

## *Two At the Same Time*

*Ephesians 1: 1-3*

**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**August 13, AD 2023  
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He was a Roman citizen. He was a devout Jew. He was brilliant. And passionate. He was trained at the feet of one of the most famous scholars in the world. He was an ardent believer in the one true God. So Saul the Pharisee considered the disciples of Jesus to be dangerous. Their worship of Jesus as the Christ was blasphemous. Saul made it his mission to seek out, arrest, and hopefully have executed these Christians—literally, “little Christs--” who had become such a nuisance. Yes, Saul scorned Jesus and hated his followers. Until he became one. On his way with papers authorizing arrest of Christians, Saul got knocked down and blinded by a brilliant light. A voice spoke, “Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Overwhelmed by this glory, undone and terrified, Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The voice replied, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Then, in effect, Jesus said, “Get up. I am sending you to tell the Gentiles about me.” And so Saul became Paul, the inspired writer of thirteen precious letters and the missionary who brought the gospel all over the Roman empire. (see Acts 9)



This morning we’re beginning a study of Paul’s letter to the church he planted in the city of Ephesus. You can see on the map that Ephesus was a coastal city on the Aegean Sea. At the time, Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, behind only Rome itself and Alexandria. Scholars estimate that greater Ephesus had a population of over 200,000.



The heartbeat of the town was the Temple of Artemis, considered one of the seven wonders of the world. This temple was four times as large as the Parthenon in Athens. Artemis was the goddess of the city, sometimes even called “Lord” and “Savior” as she watched over her city.

Between its port and its temple, Ephesus drew tourists, bankers, merchants and spiritual questers. It was a bustling, romantic, wealthy, thriving city. In AD 52, Paul brought the gospel to Ephesus. He stayed more than two years teaching about Jesus and building up the community of Christians. So powerful was his gospel that a vital piece of the economy got affected. Sales in silver shrines to Artemis went way down. The craftsman and the merchants fanned hostility against this new religion. As ever, the claims of Jesus transformed some lives, and made others furious. Christians made their way in a pluralistic, sometimes hostile world with good news of grace and love. And of the Lord who claimed their allegiance.

Several years after he left, Paul wrote the Ephesians a letter of encouragement and instruction. It's only 2500 words, about the length of one sermon. But it's so packed with treasure that we'll need about 20 messages just to shine off some of the jewels. We start with the first three verses:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

What struck me in this opening is that we can identify five pairs of ideas. Each pair has a magnetic attraction that creates energy and insight. Let's walk through them.

**1) Called and sent.** Paul writes in standard letter form. He identifies the writer of the letter. This message is from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. The word apostle means *sent*. When we post news about ourselves or something we care about on Facebook, we are sending it out for all our friends to see. Paul had been sent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We note here that Paul did not make up his mission. Christ Jesus knocked him off his horse, blinded his eyes, and made it clear there was work to do. Paul had not been seeking Jesus, just the opposite. But by God's will, he got called to belong to Jesus and sent to share the news.

The same is true of all of us who believe in Jesus. Usually less dramatically, but no less significantly, God calls us to himself. I believe because the Father sent the Spirit to create faith in my heart so that when I heard about Jesus I could believe and give my life to him. And from the moment I was called, I was sent to be a witness to Jesus. There is no Christian who is self-

called to Jesus. There is no Christian who is not a missionary. We're all sent into our lives as ambassadors of Jesus.

**2) In Ephesus and In Christ.** Paul writes to the *saints* in Ephesus. The word for saints literally means *holy ones*. And to be holy means to be set apart. No longer like everyone else. Different. Living differently. Living like you're from somewhere else. These believers were in fact living in two places at the same time. To the ones set apart for Jesus who live in the city of Ephesus. You lay down your body at night in this town. You go to work in this city. You shop here. But at the very same time, you live now *in Christ*. You're a citizen now of heaven. You have been joined to Jesus in a mystical, spiritual way. He is the source of your life. He is your truest reality. All the time you're walking through Ephesian streets, you are also with Christ Jesus. He is your home.

We become aware of this dual living sometimes when we fall in love. You may remember this. My body is in class, but my mind is on her. I am folding shirts at work in this department store, but my real life is back at dinner with her. We can feel it travelling or living abroad, especially when we're homesick. I know I can't go home, but home is living in me even on the streets of Tokyo. I'm imagining live oaks in Cairo. I'm tasting redfish in Kaluga.

Even more so, Christians have *dual citizenship*. In heaven and on earth. You could say we're amphibians. We swim in the ocean of heaven even while we walk about the hot, bumpy streets of Baton Rouge. That means it is normal for those in Christ to feel like we're different. We're no longer at home here. But we're assigned to be here. We can no longer be comfortable with the world. But we're sent to love the world.

**3) Grace and Peace to You.** In a standard Greek letter, the writer would next be offering a word of greeting. The usual word was *chaire* (ky-ray). Hi! Cheers! Greetings! *Chaire*. It's a toss-off word of friendliness no one pays any attention to unless someone fails to say it. (Why she didn't even say hello!). Clever Paul, though, wastes no words. He changes just a couple letters to make his greeting into *charis*. (kah-ris). Grace! Favor! Good will and lovingkindness to you. Why just say "Hi" when you wish someone the grace of God? Of course *charis*, grace, is a loaded word. Paul uses it twelve times in this letter and it's rich with meaning. In fact, you could say that *grace* is Paul's shorthand for the whole life and work of Jesus. When he says *grace* he means all of Jesus. He means the Son of God stepping into the world in flesh and blood. Living a faithful life, dying an

atoning death and rising victoriously. Grace is God's rescue mission by sending Jesus. Once more, grace means God initiates. He loves first.

And of course, that grace in Christ Jesus creates peace between God and us. Jesus reconciles us to God. And he creates peace between us. As people get joined to Jesus, they discover that they belong to each other in Christ. I am not my own. If I am saved, I belong to Jesus. And that means I belong to everyone else who is in Jesus. He becomes the very basis for reconciled human relationships. Jesus himself is our peace. Peace with God. Peace in our hearts. Peace with each other.

These are pretty wonderful things to wish for someone. The whole of Christian faith and life is here. Grace and peace to you.

**4) God our Father *and* the Lord Jesus Christ.** We realize behind the qualities of grace and peace is not a principle or an idea, but persons. The Father and the Son are the source of all grace and peace.

The most precious thing we know about God is that God is love. That's uniquely Christian. That's our glorious news to the world. But there's a reason Christians were the first to say that in history. Because love means relationship. And what became clear when Jesus was with us is that Jesus and his Father love each other deeply. And have loved each other from all eternity. Indeed, that love between Father and Son is why anything came to be at all. Out of love flows new life.

Paul got flipped onto his head when Jesus appeared to him in that blinding light. It affected his brain. He realized something he never would have considered. A curtain got pulled back. The one God, the LORD I AM, is both Father and Son. This Jesus that walked among us is truly a man. But he is also Lord and God. At the heart of the one God is relationship. Father and Son in dynamic, perpetual love.

Eventually we would understand that the one God is three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In fact, we'll see that later in Ephesians. But this revelation unfolded. The big leap was from one person to two. From unitarian monotheists to binitarian monotheists. To realize that love is at the heart of God. Father and Son desire to include us in that love. To be in Christ is to be taken into the magnetic field of love that flows between Father and Son.

Why do we need to know this? Because if we lose Father and Son, we lose God is love. We lose grace and peace. We lose being in Christ. This reality will always make our brains hurt. But as we rejoice in this love, we can experience it in worship and prayer. It's the best.

**5) Heavenly Blessings Right Now on Earth.** In vs. 3, Paul begins a twelve verse, 240 word blessing of the Father for sending us the Son and the Spirit. Blessing literally means "good words." Blessing God means offering God good words about himself. Blessing means praise. And the Father treasures our feeble words of praise. He prizes our worship the way parents love a child's drawing of the family. We put those disproportionate stick figures up on the refrigerator. They are precious. So the Father finds our prayers.

In his blessing, Paul rejoices that the Father has given to us on earth every spiritual blessing. Quite often we think of blessings in terms of good things happening to my life here. Land, houses, jobs, money, talent, fun. Those are indeed lovely blessings. But they are not guaranteed to those whose homeland is heaven. We may or may not be comfortable and abundant. But no matter what happens, we have greater treasure. Spiritual blessings. A sense of favor, love, peace and acceptance that runs true inside us no matter what happens.

When we try to list out spiritual blessings, we discover that what we treasure most in Christ is very like Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul lists these effects of the Spirit's work in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5: 23). These are the qualities that fill a blessed life.

So as we close, I'd like us to consider this question, "Which spiritual blessing do I seek today?" In other words, if you could go into the storehouse of spiritual blessings, which treasure would you want to take off the shelf and bring back into your life? Do you long for *trust* that Jesus really is taking care of everything? Do you desire *peace* that keeps you grounded while the world spins and heaves? Do you ache for *grace* to know that Jesus really has atoned for sins: both sins you committed and the ones committed against you. Do you yearn for *love*? To be able to get out of yourself and give meaningfully to others. Do you wish you could feel more of the *joy* you have in Christ? Just to let out the encouragement?

The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has already blessed you in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. He has already called you to

himself in grace. He has already sent you to love and witness in his name. You already live from your heavenly home in Christ even though you're stationed down here in Baton Rouge. He has taken you into the eternal circle of love between Father and Son. You have access to the storehouse of his spiritual treasures. So why not just ask him? He delights to answer. Say to him daily, "Father, send me this spiritual blessing." And then keep your eyes peeled to see how he answers.