

OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

- A. Introduction: In some ways, Christianity is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Every sermon you hear gives you a piece of the puzzle. The problem is, nobody ever shows you the picture on the box. Because you don't know what the completed puzzle looks like, you don't know where to put the individual pieces or whether they even belong to the puzzle.
1. Part of my job as a teacher is to show you the picture on the box—or the overall plan of God—to help you understand and utilize the individual pieces more effectively. In this lesson we're going to revisit “the big picture” by talking about the past and the future
 - a. It's vitally important that we understand the connection between our past, present and future because our past and our future can either ruin or enrich, energize and empower our present.
 1. If your past is filled with failures and disappointments and your future looks hopeless you'll have no peace, joy or victory in the present moment.
 2. But if you know that your past is filled with promise and potential and that your future includes the realization of both, you'll be able to deal more effectively with whatever comes your way in this present life.
 - b. When you understand the big picture or the overall plan of God you'll see that your past is good and your future is bright. This perspective will help you rise above life's many challenges.
 2. In Eph 1:16-23 Paul recorded a prayer he prayed for Christians living in the city of Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey).
 - a. Paul had a lot invested in these people. Not only did he establish the church, he spent three years with them (more than any other city). For two of those years he taught daily in a local school things concerning the kingdom of God. Acts 19:1-10; Acts 20:31
 - b. Paul wrote the epistle (letter) about AD 60-61 while imprisoned in Rome. Everything he wrote would have been said in the context of what he taught them over the course of his time with them. This prayer shows us how Paul prayed for Christians.
 - c. The great apostle prayed for these believers that God would give them revelation and insight in three specific areas as they grew to know Him more and more. He prayed that they would know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of His power toward them.
 1. Note: He didn't pray for a new job or a new donkey cart or better marriages. Paul asked God to give them increasing revelation of Himself which would give more insight in three areas. Those three things don't seem helpful when you need a car or a better marriage.
 2. Paul had already instructed them in these three areas and he wanted his readers to have greater insight. He knew that if they learned to walk in these truths they would be able to deal with any crisis of life in victory.
 3. Because we know God we have a hope, an inheritance and great power available to us. We're going to look at these categories in detail over the next few weeks. As we study, pray this prayer for yourself every day. It is a Holy Spirit inspired prayer. That means it is the will of God and it will be answered.
- B. Note that Paul began the prayer, not with the inheritance and power which is ours in this life, but with the hope we have. Knowledge of what's ahead helps us keep this life in proper perspective (more on that later).
1. v18--Paul prayed that: You may realize the hope given by God's call (20th Cent). God has called each of us to something that gives us hope or expectation of coming good. This call gives us purpose.
 - a. We all have a future. To appreciate your future you must understand some things about your past. Accurate knowledge of your past and future will help you live in the present more effectively.

1. Paul opened the epistle with a reference to our past and our purpose. Eph 1:4,5--God chose us before He formed the world and destined us to become his holy and blameless sons.
2. In eternity past God devised a plan to have a family. Chosen means to choose out and carries the idea of kindness, favor and love. God, motivated by love, developed a plan to have a family and chose us for it.
- b. God created the earth to be home for His family (Isa 45:18). When God made Adam He made a son and a race of sons in Adam (Luke 3:38).
 1. When Adam and man in Adam sinned and went into the pigpen of corruption and death, God the Father lost His family. The Lord knew this would happen and had a plan in mind to reclaim what He lost. There's a plan unfolding with an end game in sight.
 - A. God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, would come to earth to pay the price for sin so it could be removed and the Father could regain His family. Rev 13:8
 - B. Luke 19:10--Jesus said He came to seek and save the lost. He is seeking because this is a purposeful plan. He calls sinners "lost" because, in our fallen condition, we're lost to the purpose for which we've been created, sonship and relationship with God.
 2. Calling (Eph 1:18) comes from a word that means a call or an invitation to a banquet. It's used metaphorically in the New Testament to mean a call or an invitation into the kingdom of God and its privileges. God has chosen you and issued you an invitation—He wants you.
2. We said a moment ago that our past (meaning our sins, failures and mistakes) can rob us of peace and joy in the present and sap our hope for the future. If all you know of your past is what has happened since your were born, you don't know the full story.
 - a. Your history with God did not begin when you committed your first sin or even when you were born. It began in eternity past. Although you did not come into existence until the moment of conception in your mother's womb, God who is All Knowing, has always known you. Jer 1:5
 1. God created you (potentially) in Adam. We came out of Adam. His DNA eventually came to us. God is aware of men when they're still in the loins of their forefathers. He spoke of Levi (great-grandson of Abraham) paying tithes while in the loins of Abraham. Heb 7:9
 2. God knows a perfect you, the you He created in Adam. God's first comment about you was: Very good (Gen 1:31). God's opinion of you since eternity past is: Fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14).
 - A. This passage applies to more than just in the womb. Because of the curse of corruption in the earth due to sin babies can have defects in the womb.
 - B. We were fearfully and wonderfully made in Adam before sin damaged the human race.
 - b. Salvation is about God reclaiming what He lost to sin and restoring it to what He always intended.
 1. Rom 8:29,30--Paul revealed that Jesus is the pattern for God's family. God wants sons and daughters who are like Jesus in character and power, holiness and love.
 2. We don't become Jesus, we are restored to what God always intended us to be, men and women free from all trace of sin, corruption and death in every part of our being and fully glorifying to God.
3. Because we are well aware of our sin, failures and shortcomings, we struggle with believing that we can have a good future or a decent present. But we have a future and help for the present because we have value to God.
 - a. We struggle believing this because we connect value and worth to abilities and accomplishments and know that we come up short. However, true value and worth comes from what one is willing to pay for an item. God was willing to pay the blood of His Son for us. I Pet 1:18,19
 - b. Jesus made it clear before He went to the Cross to die for sinners that men and woman, even in their fallen condition, have value to God.
 1. Jesus regularly ate with sinners and publicans (Jews who worked as tax collectors for Rome) and was routinely criticized by the religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes.

2. In that day and culture, eating with someone meant more than taking it food. It symbolized entering into relationship with them. Luke 15:1,2
 3. In response to these criticisms, Jesus told a parable about a lost sheep and a lost coin. He made it clear that He was describing Heaven's response to lost men. Luke 15:3-10
 - A. When the sheep and the coin were lost the owners searched diligently for them until they found their lost items. Then they rejoiced.
 - B. The owners sought them because they had value. Lost items don't lose their value because they are lost. The owner cannot benefit from and utilize their value and the item cannot fulfill its destiny.
 - c. Then Jesus talked about a lost son and gave greater detail about what happens when a lost son returns home, when a lost man is found. In doing so He revealed some things about God's attitude toward lost men as well as the goal of salvation. Luke 11:32
 1. The father was watching out for his son, hoping he'd come home. He was moved with compassion when he saw his son's pitiful condition and ran to greet him.
 - A. In an exuberant expression of love he kissed him again and again (in the Greek), this dirty, stinky son (from the pigpen) who'd spent dad's money on prostitutes and sin.
 - B. The son wanted to talk about his sin. The father blew right over it. The Pharisees would have been horrified. They didn't forgive until there was revenge and restitution.
 2. Then the father gave his son a robe, ring and shoes. Those listening knew what a change of clothing meant.
 - A. The prophet Zechariah recorded a vision given to him where a change of clothes meant removal of sin. Zech 3:4
 - B. Rings were given as a mark of dignity and honor. Shoes were a symbol of freedom given back to prisoners of war when they were released from captivity.
 3. Then the father threw a party to celebrate his son's return. God's glad you're back!!
 4. Through His words, Jesus described a sinful son being fully restored to his sonship position because of his father's love. That's the plan.
 - a. Although men and women are lost in the pigpen of sin, they are created and loved by God and have the potential to be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters through salvation.
 - b. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He came to transform sinners into sons and restore them fully to their created purpose. Salvation is supernatural transformation by the power of God.
- C. Your past (since you've been born) can't stop your future from coming to pass now that you're come back to Father's house. Your destiny—to be a son or daughter of God living in loving relationship with your Father, fully glorifying to Him in every way—is and will be fulfilled.
1. You must understand that, just as your past includes more than the days since you were conceived, your future is more than just the days you have left until you die.
 - a. There is more to life than just this life. The greater and better part of our life is ahead, first in Heaven and then on the new earth (this world made new in connection with the return of Jesus.
 - b. We live in a world that has been damaged by sin. When Jesus returns He will restore the earth to a fit forever home for God and His family. The Bible begins and ends with God on earth with His family. Gen 2:8-25 3:8; Rev 21:3 (whole lessons for another day)
 2. Paul lived his life with the consciousness that a plan is unfolding and his best days are ahead in the life to come and that knowledge lightened the load of his life. Rom 8:18
 - a. II Cor 4:17--Paul called the many challenges he faced in his life light and momentary.
 1. Light means they did not weigh him down, not that he liked or enjoyed them. Two chapters later in the context of his many troubles, he wrote of being sorrowful yet rejoicing. II Cor 6:10

2. Momentary meant that in comparison to eternity even a lifetime of hardship is nothing.
 3. He was able to maintain this attitude because he understood that eternal realities were being played out behind the scenes in his life. II Cor 4:18
- b. Right now, in this present age, God is using the challenges of life in a sin cursed earth and causing them to serve His purposes (whole lesson for another day). The Lord didn't orchestrate the conditions in the pigpen, but those realities woke that boy up to his need to go back to his father.
1. Paul's life obviously produced eternal results because he preached the gospel throughout the Roman Empire and wrote two-thirds of the New Testament.
 2. But the Bible is filled with examples of ordinary people living ordinary lives. Yet God was at work behind the scenes working out His plan to have a family.
 - A. Jonathan's arrow carrier had no idea he was involve in conveying a critical message to David that saved his life and ensured that the line through which Jesus (the Redeemer) would survive. I Sam 20:18-23; 35-40
 - B. The person who baked the bread that fed Elijah during a great famine and kept him alive to help stomp out Baal worship and ensure the survival of knowledge of Jehovah had no idea what he or she was doing. I Kings 17:1-6
 - C. The person who raised the donkey which Jesus road into Jerusalem on palm Sunday in fulfillment of prophecy (Zech 9:9) had no idea what he was doing. Matt 21:1-5
 3. I am convinced that when we get to Heaven we'll be approached by people we don't recognize and they will tell us about their path crossed ours at some point in some way and that encounter was the seed that led to them ultimately becoming a son or daughter of God.
 3. We started out with the epistle to the Ephesians. Not only did Paul make it clear that they have a destiny, a future and a hope, to them he also wrote:
 - a. Be a light wherever you are. Eph 6:5-8--He told slaves to do their job as unto the Lord. You serve the Lord and the ultimate stage for the reversal of life's injustices, for recompense and restoration, for fulfillment of hopes and dreams is in the life to come.
 - b. Live your life with the consciousness that a plan is unfolding. You have a part in this plan. You have value and worth. God can and will cause the circumstances of your life to serve eternal purposes. You have the privilege of knowing God and showing Him to those around you
 - c. Right now, God's main purpose is to gather His family, to draw as many people as possible out of the pigpen of sin, back to Him. Your purpose right now is to be a part of that process, however that looks in your life.
- D. Conclusion: We have much more to say in upcoming lessons. Consider these thoughts as we close: This is your past—You are part of God's plan and have a purpose. God knows a perfect you. This is your future—You will be fully restored to all that God had in mind for you before He formed the earth. Right now you can be encouraged because you have hope. More next week.