

EPHESIANS 1:1-14 – Who we are in Christ (John 8:31-36)

Who are you? Good question, isn't it? Identity goes to heart of what it means to be human. So much of life comes down to questions of identity.

- More difficult than used to be. In past, station in life fixed and defined who you were – class or gender. Limiting, but also security. Now: Individual freedom – create your own identity. Sounds liberating, but evidence suggests otherwise.
- Social mobility lowest for 50 years (economic and educational factors.)
- Google 'I don't know who I am' – 2.25 billion results!

W society currently in grip of a massive identity crisis. Rootless, shiftless – no security.

Also true in church. Biblical knowledge decreased. If I asked question: 'what is a Christian?' what would you say? 'Someone who goes to church.' 'Someone who loves God.' Maybe even 'Someone who follows Jesus.' But *we are so much more than that!* We are in fact new creations, with a new family, a new future and a new source of transformative power in our lives. And not just that: we are part of a unique, global, multi-racial, multi-cultural new society that God is creating on this earth in preparation for the perfect world to come.

This is big picture stuff. If we really grasped who we are, life would look a lot different. We would be secure in ourselves. We would be empowered by God to become who we truly are. We would have extra capacity to cope with life's trials. It would transform our internal community life – imagine a few dozen of us fired up with God's love, determined to bless each other and impact our community.

And it would be good news for the world, wouldn't it? Over the last 10 years I've become utterly convinced that understanding and living our true identity in Christ is critical to our mission. The world is in the grip of this identity crisis. People are crying out for an answer to this question: who am I, really? We have an amazing answer to that question. Not just an answer: the answer. It's like we're sitting on this goldmine, and if people only knew, they would come flocking to it.

But many of us aren't sure the mine is there either! As a result, all those other voices in our lives drown out the voice of God: 'you're not good enough', 'he doesn't hear your prayers', 'you can't cope with this', 'you need that person to love you or affirm you' whatever it is. We need to know who we are first, to really get grounded in what it means to be a Christian – or to use St Paul's language, to be 'in Christ'. If we can truly grasp that, then it will be dynamite for us, for our church and for our community.

That's why our focus in 2015 is this very question: who we are in Christ. There's lots to do – but actually we need to know who we are first. Because when the storms hit – as they always do – it's not what you do that gets you through it, it's who you are.

And there's no better place to start than Paul's short letter to the Ephesians. Some evidence that written to multiple churches, of which the Ephesian version has survived. If true, then this is Paul's summary of what it means to be a Christian, it's his alpha course, if you like. This is what a Christian *really* needs to know: first half who are, second half what it means (i.e. what do). Quite dense – but awe-inspiring, like standing on top of mountain and seeing whole landscape (ASK). (Develop analogy – often thick cloud. Like us – we are already at top, but in cloud i.e. no view.)

Next 6 weeks – first half – answer this question. Who are we, really? Amazing answers.

First 14 verses prob favourite passage in whole of Scripture – only got 10 mins left, so can only scratch the surface, but in these 10 mins just give you a flavour, whet your appetite – and maybe start to open up that big picture of just how awesome it is to be a Christian.

But first, a couple of intro comments to set the scene:

INTRODUCTION (verses 1-2)

- The author - The apostle of Christ
- The readers - The faithful in Christ
- The message: grace and peace from Christ



'IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS!

Key verse of passage = v3: "Every spiritual blessing in Christ"

- God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – READ REFS
- "in the heavenly realms" – unseen world of spiritual reality, just as real as material world – more importantly, these eternal realities connect with us now – HAS blessed
- 'every blessing' – not just one or two – all we need (underlying question for this year – do you really believe you have all you need in Christ? Paul says you do)
- A plan from the beginning to the end of time

- IN CHRIST – 10x: v1, v3, v4, v6, v7, v9, v11, v12, v13 twice (add v5 through, v10 under)

"If you don't have Jesus, you don't have the blessings."

So what are the blessings we have as Christians?

- **CHOSEN (v4)**
 - 'He chose us'. God made the decision to choose us before the beginning of time (we often think that we chose God, but he chose us first – predestination a red herring, no-one can say God did not choose me – but all those who have come to know to Jesus can say: God chose me before beginning of time)
 - And he did so to make us holy and blameless in his sight (despite the fact that by nature we're not)
 - WOW! How does that make us feel?
- **ADOPTED (v5)**
 - Implies that without God's saving action we are not part of his family, but that now we are (all God's creatures, but only in Christ do we become God's children).
 - A huge privilege. In Roman law, adopted children enjoyed the same rights as natural children.
 - Also a responsibility, because he chose us to be holy. So we need to cultivate the family likeness.

- **REDEEMED (v7)**

- Powerful word (which miss today) – word is the one that was used when a slave was bought out of slavery – in this case, ‘money’ was Jesus’ blood, shed on cross
- God has set us free! – Jesus picks up on same idea in John 8
- Don’t underestimate power of this today – so many forms of captivity/slavery – God wants to redeem us from every form of it – obvious ones like drugs in all forms, gambling, to less obvious but just as bondage-forming: opinions/approval of others, work, (and dare I say it) social media

- **BROUGHT TOGETHER (v10)**

- God’s plan is to bring the whole universe under the Lordship of Jesus
- Revelation 22:5 tells us that when Christ is reigning, we will reign with Him too – WOW!

- **SEALED (v13)**

- v13-14 talks about ‘inheritance’ and there are 2 inheritances to notice:

GOD’S inheritance

- US! We are ‘God’s possession’ (v14) – He owns us now
- He’s made a downpayment, a deposit – His Spirit in our hearts

OUR inheritance

- Life with Christ forever
- BUT we need help, which is where the deposit of the Holy Spirit comes in...

- A promise – The Holy Spirit was promised in the Old Testament, and promised by the apostle Peter to all who repent and believe
- A seal – a seal denotes authenticity, so the Spirit is what marks us out as authentic Christians
- A guarantee – there’s no way we could survive as Christians on our own – but the Spirit gives us the strength to do it, and slowly transforms us to be like Jesus. And that power is our guarantee of eternal life!

What’s the result?

PRAISE! We want to praise His glory (v6, v12, v14)

If we realised the fullness of what God has done, “life would become worship, and we would bless God constantly for having blessed us so richly in Christ.”

(John Stott)

APPLY

- God’s plan: Have you got the big picture or the small picture? If trudging through the fog, look up, catch the view – you’re chosen, brought into God’s family, set free, part of a plan, and guaranteed an eternal future.
- Our image of ourselves: Who will we choose to believe – God’s view of us, or ours? Looking at all this who wouldn’t want to be a Christian? What is God saying to you today – what’s key word – CHOSEN, ADOPTED, SET FREE, PART OF A PLAN, SEALED...