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Ephesians 1: specifically verses 4,7,11:

"This Is Who We Are"

I. Tagged.

II. Redeemed.

III. Beneficiaries.

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Ephesians 1: specifically verses 4,7,11

Dear Friends in Christ,

On the platform of a railroad station was a large crate with a big dog inside. It was obvious to people standing there that the dog was sad. A lady asked about the dog's condition. She was told: "You'd be sad, too, if you were in his situation. He chewed the tag off the crate and doesn't know where he's going." Neither did the people working there.

In the Book of Revelation, the Holy Spirit says to the church, "To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it." (Rev. 2:17) What a blessed reality: In Christ we are **tagged!** We belong to Him. People headed to everlasting joy.

But what if I said that sometimes God's people start mimicking the dog in the crate - chewing away at their heavenly tag? Distracted. Pulled by the world. Justifying what we know is in conflict with clear Scripture. Playing horrible games with our faith. God give us ears to hear . . .

THIS IS WHO WE ARE

I. Tagged.

I find that some of the most frightening words of Scriptures are the ones Jesus will speak to those who have rejected Him: (Matt. 7:23) What an eternal horror; God saying, "I **never** knew you."

And recall what the Holy Spirit had Asaph write regarding the wicked: "... (they) set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth." (Ps. 73:9) Next the chilling words:

"Truly you set (God sets them!) them in slippery places; you make them (God makes them!) fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms." (Ps. 73:17-19)

"Despise them as phantoms." A phantom defined is "...something...apparent to sense but with no substantial existence". (Webster) And this: "Illusory". (Webster) Can we even grasp that? They're apparent to God but have no substantial existence. They're there, in the darkness and heat of hell, aware of who they are and where they are, yet not recognized by God! So much for pursuit of the good life here as top priority! Right?

I want to recall something I shared with you some time ago. Writer, Frederick B. Speakman wrote about an incident in which a reputable and veteran waitress was taking orders from a couple and their young son. The couple had very specific requests regarding substitutions. Speakman wrote that when the waitress addressed the son, the son "began to order with a kind of fearful desperation. 'I want a hot dog...,'" he started. Then this:

"And both parents barked at once, 'No hot dog!' The mother went on. 'Bring him lyonnaise potatoes and the beef, both vegetables, and a hard roll and ...'

"The waitress wasn't even listening. She said evenly to the youngster, 'What do you want on your hot dog?' He flashed an amazed smile. 'Ketchup, lots of ketchup, and - and bring a glass of milk.'

"'Coming up,' she said as she turned from the table, leaving behind her the stunned silence of utter parental dismay. The boy watched her go before he turned to his father and mother with astonished elation to say, 'You know what? She thinks I'm real! She thinks I'm real.'"

We might not agree with the way the waitress handled the situation, but there is a point. Our text says: "(God) chose us in him before the foundation (the creation) of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." (v. 4) In Christ, God sees us as real; that is, His! We belong to Him. We're real! And then Paul writes, "chose us...that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will..." (vv. 4,5) He chose us because it was His will; because He wanted to. He owed us absolutely nothing but made us His through faith in Christ. Paul goes on to say . . .

II. Redeemed.

"In him (in Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ... (vv. 8-9)

There's the story about the man who came home drunk after a night of carousing in a number of bars. His wife helped into the bedroom and into bed. Then she kneeled at his bedside and whispered, "Do you want me to pray for you?" He nodded a yes and she began to pray, "Dear Lord, I pray for my husband who lies here before you drunk...". And before she could finish he interrupted her and said, "Don't tell Him I'm drunk. Just tell Him I'm sick."

That's the way it often works, right? A little self-delusion. How about the "I know I shouldn't or should, but..." nonsense? Miserable excuses. The word is sin! And its wages is death, and with death hell.

You'll remember that the Old Testament sacrificial system was a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice for all sin. In the Book of Leviticus God said this:

I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. (Lev. 17:10,11)

Sacrificial blood was intended for the altar of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. It was not to be *eaten*, as the text says, in order to impress upon God's people that the life blood pointed to the coming Messiah whose life blood would be spilled on the altar of the blood as payment and covering for our sin.

Our text says "In (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses..." (v. 7) The Apostle John writes, "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 Jn. 1:7,8) The life blood of Jesus is the transfusion for our souls; the transfusion that restores to us the eternal life lost by our first parents. We have been redeemed - purchased from unending death. We are tagged as God's children. The question is: What does that mean - to you - me?

III. Beneficiaries.

How do we see life? Is it nothing more than a hope of a better tomorrow on this earth? Or, is it a longing to be someone different, somewhere different, doing something different? Or, maybe, it's just dancing around while waiting for the next sunrise. Is that the way it is?

Do you understand these words from our text: "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will..."? (v. 11) *Obtained an inheritance.* We have been made beneficiaries of eternal treasure. Jesus gives us very, very clear instruction on this: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matt. 6:19,20)

Do you remember the incomprehensible promise God made through the Apostle Peter:

"According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope (not a dead hope like this world gives, but a living hope) though the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable (it will never go away), undefiled (without sin), and unfading (will never lose its luster and joy!), kept in heaven for you..." (1 Pet. 1:1-4)

We sacrifice so much time and life grabbing and stressing ourselves for the rust and rot and decay of this world. There's nothing of this world that we hang on to for very long - youth, looks (if we have or had them), place of residence, nursing home, heart beats. Nothing.

Listen, it is not a suggestion that we try to put forth the effort; it's a must. It's this: "...let us run with endurance (we must endure, must strain) the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2) All that for us!

God's people in Christ - headed for Heaven - is who we are. Simple? It depends. Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott