

Something to Praise God for this Christmas
Ephesians 1:12
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, December 22, 2019

If you would, turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. As you know, Ephesians doesn't talk about Christmas in the usual way. It doesn't talk about the angels and the shepherds and the wise men - all the stuff we normally associate with the holiday. But instead, it tells a story in a different way by telling it from the perspective of God. Ephesians tells us the Christmas story from the perspective of heaven and not from earth, and it tells us what Jesus came to do. It tells us why God sent His Son in the first place.

If you could pull back the veil of eternity, pull back the veil of heaven from all the physical stuff and look at what was going on and from the perspective of the Lord, this is what you would read at Christmas time. And this is why God sent His Son. The book tells us God sent Jesus to save us. That's why He came. God sent His Son into the world in order to redeem it. This is about the saving process. This is about how God is bringing us to heaven.

In fact, if you're joining us for the first time, we've been in the book of Ephesians for a while and we've called this the "All of God" series because that's what the book is about. It tells us our salvation is all of God. We can't save ourselves, so God saved us. We can't reach up to heaven, so heaven came down. Amen? That is the Christian story.

Another way to say this is that God did all of this (all the things we celebrate at Christmas time) in order to bring glory to Himself. Jesus came in order to bring the Father glory. A gift always glorifies the giver. A gift always magnifies the one giving it, and that's why God sent Jesus. That's why God gave His Son - to glorify Himself. You know, you don't get a gift at Christmas time and say, "Look at me, I'm so wonderful." At least you shouldn't anyway, don't do that. You say, "Look at you, you're so wonderful." That's why God sent His Son. So we would look at Him and say He's wonderful and He's amazing.

Oswald Chambers says:

Jesus Christ was born into this world, not from it. He did not emerge out of the world, He came into the world from the outside. Jesus is not the best human being the human race can boast of, He's a being for which the human race can take no credit for whatsoever. His life is the highest and the holiest thing to ever enter our humble doors. Our Lord's birth was an advent, the appearance of God in human form.

And the point of the whole advent season is we should glorify God for it. That's the only response you can have to all of this. The only proper application of Christmas time is that you should give Him praise and glory.

We do a good job of this this time of year, I think. Our songs and sermons are very Christ-centered during the holidays, most churches are. We lift the Saviour up. Our thoughts are focused on Him, but we often forget about it afterwards. What the Lord wants us to do is praise Him all year long. Amen? He wants us to

worship Him when the season's over, which is what I want to talk to you about this morning. It's what our passage is about today.

Maybe I could introduce it like this: I don't know if you've ever heard the name Nicholas of Myra before, but he was a Christian from the early church who's rarely talked about today because he's known by a different term. He's known by another name - "Saint Nicholas." Have you heard of Saint Nicholas before? This was the original Santa Claus. He was a true historical figure who lived in the fourth century who was later given the name Saint Nicholas.

If you know your church history, the most important council arguably from the time of the apostles until the reformation was the Council of Nicaea. It was held over the deity of Jesus because Arius believed Jesus was just a man and that He wasn't God. Arius was put on trial at the council and it made Nicholas was there and he was angry. Nicholas got so angry at what Arius was saying that he stood up in the council, walked across the room and slapped him straight in the face. For which he was thrown in jail again after a short time. He couldn't stay out of trouble.

After he was released, he pastored faithfully until his death. At which point the Roman Catholic Church dubbed him a Saint, and people began to give gifts in his name. That's where the tradition comes from of Santa Claus.

In England, they changed his name to Father Christmas, in France, Pierre Noel. Germany, they called him Kris Kringle. In the Netherlands - Santa Claus, and in the US and Canada - Saint Nicholas. That is the story of Santa Claus.

Nicholas of Myra, he was a man who was passionate for the truth, passionate for sound doctrine, enough to get violent over it. And we don't see this a lot in the church today. We don't see Christians getting violent over doctrine - and we shouldn't get violent over it anyway. But we do see them getting violent over other things like the color of the carpet or how to spend the budget, or which instruments to play and worship, those kinds of things.

Nicholas didn't fight over that. Nicholas fought over the truth because he knew what was at stake. He knew what would happen if you didn't get it right. Get the truth wrong and everything's wrong. You don't have anything left. Get the person of Christ wrong and what happens? You go to hell. You have nobody to save you. And so he fought for that.

Which leads us to our passage for today; it leads us to our text. In Ephesians 1, Paul talks about all of this and he ties it into the subject of worship. He talks about the importance of doctrine and he ties it into the glory of God. If you read in verse 1 and following, it says,

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who 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 with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.

In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

You can tell as you read that passage that it is just covered in doctrine, isn't it? From start to finish, the whole thing is filled with truth. Paul gives us one truth after another. And it begins in verse 3 by talking about blessings. If you see in verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing." Paul begins by saying, you're blessed, and then he goes on to flesh that out for you.

He says in verse 5, you are adopted, and in verse 7, you are redeemed. Those are the first two blessings he gives you in the list. Verse 9 he says that you know the mystery, and in verse 11, you have an inheritance, you're going to heaven. Those are the next two. These are the truths that he's giving us, the doctrines he's giving us. We've talked about that in previous weeks.

Then he says something in verse 12 I want you to pay attention to (this is our focus for this morning). If you read in verse 12 again, he says, "To the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory."

In other words, this is the end of all these blessings. The point and the application is that we who were the first to hope in Christ would praise the Lord. We would worship Him. That's how you respond to all of this. That's how you should respond to these blessings - you should worship God.

"We who were the first to hope in Christ" is a reference to the Jews because the Gospel went to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. But this applies to all of us because we should all respond this way to what Christ has done, we should praise Him. We should give Him glory, is a common theme in this chapter. You see it in verse 12, verse 6, and in verse 18, to remind you that doctrine should lead you to praise. Doctrine should lead you to glorify God.

So many times, we hear the word "doctrine" and we think it's an academic exercise. We feel like we've got to put our big, thick glasses on and pull out our big books. Paul says, this is how you respond to doctrine - you worship and you praise. You get your mind focused on Christ. This is why Nicholas of Myra is so mad, is that the glory was being taken away from Christ. We should always give glory to Christ when we see sound doctrine.

This morning I want to look at five reasons to praise God in the book of Ephesians. So, if you're taking notes this morning, this is what our passage is about. We're going to look at five reasons to praise God in the book

of Ephesians. And in light of the Christmas holiday, I want to do something different that we haven't done before in this series, by looking at the book as a whole. In order to talk about the subject, I want to take a step back for a moment and look at this chapter by chapter, and see what we should worship God for in the whole book of Ephesians. Not just in this passage, but in the whole thing.

I think this is important because the church is pretty confused on the subject of worship today. Would you agree? I mean not just our church, but any church. There are so many wrong ideas on this topic. For instance, a lot of people think if they feel something strongly enough, if they have a good experience on Sunday, that's enough. It doesn't matter what they believe. As long as they like the music, as long as they like the lights, as long as they like the stage show, then truth doesn't matter. The Bible says the opposite.

I mean, there were no stage shows when the book of Ephesians was written. The Christians worshiped in houses with no stages in them whatsoever. They had no instruments. They didn't want to make any noise because they didn't want people to know they were there. They were under persecution. All they had to worship God was truth and that's such a confusion in the church.

This is also important because every year around Christmas time, millions of people come to the church to worship, to praise God, have an experience with God, only to forget it a few weeks later. The praise stops after the holidays.

Paul says he doesn't want you to do that either. That's not true worship. True worship lasts. The real thing goes on when the holidays are over. God wants you to worship Him every day, and that's what we're going to talk about this morning - by looking at five reasons to praise God in the book of Ephesians. We're going to see the doctrine of the entire book, chapter by chapter.

And the first one is that you are blessed. The first reason to praise God in the book of Ephesians is that you are blessed. We've talked about this before, so I won't repeat anything here. But the message we keep hearing in Ephesians 1 is that God is blessing you. He is giving you gifts and therefore you should praise Him for it. I just read Ephesians 1:3 to you. It talks about this.

We get the word "eulogy" from the word "blessing". Some of you grew up in a church that would do a eulogy at the end of the service, give a blessing to the people. That's this word in Greek. It means "to show favour" or "give a gift to someone." It has other meanings as well, but that's the primary meaning, which is what you can see all throughout Ephesians 1. It's just gift after gift after gift. Present after present after present.

I want to look at one this morning we haven't looked at yet. It's found down in verse 13. I've talked to you about adoption and redemption and inheritance in previous weeks, but if you look down in Ephesians 1:13, this is another gift the Lord gives us, another blessing we see in here. It says, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." That's a blessing we'll look at here in a couple of weeks.

But Paul says, "You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise," which means God closes the deal with you. He seals you up at salvation. Your salvation is a done deal with Him. It's not hanging around waiting to happen.

I talk to a lot of Christians who struggle with this today. This is important. They struggle with the assurance of salvation. They struggle to know if they're saved or not, because they say, "I believe, but I can't tell. I trust in Christ, but I still struggle with sin. I don't know what's going on." And I have to tell them that, "If you trust in Christ, you're saved, period. If you believe in Him, you are sealed." And if you notice, the word "sealed" is in past tense here. It's a done finished thing. It's closed, it's over. Your salvation is complete.

You see the word "sealed" here, it doesn't mean the animal seal that you see in the zoo. When the ancient people sent a letter, they would often put a seal on it for protection. They would put hot wax on the outside of an envelope and they would put their seal on it or the family emblem in it. We have all kinds of passwords today, don't we? Can you guys remember how many passwords you have for your phone and your computer? This was the ancient version of a password.

And when the wax cooled, you would have a permanent reminder of to whom this letter belonged and also, not only that, a permanent reminder that it hadn't been tampered with. If the letter got to you with the seal still on it, it meant nobody read it or nobody rewrote it. Paul says, God's done that with you at salvation. The Holy Spirit has done that with you as well. He has put His seal on you. He's put his mark on you to say, "Nobody messed with you. Nobody got in and changed the document on the way to heaven. You are unharmed, you are protected, you are safe in the arms of God. You are saved - past tense, you are sealed - past tense."

Tying this into the previous verse, the point is that God has thought of everything in your salvation. The point is He's taken care of everything from beginning to end. He adopted you, which means He brought you into His family and He sealed you to show you that you can't leave now. You're not going anywhere. Nobody's going to step into your journey in the Christian life and pull you out of God's household, amen? He redeemed you, which means He paid for your sins, and He sealed you to show that the payment was complete. He paid everything. He has shown you the mystery and given you an inheritance, and He sealed it up to show that your inheritance is yours.

And the point is God has done it all, so you should praise Him. That's the application to this. That's the application of every chapter in the book of Ephesians. God has taken care of everything, so you should give Him all the glory for your salvation. It's not like He got you started and now you've finished the job. There are Christian groups (they call themselves Christians, but they're not) that say that God got the ball rolling and now it's your job to keep it rolling. God took care of everything.

I don't know about you, but I don't think I would like my salvation if I had to finish it. I don't think I would look forward to heaven if I knew it all depended on me in the end. "Here you go, Jeremy. Here's this wonderful gift, but don't blow it." I would be terrified because I would blow it. Paul says, you don't have to worry about that because it doesn't depend on you, it depends on Him. He has sealed you with His Spirit.

You know, I read somewhere recently that we should count our blessings, not our sins. This is the greatest blessing that we may have in this whole chapter. God will see you through to heaven, which leads me to the next reason to praise God in the book of Ephesians, the next chapter we see in here. It says this: He has made you alive. So he's blessed you in chapter 1 or you should praise Him in chapter 1, because He's blessed you, He's given you gifts. To add to that in chapter 2, a second reason to praise Him is God has made you

alive. God has made you alive to enjoy the blessings. Do you get that? Does that makes sense? He has made you alive so you can experience these things in chapter 1. That's the connection with the two chapters.

If you think about it, a dead man can't experience anything, can he? A dead man can't enjoy anything. You can give him all kinds of gifts, but he won't appreciate them. God has raised you from the dead so you can. If you read in chapter 2, here's what it says in chapter 2, going along in the book. And again, we're going to look at these different chapters in the weeks ahead.

Paul says:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (for by grace you have been saved).

I love that last statement – “For by grace you have been saved” because it's almost as if Paul is saying, “If you haven't gotten the point by now, after reading Ephesians chapter 1, let me remind you again, for by grace you're saved.”

The word “dead” is a strong word in Greek that means everything the English word means. If you look in the dictionary, it's placed alongside words like “deceased” and “expired” and “inanimate.”

Paul isn't referring to our body there, he's referring to our soul because before salvation, our souls were inanimate to the things of God. They had no response in them whatsoever so that you did everything the world did, that's what verses 1 through 3 says. You did everything the prince of the power of the air did. There was no difference between you and everybody else. But then something happened. Then something changed in verse 4 because God showed up. You can see the contrast in this passage, the comparison, because verses 1 through 3 tell your story, and then verse 4 tells us what happened when God got involved.

I heard a man one time give his testimony and he was telling about his life growing up. And he would stop every couple of minutes and say, “But God ... I was this, this, this and this, but God and then I was this, this and this, but God ...”

Paul is very dramatic in the way he says this as well. If you notice, it says, not only does God save us, but it tells us why He did this in verse 4. It says, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us (you see the word “love” twice there) made us alive together with Christ.”

This is a touching thing to say, but it says God looked down at your sin, He looked down at your dead state, He looked down at your corpse of a soul and He loved you. There is no other reason why He did this. He cared for you, and He made you alive together (it says) with Christ. Jesus was already alive. He was already awake to the things of God, and God made you the same way so that you can experience His blessings. That's the idea here.

God did this so you can enjoy the gifts in chapter 1. Because as I already said, dead men can't do this, they can't enjoy anything. I've talked with some of the doctors in our church, and they said in medical school, they operated on corpses. They operated on dead men. Why? Because they can't feel anything. You can take a dead man and you can poke him and prod him and cut him, he's never going to complain. Can't feel it. It's the same way with the lost sinner before Christ.

I mean, just think about what your life was like. A lot of you were like me. You grew up in church, right? I mean, how many sermons did you hear before you were saved? How many prayers were prayed over you? How many times did you read the Bible and it just bounced off of you like a heart of stone. Blessings meant nothing to you. You had the gifts standing out there in front of you and you never took them. And then one day, something changed. One day something happened and it was the grace of God. It became alive to you. Then all of a sudden, it all made sense. Why? Because God saved you. He raised you together with Christ.

This is known as the “Doctrine of The New Birth” or “Regeneration.” The word “regeneration” has the word “genesis” in it. It means a recreation of the soul. That's what God did when He saved you. He recreated your soul. You came into the world with this soul, you're going to go out with another one.

This is also known as the “Doctrine of Conversion,” which means a change, a change of direction, a change of heart. If you notice, there is a change in you in this passage. Amen? There's a huge change: from death to life, so you should praise Him! This is another reason to give glory to God. Every single person in this room is in Ephesians chapter 2:1-3. And every single Christian in this room is in Ephesians 2:4, and we should praise God for such a change.

In the city of Hanover, Germany, there's a large cemetery with several beautiful tombs in it. It is visited by a lot of tourists. In one of the tombs is an inscription that says, “This grave purchased for all eternity is never to be opened, never to be touched.” The ironic thing is that today, there's a gigantic tree growing out of it. You go see this tomb, it has that inscription and there's just a big massive tree growing out of the middle of it. The point is that life found a way in; the grave couldn't keep it out. Paul says, “It's the same way with you. If you're a believer, life found a way into you. God's grace found a way in, and you should thank Him for that this morning.”

I can't think of anything more glorious than Ephesians chapter 2, can you? I can't think of anything more amazing. When you think of all the inventions of modern science, when you think of all the inventions of modern medicine, they have never found a way to raise a dead man back to life. I've preached several funerals and I'll tell you, that person's gone,. When you see them in the casket, they're gone and there's nothing you can do, but God can. God can raise the dead.

Let's move on to the next chapter in the book, a third reason to praise the Lord. You should praise Him because He has blessed you in chapter 1. You should praise Him because He's made you alive in chapter 2. It gets even better.

I mean, if that's not amazing enough, third reason to praise Him is that He's put you into the church. So a third reason to praise God in this passage, He has made you a part of the church, which means He's put you among the living. Not only has He made you alive personally, you individually as a Christian, He has put

you among other living people. Your soul has been raised from the dead along with a whole company of souls and you can share this experience with them.

I just want to say that I love this about the church. The fact that we can come in here and we don't have to have the same views on politics, same views on economics. We don't have to like the same sports because we have the same God. We have the same Saviour. We were saved the same way.

If you look in chapter 4, Paul talks about this there. This is a theme of Ephesians 3 and 4. But if you look in chapter 4 - we can look in verse 4. He says this about the church: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

You could just read that passage and the word that jumps out at you is the word "one,". You see it seven times in this passage. The theme here is unity. The point is that the church is unified in Christ. We are one. Before you were saved, you were many people, now, you are one. Before you were many groups or families or nations, now you're one family because God has blessed you with this. He's put you into the church.

I've told you before, I think it's been a little while now - but they've done some studies in Canada and found that the number of Canadians living alone has doubled in the past 20 years. It's doubled to the point that more Canadians are living alone now than ever before, and single parent households are now the most common type of household in the nation. An interesting thing they found in this study is that it's having a devastating impact in some ways.

For one thing, it's raised the cost of living because people are paying for it alone. That's been one challenge the country's had. Another one is it's raising the depression rates because people are lonely. They're going through life all by themselves. They have no one to share things with, no one to have company with. Paul says, "If you're a Christian, you don't have that problem. If you're born again, you have no reason to be lonely because you have the church. You have other believers who have a bond that is closer than anything this world has to offer."

That's why he keeps using the word "one" here to drive his home with you. You're one with these people. Not only have you been converted, but they've been converted too. Not only have you been regenerated and made alive, but they've been made alive too, and you can share that with them. You have this in common with them.

You guys know what this is like. When you're saved, not only does your life change, but your relationships change, don't they? Your friendships change. You have a whole new batch of friends now. Why? Because you're different. You've changed. And your relationships reflect that.

Some of you have said to me that this is one of the things that led you to Christ. It's one of the things that led me to Christ, that you would walk into a room full of people before salvation and feel like you're the only one there. You had nothing in common with these people. And you would go home at night after a party or after a gathering and you would put your head into the pillow and weep and cry out to God, "Save me, don't leave me alone," and He did. He puts you into the church.

Paul says, you should praise God for this. I think we often forget this. We often forget what it's like not to have a church family. What was it like not to have the people in this room to call? You have a room full of people that if you're lonely or struggling, they're there for you.

A lot of people don't have that. It's another reason to praise God. This didn't just happen. This is a work of God. Go to a true church down the street or in the next town, same thing, it didn't just fall out of the sky. God made it happen, God created that. That's another reason to praise Him.

Here's another one that we see in this book, a fourth reason to praise God. I'll go through this one pretty quickly. But that's this, He puts you into an earthly family. He saved you and put you into the church, made you a member of the church. That's the third one. The fourth one is He gave you an earthly family with whom to share life. As Paul is going through this book, as he's moving along in the book of Ephesians, he goes from our spiritual relationships to our physical ones. He goes from the heavenly things maybe to more earthly type things.

And if you look in chapter 5 verse 22 - I won't say much about this because we're doing an overview of the book - but he mentioned this in verse 22 just talking about earthly relationships. He says:

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.

This is the next blessing in the book, the blessing of family, earthly relationships. We don't always think of it this way, but our relationships are a blessing, aren't they? Whether they're earthly or physical, they're a gift from His hand. Especially marriage, which is what he's referring to here. Our marriage, our wife or our husband is the closest relationship we have. They are the greatest gift that we have. There is no one closer on earth to you than your spouse, nobody. They know what you're like at all times. And here's the thing, they still love you. Isn't that amazing? I mean that came from heaven. How in the world?

Then he moves on to the other blessings here - you guys know what I'm talking about - I mean, it's amazing to have someone love you like this. Then he moves on to the other blessings, and in chapter 6:1, he mentions "children and parents." He's kind of moving out in the relationship sphere here; husbands, wives, children, parents.

You know I read somewhere that said when you have children, every day is Christmas. Not just one day of the year, every day - it's another blessing.

He mentions slaves and masters in chapter 6 verse 5 or we might say employers and employees. He's just moving out even further from our parents and kids, and now he's getting into the people we work with at work.

But the point Paul is making here is that no matter where you are, no matter what stage of life you're in, you've all been blessed by one of these groups. No matter who you are, you've all been helped by someone in this list; an employer, an employee, husband or wife, parent or child. We like to complain about our jobs,

but just think about where you would be without a job. We like to complain sometimes about our families, but where would you be without your family? It's all a gift from the Lord. It's our greatest treasure on earth, and it's another reason to praise Him. Another reason to thank Him for this.

You know I meet people who are Christians and they forget this. They forget to see this as a blessing because they're so focused on themselves. They think they deserve better, they want a better husband, they want a better wife, they want better kids, better parents, better job.

Paul says, that's the wrong perspective. The point of all this is God has given those things to you, and He can take them away. The people who are in your life are there because God put them in there. The relationships you have, you have because He has blessed you. Your wife is a blessing (you don't deserve your wife). Your husband is a blessing (you don't deserve a husband like that). Everything you have is from His hand. It's another reason to praise Him.

And that leads to a final point we want to talk about this morning, just one more chapter in the book of Ephesians. Just to review these other ones: the first chapter that we looked at says you should praise God because you are blessed. He has given gifts to you, blessed you.

Second, He's made you alive to enjoy those gifts and blessings. You were dead, your soul had no life in it. God put life in it to bless you.

Third, He's made you part of the church, put you into the family of God.

Fourth, He's put you into an earthly family as well. He has put all these different people in your life to bless you.

And it leads to one more chapter in the book, which seems to come out of nowhere, but it doesn't. One more thing Paul says here that sums it up, and that is a final reason to praise God, is that He's given you His armor to wear. The final chapter in the book of Ephesians says, God has given you the armor of God to wear.

Which seems like it doesn't fit with everything else, but it does because Paul says, God has given you a way to protect these blessings. God has given you a way to guard what has been entrusted to you, and you do that with the armor of God.

If you look in chapter 6:10-17, this is the way Paul closes out the book. He says this in verse 10: he says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might."

Why does he say that? Because parenting is hard. Being a husband and a wife is hard. Being an employer or employee, it's not easy. Verses 10-17 say:

So be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to

all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Some have said this is a really interesting way to end the book of Ephesians. It's a fascinating thing because Paul would have been chained to a Roman soldier as he said this. I could kind of see Paul's mind wondering, "How am I going to wrap up this book? Oh, hey, there you go." You know, he sees a guy wearing a helmet, a guy wearing a breastplate, a guy wearing a sword and shield, and he starts describing it here and he says, "This is how you gird what has been given to you in chapters 1 through 5. This is how you protect your blessings. You do it by wearing God's armor. Not the armor of men, but the armor of God. Not the stuff the Romans wore, but the stuff on the inner man."

And this is all a way of referring to Scripture, this is all a way of referring to the Bible. The armor of God is the Bible. "Girding your loins with truth" is another way of saying girding your loins with Scripture, girding your mind with Scripture. "Putting on the breastplate of righteousness, shouting your feet with the Gospel of peace" - those are references to the Scriptures.

Verse 17 even says, "And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." So there's a direct connection there between the sword of the Spirit and the Word of God. I've heard some of you tell me that you brought your sword to church today. That's what this book is. But Paul says, this is how you gird your blessings - by studying the Scriptures.

It sounds almost too simple to say that, doesn't it? It sounds almost too easy, but this takes us back to where we started, back to where we began. This is how you worship God. This is how you praise Him - by focusing on the truth. You don't do it by having an experience, as wonderful as that may be.

Let me tell you something about experiences: Cultists have experience. Mormons talk about the burning in the bosom. Muslims talk about that kind of stuff. Experiences don't necessarily lead you to God. They can, but they don't necessarily do that. You need to fill your mind with truth.

One commentator, Warren Wiersbe said, "You have to go down before you go up. You have to go deep, far into the Scriptures and get your mind settled there before you can go up to the throne of God and worship."

Paul ends the book of Ephesians by reminding us to go to the Scriptures when we worship, to go to the Word of God. This is where God is, this is where God is found, and so, if you want to worship God, you go here. This is the book that He inspired, this is the writings that He gave us, and so if you want to praise Him, familiarize yourself with this.

I really appreciate our worship team because they work really hard at this. They pick songs that reflect the Scriptures. You can read the Bible in the music. Our other ministries do a great job of this as well, but we do this because this is how we worship God.

This leads me to ask, how are you doing with this today? Are you familiarizing yourself with Scripture? Are you going to the Word of God when you worship?

We have a phrase that you want to get into the Word so the Word can get into you. Are you doing that? Is the Word part of your daily life? Are you pouring over it so it will pour into you? In the words of Ephesians

6, are you putting on the full armor? The word “full” if you notice, it means “full” there, not part of it, the whole thing. You have a full armor so you can protect these blessings.

As you do this, applying this to the other points, are you thankful for the people the Lord has put into your life? Are you thankful for your husband? Thankful for your wife? Paul is a single guy writing Ephesians chapter 5, he didn't have a family. And as a single guy, he's appreciating the relationships God has given people.

Are you thankful for the church? Do you come in every Sunday just thankful you have a body of believers with whom to worship? That's the point of all of this. And the point is that we want to worship Jesus not one time a year, but the whole year long. We want to think of these things not just today, but all throughout the year and praise God for it. Will you do that this morning?

I opened up by telling you about Nicholas of Myra and how he was really passionate for sound doctrine. He loved the truth, it was one of his hallmarks. But he was passionate about something else as well. He was very passionate about worship. Worship was very important to him. Historians tell us that before he became Bishop of Myra, the people were looking for someone to fill the position, and they came up with the idea that they were going to wait at church all night and pick the first person who showed up in the morning to pray.

I don't recommend that for a search committee. It doesn't sound like a really good idea, but that's what they did, and it actually had some merit to it. They waited up all night in Myra for the first person who came into the building to praise God and it was Nicholas. In fact, they said he did this every day, he was known for this. He was always the first person to pray.

My friends, could that be said about you this morning? Could that be said about me? If someone waited up all night in your home, all night in your prayer closet, would you be the first person in there? That's why God brought you to faith in Christ, that's why you're a Christian to begin with. He wants you to praise Him. He wants you to give Him all the glory – “To the end that we who are the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.” Let's pray.

Father, we thank you Lord for the words we've heard this morning in Ephesians. And I feel like we've covered a lot in this book, but Lord, the point is very clear in here that this is to drive us to worship. Lord, we thank you for the gifts You've given us. Every man, woman and child in this room has been gifted tremendously by Your hand. And Lord, we often forget that. That's why the Bible is so important. We don't remember these things. And Lord, so we pray that You would drive us back to the Scriptures every day of our lives.

Lord, I pray for those who are here this morning who have been made alive in Christ and experience being part of the church, wearing the full armor of God. Lord, would they be encouraged this morning. Would You be glorified in their lives as we go out from this place and worship You.

Lord, for those who are lost and they read all these things about being made alive and armor and they don't know what it's about, Lord, would You open their eyes for the first time. Would You breathe new life into them and draw them to Christ.

And Father, as we celebrate Your Son's birth for the remainder of this holiday, Lord, would You be pleased in our worship. Thank you for the worship we've already had today, the music's been wonderful. Lord, would You be glorified for the remainder of it. As we come back tonight, have fellowship, as we have the children's service on Christmas Eve - would Christ be exalted in all these things as we remember the baby in the manger who became the man on the cross and the Lord in glory. We pray this in His name, amen.