

Who we really are

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[0 : 00] Good morning, good to see you all. And I want to start by pointing out that most of you are pretty ordinary. Now, I don't mean offense by that, but to be honest, none of us are particularly famous or done anything world-changing, unless I don't know you and you can tell me.

But when you walk in the streets, you're pretty unremarkable. You're ordinary, as am I. But imagine one day you discover that you're not nearly as ordinary as you thought you were.

Imagine you discover something about yourself which completely changes the way you see your life and where you come from and your place in this world. Imagine that for a second. Well, that actually happened to a man named David Drew Howe, who was a mechanic in Maryland, USA.

A pretty ordinary, unremarkable guy. He wouldn't be able to tell anything. He was just a guy on the street walking past you. Until one day, he did an online ancestry trace in 2007 and discovered that he was the rightful heir to the throne of the Isle of Man in England, a mechanic in Maryland, USA.

And so then he learned that he wasn't nearly as ordinary as he had previously assumed he was. Now, of course, as you can imagine, the British upper class didn't take this too well because he was a commoner.

[1 : 21] And commoners can't be royalty, let alone mechanics. And so they resisted this discovery quite a bit. And because of that resistance, as well as the fact that he learned that he had to give up his U.S. citizenship to carry out his role, he eventually ended up last year, in fact, abdicating his title.

And he is now happily fixing cars again in Maryland, USA. But I want you to imagine for a second that happened to you. All right? Imagine you discovered that you were actually of royal descent.

You did an ancestry trace. And you discovered that you had a claim to a title overseas somewhere. Imagine that. Imagine you discovered that. How would you feel?

What would you do about it? Would you uproot your life here and go and claim that title and start your new life? Or would you abdicate it in favor of the life you're comfortable with?

Which would you do? Well, that is a question that the book of Ephesians poses to Christians. You see, Ephesians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to not just the Ephesians, but to a number of churches.

[2 : 31] And, in fact, it's a letter written by God to St. Mark's today. And it's in the Bible primarily for us to learn about our true identity and then to consider what we're going to do with that.

That's what the book of Ephesians is about. For Christians to learn who they really are and then consider whether they're willing to change the life they're comfortable with in order to start living the new life they've been called out of this world to live.

And it then goes into detail as to what that new life will look like. That is Ephesians in summary. And that's where we're going this term. We're going to work systematically through this letter of Ephesians.

And so if you want to know what it says, if you want to know its message, don't miss church. Come every Sunday. If you miss church, you will miss out a key part of this letter. You need to understand the whole thing to understand what God is saying.

And make sure you're in a Bible study as well to get the most out of what we study on Sundays. It's vital. This is God's word, right? And God deserves our attention this term as we come and study it.

[3 : 39] He deserves you to put aside other things so that you can understand what he is saying through this letter. And I hope you and I pray that you will do that. And so I'm going to pray right now as we start this journey together.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for your word which reveals the hidden things of the universe. Help us to give your word the attention it deserves. Father, speak to us as we open it now, as we start this letter of Ephesians which you inspired to be written.

And as we journey through it together as a church family this term. Help us to see in this book who we truly are as Christians and what it really means to be believers.

And so help us, this term, to properly understand how we should live out our identities in our everyday lives. And help us this morning as you speak to us in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, so Ephesians begins this process of identity transformation. In fact, more accurately, identity realization.

[4 : 44] Because it's helping us to understand who we really are. And it begins that process in the very opening few verses of the letter. Vital verses. So I'm really glad you're here this morning. And it does that by taking us on a journey.

Taking us out of our day-to-day lives. Rising us above the temporary lives we're in. And giving us a glimpse of eternity. Both past and future eternity.

So it's kind of like if you're an astronaut. And you leave this world where you can only see a limited horizon. And you rise into space.

And you can see so much more. Well, that's what Ephesians in these first few verses is helping us to do. It's helping us to rise above our temporary time horizons. And see eternity. Giving a glimpse of eternity.

Painting this picture of eternity past and eternity future. So that we can see where we've come from. Eternally.

[5 : 42] And where we're going. Eternally. And it's so important to get that picture. To see that picture. In order to understand who we are. I mean, you can't really know who you are unless you know where you come from. It's part of your identity.

Your origin. That's why we have surnames. By the way, our surnames are labels of our origins. They're labels of where we've come from. And that forms part of our identity. And so what is a Christian's identity?

Where do they come from? Well, let's read from verse 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To God's holy people in Ephesus. The faithful in Christ Jesus.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world. To be holy and blameless in his sight. Okay, so right there, that is where Christians come from.

[6 : 46] Not from their mother's womb. Not from a church or a ministry. No, Christians originated in the mind of God before the creation of the world.

This passage teaches us. And so Paul begins our journey in Ephesians by stating off the bat, in the first few verses, one of the most difficult doctrines in the Bible.

The doctrine of predestination or election as it's known. And it's an essential doctrine. It's a vital doctrine.

And the reason is, because to know who you are as a Christian, you need to know where you've come from.

It states, this doctrine states that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, if you really believe that he rose bodily from the dead, and he is your God and Savior, then the Bible teaches you didn't actually decide to believe that.

[7 : 47] God decided that you would believe that. And he decided it before you were born. Before you could choose anything, God chose you, if you're a believer.

That is what this is saying. And this is not the only place it says it in the letter. In fact, this idea of election, predestination, that God chose those who believed before they were even born, it runs throughout this letter.

Look again how Paul begins in verse 1. He writes, To God's holy people, or the saints in Ephesus, depending on your translation. Who is he talking about? Who are the saints in Ephesus? Well, he then goes on to define those saints as those who are, quote, faithful in Christ Jesus.

Those who have faith in Jesus are the saints. And so that, faith in Jesus, Paul considers, is the only criteria for sainthood, because of the gospel. The gospel message is that righteousness before God is attained not through our works, but through the crediting of Jesus' righteousness to our account, if we believe and trust in him.

And so Paul can call believers saints already merely because they believe. It goes very much against the Roman Catholic idea of particular saints that are venerated and made statues of, because Paul writes here in Ephesians 1, which I'm afraid I don't think Roman Catholics read, calls all believers saints.

[9 : 17] Those who are holy. It's saying if you really believe today in Jesus Christ, if that faith is genuine, that is proof that God has elected you before you were born.

Proof of your sainthood. And so that's why Paul can write, to those who believe, at the beginning, God has chosen you. And then he goes on in verse 4 to say this, He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him.

Those two words, to be, are so important. To be holy and blameless before him, because it talks about a future state, not a present state. To be, in future. Which means that God didn't choose people to be Christians based on who they were, or who he thought they were going to be, before they became Christians.

He didn't choose them based on anything within themselves. He chooses them based on what he is going to make them into, and nothing else. And so his choice has nothing to do, because of those two words, to be, his choice, in who is going to believe, and who is going to be saved, has nothing to do, with any merit, or deserving, or anything we've done, or anything we've worked out, or anything we've chosen.

No, it's totally of God. I mean, how can it have anything to do with us? If he chose us before, we could do anything to merit it. And so that, in short, is the doctrine of election, the doctrine of predestination, which is clearly taught, in this, and other passages in scripture.

[10 : 59] And, I agree, it might be hard, to get our minds around that. And there's a lot of questions, that come up, which hopefully we can hash out, in our Bible studies. But, hard as it might be to grasp, the result of this doctrine, if you believe in it, is an incredible assurance, of your salvation, that you can find nowhere else, in all the world.

An assurance, that if you believe in Jesus today, God has already decided, millions of years ago, to save you. But now, what does that mean, for your life today?

We're talking, that's talking, that's the picture we've got, of eternity past. What happened, in the mind of God, millions of years ago, before creation, Paul has just revealed to us, amazingly.

But, that's past, what does that mean for today? How I live my life, when I go out there, and live the next week, the next month, the next, what does that look like? Well, that's what the rest of Ephesians, is about, and that's what the rest of Ephesians, is going to flesh out, especially from chapter 4, onwards, so come back.

And listen to those chapters. But in the meantime, it's summarized here, from verse 5. It says, He predestined us, for adoption, to sonship, through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure, and will, to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us, in the one He loves.

[12 : 25] In Him, we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches, of God's grace. And so, those are the present results, what that means for your life, right now, in those verses 5 to 7.

In short, the result, today, of God electing you, in eternity past, if you're a believer, is, adoption. Verse 5, He predestined us, for adoption, to sonship.

Now, what does adoption mean? Adoption means, entering a new family, and it implies, being taken out of one situation, and put in, most times, a far better, new situation.

In our country, there are 3.7, estimated, million orphans. Think about that. 3.7, million, children, who have no family.

And many of them, are living in, terrible conditions. Some of them, are rescued, out of those conditions, through adoption. Through being taken, into a new family, who loves them, unconditionally.

[13 : 38] And that is a completely, life-changing experience, for a child. And of course, as you can imagine, quite an adjustment. But you'll find, as they grow, in their understanding, of their acceptance, into that family, and their security, in that family, they more and more, take on the family likeness.

They begin to talk, and act, like other members, of their family, so that, eventually, there's no sign, they were ever not part, of their family. That's what being accepted, into a, into a situation, of unconditional love, does.

It transforms, a person, to take on, the family likeness. And that is why, the word adoption, is such a rich, theological word, in our Bibles, for Paul to use, in describing, what it means, to be a believer.

Because when Jesus, came to this earth, he came to swap places, with us on the cross. That's what the gospel says. Which means, he came, to take our sins, but not just to take, our sins, on himself, but also to give us, his rights, to God's family, his sonship titles, his family titles.

That's what happened, on the cross. Jesus didn't only, take your sin, if you're a believer, he also gave you, his rights to God's family. So that we could be, part of his family.

[15 : 02] That was his mission, to bring people, into God's family. That's why he went, to the cross and died. And so, we can enjoy, all the privileges, of being a member, of that family. Because of what Jesus, has given us.

Who believe. The privilege of knowing, God's unconditional acceptance. The privilege of, access to God, at any time of the day. The privilege of, knowing our place, in God's family.

And as a believer, grows in their understanding, of that place, that family, that they're in. And their security, in God's family. So they are transformed, and they take on, the family likeness.

You see, a believer, a Christian, unlike any, other false religion, out there, a believer, is not transformed, by keeping a list of rules.

A believer, is not transformed, by law keeping. A believer, is not transformed, by trying their best, to live a good life. A believer, is transformed, by realizing, who they are. A believer, is transformed, when they realize, the family, that Jesus, has already brought them into, and that God, has already elected them, to be in, from eternity past.

[16 : 10] When they realize that, when they realize, the unconditional love of God, and the security, they have, in God's, predestining grace, then, they begin, the process of transformation, and begin to take on, the family likeness.

They begin to live, holy lives, which is a mark, of being, God's adopted child. In other words, growing in holiness, is, is evidence, of election.

It's evidence, of adoption. Because if you are truly, in this family, you can't help, but to take on, the family likeness, and the family likeness, of God, is holiness.

That's why the Bible, says over and over again, in the old covenant, and the new covenant, be holy, as I am holy, God says. But not by your own, efforts, by Jesus, death on the cross, on your behalf, and your acceptances, into his family.

You can't, but, start the transformation, process into holiness. That is, a mark, of someone, who is truly believed. And so that, in short, is what a believer's, new identity, means for the present.

[17 : 21] And we will get, as I say, more into what that looks like, practically, in later weeks. Paul, fleshes out, what that looks like, in your marriage, what that looks like, in your work situation, what that looks like, in your priorities.

And that's what we're going to get to. And so, that is what it means, to be elected, in the present. But what about the future? Because just as important, as it is for a believer, to know where they come from, and who they are today, so it's vital for them to know, where they're going.

In fact, we can't live, truly, as believers, properly, the way God has called us to, unless we know, where we're going. And so we need a, a vision of that. And that's what, Paul goes on to give us, from verse 9.

Look at what he says, He, that is God, made known to us, the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect, when the times, reach their fulfillment, to bring unity, to all things in heaven, and on earth, under Christ.

Alright, so, this verse reminds us that, God has a plan, for this world, and this creation, for the fullness of time. History is heading somewhere, in other words.

[18 : 42] You know, the history of this world, is not just, wandering around aimlessly, it's heading somewhere, to a particular point, there is an end point, to all of this, that's going on in the world, which we learn here, the end point, is to unite all things, in heaven and earth, under Christ.

And so, what does that mean? Another translation, is to, is to unify, all things, in heaven and on earth, and, under Christ, and, later in verse 23, Paul, talks about it, as Christ, filling everything, in every way.

So, this is the kind of picture, he's, he's giving us, of God's plan, for the fullness of time. That everything is, is incorporated, and united, under Christ, and he, will fill everything, in every way.

And so, he's saying, that God's ultimate plan, for this universe, is that one day, everything, in creation, will fall, under the rule, and authority, of Jesus, his son.

That's his plan. And so, eventually, at that point, there will be nothing, in existence, which won't be, in submission to Jesus. Jesus. Think about that. Think about what that'll be like.

[19 : 54] Jesus, himself, in all his glory, as the son of God. In fact, we learned in John, didn't we, he was the word, that brought all things, into existence, in the first place, right at the beginning, of the world's history, and so right at the end, he will again, be the one, that everything, is incorporated under.

He will be the environment, in which everything, will exist. He is the environment, that everything was made for. The Bible teaches. Last week, as many of you know, we went to Arniston, on holiday, and we were struck, not just by the good weather, in fact, but by the beautiful, sea life, just off the coast.

It's a very, untouched coastline, and it's very natural, and it's beautiful, if you go there, especially at a low tide, you can walk around, the rock pools, at low tide, and you see, so much, sea life.

I mean, I don't know if, Alex or Amy, our kids counted, the amount of urchins, and anemones, and starfish, and crabs we saw, but it was just, teeming with, life, on the coast.

You know, we spent, an entire morning, just exploring the rock pools, one morning. And they were all thriving, in that environment, of the sea. But tell me, what happens, when those things, are not in their natural environment, those anemones, and those starfish, and those crabs, when they're taken, and the fish of course, when they're taken out of their environment, when they're taken out of the water, what happens to them?

[21 : 25] Someone tell me. They die, they shrivel up, they dry out, and they die. They are, they are what they are meant to be, only in the environment, they are meant to be in.

Now, this is vital, for the illustration, you'll see where I'm going with this. But think about that, a starfish, an urchin, and an enemy of fish, they are only able to be, what they are meant to be, when they're in the environment, they were made to be in.

If they are out of that environment, they shrivel up and die. Well, let me tell you, this world, humanity, is shriveling up, and dying. I don't need to convince you of that, just look at the newspapers, look at the news, look outside, look at the state, that our world is in, that is shriveling up, and dying, and the reason is, because it's not in the environment, it was meant to be in, which is the kingdom, and the rule of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

That is the environment, that humans were meant, to be under, and flourish in, but they are not. And it is because, the world is not under that, rule, that it's so messed up.

Now, for Christians, that environment, has started to break in, into lives, and into homes, and into families. The rule of Christ, is more and more, starting to take over, through the church, through Christian lives.

[22 : 52] So, if you like, Christians are like, sea creatures, experiencing water again, starting to live in the environment, they were meant for. And yet, we're still in a world, which is mostly living, outside of that environment, and that's why, there's conflict.

That we will, inevitably have conflict, with the world, and its values. And that conflict, causes many problems, in your situations, in your offices, where, you know, in your lives, your relationships, with non-Christians, will be, there will be tension, there will be hostility there, because you're in a different, environment that they're in.

You live in the environment, under the rule of Christ, and they don't, and that changes everything. And that conflict, depending on what country you're in, could cause the loss of your life.

Many Christians are killed, for their belief, and it's happened ever since, Jesus came. Because of, because of the different environments, that people live in. But that conflict, will not last.

And those people, who live outside, of the environment of Christ, will not last. One day, Jesus will return, to claim his world, he will put his flag, in this world, and he will judge rebels, and everything that is not, under his rule, the Bible tells us, will suffer eternal destruction, and he will fill everything, in every way, and there will be nothing, that doesn't exist outside, of his rule, the environment it was meant for.

[24 : 21] And then, once he does that, once he comes to establish, his rule, and reign over this creation, what will he do, with it? What will he do, with his kingdom?

Well, he will devote it, to the praise, and glory of his father, forevermore. That is the purpose of it. In fact, that's the purpose, of all of this. Humans being created, God electing some, to eternal life, through adoption, in his family, the plan of salvation, through the cross, to redeem us, for our sins.

What's it all for? It's not for us. Because look at, what this passage tells us, over and over, what it's all for. Verse 6, for the praise, of his glorious grace.

Verse 12, in order that we, might be for the praise, of his glory. Verse 14, the redemption of those, who are God's possession, to the praise, of his glory. You see what this is telling us?

It's saying we exist. We were made for, the praise of God. What's, the purpose of life? Well, as the Westminster Catechism, question one says, to glorify God, and enjoy him forever.

[25 : 34] That is our purpose. That's why we exist. And to find our ultimate joy, in experiencing, God's glory. glory. And Jesus did all that, that he did, when he came to earth.

All his miracles, all his teaching, his death on the cross, his resurrection, he did all that, for the praise, of his father. And one day, because of what he did, everything, in the universe, will be praising God, and there will be nothing, and no one, who's not praising God, and enjoying God, to the full, and it will be amazing.

But will you be there? Will you be there? Well, you know how you can tell? You can tell, by how interested you are, in praising God today.

Because anybody can say, they believe, certain things. They can even convince themselves, they believe certain things. Anybody can come to church, and do all the Christian things. But I don't know, whether your belief is true, belief.

I don't, and it's one of the, it's one of the, most frustrating things, for a pastor, I must admit. All I can see, is what you do, on the outside. I can't see, whether your faith, is true.

[26 : 53] But you can. You can. By whether you want, to praise God, in your heart of hearts. You can know, whether you truly believe, by what your heart, is doing, when we sing, when we sing these songs.

Because the purpose, for which God has chosen, his elect, is for the praise, of his glory. And so that is what, marks out, his elect, in this world. A desire, to praise him.

Day by day, a daily attitude, of praise, which will then translate, into how they live, their lives. In holy living, joyful, duty, of praise to God, is what they want to do.

That's what they desire. And so, is it your desire, to praise God, really, this morning? What would you say, if I asked you, does your heart of hearts, desire, to praise God?

If not, then you may not have, yet truly believed the gospel. Or, there's another reason.

[28 : 05] Maybe you have, believed the gospel, and you want to praise God, but you struggle to. Your flesh is against it. Is that you? Or whichever one you are.

The solution is the same, and the solution, is right here, in this passage. Because look again, in your Bibles, to how Paul begins. And the structure, of this passage, the flow of what he's saying, is so important.

He begins, verse 3, by saying, praise be, to the God and Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ. So he starts, with this idea of praise. He starts with, with the ultimate goal, of everything, and the reason we were made.

He says, praise be, to God and Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us, in the heavenly realms, with every spiritual, blessing in Christ. And then I would read on, if we had time, but I'm not going to, because basically, what he goes on then, to do, is he then goes to reveal, each one of those blessings, one by one, that the gospel gives us.

And so what he's saying, he starts with praise, and then he gives the reasons, for praise, in the rest of the passage. He's saying, that the thing, that is going to lead people, to truly praise God, in their heart of hearts, is a revelation, and understanding, of the gospel, which is what the whole Bible, is about, and all the results, of the gospel.

[29 : 25] But do you see, how revelation, is essential, for true praise. He says, praise be to God, and then he reveals, the truth, that is going to cause us, to praise God. In other words, the more you hear, and read, God's word, at church, and at Bible study, and in personal reading, at home, the more you can, praise him, and the more his elect, will want to praise him.

And so, that must be, the primary reason, for you to read your Bible, and to come to church, not first and foremost, to grow in your knowledge, but to inspire you, to praise God.

If you, if your Bible reading, isn't leading you, to praise God, then you're doing it wrong. And so this week, this term, this year, every time, you open your Bible, get into the habit, of opening your Bible, and seeking, to see God in it, and to understand, understand him, and his gospel better, so that when you close it again, your heart is filled, with fresh praise to him.

That is how to read, your Bible properly. Read it, for the goal, of praising God. Praise that will cause you, to live in this world, as a citizen of heaven.