

INTRO - The story is told of a little girl who was ill and was asked by the Make a Wish Foundation what she wanted. You know how this organization works, they help children with horrible illnesses and get these children trips to Disney World, and an opportunity to meet their favorite ball player or movie star. This little girl when she was asked what she wanted said, 'I don't want any of that stuff, I just want to be healthy.'

I know there have been problems at Star of the North. In fact, you know I have worked on them with you. As I had the opportunity to come here on vacation and bring God's word I wondered what I should talk about. Having been involved in the problems, should I talk about them. But you know, I thought, maybe you just want to be a healthy congregation, just want to look at the plan God has for any Christian person, any Christian congregation.

This summer at St. John in Palmer I am preaching specifically on the Epistle lessons. I have told my people that these are real letters written to real people with real problems. These letters give these people the directions God has for their lives. So, they are practical guidance for the Christian life.

With all this in mind, therefore, I decided to continue looking at the Epistles and give you God's practical direction for your life based on our Epistle, a healthy encouragement. So today we will focus on God's words in Ephesians 1.

I. Last night, I went silver salmon fishing. We casted and casted our lines for about 2 ½ hours. We never had what we knew was a real bite. The river was full of reds, not silvers.

A. People might feel the same way about looking for God's direction in Ephesians 1.

1. There is only one problem with looking for practical direction in this verse.

2. It is primarily, not about what we are to do, but about what God has done for us.

B. Look with me at this verse by verse. I have the verbs underlined.

1. Verse 3 says, ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **has blessed us** in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing **in Christ**. IN OTHER WORDS, GOD HAS BLESSED US WITH SPECIAL BLESSINGS, SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS, IN FACT WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING. All these are in Jesus

2. Verse 4 says, ⁴ For he **chose** us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. GOD CHOSE US, FROM BEFORE TIME BEGAN. AGAIN THE ACTION COMES FROM GOD!

3. Verses 5 and 6 say, In love ⁵ he **predestined** us to be **adopted** as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious **grace, which he has freely given us** in the One he loves. SO, GOD PLANNED FOR US TO BE HIS CHILDREN. And IN JESUS GOD HAS GIVEN US GRACE - UNDESERVED LOVE. .Again, we are hearing about what God has done for us.

4. Verses 7 and 8 say, ⁷ In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the **forgiveness** of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he **lavished** on us with all wisdom and understanding. IN THE BLOOD OF JESUS,

GOD HAS REDEEMED US, PAID THE PRICE TO SAVE US AND FORGIVE US, AND THIS IS NOT GIVEN IN A STINGY WAY, IT IS LAVISHED ON US.

6. According to verse 9 and 10, ⁹ And he **made known to us the mystery** of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment -- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. **IN OTHER WORDS, GOD HAS SHARED WITH US THE MYSTERY OF HIS PLAN FOR THE WHOLE WORLD.**

7. VERSE 11 SAYS, ¹¹ **In him we were also chosen**, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, **MIGHT BE FOR THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY.** Again, God working to choose us.

8. Finally, we hear in verses 13 and 14, ¹³ And you also were **included** in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were **marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit**, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession -- to **THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY.** (NIV)

A. God included us in His blessings which come from Christ when he Gave us His Word, and the good news of our salvation.

B. He guaranteed this to us in our baptisms.

C. This may all sound overwhelming and confusing,

1. The truth is this is a difficult verse to translate, because it literally is just one verse.

2. But, there are a couple of obvious points. First of all, God has indeed LAVISHED, His blessings on us. A healthy Christian life focuses first of all on the blessings of God rather than on ourselves.

3. Secondly, those blessings are all centered in God's love for us in Jesus,

A. Verse 7 talks about his His blood shed on he cross,

B. Verse 13 and 14 tell us about His salvation won in the empty tomb.

C. Finally, according to verse 13 and 14 God gives us these blessings through faith by His Word and His sacraments.

II. But, while there were mainly reds last night, I think I did see a silver or two. There is direction for us in this lesson. God calls for one thing, and he calls for it 3 times.

A. We are called to praise Him.

1. Verse 3 says, PRAISE be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ.

2. Verse 12 says, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, **MIGHT BE FOR THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY.**

3. Verse 13 and 14 says, Having believed, you were **marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit**, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession -- to **THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY.** (NIV)

B. We praise someone when we give them the credit, the glory the honor. We praise someone when we defer our own wishes or glory, and serve them.

1. Praise is not necessarily easy, because it puts another first.
2. When people praise God they give Him the glory, they do His will.

C. Practically, God's people don't just give God glory and honor and credit in Worship, however.

1. When we tell others about Him at work , or at home, that is praise.
2. When we give up our desires to do sinful things, and instead live lives where we trust God, and where we love others, that is praise.
3. The practical call of God to a healthy congregation is to live praising

Him.

III. This week my family and I also went to Homer to go fishing. Pastor Neels took me and my family out halibut fishing on Thursday, and was willing to take all of us fishing on Friday, but only I went. We caught a total of 14 halibut, and I have them home in the freezer. He also put our family up in their home for Wednesday night, and Thursday night, and Friday night. By the way, I did cook breakfast on Saturday morning. If I told you that before you heard about all that Pastor Neels did you might have thought it was special. The truth is, it was simply a way to say thank for all he and Sue had done for us.

A. We are sinful people.

1. We like the attention and the credit and the glory.
2. Praising someone else can be hard.

B. Praising God may not seem easy, until, however, we realize all he has done for us. But, when you look at 14 verse of all the things God has done for us, praising Him seems sort of insignificant, and deserved, that right and natural thing to do. Don't you think so?

CONCLUSION - When a new baby is born the doctors do an APGAR TEST. A baby can get from 1 to 10 on how healthy they are looking at various things. Today, we have learned signs of a healthy congregation. It focuses on God's blessings. It knows those blessings are centered in Christ. Finally, it praises God in response to those blessings. That should be practical direction and help for any Christian.