

Devotions for the Week of August 18, 2019

LARGE-PRINT

You've Got Mail:

**A Journey Through A Few of Paul's Letters
STRONG – A Letter To The Church In Ephesus
North East United Methodist Church
By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

Sunday, August 18, 2019

Read Ephesians, chapter 1.

Paul first visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey (Acts 18). During his third missionary journey, Paul stayed in Ephesus for almost three years (Acts 19). Paul writes his letter to the Ephesians while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28).

In chapter 1, Paul quickly reminds the church that God “*chose us in Him.*” Once again, Paul wants the believers to never forget that salvation depends totally on God. We are not saved because we deserve it, but because God is gracious and freely gives salvation.

In verse 7, Paul speaks of Jesus' blood being shed and through His death, how we have “*obtained an inheritance...having believed, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.*” The Life Application Bible points out, speaking of verse 7, “[Christ's] *death points to two wonderful truths—redemption and forgiveness. Redemption was the price paid to gain freedom for a slave (Leviticus 25: 47-54). Through his death, Jesus paid the price to release us from slavery to sin. Forgiveness was*

granted in Old Testament times on the basis of the shedding of animals' blood (Leviticus 17:11). Now we are forgiven on the basis of the shedding of Jesus' blood—he died as the perfect and final sacrifice (Romans 5:9; Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 9:22; I Peter 1:19)."

Paul prays in verse 17 that *"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe..."* May this be our prayer.

Might our prayer be that God would grant us wisdom and our eyes would be open to the redemption and forgiveness that has been freely given to us through Jesus Christ. May our eyes be open to the inheritance that awaits us as children of God. May our eyes be open to the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who believe.

Monday, August 19, 2019

Read Ephesians, chapter 2.

Verse 8 reiterates, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."* We cannot boast of our works, our ministry, our good deeds. In fact, Isaiah 64:6 tells us, *"All of us have become like one who is*

unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”

Our best efforts are still infected with sin. Therefore, our only hope is Christ.

If we come before God demanding acceptance on the basis of our “good” conduct, God will point out that our “good” deeds are nothing compared to His infinite righteousness. Paul writes, verse 14, *“For He Himself is our peace...and has broken down the middle wall of separation”* between us and God. It is not about what we “do;” it is about what God has “done.”

And why does God save us? Why does God offer us a relationship, salvation, redemption, forgiveness? God’s intention is that our salvation will result in acts of service which will bring others into the family of God. Paul writes, verse 10, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...”* We are saved, not simply for our own benefit, but in order to build up the church, to serve Christ, to be the light of Christ in a dark world.

Paul concludes chapter 2 explaining that through Christ we are *“no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens...and members of the household of God...”* Paul is not speaking of a building but a family, a group of people who have built their lives on the *“chief cornerstone,”* and now God, through His Holy Spirit, is growing them into *“a holy temple in the Lord...a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”*

We are members of God’s kingdom. God is building us up into temples where the Holy Spirit can reside and

work. God is ready to work through us to touch a hurting world. What a gift! What an amazing gift and privilege!

Are you trying to keep track of your “good” deeds, attempting to work your way to God? Do you recognize that you have been saved, by God’s mercy, for “good” works, to help the world hear and experience God’s love and grace? Is your life built on the “cornerstone” of Jesus Christ and are you allowing God to build you into His “temple”?

Tuesday, August 20, 2019

Read Ephesians, chapter 3.

In chapter 3, Paul speaks of this great “mystery” in Jesus Christ. When Paul thinks of all God has done, how God “*from the beginning*” was working to bring us into a relationship with Him, he cannot help but to “*bow [his] knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named...*” Paul stands in awe of God and His grace, so undeserved. And to be able to have “*boldness and access with confidence through faith in Christ*” is an unbelievable privilege; to be able to approach the Creator of the universe, to enter into His presence through our relationship with Christ, through prayer. It takes his breath away to know that he is one of God’s children.

Paul yearns that you and I would come to realize what he has realized, that we would come to feel the love God has for us and such knowledge would steal our breath, make us stop in our tracks, and transform &

reorganize our lives, our priorities, our thoughts. He prays that each of us *“may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height –to know the love of God which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

Some of us have such a burden, a yearning. We pray that our children, our family members, our neighbors, would know the *“width and length and depth and height –to know the love of God which passes knowledge...”* Who can we tell? Whose breath can we take away with the greatest story ever told? Who can we pray for, that they might be *“filled with all the fullness of God”*?

And don't forget, no matter how impossible the situation may look, no matter how tongue-tied we might get, no matter how lost we may feel, God can *“do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us”* as believers. We must have faith and lean on His Holy Spirit.

Make the phone call. Speak the words. Walk across the yard to your neighbor and invite them to church. Help someone, anyone, *“be filled with all the fullness of God.”* Help someone, anyone, *“to know the love of God which passes knowledge.”*

Wednesday, August 21, 2019

Read Ephesians, chapter 4.

Paul makes it clear that people should see a difference between how Christians and non-Christians act, think, and relate to others. Christians are to *“walk as*

children of light” (5:8). Paul tells the Ephesians and us to leave behind, put off “your former conduct, the old man” and “put on the new man, which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” Paul tells us to “let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

It is a daily decision to put off “*the old man*” and “*put on the new...*” If we keep listening to God, attempting to know Him, worship Him, talk to Him, we will grow and change, becoming more like Christ. You will be able to look back over the last year and see changes in your thoughts, attitudes, and actions as God has begun to play a much larger role in your life, affecting who you are and what you do on a daily basis.

As you look back over the last year, do you see your thoughts, attitudes, and actions changing for the better? Do you think people have seen you growing in Christ? When it comes to the list Paul gives in verses 25-32, what behaviors do you have problems with? Are you grieving the Holy Spirit? Ask God to help you continue to grow, and continue to shake off the old and put on the new, to become more like Jesus.

Thursday, August 22, 2019

Read Ephesians, chapter 5.

Paul reminds the Ephesians to walk as children of the light and then explains how we are suppose to treat one

another by using the example of Christ and the church, and the example of husband and wife.

We are to submit to Christ as Christ submitted to the will of the Father... "*Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done*" (Luke 22:42). When we submit to God we become more willing to submit to others, sacrificing our own wants and desires for theirs. Paul states that this is how a marriage should be. Both the wife and husband putting aside their own interests; thus, just as Christ served the disciples, the husband is to serve the wife, and just as Christ submitted to the will of the Father, the wife is to acknowledge the husband's spiritual leadership.

In turn, the church is to submit to Christ, to the will of the Father, that "*He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*" Unfortunately, husbands and wives often undermine one another, take advantage, or seek to serve their own interests. Unfortunately, the same happens in the church as it seeks its own agendas and plans rather than submitting to God's leading.

When you look at your marriage, are you undermining the relationship? Are you seeking after your own interests or the interest of your spouse? Are you loving your spouse like Christ loved the church? When you look at your church, has it submitted itself to God and His will or is it attempting to follow its own direction and interests? Pray that God would help you to love your spouse, love

one another, and love God as Christ loved the church, sacrificing His life for us.

Friday, August 23, 2019

Read Ephesians, chapter 6.

Take time to re-read Ephesians 6: 10-18, the whole armor of God. Satan fights with lies so we put on the breastplate of righteousness to protect our hearts from trusting in the lies of the enemy, the false teachings of the world. Satan wants us to think telling others about Christ is too difficult and too large a task, so we put on our footgear to spread the good news. Satan tempts us with setbacks and temptations, so we carry the shield of faith, remembering that God walks with us, no weapon can prevail against us, we need not be afraid. Satan wants us to doubt God so we put on the helmet of salvation to protect our minds from doubting, trusting in God's word and His grace.

The only weapon of offense is the sword, the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, allowing us to strike a blow against the enemy and remember whose we are, remember God's many promises. Remember it was scripture that Jesus quoted, that allowed Him to prevail, when He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. God's promises, His Word, is powerful. We are engaged in spiritual battle. Put on God's armor.

Saturday, August 24, 2019

Just take time today to sit with God, to reflect on Christ, to invite the Holy Spirit to work in your life. Pray. Be Still and Know God.

***And don't forget to
invite someone to church tomorrow!***

