

READING

Ephesians 1: 1-14

SERMON

New Possessions (Ephesians 1:1-14)

“Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” Words we probably all recognise as those where the father of the bride answers “I do”. In the latest Baptist worship book in the Second Pattern For Christian Marriage we have

Who presents this woman to be married to this man?

And then we read

Who presents this man to be married to this woman?

Or even as I have seen

Will you, the families of A and C, do all in your power to support and encourage them in their marriage?

In the first pattern we have for this part of the ceremony – nothing. The giving of the bride to the groom by the father is a carry over from the days when a boy would meet a local girl who would then marry and the father who had looked after the girl would hand her on to the new man in her life. It was almost like passing on a treasured possession, something that one owned, as it was in former days, the daughter who was the chattel of the father then became the property of he husband.

But to day we are more enlightened which is why some couples still want that part put it – well it does give the bride’s father something to do besides walking up the aisle with his daughter! But we do not like to think of ourselves as being a possession of someone else. However if you carry on in the wedding ceremony we do have, said by both parties,

**I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage.
With my body I honour you,
all that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you
within the love of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

I wonder if those who have signed pre-nuptial agreement say these words with the line

**all that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you**

However in the reading we had this morning from Ephesians, the book we are studying as a church over the next few weeks running up to the summer. The book which is really a letter, a letter from Paul to the people of God at Ephesus. And note in verse 1 how the listeners to this letter because it would have been read out at church to much excitement – a letter from Paul, the one who founded their church, the one who taught them so much, the one who had been instrumental in the conversion of many of them, because he allowed the Holy Spirit to work through him. In verse 1 we read

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:” (Ephesians 1:1 NIV)

To the saints, the faithful. Look around at your neighbour on either side and say “Hello” to them. Then to the person sitting in front and behind you. You have just said hello to a saint. If you look up the dictionary definition of a saint you get something like

1. a person who has died and has been declared a saint by canonization

Did the person next to you look dead? – it may be better not to answer that

- 2. person of exceptional holiness**
- 3. model of excellence or perfection of a kind; one having no equal**

And you may say that does not apply to me, but if you follow Christ, i.e. are one of the faithful in Christ Jesus, then you are a saint. The word saint or Hagios is used by Paul in this letter some 9 times

- 1. 1:1
- 2. 1:15
- 3. 1:18
- 4. 2:19
- 5. 3:8
- 6. 3:18
- 7. 4:12
- 8. 5:3
- 9. 6:18

Although you may have some trouble in the NIV finding 9 because it translates some as the God’s people, and one as God’s holy people as in

- 1. 1:1
- 2. 1:15
- 3. 1:18
- 4. 2:19 – God’s people
- 5. 3:8 – God’s people
- 6. 3:18
- 7. 4:12 – God’s people
- 8. 5:3 – God’s holy people
- 9. 6:18

So together as the saints we will be looking into this letter both in the morning services and also in the small groups, so if you are not in a small group, then do find one that suits you, or is near you, or meets at a time that is better for you, and go to it, have fellowship, continue in discipleship - learning with others.

So what was it in the reading this morning that started us off down the track of the wedding ceremony, it is stated boldly in the last verse we read, but is there all the way through. Ephesians 1:14

“who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:14 NIV)

of those who are God’s possession. We are the possession of God, we are no longer our own possession, we belong to someone else, we belong to God. Ephesians 1:11

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:11-14 NIV)

Chosen by God the Father

Firstly we were chosen by God. Verse 11

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,” (Ephesians 1:11 NIV)

We were chosen according to a plan that God knew about. And when did this idea take place? Verse 4

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” (Ephesians 1:4 NIV)

We were in the plan before the world was created. This means that it is nothing of ourselves, nothing in us that means we should be chosen. At school in the playground when the footy teams were being picked, it was always the worst players who were picked first. I made sure I was picked early because I always volunteered to go in goal and no one else wanted to go in goal! But nothing in us, about us is the reason God has chosen us.

So what made him chose me, chose you. I have no idea, but we have to accept that fact that he has.

Adopted Through God the Son

We are also adopted into his family as sons and daughters, again not because of ourselves and who we are, but through Jesus Christ. Verse 5

“...In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—” (Ephesians 1:4-5 NIV)

and it continues in verse 7

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7 NIV)

We have just been through Easter, the time when we remember that Jesus died for us upon the cross, he gave his blood for us, so that we can know forgiveness of sins. Jesus, through his blood has redeemed us. Redemption speaks of paying a price to buy something and it often referred to slavery in the days of Paul.

The Bible speaks of us being slaves to sin and not able to get out of that slavery by ourselves but Jesus came and redeemed us, brought us out of the slavery that we were in, and into the freedom of the cross, the freedom to be in a relationship with God.

As adopted children we have the rights of natural children. In this country now adopted children have exactly the same rights that any natural children in the family might have. That too is true of us. Jesus is the natural child, the first born – we are the adopted child and so are fellow heirs with Christ which is why God the Father

“...blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”
(Ephesians 1:3 NIV)

We are already blessed in the heavenly realms, in the spiritual, with every spiritual blessing. It is already there, we just need to acquire it by reading the Bible, by prayer, by fellowship with others, by following God closely.

Seal with God the Holy Spirit

So we are chosen by God the Father, adopted through God the Son and also sealed with the Holy Spirit. How do I know that God has chosen me? How do I know that I am adopted into God’s family? Because I have been

“...marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14 NIV)

The Holy Spirit is with us and it is through him that we have every spiritual blessing.

So I am God’s possession

- Chosen by the Father
- Adopted through the Son
- Sealed with the Holy Spirit

So what? Why am I God’s possession? It is no good being like that Christmas present from the auntie which is awful that gets stuck in a cupboard, shut away. What if I am the possession that only comes out when the auntie comes to visit. We were once given an ornament by someone and we thought it was hideous, but we did not want to upset the person who gave it to us. It sat on a window sill in our bedroom and several times it got accidentally knocked onto the floor, but it did not break – were we pleased? When we moved from that address, the ornament got lost in the move, as these things do!

So why are we God’s possession? Verse 12

“in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:12 NIV)

That we might be for the praise of his glory. And how does this happen? Verse 4

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” (Ephesians 1:4-6 NIV)

We are for the praise of his glory when we are holy and blameless in his sight. When we follow him closely.

In the early part of the last century there was a writer called Henry Vollam Morton or H V Morton as many knew him. He was a journalist and also an author and two of his most famous books were *In the Steps of St Paul* and *In the Footsteps of the Master* which sold in hardback over half a million hardback copies. We too are to walk in the footsteps of the Master, the master of course being Master Jesus Christ.

That way we will live those lives that are holy and blameless, we will be to the praise of God's glory. We are talking about holiness which is something we do, we live out, not something we talk about.

There are those who when talking about so-and-so say that he or she is not very holy. If I hear this I ask what they mean. How do they test the holiness of a person? Very often a test cannot be given because they do not really know themselves or they realise that it is often how a person speaks, what they say. But as we go through Ephesians we shall see that speech does come into it, but also actions do as well – the way we live remembering that we do not live for me because that then means I am my possession, but I am God's possession, so I am his new possession and must live for him.