

## Ephesians 1: 1-14

### Chosen and Lavishly Loved

Princess stories have always been a part of folklore, I think of Cinderella, who dreams of meeting the handsome prince falling in love and living happily ever after. There is Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and The Little Mermaid, all with that same sort of fantasy life. Thankfully, things have shifted and children now have characters like Mowana, Elsa, and Merinda with strong, independent, and compassionate personalities to aspire to. Superheroes have also been big, from Superman and Batman, to Aquaman, Black Panther, and Wolverine. Some children, and maybe even adults, may not aspire to princesses or superheroes but rather fanaticize about being adopted into a rich family where all the wealth and prestige of the family becomes theirs.

As it turns out as people of God, we have what many long for and it is not fantasy or fiction. We are chosen people. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before God in love. God destined us, every person who breathes, for adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of God's will.

Many people read self-help books that encourage one to use affirmations of self. This whole first section of the letter continues to burst with words of affirmation of who we are and whose we are! Our adoption is to the praise of God's glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. On top of that we have redemption and forgiveness according to the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

We have the riches of God's grace lavished on us! If you still see God as a stern old man in the heavens who is judging your every thought and move, read this first part of Ephesians everyday. Our God is generous, forgiving, lavish! We are given insight into what God is up to and what God desires for each of us. It is also important to note that this is the same lavish, generous, and forgiving God who loves the person you hate, sees the person you turn away from, weeps for the one who suffers, grieves with those who grieve.

As Christians, we are the first to set our hope on Christ. We have heard the Gospel of salvation and believed in Christ. We are marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit that is already with us and now we get to share that with others. We get to share the news with others that this is for everyone, the glorious grace freely bestowed on us, redemption, forgiveness, and the riches of God's grace lavished on us. We get wisdom and insight to help us understand God's will according to God's good pleasure set forth

in Christ. In Christ we have obtained an inheritance of fullness of life while we live on this earth and fullness of life when we go to be with our Lord.

This first chapter of the Ephesians speaks to an avalanche of gifts from our generous God, through Jesus Christ. And that is the crux for Christians and those who would believe. One must believe in Jesus Christ and what he accomplished for us in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. You may note I did not say understand, I said believe. We see and experience God's glory, we may even attain some wisdom and insight, but it is mostly mystery. We tend to think of mysteries as something that must be solved, but this is not so with God. To solve the mystery would mean that God is not as awesome and powerful as we know God to be. And we know God through scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit, the promised Holy Spirit, at work in our lives.

The opening of the letter sets a firm footing for those who would believe as the coming chapters will have difficult passages that demonstrate that though we experience this lavish grace, we still live in the world and have to deal with the struggles of relationships, health, and well-being in ourselves, with those closest to us, and as broadly as how the world is in relationship with itself. For now, the letter is focused on God's glory and how that is shared and experienced through Christ.

How about a basketball analogy to help us get just a little of what God is promising us, desiring for us?

During his championship years with the Chicago Bulls, Michael Jordan was motivated by many things. One motivation most people did not hear about was his desire to win for the sake of the new players and coaches who had never been on a championship team.

So it was in 1997 when the bulls pursued their fifth championship. Assistant coach Frank Hamblen was new to the team that season. Before coming to the Bulls he had been an assistant coach on various teams for twenty-five years, but did not own a championship ring. He was now fifty years old.

Jordan told writer Melissa Isaacson of the *Chicago Tribune*, "He's been around the league for so long, on a lot of teams and made some great contributions...and then not to be on a championship team...That will be my gift to Hamblen. That's part of my motivation."

Hamblen said, "Michael came to me early in the season and told me it was a big motivation for him to win so that I can get a ring. When the best basketball player in the world tells you that, well, it certainly made me feel special."

The bulls did win it all in 1997, and Frank Hamblen got his ring.

Jesus Christ has a similar desire for us. He is determined to carry us to victory. He wants to see us glorified with him. He wants us to share the glory of his

triumphant kingdom. When the Lord of heaven and earth tells us that, well, it certainly makes us feel special.<sup>1</sup>

God's story started before the foundation of the world, has always been, and will continue to be in a time when all things on earth and in heaven are gathered up to in the fullness of time. We are invited into relationship with the God who created us and through us others, who may not even know that this is possible, can be invited into this same lavish and amazing grace.

There is so much hope, so much grace, so much out pouring of the gifts of God that there is no doubt that you are loved, are of much value, and belong to God. It is true of us as individuals and it is true of the church world wide and especially in Canada, that is right now in much pain and grief over so much wrong-doing.

May these opening words of Ephesians inspire us to see all, regardless of colour, gender, age, size, culture, or however else we may categorize people, may we see and treat all as children of God worthy of love, hope, and abundant life. In Christ, with Christ and through Christ. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Larson, Craig Brian. Leadership Journal. *750 Engaging Illustrations for Preacher, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1993, 1996, 1998. 2002. Page 197-198.