

Ephesians 14-01-12a

This is Sunday, the 12th of January, 2014. In the book of Ephesians, we are in chapter 3, and the study that we have just done in miniature on Philippians 3.20, looking at heaven, the concept of heaven, the reality of heaven, the characteristics of what we should probably more accurately call our destination in the eternal future, directly pertain because that verse begins by talking about our citizenship. And this is the subject of this particular portion of Ephesians.

We'll take a moment to ensure that God the Holy Spirit is available and able to teach us because we have taken care of any unacknowledged sin or any distractions that might be preventing our sensitivity to His ministry and to the undertaking we have here of looking at the truth of the Word of God. Shall we pray? Father, we're grateful for the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything we have is through Him and in Him and by Him.

We were even further than Your chosen people, if that were possible. All of us are conceived in iniquity and born in sin. There are those who were drawn to You in Old Testament days by their heritage, by their nationality, and yet in every age and in every life there is the decision to be made of whether to accept or reject the opportunity for relationship with You.

And we know that in every life this is through the Lord Jesus Christ, whether in prospect or in retrospect. We know that without Him we can do nothing, we are nothing, we have nothing, and we cannot even begin to approach You. Through Him we have access.

Through Him we can come boldly to Your throne room and find grace to help in time of need. Through Him we are made acceptable in Your sight. Through Him we can attain to and lay hold of righteousness that pleases You and reflects Your glory.

Through Him we have the wonderful hope of eternal life and promotion from this mundane earth to heavenly realms and to bright new opportunities and environments that we can hardly imagine. We pray that as we look at Your Word this morning that God the Holy Spirit will enliven these realities and these truths in our souls, that we will be motivated, that we will see clearly the temporary nature of our dwelling here, the eternal nature of our dwelling with You, and the opportunity that we have to avail ourselves of the challenges and the tests and the blessings that You provide for us here to prepare for that future. We pray that You will bless this portion of Your Word to our souls.

May each one of us find it meaningful and motivating in the time that remains to us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Ephesians chapter 3 has an inclusion, if you will, a section set off with em dashes as we have seen. Paul, having detailed all of the in him benefits, I thought I might just very quickly rehearse those in case they have faded a bit from our memory. We have there were 7, 3 on each side of a central truth, the central truth being that all things are united in Christ.

That was chapter 1, if you remember. In verse 10, Ephesians 1:10, there was this tremendous affirmation that God's purpose was that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, that's now, that's us, the dispensation of the fullness of the times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ. Haven't we seen this in the rest of the letter where He says part of that all things not only in heaven but also in earth, the things in earth included the chosen people, the Old Testament saints, the nation of Israel, those under the law of Moses, under the old covenant.

And you had to be under that covenant or you were out. There was no other option until the Lord Jesus came. And when He came, He opened up a new and living way.

And He made it possible for anyone anywhere to opt in to the ever expanding plan and purpose of God. Not to become Israel, not to be inducted under the old covenant, but to enter into along with those who crossed over into the new dispensation into a new covenant. It is a new and living way.

It tells us in Hebrews chapter 10. So, that was Ephesians chapter 1 verse 10. That was the central idea in this new dispensation of fullness of times.

Fullness of times. Fullness means the filling up, the completion, the fulfillment. Fulfillment of times.

Because the Old Testament age doesn't achieve its purpose and doesn't arrive at its goal without this age. Without what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and what is being revealed to heavenly creatures and to earthly creatures in God's working with you and me, this fulfills and completes what was going on in the Old Testament age. So, this is the dispensation of the fullness of times.

Old Testament times, New Testament times, Old Covenant times, New Covenant times are fulfilled and brought to fruition and the purpose is revealed now. How many people does it take to do this? Well, in some ways it takes everybody who comes to faith in the New Testament age, which is many, many hundreds of millions. In other ways, it just takes you.

It just takes us. The fullness is not complete without you. You're not here because you are a spare.

You're not here because you're a just-in-case. You're the extra box of band-aids that you throw into the suitcase in case you run out of the first box. That's not it.

Your life, you, fill in your name here, are essential to completing the dispensation of the fullness of the times. If you were not essential, you would not be here. So, you cannot let yourself off the hook by saying, I don't matter, I don't really count, I don't make a difference.

Nonsense. That's blasphemy that God goofed when He put you here and it would go on just as fine without you. No, it wouldn't.

Each of us was destined to occupy the time and space that we are now occupying and it is a perfect plan. It is perfectly woven. Have you ever been shopping for a garment? You know, this big shopping season we just survived.

But they put a lot of stuff on sale and you go in there and you're looking through the table and maybe they've got three or four of the same item and you're thinking, well, you know, is it interchangeable? I just grab one of these and go. The more careful shopper will look at things like buttonholes and seams to make sure that as they were making these in a factory somewhere overseas, in a sweat shop where they're paying 13 cents an hour and running them as fast as they can to make as many as they can, that it is done right. And you may notice when you look more carefully, they missed the thread on the edge of this buttonhole and there's ragged cloth there.

This seam is not even. This part of the fold did not get caught by the thread. These jeans are missing a rivet, something like that.

If you take your time and look, it's really important that, let's say you're looking at some wonderful high thread count sheets and as you're looking at them, you notice that there's a little tear in the plastic and when you look, there's a broken thread. And you think, well, here's another one over here that doesn't have a broken thread. These are fine, high thread count sheets.

What does it matter if one thread's broken? Well, which one are you going to pick? If you notice that it's got a broken thread, one little broken thread, maybe it's 250 or whatever a high thread count is on sheets, but when you see a picked place and you see the thread is broken, that's not a perfect sheet. That's not the one you want to buy if there's another one available, right? Because you know what's going to happen. That's going to fray.

That's going to make a, isn't it awful when you get a brand new thing and you're wearing it around and you catch it on something sharp and you get a picked place. Have you ever had a wonderful woven sweater and now there's a line all the way across? It only takes one thread to be picked to be disturbed and it makes a difference to the whole garment. That's what we need to remember about our lives.

It is not a matter of indifference. You don't get lost in the white noise. Your life matters and it counts.

If there were just 10 people that made up the dispensation of the fullness of the times, how important would any one of those 10 people be? Well, guess what? To God, quantity doesn't matter. You are just as important as if there were only 10 people in the whole church age and you were one of them. It makes a difference and that's why the commands of God, the provisions of God, do you think God would waste time sending His Holy Spirit and entering us into the books, assigning angels, working out all of the past, all of the present, all of the future, weaving us into the fabric of His plan if it didn't matter? God is a God of details.

What if the charge on a gluon changed at some point? What if a quark didn't do the quark thing? What if protons and neutrons didn't exactly conform? This is how they start nuclear explosions is when you start changing the relationship of very small things. God is a God of detail and we are details that matter and so that creates in us or should create a sense of responsibility. That's what Paul is talking about.

That's why he wrote this letter. He is writing to these Laodicean believers just as he is writing to the Colossian believers just as he is writing to Philemon about Onesimus. All three of these letters traveling in the same bag because he's got this universal truth that applies not only in the present day that he writes the letter but in all future days to all future believers but it comes all the way down to one guy, Onesimus, a slave.

The Word of God macro to micro. It is the cosmos. It is the star factories.

It is the galaxies. It is the extent of the universe and it is the most microscopic energy charge. God is equally dedicated, equally detailed, equally sovereign, equally interested and concerned about everything from the macro to the micro.

We can barely understand that because we are so fallible and so limited that we have to generalize. We have to make assumptions. We have to overlook small things.

We have to overlook big things. When we don't, it becomes an object of humor. You think about Mr. Monk.

He gets over-obsessed with the detail and he becomes dysfunctional. That's because of our limitations. God has no such limitation.

Here's a startling truth. God is every bit as interested and every bit as attentive to your life as He was to Moses or the Apostle Paul, Daniel, Joshua, Joseph, you name it. You are no less interesting.

You are no less directly in front of the presence of God for attention, for provision, for blessing, for evaluation, for discipline where necessary than any other person famous in the Bible currently on the scene because God isn't like us. He doesn't generalize. He doesn't pick out a few representative things.

God is equally powerful everywhere. He is equally knowledgeable everywhere. His priorities pertain everywhere and you can't hide in the crowd.

You can't and we don't. It's almost unthinkable to me that out of the masses that swarm over this earth, the God of heaven who created the entire universe is intimately aware of every thought and intention in my heart. He knows them just like He knows where every star is in the Milky Way, just like He knows where every gassy nebula is in every other galaxy that Hubble has ever

seen and all the ones that we can't see because they're over the horizon, they're over the threshold.

Our perception is so limited. Even when we look up in the sky, even when our telescopes scan, we're only getting a snapshot. The light that comes to us at any given moment is a snapshot and the further it's traveled, the older the snapshot is.

When we finally see a nebula or a galaxy, we're looking at stuff that pertained millions of years ago. We have no idea what that looks like now. It's like mailing somebody a photo and if the mail takes a million years to get there, well, that's what that family looked like a million years ago.

I don't know what they look like now. Don't you love to get all these pictures at Christmas and find out how everybody's falling apart just like you are? I love that. Put them all up on the refrigerator.

People that I used to think were old because they were older than me, I think, man, they are really old now. It's very comforting to see that we're all on the same down escalator. I find that very refreshing.

It's a snapshot. You run across an old snapshot and lo, how the mighty have fallen. You think, wow.

We've never had an age like we have now where you can see this change. When Paul talks about our salvation, our dispensation of the fullness of times, this he introduced in chapter 1. The center post is what? All things united in Christ. None of the stuff I've talked about in terms of disintegration and decrepitude make a difference.

Why? Because even as this earth and everything in it is fading away, our citizenship is in heaven from which we wait for the Savior. And amazingly, astonishingly, He is going to transport and translate us out of this dissolving clay and this fallen mundane world into the kingdom of those eternal realms where there is no death, where there is no disintegration, where there is no separation from God, where the deleterious effects of sin, the corruption, the defilement, the drag and the weight and the entanglement are gone. How great is that? It is in Christ.

And through Him we have these things that Paul details in chapter 1. In Him we are chosen, we are blessed, we are holy and blameless before Him in love. We are predestined, we are adopted, we reflect the praise of the glory of His grace. We are made known to Him and His will is made known to us.

That's relationship. We are become a part of His good pleasure. His grace riches abound to us in wisdom and prudence.

And we have redemption and forgiveness of sin. That's a rehearsal of the first three things before chapter 1, verse 10. What are the ones that come after that? We are destined in accordance with

His purpose and will.

We have an inheritance. We are made known to Him and His will. We are given the privilege of praising God and His glory.

We have been sealed with His promise. We have been marked as His purchased possession. Our inheritance is not just stated, it is guaranteed.

It is indemnified. It is sealed and secured. And we are given these wonderful resources now to live our life and to make the most of this time.

Instead of this time being a waste and a pointless existence, we have purpose. Our lives have meaning. There is a defined goal and the means to achieve that goal is given to us.

All of these things are in Christ. This is the fulfillment of the purpose of this age. Now ask yourself this question.

How many believers right now in church are this Sunday morning understand all of these things in a way that motivates them to fulfill it and to exploit it and to make the most of it? Out of the millions upon millions of believers that are meeting for worship this morning, how many of us actually grasp what God has given us in Christ? Would you say it's a majority or a minority? More than 50%, less than 50%? I think you could safely say it is far less than half. It might be less than 10%. You and I are in that 10%.

We have just been talking about it. We see it clearly in God's Word. So now, how important is our life? How important are our decisions and our thoughts? How important is our daily investment of the time that God has allotted to us in this brief life? Because you have this understanding, because you have been put in the advanced class, because you have got a wonderful grasp of so many things in God's Word, you are privileged with opportunities that many believers do not have because they haven't got the information, haven't been looking for the information as you have, haven't persisted in trying to understand and apply the information like you have.

You are in a small and, if I can say it, elite group of believers, and it's no accident that God has given you this information because God knows our hearts and God knows that you have the potential to do something with this. So, how tragic would it be for us to fail the grace of God when we have been given so much? Not only the common grace that is given to all believers in Jesus Christ in this dispensation, but the wonderful things that we have seen together in God's Word that aren't commonly broadcast on Christian television. They are not in a book that you can find down at the Christian bookstore or in the Christian section of a Barnes and Noble.

These are things that God has taken pains to reveal to you and to me over time in verse-by-verse, book-by-book, concept-by-concept study over months and years. This is a huge investment God has made in us. Why? Because He knows us and He knows we are capable of

doing something with it.

This is why Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, under the guidance and ministry and inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. To these believers, Paul says, I pray that you, you in particular, he doesn't express this prayer to the Corinthians, he doesn't express this prayer to the Galatians. He says, you guys, I pray for you because I know you and I know that you are capable of coming to know these great truths.

And so the question will be for these people in Laodicea, for their fellow believers in Colossae, what are they going to do with this tremendous insight that Paul the Apostle has given them? And we can ask ourselves the same question, what are we going to do with it? It's not an accident. It's not a happenstance that you and I have been given this level of revelation of who and what Jesus Christ is, how much He accomplished for us, how much He gave us. It's not an accident.

And it has a purpose. And it isn't just, wow, isn't that great? We're supposed to be living differently. We're supposed to be thinking differently.

We are supposed to be resting in God's grace in a new and effective way. We are supposed to be making progress down the narrow road toward the straight gate that leads to life, not just for now, but for the future. It's our calling.

It's our destiny and our purpose. And it's not a casual thing. Think about Jesus on the cross.

That's not a casual thing, but that's what it took to give us what we're looking at in this letter. That's what it took to unite all things in Christ. It was a heavy price.

We were redeemed not with corruptible things like gold and silver. We were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. So why would God go to all the trouble to prepare a place for us? Why would God go to all the trouble to make the new Jerusalem? Why would God go to all the trouble to assign us citizenship there? Because our lives are important.

He didn't just make a vacation destination and send out mailers. I got something in the mail yesterday talking about how I've got a check that's going to buy me something. I don't even remember what it was because I was reading it as it fell from my hand to the trash.

But, you know, no purchase necessary, no obligation. You get these all the time. There's always something that's going to come back and bite you.

They're after something. They want something. In some way my wallet is going to be lighter.

In some way these people are going to make money. They're going to give me a prize, but they're going to end up benefiting. It's not God's way.

God's way is a grace way and the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price. So my level of appreciation

for Him will reflect in what I do with these truths, what I do with these gifts, what I do with what I have in Him. That's why Paul says in chapter 3, for this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles, pray as I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, this is verse 16, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.

Strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. We need strength in the inner man, don't we? Our inner man is not strong by nature and doesn't get strong by experience. God has to strengthen our inner man and we have to know how that is accomplished.

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. That's a tall order and it sounds kind of lofty and kind of general, but we're going to take our break and when we come back we're going to try to find the reality of all of this fullness. What does it mean for Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith? We're talking about dwelling place, what is heaven? Our ultimate citizenship is recorded there, our future dwelling place is being created there and is going to come from there.

And yet here it doesn't say do all of these things so that you can dwell in heaven, it says so that Christ can dwell in you. We don't wait to go to heaven, we wait for a Savior to come from heaven in Philippians 3.20, right? And this shifts the objectives for churches and for believers in the church age who understand that we're not surviving and trying to climb into by some spiritual tower of Babel, we're not trying to climb into heaven. We want heaven to come down and dwell in us.

We want heaven here. We want the things that God has prepared for those who love Him here. That's what transforms, that is the difference between I can't wait to go to heaven and I can't wait for heaven to appear in me.

Well, we'll see that when we come back from the break.