the Holy Spirit; at the conclusion of the service, we would love to pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you once again.

**Conclusion:** as I draw my sermon to a close, I want to return to the story of Hetty Green, *America's Greatest Miser*. She had great wealth and yet she lived with a poverty mentality. Why would anyone do such a thing?

More than a month ago, I had made plans to tell this story on this weekend, but I had no way of knowing what would happen to me this past week.

**illus:** I am a part of a small mentoring group made up of Alliance pastors from across B.C. We get together a few times a year for

prayer, mutual encouragement, and leadership training—last Sunday we flew down to Palm Springs to spend 4 days together.

With the weather expected to range from 20-35 degrees, I packed light—a bathing suit for the pool, a few pairs of shorts, flip flops, running shoes, sunglasses, and enough shirts that I could go for a run every day. I'm not a frequent flyer, but I fly enough to know that it's much harder for an airline to lose your bag when you carry it with you on to the plane. I decided to play it safe and keep my bag with me.

But when we changed planes in Seattle, the overhead bins were already full—the flight attendant tagged my bag and promised it would be waiting for me when we landed. I watched as she marched it off the plane and I had a sinking feeling that I might not see it again—that feeling was confirmed when we landed in Palm Springs at 11 pm.

I checked into the hotel that night with nothing but the clothes I was wearing, and the complimentary toothbrush from the front desk. When I called Alaska Airlines the next morning, they told me that my bag was in Seattle or San Francisco, either way it would be delivered to my hotel by 7 pm that night. The customer service representative apologized for the inconvenience, and told me to go out and buy whatever I needed.

*“Whatever I need?”*, I asked. Her statement seemed a little open ended to me; something that could easily be taken advantage of. And so I asked a follow-up question: *“Do you have a limit that you would like me to stay under?”* *“No sir, go out and buy whatever you need.”* I got off the phone and thought to myself, *“If I am going to get my*

*bag in less than 12 hours, I don't want to take advantage of the airline's offer.”*

By 9 am it was already 25 degrees and my jeans were feeling a little warm; I decided to buy only the essentials—a bathing suit, a shirt, and pair of shorts. I knew I could get by with the pair of socks I was already wearing, and a guy can wear underwear at least two days in a row—you just turn it inside out. I went out shopping but the whole time I felt guilty.

After dinner, I went by the front desk to pick up my bag but it hadn't been delivered. I called the airline, got the answering machine and left a message. They called me back the next morning and said, *“We're sorry sir, but we don't have your bag here in Palm Springs, and it looks like it didn't get on the plane from San Francisco yesterday...we're hopeful that it will arrive some time tonight.”*

Hopeful? I had been hoping to go for a long run every morning, but all of my gear was in my bag, and by this point I'd already turned my underwear inside out. I said to the customer service agent, *I'm on day three in the same pair of underwear, I've got one pair of socks, no shoes or clothes to run in, and no razor to shave with.* Once again, she said to me, *“Sir, we are so sorry for your inconvenience, please go and buy whatever you need.”* *“Whatever I need?”*, I asked. She couldn't mean that; there had to be a limit, but when I pressed she wouldn't give me one.

I went out that morning and bought what I needed—socks, underwear, a razor, running shoes—you would think that I felt relieved to get what I needed, but I felt guilty the entire time.

Later that day, as I was putting on one of my new shirts, the Spirit said to me, *“Alaska Airlines won't miss the money you spent. Mark, it's time to stop living with a poverty mentality. I have blessed you with every blessing in Christ; your needs will never bankrupt Me—my supply has no limit.”*

In Christ we have been chosen, we are loved, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, included, and sealed...not only that, but the best is yet to come. God's supply knows no limit. *What difference would it make if we believed that this were true?*

**Prayer**

**Worship**

**Benediction**