

## Our New Inheritance

Ephesians 1:3 – 14

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At the dawn of this new year, we gather together to consider the words of this passage from Ephesians, to hear what it is that God has for us this morning, who it is that God plans for us to be as his family. As we enter this new year and we look back and reflect, we consider what it means to be his children -- what it means for you in your life and in the life of this church family.

What are the new opportunities that God is going to open up for us if we're faithful? What is he coaxing you out of and inviting you into? What it means to be a kid who leans into the love of a Father, whose arms are open and waiting for us. What it means to be grounded in a love that changes everything. What it means to be in a place that is safe, where you can open your heart and tell people about your struggles. What does it mean for us as God's family in this place to live fully into our new inheritance as his family? And how is he shaping the Kingdom of God in our own hearts so that we, in turn, can help shape the kingdom of God for the world around us.

He teaches us to pray about His kingdom coming, and he intends for us to be the agents of that change -- the builders of that kingdom, that New Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> So, when we look forward into this new year, maybe because of these words, because of this passage, because of our new understanding of who we are and who were meant to be, this year will look a little different than other years.

Our passage from Ephesians is a good one for us to consider, for us to start this new year with. As Jesus' followers, he calls us every day to pick up our cross and follow him so that everything that we do and say and are and ever hope to be is shaped by his infusion of love and grace and mercy, hope, and forgiveness so that everything we do and say, everything we think and are is all for God's glory, so that we can shine brightly in this dark world. And that's what God invites us into today.

But before we go any further, let's pray: Lord God, we thank you for this day. We come to you just as we are, Lord God, at the start of this new year. We thank you for bringing us through the last year and bringing us together to start this new one together. Lord God, speak to us today. Clear space in our hearts and our lives for your love to heal and to change us. Make room for your Spirit to move in us so that we may live into all it is that you have called us to be and to do. To that end, we pray that the words of my mouth, the meditation of all our hearts may be acceptable in your sight, Lord God.

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<sup>1</sup> The New Jerusalem is a phrase that comes from Revelation 21 as a description of God's kingdom.

I want you to think back to who it is that you were before Jesus found you, who it is that you were before you figured out that Jesus was looking for you.

Ephesians 1:3 – 4

*Blessed be the God and Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be wholly and blameless before him in love.*

Since the beginning of time, God was looking for us. Even before we took a first breath, God was looking for you and for me to bring us to this point in history. All the things that you've suffered and been through, all the things that you've experienced, all the things that you've survived, all the things that you've failed in, all the ways that you feel broken, but God has infused you with his love to heal and to make whole... Since the beginning of time, he was looking for us. And all those things that we look back at as mistakes and failures and all of the things that make us so human, God looks at us and sees children whom He loves. He looks at us in love, not in judgement, not with derision, not with anger, but with eyes of love.

This is our calling and our invitation as God's people. This is what this passage points us to: A new reality from the heartbreak and the sadness and the brokenness that we know in this world. It points to a new world that we are called to help create -- a world of redemption and reconciliation, a world of healing and wholeness, a world that is free from the effects of sin and death. *In him, we have redemption, it says in verse seven, through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the witness of his grace that he lavished on us.*

Lavish. It's such a good word. It brings to mind... Do you remember all those years ago that show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous? With Robin Leach*, and he'd go all over the world, and he's like, *look at this person's yacht, look at their golden clothes, look at this golden toilet...* all of these things. And you'd think, Oh my gosh, those people have more money than sense. That's the same kind of sense that we have in this passage.

Lavish, abundant, extravagant. Jesus. God lavishes his love on us. It's not sensible. It's not something that we've earned or something that we've done to deserve it. It's something that he's just like, *Bam! there it is!* just pours it out on us. Just like this table is a lavish representation of God's love for us. Somebody who paid such an extraordinary, exorbitant price for us. It is into this sacred space that God invites us, a space God creates for us because he lavished his

love on us, his forgiveness, his mercy, his grace, his hope. He lavished it upon us, healing us from the consequences of all that we've done that missed the mark, saving us from eternal separation from him and from each other, healing us and bringing us into a sacred space without the consequences of all those broken relationships between God and each other.

It's a really timely reminder, especially at the start of a new year, a reminder that even if sometimes our life doesn't measure up to some imaginary standard, even if things don't work out, even if it's not like we want it to be or prayed to be or envision it to be on our Pinterest boards. This space, this place, is still sacred because God is there. Not just at the start of a new year, but every day God is there if we have eyes to see and hearts attuned to the movement of the Spirit.

God reached down at Christmas to make his home amongst us and to remind us that no matter what, no matter what, as a passage from Romans said, there's nothing that can separate us from his love (Romans 8:31-39), reminding us in his teachings, his life, his death, and resurrection, he models for us a new way forward, a new life in him, basking in God's lavish love just like Jesus did, redeeming us from the effects of sin and death in our lives in this world. This is the light of our life, the light of God's love that forms the basis and foundation for who we are as a family of God as we face this new year.

Ephesians 1:5 – 7

*He destined us for adoption as his children through Christ Jesus, according to his good pleasure and the pleasure of His will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed us in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.*

He's our lavish, new hope as we enter this new year. This is the blessed assurance of being the family of God in this place. That's what he calls us to enjoy and to live into and to live up to this new year.

Paul writes that *God destined us for adoption as his children*. He's stating a revolutionary thing. He's telling us about God's manifesto for a good life, a blessed life. This was God's life hack to bring his kingdom designs to its fullest view, first with Jesus, who opened the way and showed us the playbook, and then with us, here, as a church family. He tells us that none of us are in this effort alone, that his Spirit is with us to invite us into the good life that he intended. And he hands us the keys to the kingdom and says, *have at it*. In this passage, we are given a picture of what it means to be God's family.

Ephesians 1:11 – 14

*In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of Him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ might live for the praise of his glory. In Him, you also, when you had heard the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people.*

In our passage this morning, Paul writes to the Ephesians and to us. He declares that in Christ, when we say yes to Jesus and his free gift of grace, offered through his sacrifice in our place, we are all adopted into God's family. And as such, we enjoy, not only forgiveness and a radical welcome to God's sacred space, but also, because of it, God offers us His blessed assurance in the deposit of his Spirit. He tells us about what the future holds. And he tells us that we are securely and firmly held for eternity in his hands, that he holds us, and that means something special in a world of unknown unknowns. It's an invitation to be a part of God's eternally assured and divinely ordered unfolding plan of salvation for this whole world.

This isn't just spiritual poetry, it's a radical manifestation for human dignity and equality and inclusion. It's a recipe for love that transcends boundaries, hierarchies, and time. For now and for all time, this is God's plan for this family. This is God's plan for you and for me. In a world that is so easily divided according to status and access and wealth and ethnicity and gender and sexuality and anything else, everything else, God erases all of those with this one act of love. With this one act of love. And it makes us one family with one inheritance, one direction, one future, one hope, one way, one plan -- Jesus through his one free gift of love. This is our key. This is how we're meant to be now and forever.

What does that mean for us today? We here, who are in the real world struggling with systematic inequities, and discrimination, and division, insecurity, and fill in the blank. It means that our family plan is not just about our personal salvation, it's about transformation, both personal and community. Consider how Jesus began his ministry, with a reading from Isaiah, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to bring good news. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free* (Luke 4:18). That's the family plan. That's the family way. That is our inheritance as God's people. The new vision is an old vision. It's Jesus' vision of how it is that we ought to be, how it is that he makes us to be as his family. This is what it means for real adoption and inclusion in the family of God.

In verse seven, it says, *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace.* The grace that we received isn't meant to be hoarded, it's meant to be shared. Having received incredible forgiveness, we are called to extend that same grace and forgiveness to others.

At the start of this new year, our redemption calls us into something new. It calls us to be agents of change, the hands and feet of Jesus working to build a new family, a new community of forgiveness, of care, of righteousness, that are working to take apart the things that divide us, the things that make us feel insecure and unworthy, the things that work against people experiencing the full love, grace, mercy, hope, and forgiveness of God. That's what it means to be family in this place. That's what it means to have that pause of the Spirit placed on your heart. It means that we embrace our full dignity as the children of God so that we can help, with God's help, others embrace their full humanity in Christ Jesus.

The prophet Micah says, *What does it look like to be a righteous person, to be God's family?* And he answers this: *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6:8). Jesus puts it a different way. He says, *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever* (Matthew 6:9-13). He taught us the family way when we pray. This is how we become who it is that we're fully meant to be as God's people.

That Jesus, he was always getting into trouble because he was doing things that, as a good church person, he wasn't supposed to do -- he ate with tax collectors and with sinners, he was touching off societal scandals -- and the religious elite, you know, good church folk, they hated him because of it, because he loved and trusted God above the church ways. He trusted God's guidance over the social mores and structures that were in place. He's like, *hey, look, a woman from a different ethnicity that we hate and distrust, I'll go over and hang out with her. Hey, lady, spare a fellow a drink of water. He's like, hey, look at that person over there with leprosy, should be avoided because he's going to make me ceremonially unclean. Heck, I might even get sick myself. Hey, buddy. How you doing? What's going on with you? What can I do for you today? How have you been? You want to be healed? Okay, we can do that.* And Jesus touched him and he was healed. He points to the actions that our family is supposed to take. The

blind are supposed to receive their sight. The lame are supposed to walk. The lepers are supposed to be cleansed. The deaf are supposed to hear. The dead are supposed to rise. The poor should be given good news, that God would feed them and love them and accept them and call them to be his own family and invite those people, those people, into his inheritance, into our inheritance. All because he loves us. That's what it means to be God's holy thing. That's what it means to start this new year with a new vision of God. It's not really a new vision, it's the same vision from beginning to end.

So, what would it look like for us as individuals to live into that space, us as a church family, to start to use our inheritance differently? How do we as finite beings understand what it means to be filled up with an eternal, infinite God's love? How are we supposed to keep all that for ourselves? How can we help but let that overflow in who we are and what we do and what we think and how we are in the world. He teaches us how to love him first. Then he teaches us how to love ourselves so we can love others.

As we begin this new year, we must ask ourselves, how are we living out our divine inheritance? This isn't comfortable work, but it's not work that we're meant to do on our own. Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places God has given us to do that work. God has blessed us with His power, his strength, his courage, and his love to do all he's asked us and invited us to do. We don't have to do it by ourselves. We do it empowered by the Spirit of God. We do it in caring, sacred community. We do it together as accountable family members trying to uphold the calling on our lives and the family heritage. We've been marked with a seal by the Holy Spirit, not as a mark of superiority, but as an empowerment for service.

So, as we move together into this new year, let us embrace our inheritance as God's children by creating spaces where everyone's voice is heard and valued. Following the example of Jesus, who did the things that he was not supposed to do, let us examine and challenge all the things that get in people's way, all the things that we see that are not fair, not equal, not kind, and not... (There's no second-class place in heaven. Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.) ...standing together with those who face exclusion through discrimination, marginalisation, all the challenges that they have in life. We don't just put in a good word, we reach out like Jesus did to the lepers and ask them, ask them about how it is that they want their lives to be different, using our resources and our influence to promote full inclusion. Justice and love go hand in hand. Building bridges, breaking down walls that divide class and race and gender and ideology. And looking across the aisle at a person with an

ideology that we disdain and dislike, and seeing, not an enemy, but somebody made in God's own image who is part of the fabric.

So, as we reflect on these things together. I want to remind you, (I remind my kids, when you go out those doors, you are not going as your own person, you are going as a person that is part of a family. You represent us. You represent me, When you walk out that door.) As the people of Walmer Road, we represent our big brother [Jesus]. You represent the dad [God the Father]. You represent the Holy Spirit, who's whispering love and encouragement in all of our moments. There's not a place or a space that God isn't already there, that he hasn't foreseen since the beginning of the world and then invited us into. This new year is our promised land. Every place that we place our foot, God has already been there to make a way where there is no way presently. He is shining his light and all we have to do is trust and obey. Trust that he loves us enough to make it possible. And obey when we are too afraid to move. I speak from experience. Take up our cross every day and follow after it in the family way. That's our call. That's how we embrace our new inheritance as God's family.

So, what are you going to do?

I pray this morning that God has spoken to your heart, that something in you has shifted, that God has touched you in a new place, has healed or pointed to an old wound. I reminded you that he's lavished his love upon you. My prayer for each of us is that we would step fully into our renewed identity as we start this new year together. Let us go on out into the world as little kids, spoiled with God's love, so that we can live as people who have more love than sense. Amen?