

Ephesians 14-03-23a

This is Sunday, March the 23rd, 2014. We continue our study in the book of Ephesians, which records for us the letter Paul wrote to the Laodicean church. We are beginning this morning chapter four.

We'll take a moment, as is our custom, to give each of us the opportunity to ensure that we are susceptible to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, that we're focused on the task at hand, that we understand who we are, why we're here, and how important it is as we spend this time of fellowship together in God's work. Father, we're so grateful for your grace, the compassion that you have expressed toward us, the love that has its highest expression in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who voluntarily came to this earth in obedience and in accordance with your will, and as a part of His own desire to save us, to rescue us from a lost and hopeless condition, not only to redeem us from the power of hell and of judgment, but to lift us up and to set us on high, to bless us, to equip us, to qualify us, to stand in your presence, to be of service, to be useful, and to reflect your glory. We thank you for the means by which these things take place, which is the power of your Spirit resident within us, and the power that is ever abiding in your eternal Word, which we open this morning in an attempt to understand it more fully and to live more faithfully in its light.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enable us and empower us, not only to understand what is written in this passage, but to see its pertinence and its applicability in our individual circumstance, in the relationships that we maintain, the life that we live, the tasks that we undertake, the goals that we pursue. We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified, and in Him that you yourself will be glorified in our lives. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians is a very tightly structured book. It may not be immediately apparent, it may not be obvious to the casual observer, but it is a very finely woven tapestry of truth. It begins and ends with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is structurally founded on the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything that Paul expresses here ties directly back to the Lord Jesus in some way, shape, or form. You cannot find a verse in this book that doesn't in some way tie back to the Lord Jesus.

Because we live in this age, because we are in Him, of Him, we are a unique special gift that God the Father has given to us, has given to the Lord Jesus. We, us, we are that gift, uniquely so. It involves special privileges, but from those to whom much is given, much is expected.

And because the potential is great, the responsibility is great. That's you, and that's me. So we've seen in these first three chapters the theme of chapter one, if you remember, it is in Him, all of the things that God has given to us in Him.

Chapter two is united in Him. He has broken down the wall of partition. It's no longer Jews and Gentiles, it's no longer those who are outside and those who are in.

The nation of God, the people of God, the lineage of God, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's seed. The seed is now not defined genetically. The seed is defined spiritually.

Chapter three, because the mystery that had been hidden in God's eternal plan and purpose, but not revealed in the Old Testament, has been revealed. That union, that uniting, that bringing out of salvation for all men, the fulfillment of some of these sort of cryptic promises, back to Abraham and thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed, I think that's back in Genesis 22, telling Israel you will be a light. Some of the prophecies that were made at the time that the Lord Jesus was born.

Light shining in a dark place. Those who sit in darkness have seen a great light. And there's nobody further in darkness than the Gentiles back in the days when you had to come to Israel for relationship with God, to know God, to come to appreciate who and what He is.

Well, so chapter three unpacks and unfolds this new part of the equation of God's plan. The dispensation of the grace of God, verse two. And Paul prays in verse 14 and following of the last chapter that we, that you and I, fill in your name here, will be granted strength.

Remember I asked you a couple of weeks ago, hands up anybody that doesn't want strength in the inner man? Is there anybody that says, you know, I'd really like to be weak. I just love being pushed around. I like being put in impossible situations with requirements that I can't fulfill.

I love feeling helpless. I love feeling blown about and a victim of circumstance. You know that little spot right between the rock and the hard place? I love that.

I just, you know, the squeeze, the pressure, the failure, the sense of insignificance and of uselessness and helplessness. I love that. Nobody loves that.

You're crazy if you enjoy being a victim. But victimhood has become a popular theme. You're a victim.

Claim your victimhood rights. God does not condone. God does not encourage.

God in fact condemns victimhood. You and I are in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not victims.

We are victors. We are victors. We are overcomers, strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

There is no victimness in that. If you find this little wormy poisonous gourd plant growing up in your thinking that says with an ever protruding lower lip, why is everybody always picking on me? Why didn't I get what I thought I should get? Why didn't I, why wasn't I recognized? Why wasn't I

appreciated? Why was I snubbed? Why was I, as soon as you get to the why was I, you already need to start looking for trouble. We are not victims.

We are victors. The Lord Jesus Christ is, remember up from the grave He arose with a mighty triumph over His foes. He arose a victor over the dark domain and He lives forever with His saints to reign.

That's us. To reign. To rule.

To overcome. Overcomers walk with the Lord Jesus Christ in white. Overcomers sit with the Lord Jesus Christ on His throne.

They're not victims. They're not waiting for charitable handouts. They are not beggars.

They are victors. Remember Lazarus that in life had to sit outside the gate and the dogs were licking his sores? Where did he end up? He is not at the gate of the New Jerusalem with the dogs and fornicators and liars. He is inside.

He is sitting at the right hand of Abraham. That's what it means when it says Abraham's bosom. Remember the Lord Jesus, we talked about that seating chart in the upper room and the Apostle John being at the Lord's right hand has his head in his bosom.

Well in the picture of the rich man and Lazarus parable, Lazarus is seated at Abraham's right hand. It's the place of honor. He is in the highest place at that particular banquet's seating chart.

That's us. We are overcomers, not under someone's heel. If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, Paul says in chapter 3. Now this is all background.

Chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3. Everybody got that momentum. You see where we're at. The Lord Jesus Christ has made this possible.

He has opened up the door to a new dispensation in which we live and it is the dispensation of God's grace. Our success, our achievement in the real sense, in the spiritual sense does not depend on us and it doesn't depend on the people around us either. I'd be far more successful if I wasn't being held back by this person and that person.

The person immediately over me, I could achieve, I could attain, I could be promoted, I could do wonderful things, I could take charge, I could, you know, plow the seven seas and get booty and plunder and raise my mighty flag all over the earth if only people weren't holding me back. This person has undercut me. That person has diminished my ability to get stuff done.

No. Wrong. Purge that thinking out of your heart.

By the way, the secular world will tell you the same thing. Dr. Phil will say, purge that kind of

negative thinking out of your heart. Problem is, Dr. Phil can't give you the means to do it.

You can say, okay, I've just heard Dr. Phil or this guy, you know, the bald guy, looks like Mr. Clean, has all the PBS seminars, you know, spirit guides and, you know, the great Buddha and Jesus were big buddies. People all over the earth will tell you these things. What they cannot provide is the means.

You can listen to the bald guy and right after the TV shuts off, you say, yes, what I'm going to do? Fifteen minutes later, you're going to be in the grip of all kinds of snakes and dragons and you've got no ability to purge out these bad thoughts and think about the ascended spirit masters and all their wives' words because somebody just said something bad and you've got no power to do these abstract, wonderfully sound good, feel good, aphoristic notions, there's no power. The Lord Jesus Christ has the power. The Lord Jesus Christ is the power.

And this is what you and I have, that no other philosophical system, no other religion, no other feel good, get ahead, buy my package and you can be a success in real estate or whatever else, nobody has that. You can have seen every episode of Oprah there ever was. You can watch every Dr. Phil there ever was.

You can read every self-help book there ever was and you have no power to overcome the snaky corruption that is within us. The fallenness and the power of sin is beyond us. It is beyond us.

If I put you on a weight bench and I put the bar over you and I stick 300 pounds on each side of the bar and I get two or three hefty guys to lift up that bar and hand it to you on your chest and I say, bench press this 600 pounds, that's sin. That's our own nature and our own corruption. Nobody and I mean nobody that I know of benches 600 pounds.

It's not humanly possible as far as I know, maybe I should, maybe with steroids. So where is the power? That's what this chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3, this is why it is Jesus Christ from beginning to end because He brings the power of God in heaven into our hearts and into our souls and we can do this. We can recognize the greatness of God in Christ.

We can recognize the fellowship that breaks down all former walls of division and all other bases of prejudice and allows us to be humble and to be united in Christ so that we can appreciate this grace, the dispensation of grace in which we live. It is like no other. There's never been a dispensation like the one in which we live and there will never be again.

Never again will there be the assembling together of the body of Christ which will one day be the bride of Christ. We are unique. There's nothing like it and what a privilege to live in this age and what a tragedy to miss it, to get caught up in the mundane, menial, dusty, temporary, temporal things of this earth.

Oh, I want this job, I want this possession, I want this Indian motorcycle, I want this musical

instrument, I want this car, I want this person, I want this job, I want this to get caught up in those pursuits. Nothing wrong with pursuing goals but when it fills the windshield, when we have a myopic fixation on these things and that's what we think about, that's what we press toward and we miss the great light of the future kingdom of God because this is blocking our view. We need to shift our perspective and that's what we're getting to in chapter four.

Read with me the first eight verses, actually the first, yeah, first eight verses will be good of chapter four. Ephesians chapter four verse one, I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope, and one baptism. One God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in you all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore he says when he ascended on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Now the reason I, you know there's a natural break there right after verse six but the reason we go on into seven and eight is to see the contrast. There is one body, one spirit, one hope of the calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all through all and in you all.

It's all a unity but to each one of you is given. Because what's the danger? Why does Paul follow that unity peon of praise if you will? It's not P-E-O-N, it's P-A-E-A-N. A peon is a hymn of praise, a poetic expression.

Some of you might be thinking of other homonyms but there is one body, one spirit but to each one of us grace was given. Hang with me now. Chapter one, in him.

It's all of grace, right? By grace are you saved, by grace are you in Christ, by grace we're in this dispensation. Chapter two, by grace those who are far off have been brought near. Chapter three, this great mystery this is the dispensation of grace.

Chapter four begins, you are part of this unity, this new unity that chapter two talked about and chapter three talked about all the privileges that go with this unity. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, isn't it great we're all one, we're all on the glory train going to heaven. But the key here in chapter four is verse seven, to each one of us grace is given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Now what's the measure of Christ's gift? It's always kind of awkward when it comes to gifts. You've got to balance a lot of things. If it's your wife and if it's your fiftieth anniversary and you give her a new potato peeler, you know, that's going to be a struggle, it's going to be a struggle.

Why? Well, you expect that a gift in some way will be proportional and this is where the awkwardness comes in. Gift giving is the most complex, fraught with danger thing there is. Because, you know, when you're people cannot help but read something in, all kinds of stuff can happen.

You can have had a financial setback where two of your cars went in the shop and you have got no money at all and you would love to give this person something in the three figures, let's say, but you are tapped. All you can do, you don't want to go say, well, you know what, I got you more, but I was really broke this month, so here's your round to it, here's your potholder that you can hang on the fridge that says round to it. Are you ever going to get a round to it? Yeah, I got one, it's on the fridge.

And that's what you give and it doesn't adequately express the appreciation, the esteem in which you hold someone, the closeness of your relationship. And you wish it was different, but it's not. And apologizing around that just makes things worse.

Gift giving is a difficult area. Receiving them, feeling like you need to reciprocate, my gosh, it's Christmas, I gave her a package of clothes pins and she gave me a mohair sweater worth three or four hundred dollars. I feel bad, you know, this was big, that was little.

It's extremely awkward. This is what's great. Each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

God doesn't have any of these problems. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. God is God.

God's grace is infinite. His mercy is infinite. His compassion is infinite.

And His relationship with you and with me is based on the Lord Jesus Christ. And God's grace that comes to us is in accordance with Christ's gift. Now, there's a weird thing in Greek, there's a dilemma that you face any time you get in a situation like this, because it's the gift of Christ.

When you do a possessive in Greek, you use the genitive. It's the boat of Peter. It's the nets of the fisherman.

And of or from someone, this is the genitive. And so, here we have the word gift, which is dorea. And this is a genitive.

It's in the genitive. Ha dorea. And you get your names like Doris from this.

Dorea. And it means gift. That's different than charis, which is a different kind of gift.

This is dorea, and it's in the genitive. So you have, according to the measure of Christ, of gift. So it's according to the gift of Christ.

Well, there's two different kinds of genitive in this situation. There's the objective genitive and the subjective genitive. Think about this.

Think about a sentence. What do you know about a sentence? What's the fundamental definition of a sentence? What does it have to have to be a sentence? Subject and a verb, right? The subject is the actor. The verb is the act or the state of being.

And if it's an active verb, often there is a direct object, right? I hit the ball. I threw the plate. I smashed the china.

That's subjective genitive. Subject, verb, object. Well, when you say gift of Christ, is this a subjective genitive, meaning Christ has given the gift? Is it a gift of Christ because it came from Christ? Or is it a subjective genitive, meaning the gift is Christ? I gave you the gift of Christ.

You know, what do they say? What is that deal? The gift of... It's a commercial. Give them the gift of something. Remember what it is.

Probably mercifully so. So is this what Christ gives or is it what God gives and that gift is Christ? Well, happily for our situation we don't have to really solve that puzzle because either way the point here is that grace has been given us according to the measure of Christ's gift or the gift of Christ. So what is the measure of God giving Jesus Christ as a gift? Is it limited or is it infinite? And what is the measure of the gifts that the Lord Jesus gives? When He led captivity captive and ascended on high, He gave gifts to men.

You remember that? When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and He gave gifts. And it's talking about the Lord Jesus. Well either way the measure of the gift of Christ is beyond our comprehension.

Now I have more to say about this when we do this verse 7 in detail, but we talked about verse 1 last time. I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you, plead with you, beg you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. So, let's say you are a prisoner of the Lord.

You are now in glory. The resurrection body has been issued. You're in the realms of the glorified saints of God.

And here's the Apostle Paul. Will he still be a bald, beak-nosed, high-pitched voice little guy? I don't know. I kind of think not.

Because I think our resurrection bodies, as I've told you before, will reflect the inner man, the inner woman. And this is why people didn't immediately recognize the Lord Jesus, because His physical visage was different. The glorified Lord Jesus isn't recognizable from His physical form.

He's recognizable from the way He breaks bread, from His voice. When He says, Mary, Mary immediately knows, hey, this is not the gardener. The men on the road to Emmaus talk with Him

for hours.

And they become, did not our hearts burn within us when He spoke with us? The Word creates a flame in their soul. But when He breaks that bread, they instantly know who it is. And as soon as they recognize Him, He disappears.

But they didn't recognize His face. Even when He's on the banks of the Sea of Galilee and the disciples are up there fishing and it takes them a second, it is the Lord. When John says, it's the Lord, Peter dives in.

But they could see Him and they didn't immediately recognize Him. This is you and me. You can be thankful, perhaps, that the resurrection body, I think, is going to reflect the inner person.

So here you are. You're standing up there and you come into the presence of the Apostle Paul. And he says, well, fellow believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you remember that letter I wrote to Laodicea and they messed it up and called it Ephesians in the Bible.

But when you read the thing, when you studied the thing, when you got to what they called in your English Bible, chapter 4, and it said, I plead with you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, did you do it? Were you able to pull that off? Did it make sense to you? And did you do it? Standing at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Lord Jesus looks into our eyes and says, remember when I sent my faithful servant, Paul, with this message? And He put it in your Bible and you had it right before you? And He said, I plead with you in the name of the Lord Jesus to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. This is the calling of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the calling of God the Father in Christ. I gave you limitless grace. I gave you limitless resources.

I gave you limitless provision. What did you do? Did you walk worthy of the calling? You say, well, I had a little trouble with that whole calling thing because, you know, calling can mean so many things. Did you notice that verse 4 says there's one body and one spirit just as you were called in one hope of your calling? There's one hope of your calling.

So, close books, pencils out, get your blue book out. You've got half a sheet here. Describe for me in one sentence or less what is the hope of your calling? Go.

Hope of your calling. You've been called in one hope of your calling. I plead with you, Paul says, walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

So, what is it? Can't hit a target you can't see, right? If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time. You've got to have a goal. You've got to know what the goal is.

It has to be well defined, right? This is the problem with a lot of us. When we went to school, I

went to school, I didn't know what the major in. I didn't know what life would unfold before me and I thought, well, I'm at an engineering school and I should get some kind of an engineering degree.

So, I picked a major and it absolutely clobbered me. It was like somebody taking a giant frozen turkey and beating me into the ground with it. Never saw it coming.

You don't think a frozen turkey is a weapon, but I didn't think that the major would defeat me. I was failing. I was about to be given the heave ho because that was not my calling.

God did not build me to be a systems engineer. Let me tell you, you try to be a systems engineer when you're not built for it and it is humbling. It is crushing.

It grinds what little bit of ego you may have tried to build into dust. Oh, failure. How can I go back home? I got kicked out.

I wasn't good enough. Couldn't complete it. Couldn't finish.

Oh, it wasn't my calling. Come to find out the subject that I least liked from the teacher that I least liked in high school, but that I had a facility for, was English. And when I went in dire straits to my plebe English professor, who I didn't even have anymore at the time, and said, sir, I just walked out of my test for the midterm and handed it in blank, so I've got a zero, which will certainly flunk me and they'll be sending me home.

He said, well, I told you in plebe English, you ought to be an English major. And he just walked me through and changed me. This was my calling.

And immediately, that was the bottom of the parabola there. And I started going up the other way. And I needed to know what my calling was.

And once I knew what it was, I could throw myself at it and everything conspired together. And this is what God knew. I would need these skills.

I would need to be able to understand literature and the way that communication on paper works to do this job primarily. That's what it was for. Who knew that going to the Naval Academy is a preparation for studying and teaching the Word of God? I didn't see that coming.

But once I identified my calling, everything became harmonious. Things immediately started turning around. It took time.

It took additional humility on my part and additional humbling experiences. But in the end, no discipline seems good at the time, but in the end, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Here's the point.

If you cannot answer the question, what is my calling? You can't answer the question, what is the hope of my calling? And if you can't answer either one of those questions, if we cannot answer

these questions, how can we possibly succeed as believers? Paul says, I plead with you. I beseech you. And he does this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

If you were listening to the sound of my voice, I am certain you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Otherwise, you wouldn't be listening. That means you have a calling.

And there is a hope of that calling. There is an expectation. There is a future.

What does it mean, hope of the calling? It is the future attached to that calling. You don't recruit people and bring them in just because you want to give them a cool looking uniform and they can call them a little name tag. Hey, look at me, I've got a uniform and a name tag.

They recruit and bring people in for a purpose. We've got a mission to accomplish. We recruit Marines because we want to go kill people and break things.

We recruit sailors because we've got ships that we need to sail. We recruit pilots because we've got things that need to be flown. You don't just say, hey, I know you'd love to walk around and have those wings on your chest, so here you go.

You're a pilot now. There is a future attached to the call, to the identity, to the new association and the new mission that we are given. Beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

Well, what is the calling? And what is the future attached to that calling? Well, we know this, don't we? You filled out your little paragraph in the blue book when I asked earlier, did you not? Do you know what the calling is? We are to be a reflection of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we exist. He saved us.

It's his grace. It's his obedience. It's his faithfulness.

It's his divine love. And we are the example. If we didn't exist, how would the mercy and grace of God be demonstrated in salvation? If there's nobody saved, how do we know God is the Savior? You couldn't even call him a Savior unless he saved somebody, right? We are the somebody.

If he is the firstborn among many brethren who inherit, well, there's got to be some other brethren. That's us. We demonstrate.

We are examples. If there wasn't a Lazarus outside the gate who believed in God and trusted God and quietly accepted his faith, did not go break the windows of the rich man and didn't go in and rob him and say, it's unfair. You've got all this.

Look at me. I'm out here. The dogs are licking me.

What's the matter with you? And you're violating the laws of Israel. Let's say you're supposed to look out for those that are your brethren who are unfortunately, you know, disabused of their wealth and so on. Look at what you've done.

It's mine by right. You've got much. I've got little.

You're violating the law. I'm going to come in and take it. He didn't do that.

He sat there quietly. Dogs licked his sores, bided his time. He trusted God.

And in the resurrection, he is at the right hand of Abraham. And the rich man is held to account. They're both saved.

The flames that the rich man feels, this is the discipline and the loss of blessing and reward in the eternal future because of disobedience. Didn't understand his calling. God gave you great possessions.

You have a responsibility of what to do with them. You had an opportunity and you didn't exploit it. Rich man didn't understand his calling.

He was given riches so that he could be a benefactor and be a blessing. Remember Boaz and what a blessing he was to people around him, including Ruth. And from him comes the King of Israel.

And from that comes the Lord Jesus Christ himself. You can trace the Lord Jesus back through Solomon through King David back to Boaz. And Boaz is a generous man.

And he's willing to take in this woman who is a kinswoman by marriage. She's a Moabite. But he knew his calling.

He was blessed. He was put in that family. He saw the potential.

Boaz understood his calling. And when he marries Ruth, this is woven into the fabric of God's plan. And Boaz is going to be eternally reflecting the glory of God because what God gave him, he used in the service of God's plan and purpose.

And he fulfilled the hope. What is the future attached to Boaz calling? The Lord Jesus Christ himself. It doesn't get any better than that.

Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. There is one hope of your calling, one future attached to it. There's no future in solving mundane problems in this life.

Do you remember what you were doing on March the 23rd last year? What day of the week was March the 23rd, 2013? I don't know. What was my task list looking like on March 23rd of last year? I have no idea. It seemed important at the time, but it's gone in the wash of history.

One thing I do know, my calling and the hope of my calling was exactly the same one year ago as it is now. And I hope one year ago I was doing my best to walk worthy of that calling because that will go forward. That will count.

That will make a difference. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, what is the difference between the common grace that binds us all together as one body and the individual grace that Paul talks about in verse 7? To each one of us, grace was given.

You have individual grace, tailor-made, designed, packaged with your name on it from God. To each one of us, grace was given. And it is limitless.

It's according to the measure of Christ's gift, which has no boundaries, has no limitations. We have an unlimited grace with our name on it. What are we doing with it? Well, He's going to tell us what we should be doing with it, and we need to know this if we're going to walk worthy and if we're going to fulfill the hope of our calling.

But let's pause here and take our break.