

WHAT A BLESSING!
2 SAMUEL 6:1-2, 17-19 / EPHESIANS 1:3-14

Today's scripture readings bring together these two threads: worship and God's great plan for all things. God is working this great wonder in every age, in every day, in each of us, and, as a community, in all of us, together. Let's consider the verses from the two perspectives of praise and prayer. From the Old Testament reading of David, the praise is exhibited in joyful music and dance; the prayer is done through traditional sacrifices which God gave to Moses and is described in Leviticus. In the verses of Ephesians, praise is offered because Paul knows we are blessed by being adopted as God's children. "In Christ we have obtained our inheritance." (Eph 1:11) We are redeemed and forgiven. In Christ, God has made known to us the mystery and purpose of his will to be part and members of the chosen. The prayer is that God would open our eyes to grasp this blessings.¹

The first reading from 2 Samuel brings us to the point of God's plan with David completing the task to move Israel into all the land God had promised. David is well into his reign as King. In the previous chapter, David conquered the Jebusites and taken the city of Jerusalem. He battled and turned back the Philistines. The next step would be to unify the kingdom with a strong symbol. The ark was the most powerful ancient symbol of faith. It was the presence of God for Israel. Many years before, the ark had been captured by the Philistines but caused them so much devastation and suffering the Philistines packed it on a cart and set the cart off down the road. The cart made it to Beth Shemesh. The Levites took it to the house of Abinadab and it stayed there for twenty years. So the people had lost the true presence of God among them. Now we come back to David and gathering thirty thousand of Israel's chosen men he sets off to bring the Ark of God back to the conquered city of Jerusalem.

I want you to get a feel for how this procession of thirty thousand men might look. It is likely it was more because there would also be slaves and servants buzzing around. Progressive field has a seating capacity of thirty-five thousand. If you've been down to a game, think of how it feels to park and walk down the street with the crowd of fans. Now, picture the stadium completely filled; organize and march them off to let's say, Akron. David's intention was to make this move a memorable event, but to who's praise and glory.

God had to make sure David's intention were for God's plan and not David's glory. Rather than creating an image that makes him appear to be blessed by God, God reminds David that you can't take something holy and make it a political prop. David is blessed but

¹ Butcher, A. (2012, Nov 2). On Holiness. *Colloquium*, 44, p. 199.

not by his own plans. He is blessed because God chose him to be king.² Once the ark is in Jerusalem, David celebrates with high-spirited dancing and songs, followed with the traditional burnt and fellowship offerings which represented a personal and corporal worship. In this way, David praised God and blessed the people in the name of the Lord.

The enthusiasm David displayed in his dancing and music is mirrored in the passionate passage that opens the letter to the Ephesians. The original text is one long sentence, every English teacher's nightmare, with an outpouring of praise to the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is referenced as Paul's "Great Doxology" or hymn of praise to the Triune God for His glorious grace and describes God's plan as dateless, timeless, and formed before the foundation of the world. This was an ecumenical letter probably meant to be read in multiple churches and ultimately for the whole of the "inhabited earth."

Written by Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome. A mature thoughtful statement written so that the saints may understand and grasp what the mystery of salvation and the church mean. Paul's concern reaches out to everything God has done and will do in the future for human beings; believing the Christian experience and ethics is based on a God of mercy and love.³ Paul's deep sense of gratitude for all that God has done and will do is expressed through his passionate acknowledgement of God as both blessed and blessing.

God has given the possibility of every spiritual blessing for those who are found in Jesus Christ. It is a statement of thanksgiving that the Father has chosen to elect a people in the Son he loves. In the Old Testament, Israel is said to be God's elect; his chosen people. Part of God's grand design is to call a people his very own. The New Testament affirms that Christ is now the elect of God. The election is first of Christ and then of men "In Him." This is a new relationship that has been brought about by God's love. Paul praises God because we now know that we are loved by God united with him in Jesus Christ. The frequent use of the preposition "In Christ" emphasizes that God from eternity appointed Christ as the Mediator and Head of the elect and the foundation of salvation.⁴

At the most foundational level, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ restores our identity as children of the living God. We learn in Genesis that all people are made in the image of God and sin distorts the image but does not erase it. Each person we meet is a recipient of God's ongoing common grace but only God's people can be identified as "saints," sons and daughters of God because of the saving grace through Jesus Christ. Though not everyone shares in the identity of saint, the experiences of suffering and sin are common to everyone, Christian or non-Christian. Every person we meet has

² <http://sojourner-tim.blogspot.com/2012/07/who-is-really-blessed-2-samuel-61-19.html>

³ Couch, B. M. (1988, April). Blessed Be He Who Is Blessed. *International Review of Missions*, 77(306), p. 213.

⁴ Lewis, J. (2004, Oct). Doing Theology Through the Gates of Heaven: a Bible Study of Ephesians 1:3-14. *Evangelical Reveiw of Theology*, 28(4), p. 364.

experienced grief, suffering, challenges, and tragedies. And every person falls short of even their own standards let alone God's standards for holiness.

However, Paul is telling us there is a distinction to keep in mind. The relationship with Christ has a redemptive significance due to the renewing and sanctifying work of the Spirit. Therefore, the saints suffer in unity with Christ with the hope of the glory to come. (2Cor 4:16-18)⁵ The gift, work and presence of the Holy Spirit become equal with our new identity as children of God.⁶ God has adopted us into his family. God has worked and designed to make it so. God wanted everyone before we even knew we wanted Him. Being wanted by a Father who knows everything about us and still wants us, that's blessed. To live meaningfully in this moment, however, we need to see ourselves not only as heirs, as those who receive these blessings, but as ancestors as well, for God has an eye on all that will come after us, and a grace-filled purpose for it all. What will future generations know about us?

To underline that it is God's sanctifying grace rather than our works through which we are adopted into God's inheritance. Ephesian says remember at one time you were Gentiles by birth, remember that you were at a time without Christ, as aliens and strangers. But now in Christ Jesus, both groups have been made into one.⁷ Do we see the image of God in all? Do we recognize the ever-present common grace of God? As C.S. Lewis said in *The Weight of Glory*, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal."

Remember, God's image is never fully erased from within us. Are we looking for this image and hoping to share the saving grace of Christ. We know that not everyone wants to hear the Good News of the Gospel but shouldn't we always look and treat each other as potential adoptive brothers and sisters?

Adoption means we have all the rights not just to the inheritance but to the lineage and to the name. When we embrace our adoption into God's people we share in a wealth of love, forgiveness, and compassion. This is why Paul lavishes praises on God that in Christ there is unity. This unity arises out of deeds and goes along with love, service and giving to members and non-members alike. A true Christian ethic seeks to promote the unity of the church and of humanity. The same concern for all to be the instrument of the love of Christ. This scripture begins and ends with blessings and praise. The Father blesses us, making us as we should be and we bless him by praising him. Praise is a privilege of those who live in Christ and it achieves its fullness in the reflection and action of Christians. There is no need for a special place to praise God, nor a special time. Praise is expressed by all that we do in a life lived in the truth. Truth as an action not a concept and we practice it to cope with the task of fulfilling the will of God as joint heirs of his

⁵ Emlet, M. R. (2018). Loving Others as Saints, Sufferers, and Sinners. *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 32(1), pp. 35-36.

⁶ (Emlet, 2018) p.39.

⁷ (Butcher, 2012) p. 201.

kingdom. To be in Christ is the central theme of the entire doxology, the new life, or as Paul calls it “the new humanity.”⁸ What a Blessing!

⁸ (Couch, 1988) p. 219.