

## **Sunday, Mar. 1**

Rob preached on Ephesians 1 and God's inheritance. He pointed out that the word can be viewed from two directions. First, that we receive a glorious inheritance through Christ's sacrifice, which brings us eternal life. But also, that we are God's inheritance.

After noting that Paul laid out numerous blessings God has blessed us with in verses 3-14, he read verses 15-19. In it, Paul prays that God will give His children the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him and that our hearts will be enlightened.

"This prayer is full of stuff," Rob said. "When he mentioned this prayer, there are three things: 1) the hope to which you're called, 2) the richness of the glory of His inheritance, 3) and the immeasurable greatness of his power toward those who believe."

In a recent sermon, Pastor Steve referenced this prayer and commented that some people read it as meaning that we are God's inheritance. In other words, He views His followers as His treasure. That inspired Rob to dig deeper into Paul's prayer and appreciate how Paul was praying for us to have an understanding of God that comes from being in His Spirit.

"If we're not seeking (God) in that way, we don't really know Him," Rob said. "And there's so much more to learn. ... That's what's important to Paul here, that we understand God and understand ... what He's already provided for us."

Paul prays that the eyes of our heart would be opened, said Rob, who finds that interesting because the knowledge of God is a "head thing." But Paul is also praying that we know Him in our hearts. He wants us to understand this here, he said while touching his chest. Paul wants the eyes of our hearts to be opened and enlightened to who God is and the hope to which He has called us.

"What does it mean to have the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints?" Rob asked. "What does it mean for your life? I think that's what Paul means here when he uses those words. He's trying to get you to deeply consider these truths, these gifts that God is providing you."

Rob concluded by relating a lesson from a fifth-grade kickball game, when he fortunately got chosen for the better team. When he saw the good players kick first, he knew the pressure was off.

"Maybe I could take a big kick and try ... because I knew that behind me the winners were there," he said. "That's the way I see this. We are on God's team. We're the recipients of the hope of His calling."

## **Sunday, Mar. 8**

For "Romans Return," we looked at Romans 8:1-9. Pastor Steve also mentioned Romans 7:10-13 and the law causing people to sin. He paraphrased Paul: "I didn't know what coveting was until I heard, 'Thou shalt not covet.'" Every parent knows what rebellion looks like in children—the very thing you tell them not to do is what they want to do. It's the same with adults.

"You inherited your sin nature from Adam," Steve said. "What Jesus says are the greatest commandments are to love God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and to

love your neighbor as yourself. You should feel the weight of what He said. Did you love God this week with all your heart, soul, and strength? ... The answer is no.”

In fact, if we went before God and gave Him a box of all our achievements, it would be full of garbage. We are in trouble. This is why the first words of Romans 8 are so important, Steve said: they are the declaration of what God did in Christ—forgave us. Because Jesus has pardoned us, we don’t live with fear of future judgment or punishment.

“Hebrews says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of God,” Steve said. “(His) wrath is coming. To ignore it is foolish. But I am seated with Christ in heavenly places, united with Him in a way that is impossible to explain. That’s why there are no conditions. I’m His.”

Romans 8:1-2 assures that the law of life in Christ has set His followers free from the law of sin and death, while verse 3 tells us that God did what the law could not because of our weak, human flesh. God addressed the problem we had of being unable to keep the law, Steve said. Meaning we can’t earn our way to God, or work enough to earn His favor. Jesus was born without sin and lived up to every requirement of the law. He lived the life of perfection that we were unable to live.

By taking on the sin of the world and being crushed by it, Jesus condemned sin in the flesh, Steve said. God loaded all the sin of Adam and the world and laid it on His Son. All righteousness was fulfilled through the punishment of His Son. He gave us God’s righteousness.

“This is why I can go to sleep at night and not worry,” Steve said. “Guess who didn’t love God perfectly this week? Me. Guess who did? The Son. Who didn’t love their neighbor as themselves this week? Me. It’s so evident I need His grace.”

## **Sunday, Mar. 15**

Dr. Kevin Yingling spoke today on the pain and suffering Jesus endured on the cross. The former president of Cabell Huntington Hospital spoke with authority because of his background. He mentioned that the understanding of the crucifixion has waned in recent times, which is why he feels led to address the situation.

“I make a diagnosis, and then I do something to try to change the course of that disease or illness,” he said. “I use that same practice in my faith journey. I look at the evidence (and) seek the insights of wise people. I get the eyewitness accounts ... I know that Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and you.”

Luke identifies how Christ came to us in human form, born of a woman in a manger, Kevin said. The disciple also relates how Christ rescued us through His death. He said it is important that we “stir up” our minds and remember the events surrounding the crucifixion. As he shared about it, Kevin said he wanted us to understand that God provided the right remedy at the right time for the right patient—you and me.

Among the events he outlined the final week of Jesus’s life were:

- Him telling the disciples they were going to kill Him, as prophesied in Isaiah 53
- His betrayal to the chief priests and the scribes, who condemned Him to death
- His deliverance to the gentile Romans to be mocked, scourged, and crucified

“Some have said this presentation is too harsh,” Kevin said. “Some have said this is too real. Some have said this anguish is too much. Well, I think not. I think we need to stir up our minds to understand what Christ did for us on the cross.”

He told us to picture Jesus at the Last Supper, expressing His love for the disciples, washing their feet, and breaking bread and drinking wine with them. Afterwards, Jesus walks through the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He will be taken into captivity. Kevin pointed out that Luke 22 describes Jesus praying in such earnestness that his sweat fell to the ground as great drops of blood.

“I want to point out to you that this is Luke, the physician disciple,” he said. “This is a person whose mind has been trained in medical things ... He’s describing as an eyewitness what’s actually happening. ... The weight of the world is on His shoulders. He knows exactly who He is: God and man.”

Yet even though He could have called a legion of angels to rescue Him, Jesus suffered enormous humiliation, punishment, and torture in order to save mankind. Christ knew when the mission was complete, Kevin said: “No person took his life. No, He laid down His life for us.”

## **Sunday, Mar. 22**

We resumed the Romans series with “The Walk of the Spirit,” based on 8:1-9. Pastor Steve mentioned that Paul talked about the law, but that we are not condemned by it because Christ’s sacrifice delivered us. Asking why he needed the first part of verse 4—about the righteous requirement of the law being fulfilled in us—to be true, Steve said because he couldn’t do that on his own.

“He did do it,” Steve said. “It should create more fanfare. The news of receiving Christ’s righteousness is infinitely more valuable than receiving \$100 trillion in your bank account. When Christ has fulfilled the requirements of the law and given us righteousness, that is good news.”

In other words, God imputes Jesus’s righteousness to our account. Reading the rest of verse 4 and how it applies to those who walk according to the Spirit, Steve said we have to look at what the Scripture is saying: that we can’t earn righteousness. When we receive Christ, something changes in our life. It’s not because of something we did, but a gift from the Son of God.

Many Christians live with a sense of guilt and frustration because they can’t live righteously. A good explanation of what that means is found in the Bible: 1) love God and 2) love people. Throughout Scripture, walking with God means we have some things to do, Steve said. We are told to walk in holiness and the good works God created for us to do.

“How are you walking in the Spirit?” he asked. “Paul makes it as those who have received the Spirit of Christ will walk in the Spirit of Christ. It’s important to understand the difference between those who are Christians and those who are not.”

After reading verses 5-8, which talks about people who walk after the flesh and those who walk after the Spirit, Steve said he grew up hearing hundreds of sermons about salvation. He also feared he would do something to lose it, but Paul makes it clear there is a difference between those who are living to please God and those who are out to please their flesh. Verse 9 emphasizes that those who have the Spirit will live to please God.

“Where do you think the desire to live like God came from?” Steve asked. “Those who are in the flesh can’t please God. “If the Spirit dwells in you, you belong to Jesus ... the Spirit of Christ is in you. ... If you have the Spirit of Christ, you are His possession. ... You aren’t the Rescuer, He is. Because we received the Spirit of God, we are not the same.”

## **Sunday, Mar. 29**

“A Promised Resurrection” came from Romans 8:9-11. First, Pastor Steve recalled the frustration Paul expressed in chapter 7 (“Oh wretched man that I am”) and the joy of 8:4, which talks about the righteous requirement of the law being fulfilled in us because of Christ. What Paul’s message boils down to is a Christian is in the Spirit and a non-Christian is not in the Spirit, he said. So if the Holy Spirit is in you, you are in the Spirit. While we can do fleshly things, we still belong to Christ. We were bought with a price: crucifixion.

“We will never grow weary of the reality of a God who is love (and) who came to earth to save (people),” Steve said. “You are loved to the point that God died for you.”

He said one notable element of belonging to the Spirit is that those who follow Christ are not in the flesh but the Spirit. Wrapping the fingers of both hands together, Steve said if the Spirit of God dwells in you, then the Holy Spirit is in you and you are in the Spirit.

“In Ephesians 5:29-33, Paul says marriage is a profound mystery,” Steve said. “It refers to Christ and the church. The idea I can be one with my wife and one with the Spirit and part of the body of Christ is profound ... The Spirit of God is in them and me. It’s a bedrock of every marriage.”

Not only are we one with Christ, God the Father isn’t measuring our good works and saying we can only go to heaven if we don’t mess up, Steve added. He said the gospel trail doesn’t follow the path of what we have done, but what Christ has done. At this point, Steve read John 14:15-20, where Jesus told His disciples that when He left, He would not leave them as orphans, but would give them the Holy Spirit to be their ever-present helper.

If you had watched the Lord hand out fish to the multitudes and listened to His teachings, would you not have been amazed and impressed? Steve asked. So, if He said He was leaving, would you not also be upset? But, Jesus told the disciples that it was to their advantage that He leave, because the Spirit would come and impart Christ’s righteousness to all believers.

After referring again to Romans 8:11, about God giving life to our mortal bodies, Steve said, “The Spirit is a life-giving agent who gives us the righteousness of Christ. What is he saying? This is a promise of a future resurrection.” After reading 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18, he added, “You are going to get a new, glorified body.”