

**The Blessed Life: A study through Ephesians**  
**September 9 // To the Saints // Ephesians 1:1-2**  
**Jeff Kennedy / Sept. 9, 2018**

**Introduction:** We're beginning a new series called "The Blessed Life"—that title is taken right out of Ephesians ch. 1 in which Paul tells the churches in the Ephesian region that they have been "**blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.**" The book then proceeds to unpack that idea for us.

But before we get to that, we've got to understand why Paul planted the church(es) in that region...

**Here's how Paul described his time in Ephesus to the Christians over in Corinth...**

1 Cor. 16:8-9 "But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup> because a great opportunity to preach the Gospel stands before me, but my adversaries are multiplying by the day."

That statement captures his experience in Ephesus and I want to briefly take you back there.

Up until this time in Paul's ministry, he has mainly experienced **fierce opposition from the Jews**—his countrymen.

- The message that their Messiah—the long-awaited king of Israel in the line of David—had come in the person of **Jesus from Nazareth** in Roman Palestine,
- the message that he had been **tried as a blasphemer** by the Jews and crucified as a dangerous revolutionary by the Romans—that message isn't going down well.

Paul arrived in the city of **Ephesus**, which was located on the **Aegean Sea**.

- Paul has left **Apollos, a very skilled and capable teacher behind in** Corinth where he had planted a thriving and enthusiastic church.
- Ephesus was a port town—**rivaling the greatest seaports** in the ancient world.
- It also boasted the largest cult to the **goddess Artemis.**

Paul found disciples of Jesus who had visited Jerusalem and had been converted by John the Baptists' message of the coming Messiah.

The only baptism they knew was John's baptism of repentance. When Paul discovered this he asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And their response was, "Huh. Holy what?" They were baptized in water in the name of Jesus, And Paul laid hands on them and the Spirit of God descended in power evidenced by flaming tongues of fire and molten prophetic words from heaven. The Spirit of God had come upon this small church and Luke says, "(Now there were about twelve men in all.)"

But a faction rose up within that Jewish synagogue opposing Paul's message. So he took the new converts with him, and they began to meet regularly in the public lecture hall of Tyrannus.

Luke says, "This went on for two years, so that all who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord." The math on that is about 300 new people a day—packing out that lecture hall, captivated by Paul's Gospel—and then going out into the city and the greater region contagiously spreading the word about this new faith of Jesus the Messiah.

And the Gospel was validated by extraordinary signs. Paul was enabled to perform mind-boggling miracles by the Spirit. Diseases, evil spirits—the forces of darkness vanquished. False arguments by those who oppose Paul are demolished, and enemies routed. In fact, Paul's ministry is so illustrious there that a group called "the 7 sons of Sceva the High Priest"—likely a magician's guild, attempted to exorcise a demon from a person—in imitation of Paul. The evil spirits within the man replied, "I know about Jesus and Paul—but who are you?" The demonized man then attacked the 7 magicians, beating them so badly that they fled the house naked and without wounds.

The result was Jesus' fame: "This became known to all who lived in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks; fear came over them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised. <sup>18</sup> Many of those who had believed came forward, confessing and making their deeds known." Now this isn't confessing how much they gave in the offering or hospital visits made—no they are confessing their evil and wicked deeds. Their participation in the magic arts—in the occult, and in all manner of godless, immoral pagan religions. The pile of scrolls offered to Paul and the church for a bonfire was immense. The plum and ashes of wickedness could be seen for a mile.

But, it turns out, pagan religious devotion is big business in the region of Ephesus. And a man named Demetrius—a member of the silversmith guild—congregated all the artisans and craftsmen together to turn them against Paul and this new faith that has come to town. Paul's efforts have cost the local merchants. That market is a 360x360. That is exactly as long as a modern football field, and as wide. The local market used to be flooded with trinkets and amulets and personal idols for pagan shoppers. And now, these same pagans are flocking to this new faith in droves—and the markets are quiet. And the

owners' pockets are lighter. Demetrius shouted at the guilds in anger, "And you see and hear that this Paul has persuaded and turned away a large crowd, not only in Ephesus but in practically all of the province of Asia, by saying that gods made by hands are not gods at all."

**Do you see what the gospel does when it takes a hold of province, a city, a town, a home—or a person?** God is in the business **of confronting the idolatry** in the world. Images made by human hands to "look" like the gods or represent the gods—it's not only an affront to God's sole place as the Supreme ruler and God of the universe. It's an assault on his true image—these very confused human beings who themselves were made by God in His own likeness and as image-bearers.

**How silly of a scene this all must be to God.**

We're the ones who are supposed to represent the character and goodness of God—to embody the holiness, justice, the authority of God in his good world. And we give it to some dumb idol of stone or gold, sex or greed, power and position?

So on hearing Demetrius' agitated plea, the guilds and artisans worked themselves into a pagan frenzy, and the **rally turned into a riot**, and the riot turned into a murderous mob. And they stormed the theater where Paul and his companions had been meeting with crowds, dragged off Gaius and Artistarchus. Paul tried pressing through the crowds to get to his companions and fellow workers. But the disciples—the believers in that region held him back. Even some very friendly provincial politicians pleaded with Paul not to go in.

The shouting and confusion had gotten to such a fever pitch, that many of the people there raging had no idea why they were even there or what cause they were shouting about. When one of the men stood up to make a public defense, seeing that he was Jewish and a worshiper of the Hebrew God—the crowds **began chanting loudly "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" for two hours.**

**Statues of Artemis of Ephesus have** been found all over the Roman empire. The fertility goddess was thought to be related to Cybele—the patron goddess of the most important oracle in the Greek and Roman world.

**And her temple is considered one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.** As perhaps the most popular goddess in Greek and Rome, travelers came from all over to worship in her spectacular temple. 2 times a year, Ephesus would be flooded with visitors in a festival to Artemis. The false idol brought them prestige, honor, wealth, and fame.

And the craftsmen who furnish thousands of idols for her, who make money off of this sick, twisted, crazy pagan cult—their wallets are lighter because of this new faith that is sweeping over Ephesus. Led by Paul, the converted Rabbi from Jerusalem.

Luke says, "After the city secretary quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, what person is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the keeper of the temple of the great Artemis and of

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her image that fell from heaven? <sup>36</sup> So because these facts are indisputable, you must keep quiet and not do anything reckless.”

Paul left the region, and after traveling for months through Macedonia and the surrounding region, he came to Miletus and sent for the Ephesian elders from Asia. They came and met him. His farewell address is moving and gut wrenching and heart breaking. But hopeful.

You remember my way of life—my trials, the plots against me, my fearlessness in proclaiming God’s Gospel of faith in the Lord Jesus our Messiah. I proclaimed Jesus in public, in the theater, in the lecture halls, in the basilicas, and from house to house. I preached to Jews, Greeks, and to anyone who would listen to this life changing message.

And now the Holy Spirit is moving me on—to Jerusalem where trials, persecutions and imprisonment await me. “But I do not consider my life worth anything to myself, so that I may finish my task and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace. <sup>25</sup> “And now I know that none of you among whom I went around proclaiming the kingdom will see me again.”

Now, be alert! Watch over the flock whom God has made you overseers. Shepherd the church bought by God’s own blood. Protect them from ferocious wolves who will infiltrate your ranks and spread false teaching among you. Seeking to destroy the flock.

“And now I entrust you to God and to the message of his **grace**. This message is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are **sanctified**... <sup>36</sup> When he had said these things, he knelt down with them all and prayed. <sup>37</sup> They all began to weep loudly, and hugged Paul and kissed him, <sup>38</sup> especially saddened by what he had said, that they were not going to see him again.”

Paul ended his time there by telling them that they had been sanctified, made holy, and entrusted them to God's Grace. He begins his letter the same way.

## 1. Believers are called to be faithful to the high calling of God in Christ.

Eph. 1:1 "To the saints in Ephesus, who are also faithful."

God, by his grace had made them saints. *Hagioi*. That word means "holy ones." The holy people.

Contrary to what some have taught or popularized, saints are not some **special forces branch of spiritually elite** Christians who have attained a unique status with God. Maybe they've performed a miracle—at least one. Maybe they have lived a super pious life and given all they had in service to the poor—like Mother Teresa? Maybe their great men of God who, like Billy Graham, they've preached to millions and won countless disciples to Jesus through their ministry.

No. No. No.

The word "saint" is Paul's normal term for every believer. When he isn't calling them "the church" or "believers" he's calling them "saints." The saints in Ephesus are all the people who comprise the church in that region of Asia.

And they are already made holy in the precious blood of the Lamb of God—crucified for our sins on a Roman cross.

They have been justified and raised to life with Christ—seated in heavenly realms—at least positionally.

**Being a saint is all about your status, or your standing with God.** If you aren't made holy through faith in Jesus' blood, you're not a saint, and you're not saved.

But he doesn't only call them "saints" He calls them, "Who are also faithful in Ephesus."

Saints who are positionally declared in the right—right with God. But who are also actively faithful to that heavenly calling.

**Paul says to the Philippians, "Nevertheless, let us live up to the standard that we have already attained." (Phil. 3:16)**

How do we live up to the holy standard that has already been met in Christ?

**Paul says to the Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (Gal. 2:20). This is what it means to be faithful.**

## 2. Believers are called to a life characterized by grace and peace.

1:2 "grace and peace to you."

Do you know what two people who show each other grace enjoy?

Peace.

Because when you have grace, you have peace.

And when you have the grace of God in salvation—you have peace with God. You're a saint—made holy, spotless, standing in the right before his holy court.

And when you have his grace in your life, transforming your heart—you will have peace.

**The Ephesian citizens had prosperity.** The largest seaport in the levant or Macedonia. And one of the largest in the world.

- They knew how to make a buck. Their ingenuity in commerce was legendary.
- They knew how to have a good time. 2 massive celebrations of fertility and drunken sensuous revelry. They knew how to conduct business, but on the weekends and holidays, no one partied like the Ephesians.
- They knew how to be religious. Their city was inundated by the symbols of religious devotion. They were fastidious in their prayers and sacrifices to pagan deities **Who were without grace to them and offered them no peace.**

Until Paul, Gaius, Aristarchus, and Timothy came to town with a life transforming message, that began with 12 people meeting in a hostile synagogue.

It reached out to 100's in philosophical lecture halls.

It eventually reached the ears of 10's of thousands as they packed the stadium to hear Paul's gospel philosophy, and to encounter the life changing power of the Spirit.

And the day they repented of their wicked, godless idolatry—they day they embraced Christ Jesus as God's Son, and God the Son—by faith—they became the saints in Ephesus.

They knew his grace and forgiveness and finally—they had shalom. Peace.

Because when you have grace. You have peace.