

**Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:3-10**

**“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom & prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”**

## **"Gathering All Things in Christ"**

**I hope after last week we have taken a bit of the mystery out of mystery when it comes to understanding how God's story is worked out in history!**

- **This week we come to what well could be seen as the center of God's story, and many in today's modern world would be disappointed to hear that it is NOT about them!**

**Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones certainly did not pull any punches when he came to verse 10, which as our text reads: “that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”**

**Pastor Martin says that “this verse explains the nature of the mystery which God has been pleased to reveal to us. I do not hesitate to assert that we have in this verse the key to the understanding of the chief practical purpose of this Epistle to the Ephesians. This is the message which the Apostle is most concerned to expound. At the same time, of course, he was anxious to tell them all the things which we have already considered;**

**but the peculiar feature of this Epistle is that it is meant to be an exposition of this particular theme. Indeed, we can go further and say that this verse states what is the central theme of all Scripture.”**

- **I honestly do not think he is overstating the case and I trust we can better understand this as we consider what gathering all things in Christ truly means.**

**As we do, we should see that this brings great blessings to us as individuals, along with great responsibilities.**

- **At the same time we must not lose sight of the global implications of what the Apostle teaches here and the impact of that as well.**

**At bottom this is another area where we see the importance of the one and the many which has been revealed to us from the very nature of our Triune God.**

**Gathering all things as one in Christ does not mean that the individual loses his or her significance, but rather gains their true identity...**

- **And yet at the same time we learn that it is not just about us, but about the whole of God's plans.**

**So what does it mean to, “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”**

**“In Christ” is used almost one hundred times in the New Testament!**

**So, let me discuss with you what it means to us individually & collectively...**

- **What is presented is almost overwhelming and I think that it well should be!**

**As we studied just a few weeks ago we have the forgiveness of sins and we will learn much more as ‘in Christ’ is found a dozen times in this Epistle! But is it a broad theme as Pastor Martin stated:**

**In Romans, we find that we have redemption in Christ, we are alive to God in Christ, we have eternal life in Christ, freedom from sin and love of God in Christ and in Christ we are made one Body and approved by God. In I Corinthians we learn that we are sanctified in Christ, made wise in Christ and again made alive in Him. The Apostle continues on in II Corinthians to teach us that we are established in Christ, that we triumph in Christ and in Him we are a new creation.**

**Galatians, though written to a very troubled local body, still teaches us that we have liberty in Christ, that we are justified in Christ and that we have unity in Him. In Philippians we see that we should see our trials [Paul’s chains] as something in Christ and that we have our upward call in Christ.**

- **I could go on to discuss our steadfastness in Christ or that we have truth in Christ, but I think you get the picture!**

**So, was I wrong to say that it was not all about us? Are not all these blessings ours in Christ?**

- **Yes they truly are... But always in Christ!**

**AND we should notice that in all the Epistles of Paul, and especially this book we are studying, all of these glorious blessings result in our being called to live in Christ!**

**As we will learn and study in Chapter two of this epistle, “ We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”**

**Paul will go on to show us how being in Christ should impact our relationships, our church life, our marriages, our parenting, our vocations and we see much of the same in all of his Epistles.**

- **Being in Christ is not something other worldly that we meditate on to take our minds off of the hustle and bustle of our everyday lives!**

**Being in Christ is what makes us who we are in our everyday lives and gives true meaning to all that we do, from changing that diaper to voting for governor or even being a governor!**

**So, being in Christ is important to us as individuals and should change how we live, but what about the big picture, the one that goes with the many?**

- **The Apostle clearly teaches that we are all members of the One Body and that is something often lost in our individualistic world today.**

**Understanding the significance of the Church gathered is not about learning what is in it for us, but rather what is in it for the world! Again, listen carefully to what the Apostle says in verse 10: “that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”**

**Now we often read the Great Commission as we are sent forth to serve our Lord and Savior each week and this should sound similar and should be seen with that child like faith Jesus spoke of:**

**In this verse Paul says there is going to be a gathering of what? All things!**

**A gathering of all things where?**

**In heaven and on earth!**

**A gathering in Who?**

**The Lord Jesus Christ!**

The one Who has been given all authority and power, on earth and in heaven calling on us to disciples the nations... To gather all into Christ!

- This is confirmed each week as we pray that the Lord's will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

Now it is important for us to see that this gathering together of all things in Christ is a BIG deal and to help us see what this means I want to turn to Colossians chapter one where we see the very purpose of the Creation: Colossians 1: "13 [The Father] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

- Paul then tells us about the Son Jesus and why all things will again be brought together in Him:

15 "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him."

Notice we see things in heaven & things on earth again, We should pause and let the children help us take this in: Many of our children have been learning the Children's catechism which teaches this grand truth at a very young age:

Children, who made you?

What else did God make?

Why did God make you and all things?

Now with that in mind, let me return to this text from Colossians:

16 "For by Him [Jesus] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

- Notice that peace through the blood of Jesus is linked with bringing all things under Jesus in both Epistles.

This is because things cannot be brought together in Christ without the sin problem being dealt with justly. The fall of Adam created chaos in God's good creation...

- Man's relationship with God was destroyed, his relationship to his fellow man was destroyed and even his relationship with the creation was destroyed.

This is why the Apostle could say that we are dead in our trespasses and sins, why men became beasts with regard to their treatment of each other and why even the creation itself groans as it awaits the reconciliation of all things!

When we truly understand what is broken...

- Then and only then can we see the need for repair and the means that God uses for that repair.

The blood of Jesus pays for the sins of all God's people and the Lake of Fire is there for the judgment of all the angels and men who remain in their rebellion.

Going back in Colossians we should note how Paul prays for them before sharing those grand truths about Jesus...

**Colossians 1:9 “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.”**

**And yes we are to be partakers of what we read in verse 19: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”**

**Or as we have in our text from Ephesians for this morning:**

**“7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom & prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”**

**Now of course we come back to that very basic question:**

- **How is God going to accomplish all of this in time and history?**

**Remember all those blessings that we have as those who are in Christ?**

**Remember the responsibilities that come with all those blessings?**

**Remember all those good works that we were created in Christ to walk in...**

- **They are very important to remember, because even with this grand plan to bring all things under Christ Jesus, God uses means!**
- **As we have been learning: Using one faithful obedience after another!**

**At bottom we must see that it is not all about us and neither is it all about some Kingdom we have no part in. The ditches to avoid on this godly highway are treacherous & often entered:**

**On the one side we have what is often called the social Gospel where we strive to bring the Kingdom of God on earth through our own strength and ways.**

**On the other side we have the other worldly Kingdom that is spiritual leaving us to fend for ourselves in the secular realm in which we must live.**

- **Both are wrong and we must pray as Paul did that we would be greatly used of God to advance His Kingdom in His ways!**
- **Doing the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way!**

**Now Martin Lloyd-Jones’ work on this book was given in a series of sermons back in the early 1950’s and I found his encouragement to the Saints to be very challenging at this point, especially in light of when he gave it... We need this wisdom SO much more today, so here is what he said in his conclusion...**

**“Once more I must ask some questions. Do you know these things? Are you prepared to give time to these things – to listen to them or to read about them? Do you know that these things are so marvelous that you will never hear anything greater, either in this world or the world to come? Do you realize that you have a part in these things? As I said at the beginning, I do not know whether another world-war is coming or not; but whether it be war or no war, as Christians we are in the plan of God.**

No bomb can be invented, no bacteria can be cultivated and used, no chemicals or gases can be brought into use, that can ever make the slightest difference to these things. That is God's plan as revealed in Scripture, and God's plan will be carried out; and if you and I are in Christ we are involved in it. We are destined to be elevated and restored to what man was meant to be. We shall be 'lords of the creation'. 'Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world... [and] angels?' says Paul to the Corinthians [I Cor 6:2-3]. Let us decide to spend less time in reading the newspaper and more time reading the Bible."

- Wise words for the Saints of that day and wise words for us today.

As we prepare to respond with the singing of In Christ Alone, let me close with something we will study at length near the end of this Epistle. For this morning I want us to remember that the armor we are told to put on, is something we need every day for our daily tasks...

- Those we have been created in Christ Jesus to walk in...

Ephesians 6: "10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— 19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

- May we all speak as boldly as we ought until all things are gathered together in Christ!

Communion Meditation: Psalm 132

"For Jehovah has chosen Zion;  
He has desired it for His dwelling place:  
14 "This is My resting place forever;  
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.  
15 I will abundantly bless her provision;  
I will satisfy her poor with bread.  
16 I will also clothe her priests with salvation,  
And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.  
17 There I will make the horn of David grow;  
I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.  
18 His enemies I will clothe with shame,  
But upon Himself His crown shall flourish.""