

LIVING IN TWO PLACES

EPHESIANS 1:1-3

An ankle monitor emits a GPS signal to a base unit that's connected to the police or a monitoring service.

Courts use the device to track the whereabouts of prisoners serving their sentence under house arrest.

It electronically tethers the person to his home.

I'm quite sure the Apostle Paul never wore an ankle monitor, but according to Acts 28:30 when Prisoner Paul arrived in Rome he spent two whole years under house arrest awaiting his trial before Caesar Nero.

Paul had been accused of treason against the Emperor for bowing to another King - *the King of kings name Jesus*. Paul had appealed his case to Caesar.

He was sent to Rome to stand trial, but it would be months before Nero found the time to hear him out.

While Paul waited on his day in court, *the preacher of the Gospel* was tethered to a rented house... *but the message of the Gospel was anything but tethered!*

Paul took advantage of being in the heart of the empire. The last verse in Acts tell us he preached the Kingdom of God and things concerning the Lord Jesus.

And along with a constant stream of visitors who heard Paul explain the Gospel, he used his time wisely, and wrote four letters we call "*The Prison Epistles*" - *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and... Ephesians.*

Paul picked up quill and papyrus and penned a letter that has become one of the great treasures of the Church. *In the book of Ephesians* Paul crystallizes the basic tenants of Christianity, and the Christian life.

If Bible books were given stars - Ephesians would be **a 5-star letter**. The book receives rave reviews from everyone who immerses themselves in its pages.

Here's a sampling of their comments...

"The most profoundest thing ever written."

"The Queen of the Epistles."

"The crown and climax of Pauline Theology."

"The distilled essence of the Christian religion."

"Paul sounds the depths of truth and reaches its heights..." "Nowhere in the New Testament does Paul's inspired mind soar to greater heights..."

And my favorite description of this letter, *"Infinities and immensities for those bound in shallows and miseries..."* How's that for impressive endorsements!

This morning we begin a many-months study that has the potential of revolutionizing your life. *I know!*

I know of its power, for it's had that effect on me.

When I was 20 years old I gave my life to Jesus, *and had nasal surgery*. The doc fixed my deviated septum.

How's that for an altar call, "Come to Jesus, and you can have a new nose?" It's suppose to be *a new heart, not a new nose!..* At the time, my conversion and my surgery seemed to be a weird coincidence. But now I realize it was the providence of God at work.

My recovery was pain-free, but I couldn't go anywhere for two weeks, lest I break loose the repairs.

So I decided to put my solitary confinement to good use. All I did for fourteen days was pour over this letter.

And it really did change my life. The Holy Spirit became my teacher and for the first time my hungry heart learned just how much God loved me! My faith was set on fire! I realized *who I was* and *what I had* in Christ. And I literally have never been the same since.

Those two weeks gave me a special affinity for this letter. That's why I'm looking forward to the next few months, *spending some time again with an old friend!*

Let's start by reading the first three verses, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ..."

Every letter has some common ingredients, and Paul's letter to the Ephesians is no exception!

Look at the envelope... There in the upper left hand corner is **the return address** - the first half of verse 1, "*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.*"

In the center of the envelope you'll see **recipients and their address** - the second half of verse 1, "*to the saints who are in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus.*"

Next open up the envelope, and you'll find **the author's greeting**, in verse 2, *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

And lastly, in verse 3 **the body of the letter** begins with a blessing, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."*

Notice first, **the return address** on this letter.

It reveals its author, *"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God..."* The word *"apostle"* refers to *"an official emissary sent to deliver a strategic message."*

When a member of the State Department sits down with someone from a foreign regime, and relays a Presidential warning, they're functioning as an *apostle*.

Paul had a message of love, and pardon, and peace from the King of kings, and he was on a mission to declare this good news to anyone who would listen.

And Paul was *"an apostle... by the will of God..."*

You don't run for election to become an apostle...

You don't earn the position by climbing the ladder...

Even if your family is influential - has tons of money - no amount of lobbying will win you an apostleship...

The only way to be an apostle is if *God wills it!*

No amount of wealth, ambition, influence, or good fortune can obtain God's calling. He appoints whom he chooses. *And the same is true of pastors. A self-appointed pastor is a pretend pastor.* A true pastor is the one who's God-ordained - called by the will of God.

Paul was called by God on the Road to Damascus.

He was headed there to persecute the Church, but God chose to turn *the persecutor* into *the preacher*.

The **return address** on this letter is pretty standard, but its *recipient* and *destination* is extremely unusual.

Not many letters have **two addresses...** “to the saints who are in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus.”

It’s good that this letter was sent via courier. With all due respect to our postal workers, there’s no way the Post Office would’ve gotten this letter to the right folks.

It’s to one group, “*the saints and faithful*” - who live concurrently in two places, “*in Ephesus*” and “*in Christ*”

On the one hand, its recipients are “*in Ephesus...*”

On Paul’s third missionary venture he spent a whopping two years in Ephesus teaching-up its new believers. He was there longer than any other city.

And that’s not surprising, you’d want to spend some time in Ephesus too. It’s a picturesque port on the Mediterranean - surrounded with beautiful beaches and pristine harbors. In Acts 20 Paul said his good-byes to the Ephesian elders on one of these beaches.

I’m sure the believers in Ephesus liked to go down to the rocky coast to *surf*, and *sail*, and *soak up the rays*.

During Paul's extended stay in Ephesus, churches were planted throughout the surrounding region.

The city of Ephesus became a hub for Christianity, and continued in that role for many years to come.

Actually, in a few of the Greek manuscripts the two words "*in Ephesus*" are left out. It's as if the scribe who copied this letter didn't want to limit its readership.

He sensed this letter was meant *for all churches... in all the region... in all the ages... over all the Earth...*

Perhaps the location was left blank by some perceptive scribe so that every church could insert their own address, "*to the saints who are in Atlanta...*"

But this letter has a second address. *It's to believers "in Ephesus" - but more importantly they're "in Christ."*

Its recipients occupy two locations simultaneously.

Physically, they're "*in Ephesus.*" Spiritually, they're "*in Christ.*" Every believer has two locations. Physically, I live *in Atlanta, Georgia* - and spiritually, I live *in Christ!*

In the film, "*Field of Dreams,*" Kevin Costner plays an Iowa farmer who hears a mysterious voice tell him, "*Build it and they will come.*" So he builds a baseball diamond in a cornfield, and players from yesteryear come out of the cornstalks to play ball on his field.

In the movie his *field of dreams* butts up to another dimension. Another world exists beyond the outfield.

And in a sense this is what Paul is saying to you and me. The physical life we live butts up to another world.

We eat, and work, and drive, and play, and raise our kids in a tangible, tactile world. But there exists a spiritual, eternal, heavenly world just beyond.

Whether we're conscious of it or not, as Christians we live simultaneously and concurrently in two realms.

If Paul were writing to us he would address us, "*in Atlanta*" and "*in Christ.*" A spiritual realm lies adjacent to our physical world - *and it's reachable to us by faith.*

And this becomes the defining issue for a Christian.

Which way am I leaning? Am I caught up and immersed in what's going on around me physically - or am I listening and reaching and stretching towards what's beyond - in the cornstalks, you might say?...

Paul is going to sound like the voice in the stalks that haunted Kevin Costner, "**Build it and they will come.**"

Build a strong identity "**in Christ.**" Learn to *live for* and *trust in* things that are spiritual, and eternal, and heavenly - what's beyond *the physical and temporal* - and God's blessings will fill every corner of your life!

I like how Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes what occurs when a person repents, believes, and comes to Christ.

"It's not a superficial change. It is not merely that we don some robe of respectability, or decency, or morality, it is not some surface improvement or some temporal change. It is as profound as this, that we are taken from one realm and put into another."

Every Christian is an **extraterrestrial**.

We're called to keep our feet on *terra-firma* - *solid ground* - yet our hearts are summoned to the heavens.

On the one hand, we live in a world that's hollow and empty. We grope to find fulfillment, relying on only our five senses - what we see, *hear, smell, taste, touch...*

Whereas, at the same time we're bumping up against a realm that promises spiritual satisfaction for all eternity - yet the only way to access it is *by faith!*

And we need to grow in faith. In fact, I can think of no better training ground for faith than stretched out between two realms. Realize, **everyday you're sinking your roots a little further into one of those two worlds.**

These Ephesians are a single group occupying two locations, but notice they're very important people. Paul refers to them by lofty titles... ***"saints and faithful."***

And this is so strange, for when you read the book of Acts, and its account of Paul's time in Ephesus, you realize the believers there were normal folk - everyday Christians like you and me... *And let me just ask you, how often does someone refer to you as a "saint?"*

Yea, I wake up every morning and my wife refers to me as **"Saint Sandy."** I'm greeted by my co-workers as **"Saint Sandy."** *Don't hold your breath waiting on that!*

This is odd to me, Ephesians wasn't written to a few *celebrity Christians*, or to *New Orleans football fans*, or to *specially designated Roman Catholics who somehow impressed the Vatican*, or to *super-spiritual and super-devoted servants*, or to *martyrs for Jesus*.

These folks were regular believers, like us, yet Paul identified and addressed them as *“saints and faithful.”*

Realize this up front, there’s an obvious disconnect between the way Paul sees his readers (*which include you and me*), and the way we see ourselves.

Certainly, none of us are *“saints”* in the Roman Catholic sense of the term. *And we should be glad!*

In Catholicism you have to be dead to be up for sainthood... *Then there’s all kinds of red tape.* Even if you were alive it’d kill you just filling out the paperwork.

Actually, it was in Mediaval times when the Church began singling out Christians for some unusual piety or power - and then bestowing on them the title of *“saint.”*

To some degree sainthood was a political tool. It was a corrupt Church’s way to capitalize on the popularity of a sincere believer - after he was dead - even though the Church may’ve opposed him while he was alive.

The bottom line, God never wanted *an elite branch of Christianity.* Paul refers to *all Christians* as *“saints.”*

In the NT, every believer - *young or old, rich or poor, noble or commoner* - is referred to by this term, *“saint.”*

The Greek word translated *“saint”* is *“hagios.”* It means *“to set aside for special use.”*

In the OT the bowls, shovels, and pans used in the Temple were called *“hagios”* or *“holy.”* They were only for the Temple - for the purpose of worship and service.

It's funny, but in a biblical sense it's appropriate to refer to my toothbrush as "holy." *And why?* Because it's dedicated to the service of my teeth only. It doesn't go into anyone else's mouth... When my kids visit, no one is tempted to brush their teeth with my toothbrush!

This is what makes a person holy today - have you taken a pledge to live your one and only life for God?

Are you devoted to the worship and service of Jesus? If you are, then you too are "holy" - or a "saint!"

You're *special*, and *loved*, and *important* to God.

In fact, the NT teaches that there are really only two types of people in the world. And the distinction isn't *racial*, or *national*, or *cultural*, or *sexual* - it's *spiritual*.

You can divide all of mankind into two categories: "Saints and Ain'ts." Either you've committed your life to Jesus, or you haven't... *Are you a Saint, or an Ain't?*

Yet here's a key point I want to make this AM, the way Paul saw these believers wasn't the way they saw themselves. It's certainly not how we see ourselves.

In Atlanta I'm a husband, father, pastor, Little League coach - but in Christ I'm somebody special - a "Saint!"

*Yet how many of you truly consider yourself **special to God, loved by the Savior, important to the Creator?***

Probably not many. Maybe you're *a Saint not an Ain't*, yet more often you **feel** like an *Ain't not a Saint*. One of the most strategic lessons to learn in the Christian life is to see yourself as Christ sees you!

Here's one of life's biggest questions, "Who am I?" And people try to answer that in many different ways...

I'm married, I'm single...

I'm a parent, I'm an empty-nester...

I'm a firstborn, I'm a middle child...

I'm smart, I'm dumb...

I'm athletic, I'm academic...

I'm mechanical, I'm musical...

I'm an introvert, I'm a Type A...

I'm a thinker, I'm a feeler...

Some folks define themselves by the products they consume - *the car they drive... the coffee they drink... the clothes they wear... even the style of their hair...*

Other folks base their identity on social networking - *how many Facebook friends... or Twitter followers...*

People build an identity around *the music on their playlist... or a college football team... or a video game...*

And there are people who define themselves by their work... *I'm a plumber - a product manager - an Army private - a pediatrician - a police officer - a pastor...*

Major life experiences also have a way of defining a person. You'll hear folks say, "I'm a single parent... I never had a dad... I'm a failure... I'm a cancer survivor... I'm a recovering alcoholic... I'm a victim... I'm unemployed... I'm an ex-con..." **Hey, who are you?**

There're numerous factors that **explain you**, but what **defines you?** I'm not asking, *what you do*, or *what's been done to you...* I'm asking, *who are you?*

Each of us forms an identity of some sort - a way to relate to life, and measure our importance - our value.

Some of you think of yourself as *Mr. Tough Guy*.

Others see yourself as the *Smooth Dealer*, or *Popular Socialite*, or *Cool Casanova*, or *Sophisticated Intellectual*, or *Class Clown*, or *Successful Plodder*, or *Ageless Athlete*, or *Mister Fix-it*, or *Perfect Parent*...

But what happens when that identity blows up?

The *Tough Guy* gets busted...

The *Perfect Parent* has a kid who flunks out...

The *Popular Socialite* ends up rejected...

The *Ageless Athlete* blows out his knee...

The *Cool Casanova* gets dumped...

The *Smooth Dealer* has to file bankruptcy...

The *Successful Plodder* gets laid-off...

The *Class Clown* tells a joke and nobody laughs...

What do you do, when the identity you've built to give your life meaning, falls apart?
When your source of significance gets yanked out from under you?

If you choose an identity *from your physical location* you'll spend all your time *updating it*, and *polishing it*, and *improving on it* - but it'll inevitably let you down!

The Bulldogs will lose, or your job will get phased out, or you'll be de-friended, or you'll get sick, or your kids will grow up and move out... And you'll end up devastated. You'll have to choose another identity...

People bounce around from one superficial identity to the next - *OR they lock into a life with Jesus!*

You can start the process of learning to see yourself as God sees you - *a new creation "in Christ" - a saint!*

Build a new identity around who you are in Jesus, and He'll never fail you, or abandon you, or reject you.

Your significance will be anchored to a solid rock.

This matter of identity has mega-consequences. For **how we see ourselves** shapes **how we live our lives!** This is the outline of the book of Ephesians...

Chapters 1-3 teach us *who we are* and *what we have in Christ*. Then in light of those treasures, **Chapters 4-6** describe their impact on how we do life, and love, and church, and family, and business...

It's so true, **identity** determines **behavior**.

If you see yourself in Christ it'll effect *who you hang out with - what you hold on to - how you spend your time - how you handle money, work, and people...*

I love Mark Twain's story of Huckleberry Finn.

Especially when the little street urchin gets adopted by the widow Douglas. He's lived in the back alleys and backwoods. He needs refinement - domestication.

She tries to orient him to the comforts of civilization.

Here's how Mark Twain tells the story, "Huck Finn's newly acquired wealth, and the fact he was now under the protection of the widow Douglas introduced him to society - no, dragged him into it, hurled him into it - and his sufferings were almost more than he could bear.

The widow's servants kept him clean and neat, combed and brushed. They bedded him nightly in unsympathetic sheets that had not one little stain which he could press to his heart and know for a friend.

He had to eat with knife and fork; he had to use a napkin... wherever he turned, the bars and shackles of civilization shut him in and bound him hand and foot."

It all lasted three weeks before Huckleberry flew the coop. He went back to sleeping in the hog sheds and eating stolen scraps. He'd been adopted, but he never learned to see himself in a new light - develop a new identity. And Ole Huck ended up returning to the slop.

Many of us are children of God. In Christ we're somebody - we're *a Saint*, not *an Ain't*. Over the next several weeks we'll learn that we've been *chosen, adopted, accepted, redeemed, forgiven, and sealed...*

But none of it will impact us practically if we don't believe it, and take it to heart, and own these truths.

I love a song by Tenth Avenue North, "You Are More." The chorus goes, "You are more than the choices that you've made, you are more than the sum of your past mistakes, you are more than the problems you create, you've been remade." And we need to believe that truth with all our hearts! *You are more!*

Paul addresses this letter *“to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus.”* Then he pens his signature greeting, verse 2, *“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

This was **Paul’s normal greeting**, but it was not so typical for the time and culture. Walk the streets of the ancient world and you would never hear this greeting...

“Grace” or *“charis”* is *Greek*. It speaks of *“unmerited favor.”* When a fellow Greek greeted you with grace they were wishing you a better day than you deserved.

“Peace” or *“shalom”* is *Hebrew*. The Jews use it as both a greeting and a farewell. They wish you peace coming and going. Peace is the by-product of grace.

Grace was a Western greeting - whereas, peace was a greeting from the East. There was nothing special about either salutation *until you combined them!*

When you put them together they proclaim the Christian gospel... The grace of God purchased on the cross of Jesus has brought the world peace and rest.

Unmerited favor produces inexplicable peace.

Thus, *“grace and peace”* became the distinctively *Christian greeting!* Author Kent Hughes says that in the ears of those who first heard it, this phrase sounded like *“a brand new greeting from another world.”*

Here’s God’s greeting *from the cornstalks*. When that other realm presses in, it brings *“grace and peace!”*

There’s another point to be made from verse 2. Notice, Paul brings greetings from *“God our Father.”*

One of the great causes of confused and shattered identities in our generation are caused by absent dads.

This is an epidemic problem in today's America.

Realize, the purpose of a father is to anchor a child's identity. I mean, a dad gives us *our name* and more...

A child looks like his dad. Dad is his most formative role model. Even when we don't like it, or want to, we still act like our dads. When we look ahead in life, *whether he's there or not*, we know he's the person who's suppose to be. *And when dads leaves kids hurt.*

In his book "Fatherless Generation," John Sowers writes, "Over time, the unmet needs created by Dad's absence turn into something called *"father hunger."*

And in America alone, millions are starving to death.

It's the sadness of what will never be. It's living with the knowledge that someone chose to turn his back on you. Someone has determined your value and decided you are not worth having around." That scars a person.

Sowers writes of a man who's world fell apart at nine years old, *the day his dad left*. Over the years all he could conclude was "If my own father couldn't love me, how could anyone else?" Sowers writes, "When Dad leaves, something dies." *And I can't ease that pain...*

But God can! I'd be remiss if I left this verse without pointing out to everyone who's been abandoned by his or her dad, that God wants to be your father! *He does.*

Christ is willing to give you His name... **Christian!** In verse 2 Paul refers to God as “**our Father.**” Verse 5 speaks of Jesus adopting us as sons. This is one more reason to build your identity around Jesus Christ.

He is the Father to the fatherless!

And then Paul begins **the body of his letter** with a blessing. Verse 3, “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...**”

“**In Ephesus,**” life was a beach. You could surf, swim, sunbathe. - The city was a major port. You could shop the boutiques for the latest fashions from all over the world. - And seafood... always fresh and scrumptious.

You had all kinds of *perks and privileges* simply by living in Ephesus. There were blessings that simply came with the location. You didn’t have to buy them, or earn them, or pay dues - *they just came with the turf!*

And so it is “**in Christ.**” Paul tells his readers that God has blessed us “**with every spiritual blessing in Christ.**”

Again, you don’t have to earn these blessings, or buy them. They were paid for in advance on the cross of Jesus. If you’re “**in Christ**” they too come with the turf!

Being “**In Christ**” is not like “**Sam’s Club.**” At a Sam’s Club or Costco you get perks and good deals but you buy a membership. “**In Christ**” the membership is paid by Jesus. The good deals are yours by being *in Him!*

But notice what kind of blessings God puts in our basket. We’re blessed with “**all spiritual blessings in heavenly places...**” In Matthew 6 Jesus promises His followers

that God will take care of our physical needs.

If our Heavenly Father cares for the birds and flowers, He'll take care for us! Charles Spurgeon once put it, "He that gives us heaven will certainly give us whatever spending money we need for the journey."

Yet here the emphasis is on "*spiritual blessings.*"

When God brought the Jews out of Egyptian slavery He led them to a prime parcel. He promised His people if they entered the land He'd pour out *every physical blessing - health, fertility, prosperity, victory, influence.*

God's blessings were physical because He was establishing "*in Israel*" an earthly and tangible kingdom.

But the Kingdom that Jesus founded is *spiritual and heavenly* - not *physical and earthly*. Thus, it's fitting that *His blessings* correspond with *His Kingdom...*

Our Deliverer has led us out of slavery to sin into a new and better experience. "*In Christ*" we're blessed with "*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*"

But again to take advantage of the spiritual, heavenly blessings we have to *lean toward the cornstalks!*

We have to stretch, and listen, and press toward that other world. The blessings we're promised aren't "*in Atlanta.*" In fact, we may have trials and tough times "*in Atlanta*" - but we're promised "*every blessing in Christ.*"

In the coming weeks we'll discover those blessings.

BBC TV produced a reality show called "*Monastery.*"

Five men - not necessarily Christians or even religious - were invited to spend 40

days of prayer and reflection in a Benedictine monastery. The men agreed to obey the rules, but nothing else was expected.

One of the men, Tony, was deeply impacted by his visit. Tony was a pornographer. He wanted to keep his job, but was torn. He'd enjoyed a newfound peace.

With two days left in the Monastery, a conflicted Tony comes to Brother Francis, and confesses, *"Part of me wants to keep the whole thing alive and carry it through. But I know the minute I get out, it will fade."*

Brother Francis gives Tony some good advice, *"I want to give you something that I think will help... This is about discovering who you really are and maybe what you should really be doing. And that is what we are trying to do here - discover who we really are."*

I want to give you this stone, this white stone. We have our Christian name, our family name. But we also have another name. It's called our "white stone name."

Revelation 2:17 tells us our new name is written on a white stone in heaven. I think it's your duty to find out what that name is - to find your white stone name."

The monk hands Tony a white stone, lays hands on him, and prays for him... It forces Tony to decide...

And I think that's our job as well, *to discover who we really are...* What's our name in heaven? *Our white stone name?* Then choose to form an identity in Christ.

For the next few months this is our goal - to discover *who we are spiritually*, and build a new identity. We'll align *how we see ourselves* with *how God sees us!*

And today, I've given you a white stone. *(Still got it?)*

I want you to put this stone in your pocket or purse, and every time you touch it, or hold it in your hand, or take it out - let it to remind you of what you're learning.

This morning... that you're *"in Christ."*

That you're a *"Saint"* - not an *Ain't*.

That God is the *"Father"* you can finally trust.

That His desire for you is *"grace and peace."*

That you're blessed with *"every spiritual blessing."*