

You Are Redeemed!

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Ephesians, chapter 1. Going to begin reading in verse 7 all the way to verse 10.

In him 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. As a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him.

[1 : 16] Things in heaven and things on earth. This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Amen.

You know, it is hard to watch things die. You know, it's hard to watch restaurants you love close. It's hard to watch homes you lived in fall into disrepair.

It's hard to watch vacations end. Seasons change. Children graduate. Relationships alter. Traditions conclude. For sports fans, it's even hard to watch athletes we love no longer compete.

Just this week, Simone Biles, the most decorated gymnast in Olympic history, announced that she would never do her signature move. The Rochenko double pike again.

I'll never forget as a long time Wake Forest fan watching Tim Duncan walk off the court for the final time. I watched him my whole life, it seemed. For all of us, even those who really like change, or even those who quickly get bored, it's hard to watch some things change.

[2 : 25] For a pastor, it's hard to watch words die. Pastors care about words and it's hard to watch them. B.B. Warfield, the great Presbyterian theologian, the early 20th century said, It's sad to witness the death of any worthy thing, even a worthy word.

And worthy words do die like any other worthy thing if we do not take good care of them. But the dying of the words is not the saddest thing which we see.

The saddest thing is the dying out of the hearts of men of the things for which the words stood or stand. I love that.

Words die if we don't take good care of them. All you got to do is get a Webster's Dictionary and find all these words that shouldn't be in there. Because language changes and America's got more casual.

Even more significantly, the realities those words stand for die out in our hearts. It means they no longer affect us. For this reason, a pastor's work is word work.

[3 : 38] Pastors trying to build, God commands pastors to build the church with words. Could there be anything more flimsy? A pastor's work is helping the church take care of words.

As John Piper says, the word of God that saves and sanctifies from generation to generation is preserved in a book. And therefore, at the heart of every pastor's work is book work.

Call it reading, meditation, reflection, cogitation, study, exegesis. Whatever you will, a large and central part of our work is to wrestle God's meaning from a book, from words, and proclaim it in the power of the Spirit.

That is what we're commanded. That's what I'm commanded to do. That's what we must do as a church. This morning, I want us to take care. Take good care of a few words. I want us to make sure the precious realities behind this word continue to do their work in our hearts.

We're going to continue to study this blessing. We said the Apostle Paul begins with this blessing, blessing and praising God. Before he talks about prayer, reports on what's going on like he does in his other letters, he begins with this long blessing, 202 words stretching, one sentence from verse 3 to 14.

[4 : 58] It began in eternity past. As we talked last Sunday about God choosing a people before the foundation of the world, before anything was made. Well, it focuses this morning on the present, on what we possess with certainty and enjoy in Christ.

In a word, where we're going is, Praise God, who's redeemed us through the blood of Christ and is bringing all things to completion in Him. Praise God, who's redeemed us through the blood of Christ and is bringing all things to completion in Him.

So, three words that I want us to take care of this morning. And the first one is redemption. Redemption. This first word I want us to take care of is redemption.

You see that immediately in verse 7. In Him we have redemption. Paul announces it with no back story. But redemption helps us understand what God has done for us in Christ.

And throughout the New Testament, the New Testament includes numerous metaphors, if you will, or ways of understanding what God has done for us in Christ. If you think about it, justification, which is a precious truth that it has behind it, this idea, this context of a courtroom.

[6 : 14] We have sinned against God and the punishment we deserve for breaking the law is condemnation and judgment from the just judge. But we're justified by faith.

The context for adoption, which we talked about last week, is not a courtroom but a family. For we were hopeless orphans running away. And God brought us into His family.

Well, redemption, the context for redemption, is the marketplace where goods are bought and sold, where business is done.

Until recently, redemption was a common financial term. Someone would redeem a mortgage by paying down all the missed payments. Someone would sell a watch or something to a pawn shop with plans to redeem it back a few weeks later.

The jazz saxophonist, Charlie Parker, was infamously famous for, or whatever, infamous for hawking his saxophone each day and then redeeming it back before the gig that night.

[7 : 21] So somehow he'd hawk it after the gig so he could get some money to get high and then he would redeem it before the gig the next night. Redemption is a common concept in our Bible.

There was a provision for redemption. In our Bible, if your brother had to sell his property because times were tough, you could act as a redeemer and buy it for him.

If you had to sell your property because times were tough, you could return and you could buy it back for a rate that's fixed by the law. If you died and your wife was destitute, a close family member could marry her and provide for her and your children.

He could redeem her and your children. And in so doing, redeem you even though you were dead because he's redeeming your family. That's the story.

If you remember that wonderful story in the book of Ruth, which I'm tempted to preach right now, but I can't do it. This idea of redemption. Well, whereas in the Old Testament, God provided this idea of redemption to preserve financial and material goods.

[8 : 32] It focused on financial and material desperation. Redemption in the New Testament focuses on moral desperation. Its focus is not financial and material, but moral, having to do with our rights and wrongs.

That's what Ephesians turns us to in this verse. Redemption focuses on our plight, on who we are as sinners before God and the desperation of our condition.

Look in verse 7, in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses. Now, if you notice that forgiveness of our trespasses is placed in opposition, apposition to redemption.

The idea is what you're immediately meant to see in him we have redemption. Well, what is redemption? In Christ, it's the forgiveness of sins. So where then are we most in need of redemption?

New Testament would say, and this verse would say, the reality of our sin against God and the desperate situation into which it leaves us. While this life can't include financial, relational, political, and even emotional trouble, there is no more serious trouble than our moral trouble.

[9 : 52] The desperate reality of our plight is made clear in the whole New Testament because of our sin against God. We're alienated from God. We're separated from him. As Ephesians 2 says, we're without God and without hope, strangers to all of his work.

We're enemies of God. Romans 5 takes it further. Going our own way with no regard to his holy law. We are, as Ephesians 2 says, children of wrath.

That doesn't mean God created us for wrath, but because of our sin against him, we're deserving of nothing but wrath. Just judgment from God because of the sinful nature we inherited and the sinful deeds we have committed.

More seriously, we're unable to free ourselves from sin to make anything better. We cannot do enough good things to make us acceptable before God because we're unable to do anything without sinning in some way.

As Isaiah said, all of our good deeds are filthy rags. It doesn't mean they're worthless. It means all of them contain some of that filth in our hearts.

[11 : 06] We all know bad people don't go to heaven, but the New Testament says good people don't go to heaven either. Why?

Because no person can do any good without some sin inside it. No one is good, Romans 3 says.

Romans 7, the Apostle Paul captures the desperation of our situation so well when he says, I am of the flesh sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions.

For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin dwells within me.

[12 : 09] It's describing the law of sin, the sin nature which dwells within. I'll never forget when my son, I took him backpacking. He was maybe seven or something.

We were laying underneath. We loved to end the night before we got into the tent for a night of fitful sleep, you know. But we loved laying in the enu for a minute or in the hammock for a minute to talk.

And he said, Dad, I wake up every day and try not to sin. But every day I just keep on sinning.

I can't stop getting angry. I can't stop it. What do I do? I said, buddy, I completely understand. That's the reality.

And this idea is this incessant craving going on within our hearts. So this is, according to the New Testament, the desperate, humanly unalterable plight into which you have been born.

[13 : 15] This is the bad news. You must agree with what the Bible says about you first and foremost before you can understand what it says about Jesus Christ.

This is our plight and this is the background to redemption. We are sold into sin. We need someone to buy us out. And so redemption includes a price.

Redemption is often associated with a ransom payment. If you remember in the story of Ruth, which you should all go home and read this week. In the story of Ruth, Boaz goes and she's a widow.

A Moabitess widow too. A double whammy. And then, but Boaz pays down her debts to redeem her. He pays the ransom.

If we could put it that way, for her. And so, redemption always includes a payment, a ransom. Look in verse 7. And then we have redemption through his blood.

[14 : 13] Through his blood. The ransom price is the blood of Jesus Christ. Now, the Old Testament says the life of the creature is in the blood. And that's why you would offer the creature, make sure the blood was spilled.

Well, the significance to the reference of the blood of Christ is not that it contained his life at some point. That it contained Jesus' life at some point. But it testifies to his death offered in sacrifice.

So, we sing of blood, not because blood flowed through Jesus, but because Jesus died to offer a bloody sacrifice, to shed his blood for our many sins.

We're redeemed not through his blood generally, but through his blood shed in his sacrificial death. And so, the ransom payment is there for our redemption as well.

Redemption results in a mighty deliverance. The Lord redeemed his people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Exodus 6 says, What is the result of our redemption?

[15 : 17] The forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness of sins. Again and again, forgiveness of sins is repeatedly cited as the result of salvation.

If you run through the book of Acts, that's what Peter is announcing. Repent and receive the Holy Spirit and forgiveness of sins. This word for forgive literally means to send away, dismiss, to release.

You know, if someone has a debt they cannot pay, eventually they're thrown into prison. In this country, you're just bankrupt. You can't buy anything for seven years. They cannot be released until they pay down their debt.

That's what's behind the parable of the unjust steward. Another parable. They cannot be released until they pay down their debt or until their debt is forgiven. You know, we often talk about forgiveness in this debt prison type thing.

You know, when someone sins against us, we imprison them. We grow bitter. We throw out our affection. No more nice guy to that person.

[16 : 26] You know, we cast them out of our kindness. We put them in the doghouse. But when you forgive, they're released. They're sent away.

They're set free. There's nothing more satisfying than forgiving. And that's what's happened to us. That's what Paul is saying. That you have been released.

We've been released from the prison. We've been redeemed. Once we're alienated from God. Once we're enemies of God. Once we're children of wrath. But the ransom has come in.

And we go free. That's what it means. Forgiveness of sin. It means God has conquered and rescued us.

I was reading my friend Stephen Charnock. My old friend. From the 1800s or 1700s. He said, this week.

[17 : 24] Just blew me away. This one sentence. There is not one converted soul from Adam to the last. That shall be in the end of the world. But is a trophy of the divine conquest.

That's what's behind redemption. A bunch of trophies of divine conquest. One of the things that stands out to me here though.

Is redemption is spoken of in such a way. That it's completely ours right now. If you know the book.

The Pilgrim's Progress. Books have been translated in more language. Than any other book except the Bible. It's an allegorical story. The Christian life. Christian.

The boy in the book. Comes to understand the seriousness of his sin against God. At the preaching of the gospel. And understanding the seriousness of his sin.

[18 : 23] Leaves him with this massive burden on his back. So much of the beginning of the book. Is him trying to find a way. The preacher said to go to the celestial city.

Trying to find a way. To get this burden off his back. And he faces all sorts of danger and dopes along the way. And he finally makes it to the place.

Look at this. This is John Bunyan. He writes. He ran thus. Until he came. At a place somewhat ascending. And upon that place stood a cross.

And a little below in the bottom. There was a tomb. So I saw in my dream. Bunyan's writing. That just as Christian came up with the cross. His burden loosed off his shoulder.

And fell off his back. And began to tumble. And so continued to do. Till it came to the mouth of the tomb. Where it fell in. And I saw it. No more.

[19 : 24] It's the only way to get the burden off. You fish around this culture. There's going to be lots of psychological answers. Lots of sociological answers.

They won't get the burden off. It's only one way. Then Christian was gladsome and lightsome. Or glad and lightsome. And said with a merry heart.

He hath given me rest by his sorrow. And light by his death. And he stood still a while to look and wander. I love this. For it was surprising to him. That the sight of the cross should ease him of his burden.

How could this be? He looked therefore and looked again. Even till the springs that were in his head. Sent the waters down his cheeks. He started to cry.

The forgiveness of sin. That's the wonderful reality. But you know if you know the story. He's not at the celestial city yet. He's not at heaven.

[20 : 30] Nor are you. In Christ God does not promise to forgive your many sins in heaven. The wonderful truth of the gospel.

Is that God has already completely forgiven all of your many sins. It's so important. And maybe it just seems like so obvious. But I'm here Captain Obvious.

Because God in the gospel does not promise to forgive your many sins when you reach to heaven. So go ahead and drag yourself along. You know like lower than a snake's belly all your days.

Because you're still carrying those sins. That's not the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ announces forgiveness of sin once and for all. To the redemption that is found in him.

The gospel is about a redemption that is outside of you. Proclaimed over you. And you are brought up into for eternal life and forgiveness of sins forever. And our joy and peace in this life is not meant to be derived from how well we're fighting the remaining sin.

[21 : 33] But how completely he's forgiven it all. So have you found forgiveness of sins? Has the burden been removed?

Have you come to understand the reality of the gospel? The reality of your sins? The Bible says if we walk in the light, he's in the light. We have fellowship with God. And fellowship with one another.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just. Forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. I proclaim to you a gospel for complete forgiveness of sins.

You can try to ease your conscience all over the place. But there's no other place where you will find the ease of conscience and the peace you need. But in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So would you come, confess your sins and find life in him this day. No wonder Paul kind of erupts after this with this wonderful clause.

[22 : 41] In him we have redemption through his blood and forgiveness of our trespasses. According to the riches of his grace. That's an odd phrase that recurs several times in Ephesians. You know, when most people talk about their riches.

You know, about their crib or something like that. They're showing off something that you can't touch. But that's not what God does when he talks about his riches. He talks about all that he's pouring out on those who deserve his wrath.

The riches of his grace. That's what's been secured for you. So redemption, it's a word, it's a good word. Let it not die in your heart. Hold on to it.

He came to redeem you. To set you free. To forgive you of your many sins. Second word that we gotta hold on to. Good word, take good care of is mystery.

Mystery. You see this immediately in verse 8. Which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight. Making known to us the mystery of his will. In addition to forgiveness of sins.

[23 : 44] God is making known to us something that could not possibly be known unless he made it known. That's the only way you come to understand the truth of the gospel.

Is if he does the making known of it. So after he tells us we receive forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace. He tells us another gift of grace.

What is it? He lavished grace upon us. Another kind of overwhelming phrase. Pointing at the precious and amazing and generous reality behind what he has done. He gave us all wisdom and insight.

What did he give us wisdom and insight into? The mystery of his will. Now this word mystery occurs seven times in the book of Ephesians.

In the midst of a culture enamored with magic and spirituality. Paul says the greatest mystery is made known by the gospel. Mystery here does not refer. Sorry you 80s kids.

[24 : 40] It does not refer to something unsolved. You know unsolved mysteries. Or something undiscovered. That's not what he's talking about. He's talking about something previously hidden.

Something previously hidden. In chapter 3. Paul says this mystery was actually turn there. In chapter 3. Turn to the beginning of chapter 3. In verse 3.

He says this mystery was made known to me by revelation. So this mystery was made known by God revealing it. As I've written briefly. When you read this you can perceive my insight.

Insight references to divinely given knowledge and perspective. Into the mystery of Christ. Which was not made known.

That revelation word to the sons of men and other generations. As it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit. So this idea. You see that a previously hidden mystery.

[25 : 41] This idea that what God was doing in Christ was hidden for a time. It was kept secret. Even Jesus he says. He speaks to.

In parables to those outside. But that doesn't reveal the secret. Only reveals the secret to those within the kingdom. Well now it's been revealed. What is the mystery? We're going to unpack it.

Phrase by phrase to get at it. Look there immediately in verse 9. Making known to us the mystery of his will.

First phrase. According to his purpose. That's the same phrase back in verse 5. Making clear. It's not by the will of man. This mystery is not made. God's given us insight into something we would not know unless he made it.

Known it but by the good pleasure of God. According to his purpose. Which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time.

[26 : 39] For the fullness of time. That's an odd way of talking about time. We don't think about time as filling up like a jar. We think about it very different. But it's a way of saying not that a certain time has arrived.

But that a decisive moment has arrived. Athletes say this at the end of post-game conferences. I was watching Jameis Winston back when they won it a number of years. As I was rejoicing over Florida State.

Dying again yesterday. So celebrating their death. But sorry that sounds bad. For you Florida State fans. But they say this is our time.

This is our moment. This is our destiny. No it's not. You just won. It could have been a cornflip. You know. I mean that's what you want to say. What are they trying to say?

This was the plan all along. The only person that can say that is God. That's what he's saying right here. Before the foundation of the world.

[27 : 36] God had a plan. When God created all things. He was unfolding a plan. When Adam failed. He was unfolding a plan. When God called a people. He's unfolding a plan. When God gave the law.

And told them to live before him. He was unfolding a plan. When God brought judgment on him. And cast him into exile. God was unfolding a plan. When he sent the prophets. To call them to repentance.

And to look forward to a new day. God was unfolding a plan. For the fullness of time. A plan that we brought about. By the decisive moment. Of the coming of Jesus Christ.

No wonder Jesus announces his ministry. In Mark 1. By saying. The time is fulfilled. Repent. And believe the good news of the gospel.

The time of hiddenness is over. The time of waiting is over. The time of hiding the mystery is complete. And Galatians 4 uses the same phrase.

[28 : 34] He says. When the fullness of time had come. God sent forth his son. Born of woman. Born under the law. To redeem those who were under the law.

So that we might receive adoption as son. You see that phrase again. Right? When the fullness of time had come. That's fascinating to think.

How was the first century? The fullness of time. For the gospel was after the Roman Empire had expanded. And spread the Greek language. So that the gospel could be proclaimed. Through this vast empire.

But that's just historical reason. If salvation historical reason. Are all these mounting prophecies. And promises and expectations. About this coming king.

The people waiting for a time. Because the time was coming. It was building. It is the mystery that gradually unfolded. That's now clear. And this is it. The plan and purpose of God throughout history.

[29 : 31] Finds an ultimate all-inclusive meaning in Christ. I know it's a mouthful. But this is a mystery. The plan and purpose of God throughout history. Finds its ultimate and all-inclusive meaning in Christ.

All that God has done for all time. Finds its all-inclusive meaning in Jesus Christ. It was a plan. As verse 9 says.

Set forth in Christ. The implication is. We can look back and see this mystery was unfolding all along.

The Bible. If we could put it this way. Is like the old movie. The Sixth Sense. Movie has a startling ending.

That forces you to go back and re-examine everything you watched before. The second time you watch it. Is vastly different than the first.

[30 : 28] You can't ignore the ending all along. You're tracing everything back. Well that's what the Bible is. All the Old Testament. The rock and the manna.

The cloud by day. Pillar of fire by night. All of it. The burning bush. All of it is whispering something about this mystery that's come to be true in Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ brings about a great revelation.

A great unveiling. A great disclosure. Like the end of that movie. We see that the entire Bible finds its meaning in Jesus Christ. There's one story to the Bible.

Every verse. Every chapter. Every book is telling one story. About Jesus. This has massive implications. For how you read your Bible. For how I read mine.

One of the things you don't know about me is that I'm in a lot of wedding pictures. There are quite a few people who have wedding pictures of me in their houses.

[31 : 32] Their offices. Probably their dashboard somewhere. I'm in a lot of wedding pictures because I've officiated a lot of weddings. Now it would be crazy if I looked at that wedding picture and thought it was all about me.

It would be crazy if you read your Bible and thought it was all about you. Do you see? It's no different.

There's two ways to read the Bible. You can read it. It's mainly about you. Mainly about finding a verse. A cracker barrel might sell you something to hang. Or you can read it.

It's mainly about Jesus. It changes everything. It's all about Jesus. Every page whispers his name.

Every page draws out the contours of who he is and what he's done. All of it is about him. Stephen Charnock, my friend. I forgot. I had this in here. He says, I love this.

[32 : 37] So beautiful. Is Christ not the subject of the whole Scripture? And like golden ore runs through every vein of the mind.

He is the center where all the lines of Scripture meet. We can open no part of it. But something of Christ strikes upon our mind. That's the question when you read your Bible.

Don't ask, how does this make me feel? Don't ask that. That's just a dead end waiting to happen. How is this telling me about Jesus Christ?

How does it help me see him? All right. The third word. Or words. I cheated here. Unite all things. I know it's three words.

But I want us to take good care of all three of these. Unite all things. This is closely related to the mystery. I mean, Paul, this is just one big run-on sentence.

[33 : 36] So it's kind of hard to get three points out of it at a time. But I think this is a justifiable one. A plan for the fullness of time. There in verse 10. To unite. Excuse me.

All things in him. Things in heaven. And things on earth. What is going on? I think the idea is if the mystery is the revealing, the unveiling of the plan and purpose of God and Christ, uniting all things is the content of the mystery.

So the mystery is the purpose and plan of God and Jesus Christ. And it all goes back to him. The uniting of all things is the content, the result of the mystery.

So the mystery is something that makes us look back wonderfully the way we read our Bible. But it also makes us look forward all that God is doing throughout the world. And so Paul jumps into this cosmic reality of all things.

Things in heaven and things on earth. This idea is Jesus is not just the meaning behind all things. Jesus is the focal point into which all things are brought together and reconciled.

[34 : 49] Things in heaven and things on earth. Now think about that. What is Paul saying? Is that just a way of saying Jesus came to touch everything, you know?

Or to unite everything. Is that a similar way Genesis 1-1? In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Same words. No, things in heaven and things on earth run through this letter.

So you just hang on with me for a minute. There are two strands that run through this letter that remind us that we live in a world defined by two spheres. We're defined by things in heaven.

We're defined by things on earth as well. We're defined by these two spheres. We're defined by the things that are seen. The church and the world and the flesh.

But that's not all of reality. We're defined also by things that are unseen. The angels, the demons, the spiritual forces of evil. As we know from Ephesians 6.

[35 : 51] Well, all these things are going to be brought together and reconciled and united in Christ. The things in heaven, the things on earth, the things seen, the things unseen. Just as Paul says it into this chapter.

So what God is doing in Christ is way more than giving you some fire insurance to make it to heaven.

It's much more massive. The summing up and bringing together of all things in Christ has already begun. It's like, you know, like I said, Aslan's on the move.

We are redeemed. That's the line, the witch, and wardrobe. But we are redeemed. We're forgiven. We'll study next week. We're sealed with the Holy Spirit right now. We're one people in Christ.

I've been studying this book for months now. And Taylor asked me one day, What is the core of Ephesians? I said, It might just be Ephesians 3.6.

[37 : 03] The mystery is that the Gentiles are co-heirs. Members of the same body and partakers of the promise. One of the most important application of this summing up of all things.

Is God bringing together all people in the church. The church of God, the people of God, no longer defined by a national, ethnic affinity in Jesus Christ.

Paul says in chapter 2, which we'll talk about in a couple weeks. He came to create one new man in place of two. And so the church is the place where you see what God is doing better than you see it anywhere else on this planet.

According to Ephesians and the word of God. That has massive implications for government and politics. But you'll have to come to the seminar to find that out. But much of this summing up and bringing together of all things in Christ is yet to come.

We do not yet possess the full inheritance. Man, we have the guarantee. We have the earnest money.

[38 : 22] But it's not in full. We are still being built together. There's a building going on by the power of the Spirit. We've not yet attained the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Ever had a hard time walking what you know to be right? Yeah, that's right. Me too. Why? Because we haven't had the unity of our faith and our knowledge with our lives yet fully.

We need to grow still. We're still fighting an enemy within. Ephesians reminds us sexual immorality, impurity, foolishness, filthiness, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice.

Unforgiveness. We're fighting an enemy without. We don't wrestle merely against flesh and blood but against the rule that authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness, spiritual force of evil in the heavenly places.

We still weep and grieve. Christianity is not an opiate of the masses. You know, it's not a pill you can take and suddenly you don't feel any pain anymore.

[39 : 29] That's not biblical Christianity. Christianity, we are sorrowful. We're still surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. That's wonderful, but it reminds us that we're still separated from those who've gone before.

How do we live now? Contrary to what some people say, we're not called to bring heaven to earth now. That's what some folks say.

We're not called to usher in the kingdom, whatever in the world that means. We're not called to make earth like it is in heaven. Sure, we'd love that. That's God's job.

That's what he promises to do in the age to come. He promises to do that. He doesn't need our help. He's a man who's not served by human hands as though he needed anything. Rather, our responsibility, I believe, biblically, based on these verses, is to live as citizens of heaven and of earth.

Do you remember how Paul opened this letter? Look up in verse 2. He says, to the saints, or verse 1, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus. It's a wonderful way of locating them to the saints who are in Ephesus, where it is your geographical location, your home, who are on earth.

[40 : 46] And yet, to the saints who are in Christ, who are in the heavenlies. So, we are still citizens of this world. We must vote in a few weeks.

But we must continually remember that we are citizens of heaven. We must develop a kind of homesickness for heaven. If we lose a sense of our heavenly citizenship, we begin to live for the next election, the next attraction, the next technological advance.

We begin to exchange the precious realities of the Christian faith. All the guilt and suffering and faith and hope and devotion and mercy and justice and forgiveness for the pop psychology sold in most churches.

Most seriously, we lose a hunger and thirst for heavenly things. Like sniffing poisonous glass, gas leaking into a room, we fall asleep.

But beloved, this world is not our home. What Paul is commanding you to do is to hold on to these massive realities. That what God is doing in Jesus Christ, what he's doing in your life pertains to all the things that are in heaven and the things on earth.

[41 : 56] It's only by remembering this reality that we will be further fitted for the world to come. It's only by remembering this reality that we'll be able to offer a true and better word to the world that surrounds us. And that's what we need.

We don't need the church to become a political block or anything like that. We need the church to be the church and devote themselves to the church things and devote themselves to God. And so let us do it.

Hold on. Things in heaven. Things on earth. Occasionally this world bites hard. Kicks you in the teeth.

It's at these moments you need these truths. Don't run to another comfort. We could well heed the advice of George McDonald gave to a lady at the death of her husband in 1888.

Look at this. These are precious. We are in a house with windows on all sides. On one side the sweet garden is trampled and torn.

[43 : 03] The beach is blown down. The fountain broken. You sit and look out and it's all very miserable. Shut the window. I don't mean forget the garden as it was, but do not brood on it as it is.

Open the window on the other side where the great mountains shoot heavenward and the stars rising and settling. Crown their peaks. Down those stars look for the descending feet of the Son of Man coming to comfort you.

This world, if it were alone, would not be worth much. I should be miserable already. That's the true reality. But it is the porch to my Father's house.

And he does not expect us to be quite happy. And knows we must sometimes be very unhappy until we get there. We are getting near.

Aren't we? Oh, man. That's what I want you to hold on to. It's tightrope. These things.

[44 : 11] Who God has made you in Jesus Christ. These things of the heavens. Sometimes you do got to shut the stupid window and look out on this other side so you can see the mountains again. Hold on to them.

Don't think that you can be too heavenly minded to be too earthly good. That's baloney. Never met a man like that in my life. What you need is to be heavenly minded so that you are earthly good.

So you have a better word to say. So you have a hope that is unshakable and indestructible and filled with glory. May God help us do that. Praise the Lord who has redeemed us through his blood.

Bringing all things into completion in Jesus Christ. That means everything in my life and yours. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we offer ourselves to you.

Sincerely and completely. We thank you God for redeeming us through Jesus Christ.

[45 : 08] And forgiving all of our many sins. And bringing us up into these massive realities in Christ. Lord, I pray that you would locate us more and more into the truths of dual citizenship.

And keep us, Lord. In our most holy faith. As we strive to cling to you. In light of these things.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander. Lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

Amen.