

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Grace Unleashed

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1

TITLE

Grace Unleashed To You

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 1:1-2



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Well, good morning Providence, it's so good to see you. If you brought a Bible with you, if you want to turn to Ephesians chapter one. If you did not, there should be one in a chair near you. And if you don't have one at home, please take that home as a gift. In that Bible, Ephesians 1 is on page 977, and so we would love for you to turn there with us.

If you're a guest here at Providence, welcome. We're really glad that you are here. And you know, each and every week, of course, right now, we're in lots of different rooms and so for all those right now who are in the Fellowship Hall in Prisms, welcome. So good to see you as well.

But there's about 300 trackable screens who actually watch the whole service, and a lot of these are outside of Raleigh, outside of even our own country. And where we know them to be there is there's a lot of families from Providence, who God has called them out to go overseas with the Gospel and so, I just want to pause and just look at the screen and for all of our missionaries around the world, who can hear this? We love you. We're proud of you. We're grateful for you. We remember you and in a moment, I'm gonna pray for you.

But it is so good to see you. This is an amazing book that we have. I hope that you know that, Providence. In fact, if you're a guest here, it's important that you know that we love the Bible here. We love to sit under the Bible, not over it, to read it and evaluate it and see if we like it, but to sit under it, to say God, "We believe this is true."

And in the Bible, it actually tells us that God uses metaphors to sort of help us understand the impact and the influence the Bible can have and should have in our life. There's one metaphor, and it says that the Bible is the plum-line of all truth claims.

Now, a plum-line basically hangs, and so you know what is upright. You know what is due north. You know what is true and straight and so a plum-line is used in building and things like this to make sure that walls are straight. But the fact is, when he says that this is a plum-line, this book, what he's saying is that you and I both know that in our culture, there's all kind of truth claims that are thrown out here and there. And what the Bible says is this, how you know those are actually truth claims instead of crooked. How do you know they're straight instead of in error instead is that we have the Bible to tell us.

It also says that the Bible is a lamp. It's a lamp to the feet of those who fear God, giving direction and understanding and clarity to our steps and knowing where to go and how to do that.

I love the Bible and how phenomenal it really is that God in his mercy would take thousands of different stories and that he would combine those together, and those stories would coordinate to tell one story about one man named Jesus Christ who came to rescue us from our sin. And we as a people, if you're a guest here, you need to know, we love the Bible because we love Jesus. It's the window to help us see Jesus, to know Jesus, to love Jesus, to worship Jesus, and as a result of that, we are Bible people because we are Jesus people to the core.

And so, as we study a new book, all right? Six chapters in the New Testament, I want to encourage you to consider leaning in in an unusual way, to not just come when you can and hear it and then leave it, but to even read the passage before you come. Think about the passage before you come. On a Thursday. Every Thursday, we send out an email to all that we know with a little study guide just to help you read it and ask a few questions, just to kind of prime the pump so that when you come here is that your heart's already engaged with what is being said.

I would encourage you to study it, read it, I would also encourage you to memorize a little portion of it every month. Like we did back when we were going through John, every month, we're gonna have one passage where we ask you as a church family to actually join with us and everybody memorize the same one.

So, in September, it's Ephesians 1, verses 13 and 14. And when we gather, we're gonna practice. We have to be gathered, so let's practice. Here it is:

"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

Now, why memorize? Why would I ask you to do that? Why would we ask you to do that? And the reason is because whatever's planted in our heart, there's a corresponding fruit that comes with it. And you and I know that this last week, we didn't pull it off perfectly.

And that gives us a lot of clarity that this next week, we're not gonna pull it off perfectly. We're gonna make mistakes; we're gonna sin. And sometimes, our mistakes and our failures can actually grip us so much where the shame and the regret leads us to wonder about our relationship with God. Is God really that close? Am I really that close? Am I really loved? Do I really love God, because would someone who really loved God do this?

And so what Paul does is he gives us an anchor that if we memorize it that when we go through those times, we can tie our life to that anchor. And that anchor says this, that if you have believed in Jesus Christ in the Gospel that you have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit and that promise is a guarantee. That sealing of the Holy Spirit is a guarantee that God is saying, "Look, even if your failure, even in your weakness, even in your infirmity, I want you to know that I am going to finish my work in your life." And here's the guarantee: I'm going to give you my Holy Spirit to live within you as a guarantee that it's gonna happen.

And so, I would just ask you, Providence, to give yourself to this. Okay? It really doesn't take that much. I know that Paul, Paul would fail English. You need to know that. He loves run-on sentences and he loves to just keep stacking phrases upon phrases, and so it takes a little bit of effort. But I promise you, if we give ourselves to it, it will be worth it, okay?

So, let's bow and let's pray together, as we get into it. Father in Heaven, we thank you for the opportunity to gather and as we gather, we thank you for those in our family of faith who've been called out by you and are around the world, sharing the Gospel with other people. And this morning, we pray that you would watch over them, that you would protect them, you would expand their influence. And we pray, God, that even this week, that they would have the privilege to share the Gospel and maybe even lead someone to faith in Christ.

We also pray for those who, around the world, whether it's fire, whether it's hurricane, whether it's flooding, whether it's earthquake. There are people in South Asia and in Mexico and in Florida and in Texas and in the northwest who are really hurting today. In Florida, they're ... it's in process. And we pray, God that you would protect. We pray, Father, that you would show mercy. We pray that the Church would rise up and be people of truth and love and kindness.

We pray that you would help us, as a church family, even though we're not in those specific areas right now. We pray that you would help us to know how we can contribute and help and show the love of Christ to people today. We believe that you are the one true God and apart from you, there is no other. That you make known the beginning from the end and that everything is at your disposal. And so we trust you. We don't understand why these things happen.

The complexity sometimes of your ways is beyond us. And yet, we tell you, we trust you. We need you and we need your help now, so as we open your word, I pray that you would show us grace. And we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, this past Tuesday, after a week away on vacation, I drove into the parking lot of ... north of Providence, you know? And my role, sort of allows me to sort of know the timeline of the progress of this whole process, the whole construction of a worship center.

And I knew, driving in, that even though I'd been gone for six or seven days that we still had several weeks of foundation work left, and yet, I confessed to hoping to be surprised in some way. That somehow, God did a miracle, and when I drove in, there'd be a visible building there.

And there wasn't. Of course, you know that. When you drive in today, yep, it's not there yet. This is what's there right now, okay? It's straight, which is great, but it's not the most attractive thing is, right?

Like, if we ended here, the church family would go, "This is not what we had in mind." This is not the most visually appealing part of the process, for sure. And yet it's really important, isn't it? It sort of got me thinking that it's interesting that no matter what project that we're working on, whether it's a garden, whether it's a building, whether it's a marriage or a friendship, is that you and I are inclined to skip over the foundation work in order to get to what we consider to be more visually appealing.

Why this is, I think, really, really important is because in every one of our lives, we're building things. You're building things right now. And you have a deep propensity, you need to know this, is to skip what is most important, to rush through what is most important in order to get to what is visually appealing. But sometimes, when we do that, or if we do that, we run the risk of becoming jeopardized and insecure in what we're actually building.

Years ago, we bought our first house, my wife and I and there's a little section in front for plants and flowers. And so, I went and I said, "I'm gonna do this." Went to Lowe's, bought a bunch of plants. Bought a bunch of flowers. Some soil and started doing it. And you know, I rushed through the process of soil development and just got to the place where I just wanted it to look good and so I had this beautiful-looking garden. It was all dead in just a few months from then, right?

We were watering it, yet we were watering in what amounted to a clay pot for every single one of those plants because we didn't do the work necessary, the hard work, the boring work, the unappealing work of soil development. The same thing happens, I think, in our relationships.

There's a lot of people, over 20 years of serving here at Providence, where it's in martial friendship or just normal friendship that's not marriage friendship. They come and there's tension in those friendships.

There's a longing for practical information; practical instruction on how do we become more patient with one another. How do we get on the same page financially or physically or emotionally? Or, how do we communicate with each other? The expectation. All these sorts of things are happen and it's interesting how everybody wants to always skip to the most important parts.

Just give me four steps to how ... how do I deal with this person, you know? I remember a guy, almost twenty years ago, walked into my office and he was a soldier and I mean, really a great guy. Sacrificial guy, like in his life. And he just went through a really hard time. Broken marriage and broken friendships and he came in.

I said, "Listen," I said, "Let's talk about Jesus." And he goes, "No, we don't need to talk about Jesus, I just need you to tell me how to get along with people."

You see, Jesus, through Paul, in Ephesians chapter five, he starts telling us how we get along with people. In particular, our spouse. And the foundation of all marriage. All the instructions in the Bible start with foundation work, and this is what he says.

Ephesians 5:21: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." So people come to me and they start talking about their broken relationships, and I start talking about their relationship with Christ. And they're like, "Why are you doing this?"

And this is why, because if you do not revere Christ, you have no resources to deal with each other. The whole Bible assumes that you are planted in really good soil and your soul is drinking deeply from the well of the gospel and if you are not revering Christ, it makes it really difficult to love one another. Impossible to love one another.

Now, why am I doing all this? Well, because Ephesians is the book, it's the blueprint for construction a Christian. The first three chapters draw the blueprint of the foundation work of the believer, of God's grace unleashed to us.

And then chapters four, five, and six, it's the blueprint that details the physical, practical, appealing things that we all love. Career and our speech and our relationships and marriage and parenting and work and money and all these other things. And we're like, "Yeah, let's get to that!"

Here's the point. I know it's tempting to jump to what is practically appealing, such as love and marriage and family, career. But if we do the visible areas we'll soon reveal instability in our life. Let me say it a different way.

If you look at chapters four five and six, and you find an area where you're struggling, the solution is actually not in chapter four, five, and six. It's in chapter one, two, and three.

If there is cracks that appear in your tongue or in your love or in your finances or in your relationships? Putting putty over the cracks isn't the solution. It's always going back to say, "Let me see on what kind of foundation is my finances resting upon."

Is my relationships resting upon. And so what we're gonna do is the slow work. We're gonna actually spend three months sitting in the concrete of Ephesians one, two, and three, in order to allow it to cure around us so that we have a foundation when we get to the more practical parts of our life in chapters four, five, and six.

Ephesians. Ephesians is a book, it's a letter, six chapter letter, written by Paul to a church in Ephesus. Ephesus was a magnificent city, right on the water. A cultural city. In modern day Turkey. It was an urban place. It had ports and harbors. There was people coming in all the time. It was diverse, culturally, commercially, artistically. Lots of literature. Lots of theater. Lots of stadium. Lots of people coming in and lots of people coming in means lots of immigrants. Lots of immigrants means lots of religions and cultures and languages and so, Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman Empire.

It was an amazing place. And 20 years after Jesus rose from the dead, Paul as a missionary, comes into Ephesus. He starts sharing the Gospel. People believe. A church is formed. And soon thereafter, he goes to another place, where he does the same thing.

Two years later, he comes back to Ephesus. He sees that the church is really doing well and that this is a place that literally, his work, his writing and teaching and training, that it can really be sort of spread across the world and so, he stays for a few years to teach. While he's teaching, the Gospel has such effect in this amazing city of Ephesus, that the local workers' union, they pull off a riot.

And the reason is because the Gospel had such an effect in the people's life, that they stopped buying silver trinkets to worship the goddess Diana. You see, when people came to faith in Jesus Christ, and they left other gods, they stopped buying the things that the silversmiths wanted. And so, they got all uptight, and so they pull off a riot.

Paul has to leave. He sends Timothy in. Ten years later, Paul writes him a letter. And that letter is what's in your hand. When you think about the city of Ephesus, and even more so, the church of Ephesus, what we find here is a pretty remarkable thing, because we actually know more about the early church through this church in Ephesus than any other church.

It's a remarkable people. They grew through persecution. And when you think about who was there, right? Their preaching team was legendary. The first four pastors in the church of Ephesus was the apostle Paul, Apollos, Timothy, and the apostle John.

So you get Dave, Thomas, Ryan, Brian, and me. We are sorry, right? They got Paul, and Apollos, and Timothy, and John! You think, "Well, what's the big deal?" Here's the big deal. The New Testament has 27 books. 18 of them were written by Paul and John.

How cool would that be, right? To sit under that every single week. What they wrote, it became Scripture. I mean, can you imagine the vivid illustrations as John was teaching through the gospel of John? I mean, it was a lot better in my series, right?

He was there. He saw it all. Why am I telling y'all this? This is why. Because when these leaders died, or at the end of John's life, who lived the longest of all of those, the people in the church, they lost their first love. Jesus actually speaks to them in the book of Revelation, to Ephesus: "This is what I have against you. You don't love me like you once loved me." And they began to set aside the teachings that Paul gave them, right here in Ephesians.

And as a result, before the end of the second century, the church in Ephesus, was completely gone. It wasn't even there. Now why am I telling you all of this?

To tell you, that Providence, we are not immune to such a fate. And so, as we study this book, we want to study it with one hand, with passion and intensity and the other hand in great humility. He starts with an introduction. We want to read it right now.

Ephesians 1:1-2 says Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I realize that some of us, we kind of blow over Paul's greetings in order to get to the meat of the letter that normally starts in verse three. We're not gonna do that, and the reason is because in this greeting, Paul is literally going to establish a central truth that we're supposed to learn in the entire book of Ephesians.

And that is this: that our identity shapes our activity, our behavior. Who we think we are shapes what we do. And you notice that in the two verses that I just read, in fact, in the first verse, he gives his identity and their identity. He speaks them in words of identification that you are this and you're not this.

And he's doing this in order to show the church that if you really take hold of this, just as I have, that you'll begin to live a different life, because our identity shapes our activity.

Now think about your life for a second. Most of you know who you are and what you're like, and how you're different than the person who's sitting next to you. And so, just take ... just a few moments, choose three, four, five words that most clearly describe you, that's your identity. You may say, "Well, I'm male or female. I'm a leader or a follower. I'm a husband or a wife. Or I'm a child or a parent. I'm an extrovert. Introvert. I'm an architect, engineer," right? All of us have words that we would think, "This is who I am. This is what I'm known for."

This identifies me as different than the person who's sitting next to me. And what I want you to know is the words that you choose, that becomes your identity and that identity shapes the way that you respond to real-life situations that will come tomorrow.

For example, if you consider yourself a leader. If you say, "You know, I'm a leader. God made me a leader." That tomorrow, when you're in a situation and there is a need of somebody to step up and lead, you're more apt to somebody that says "No, I'm a follower," to actually say, "You know what? I should lead right now. I should do that."

If you're a parent, you're gonna get into a situation where you're gonna say, "You know what? I should sacrifice right now. My identity as parent to this children is gonna inspire a certain kind of behavior in my life."

If you're an extrovert, and you identify yourself as an extrovert, you might say, "I should talk right now. I should be the one talking. He shouldn't talk; he's an introvert. He should be listening; I should be talking."

All of us, we have these ideas in our life of our identity and what I want you to know is they're critically important to what you're going to become in life, because what you think of yourself is how you're going to become because you're gonna act that way.

And what he does here in this little introduction is he shows us something really powerful and that is God's grace, when we trust Jesus, he literally transforms us in such a way that he gives us a new identity, and that new identity corresponds to giving us the power to live different kinds of lives.

And so the first thing I want you to see is that God's grace turns rebels into representatives. He turns rebels, people who are in rebellion against God, into representatives of God. And this is what we find here in the life of Paul. He says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."

You see, before Paul identified, though, as an apostle of Christ, he was Saul and he identified as an opponent of Christ. And his identity shaped his behavior, and so he gave himself, for a period of time, literally to hunting down believers.

He would go, he would find where they were at, and thinking he was serving God and loving God by opposing Christianity is that he would go hunt them down. And sometimes he would imprison them, sometimes he'd take from them. Sometimes, people died. Stephen, he stood over the death of Stephen.

Well, this same Paul, I'm sorry, Saul, Saul hears that there's some believers in Syria, and so he gets on a road going to Damascus. Specifically, to go and imprison them. To harm them. And while he's on the road, Acts chapter nine tells us that Jesus appeared to him.

And said, "Saul. Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And Saul goes, "Well, who are you?" He goes, "I'm Jesus." And suddenly everything in his world changed. Now, those of you who have glasses or contacts, do you remember the first time, just living your life and all of a sudden, you go, "You know, I should have my eyes checked."

You go and have your eyes checked and they're like, "Whoa, man, you like, really need glasses." So, you get glasses and you go back outside and you look at a tree, and for the first time in like, forever, you're like, "Wow! You can see all the leaves individually. You can see blades of grass." Everything comes into focus.

Well, this is exactly what happened to Paul. This picture, right here, explains what happened to Paul. His world was still real. Things that he was doing, the road that he was on, the cities, his passion for the Old Testament of our Bible, his passion for God, all those things were still here, and yet, they were all fuzzy.

And God revealed himself and all of a sudden, it was like he was able to put on some lens to where everything became very, really, really clear. You see, Paul was a man who gave himself to hope, to work, and to God.

And all of a sudden, he sees Jesus Christ, and in Christ, he saw the fulfillment of all of his hopes. Think about this. This was a man who was a Pharisee and so he gave himself to things like the temple, and the sacrificial system, and works, and the feast and the festivals and every one of those things, God had built.

God had designed in order to point our attention to the coming Messiah. And now all of a sudden, all that he had put his heart into, in terms of Judaism, everything that was real that he could put his ... All of a sudden, he sees Jesus and he sees the fulfillment of all of his hope.

In Jesus, he sees the creator of everything that he knows to be beautiful. In Jesus, he sees the perfection of righteousness that he had worked so hard to attain, but couldn't. All of his life had been spent trying to work his way into favor with God, trying to be perfect, to be perfectly obedient, and seeing he couldn't do it, he looks at Jesus and goes, "Perfection of righteousness."

Before this time, he loved God but he couldn't see God, and so Paul, in Colossians, he says, "When I looked at Jesus Christ I saw in him the image of the invisible God that I once loved but now all of a sudden, I saw who he was." And this radically transformed his life, so much that God says, "You know what? We're not gonna call you Saul anymore. We're gonna give you a new name. We're gonna call you Paul."

And he became an apostle. And apostle means “a sent one,” it’s a messenger. It’s a representative. It’s somebody who speaks on behalf of the person in total authority, so Jesus has all authority given to him in heaven and earth. And then he gave some of his authority to people. He calls them sent ones, messengers, representatives to go into the world.

You have to understand that God’s grace landed on Paul without his request or permission. He says that I became this by the will of God. I didn’t ask for this and he didn’t ask me if I wanted it. He just came.

He appeared. He opened my eyes. He changed my life. You see, so God ... so, Paul now, he’s on the road, he’s got some friends who help him into Damascus. He’s at a house. God comes to a man, his name is Ananias, and he goes, “Ananias, I need you to go over,” Paul ... Saul of Tarsus, that’s the guy you know, well, he’s had a big day and he needs some encouragement, and I want you to go over and encourage him.

Ananias is like, “No. I’m not going to go, because he’s come to Damascus in order to imprison us, and no.” And all of a sudden, God says, “Shh. Go. For his a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name and I will show him much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

This is the sovereign Christ saying to Ananias, “I Choose Paul. I’m gonna use Paul so that every other person who’s ever been in rebellion against me will know that they have hope.” And if Paul objects to this? I will overcome.

He will be my apostle by my will. And what’s amazing was all the passion he once gave to persecution, he now gave to preaching. Activity followed his new identity. I just want to encourage you with this application.

Let’s look to Jesus and receive a purpose worth our days. You see, every single one of us give ourself to what our eyes see as valuable. That’s how you’ve spent your last week. Your eyes see something as valuable, and so you respond. And what I want you to know that is that there’s no man or mission or purpose on the earth that’s more valuable than Jesus Christ.

And so, I would encourage you to immerse yourself in the scriptures to see Jesus Christ. If you don’t know Christ today, I want you to know today that he wants to rescue you. He wants you to look to him in faith. And then, he wants to give you a purpose that’s worth the limited numbers of your remaining days.

And if you do know Christ, you need to understand, he’s given us a new identity. A new identity. You see, we’re not apostles in the same way Paul was. We can’t look at this and say, “Well, I must be an apostle, then.”

In a sense you are, in that the word means representative. But in one sense, you're not in that you're not like the first apostles. The first apostles that Jesus got, they were eyewitnesses of a physical, resurrected Jesus Christ. He gave them special authority so that when they wrote stuff down, it became scripture.

I write stuff; it becomes a devotion, right? It becomes an email. That's it. It doesn't become scripture. And yet, as representatives of Christ, we can take the words of scripture and we can share them with others. Neighbors. Nations around the world. Now listen to me: every one of us has a great propensity, every time we open the Bible, to ask God, "God, what am I supposed to do?" And we look for things, that we look for things within the scripture to help us understand what am I supposed to do?

I would encourage you to go to the Scripture not asking the question, what am I supposed to do, but "God, would you help me to see your Son?" Help me to see the glory of your son. The holiness of your son. The righteousness of your son. And this is why: we become like what we admire. See him as valuable and you'll live your life for what is valuable. See him as valuable. Run to Jesus and receive a purpose that's worth your days. The second thing is that God's grace turns sinners into saints. You see what he says? He says, "To the saints, who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus." What a thing to say: to the saints.

Providence, I recognize that our culture thinks morality is determined by majority. But no matter how unified the masses in America or the world may become, morality is determined by God. Referees today will throw a flag and they will not look into the crowd and ask for a vote. And neither will God.

When you die, you're gonna give an account of your life. And you're not going to give it to a mirror or a therapist. You're not going to give it to a friend or to a collection of people. You're gonna stand before Jesus Christ alone. And Jesus has given us a preview of what he has observed in our life on the earth.

Romans 3:23 says "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." What this means is that positionally, we, as people, on the Earth, apart from his son, he looks at us and he considers us sinners.

But look at what Paul called this church. He called them saints. Saints means holy ones. Not perfect ones. Set apart ones. Holy, different. Saints. Now, he didn't call them saints because they walked around with halos and harps. They were fallen, just like us. They were sporadically faithful, just like us.

So, why did he call them saints? He called them saints because these people, who are sinners, trusted Jesus Christ who died for their sin and rose again, and when they trusted Jesus Christ, Jesus took away their sin and he gave them his perfect righteousness. They became holy, innocent. 30 times in the book of Ephesians we're gonna see the words, "in him, we are," justified. Forgiven. Made alive. We're saints.

Saints. Now, what I'm about to say, any time I talk about traditions on the earth, I always get a little bit nervous, because people are pretty passionate about traditions, okay?

But for a lot of us in the room, when you hear the word 'saint,' you might think of a school, like St. David's, but for the most part, what we know here on the earth about sainthood comes from the Catholic Church. And there's a process by which they've outlined, you can look at it on the Web, this afternoon, because that's where I found it, and you can actually go and you can see the different popes and how they have contributed to a process that this is how they designate someone as venerated, as a saint.

I want to tell you what that process is. First thing it says is that you have to live your life in such a way, first of all, you have to be Catholic and you have to die. You can't be a saint while you're still living. You have to die. Okay, I'm not exactly sure why, you can't enjoy it while you're on the Earth, okay? Something happens afterward.

And then what happens is, because of your life, either because it was so exemplary or because you were martyred, which was so exceptional, that a file of your life is given so long as honor grows around your memory and it's given to a local bishop. And so the bishop investigates, and if he's impressed, inspired, then your file goes to Vatican, where it sits until you do a miracle from Heaven on the earth.

A miracle. How they would say this is that people would pray to God in your name, and if somebody was healed on the Earth and they could verify that it was no way that it was because of medicine or anything else, it was because they prayed to God through you, that you would be accounted for as the miracle maker.

If that's confirmed, the Vatican would call you blessed. Interestingly, Ephesians chapter one, verse three, which we'll look at next week, Paul calls every believer blessed. Every Christian, blessed. And then what takes place is they wait for a second miracle. You have to have a miracle after you've been considered blessed, as well. And if you pull that miracle off, then you're venerated as an official saint. Now, this is what most people in the world know of, is the process to become a saint. But do you see what the New Testament tells us is the process is to become a saint? It's like, really simple. Ready? Trust Jesus.

Bam. That's it. Trust Jesus. And Jesus takes away your sin and he gives you his righteousness. Apart from Christ, our position before him is sinner, after we've trusted Christ, our position before him is no longer sinner, it's saint.

It's saint. He justifies us. He declares us innocent. We get a new biography. A new nature. A new identity. And sin may explain some of our behavior as Christians, but it no longer defines our identity. So what are we to do with this?

The fact that God's grace can turn sinners into saints? Well, let's look to Jesus. And receive an identity that will change our lives. You see, some of us today are stuck in unfaithfulness because our identity is more wrapped up in our sinfulness than our savior.

You see, before Jesus Christ, the ingredients in your kitchen led each one of us to resign that we're simply gonna make more sin. But in Christ, we become saints, and therefore, we don't have to resign to sin, we resign that we're gonna be faithful. The kitchen has been retooled, it's been restocked. And it's true. We will occasionally bake a really bad cake. But we are not resigned to do so.

We can say no to sin. We can be faithful today. And so, Paul would say, "Hold on to your identity, because that identity is gonna propel you towards activity in your life."

Providence, our transformation is not complete, but it is genuine. He will cause it to be completed. And knowing he will, he calls us now what he knows he will make us later. And that is saint.

And this is possible only because, verse two says, "Grace and peace have come to us because of God, our Father and Jesus Christ." You see, we don't start with obedience. We start with Jesus. God's grace gives us a new identity that shapes everything that we get to do and be in life.

And so, Providence, consider yourself blessed today, for he has made you holy in his sight. And he's given us an amazing way for us to remember and celebrate this. It's called the Lord's Supper, and so for those that will be serving us, if you want to get up and head back to get ready to serve these elements.

You guys know the elements? There's a bread and there's cup. The bread is symbolic of the body of Jesus and the cup is symbolic of the blood of Jesus. Jesus told us to take this regularly in order to remember what he's done but also to tell other people we believe what he has done. And so if you have never trusted Christ, we would encourage you just allow these things to pass.

We would love to talk with you after we're done about trusting Jesus and the next time, you can take it. But if you have trusted Christ, we welcome you to this table. And as I pray and as these things are passed, I want to encourage you to do what Jesus tells us to do, and that is before we take it, that we ask God to examine our life, and if there's any unconfessed sin, that we confess it to him so that we can take this with a clear conscience.

So if you would, let's bow. Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your kindness to us. We thank you for what you've made available to us. We thank you for the Gospel. We thank you for forgiveness. We thank you that you have taken us from rebels to representatives and from sinners to saints. We know that this is entirely grace, because if we look at our life, we know that that's not who we are. That's not what we've earned. You have been kind to us. We see it. And so I pray, God, that as we pass these elements that you would remind us of your kindness to us, that you would remind us of the cross and the resurrection. That you would remind us of the things that you call us, sons and daughters, redeemed and justified, forgiven, the identity we have in Jesus. I pray God, that you would drive that deep into our heart.

So, God, we love you. We need you. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.



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