

Title: A Prized Possession
Date: September 13, 2020
Subject: Pictures of the church – God’s possession and workmanship
Scripture: Ephesians 1:11 – 14, 18; 2:10

Children have their prized possessions. For some it’s a blanket. For others it’s a stuffed animal. What was yours growing up? _____

One of mine was football and baseball cards. One way we got them was after going to the dentist. Rip open the pack, pop in the gum that used to come with the cards. Well, maybe not the gum, unless you didn’t have a cavity that had been filled and you might also get your brothers’ gum.

Adults also have their prized possessions. Cars, homes, family photos.

Would it surprise you that the Lord has a prized possession?

READ Ephesians 1:11 - 14

Since our goal is to focus on pictures of the church, we look at the last verse to the phrase - *God's possession*. What does it mean to be God’s possession?

A possession is something that belongs to a person. There are various levels of possessions. There are some things that we highly value – homes, cars, our art collection, even if that might be pictures drawn by our kids or grandkids. There are some things that we don't value very much at all - the dust in our furnace air filter or the -----

People are high on God's list of things he possesses. That’s not quite right. People are his most important possession. It might sound a little unflattering to be referred to as a possession. It's ultra significant as it signifies that we belong to the creator and owner of the universe. The one who owns us is the one who gives us our worth. It’s like a piece of paper being given worth because it has the autograph of George Washington which on February 22 of this year was valued at 9.8 million.

Verse 13 indicates the Lord has placed his autograph on us, his seal of ownership upon us. He has sent the Holy Spirit into our lives. This means God is inside of us. He is the deposit that guarantees we’ll have an inheritance that will come sometime in the future.

The word *inheritance* is prominent in the opening chapter of Ephesians. Go down to verse 18. Read verse 18.

This is one of the things Paul is praying for at this point in the book. The subject of this prayer and other prayers in the book are that Christians will be grounded in Christ.

It seems like metaphors are mixed again as talk about eyes of our hearts being enlightened so that we may know. At least it's a mixed-up body as eyes, heart and brain are connected.

The goal of the prayer is to be enlightened or illuminated. It's to have an Eureka moment or rather series a continual Eureka moments. It's like going from an incandescent light bulb to an LED with the same

wattage. Since LEDs emit much more light per wattage, keeping the same wattage would send out a tremendous amount more of light. This is the goal for our spiritual lives that we would have sufficient light to see.

It's like man who was a blind Carpenter picked up his hammer and saw. (May need to repeat this). The light bulbs are going off about the meaning of that. We're to have light bulbs continually popping.

But what are we to be enlightened about? What are we to understand? The Lord has called us to something. He's summoned us just the way a judge summons people to court. And since it's the Lord as the ultimate Judge, it must be important.

The Lord called us to salvation. The desire is that we'd grasp the purpose of our salvation, to know the hope. The word hope isn't used about wishful thinking. It's not even about our trust in Christ as in v. 12. Nor is it about anticipation of what's going to happen. Hope is defined for us. This hope is "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints."

This phrase is understood in two main ways. The first is inheritance references what God gives to the saints. It is what they get to enjoy. V. 3 proclaims that we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

When we looked at the idea of being part of the family of God, being his sons and daughters, it was connected to becoming his heirs, joint heirs with Christ (Ephesians 5:32, Romans 8:17). Other Scriptures inform us the "Father... has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light" (Colossians 1:12), "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, now that He has died to redeem them" (Hebrews 9:15), and "By His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3, 4).

This second way the phrase is understood is it describes what God possesses in the saints. It's what he receives and gets to enjoy. This second one seems a better fit with second part of verse 14 about followers of Christ being God's possession.

The two understandings are similar in that believers wind up in the same position – in heaven with God. There will be enjoyment experienced by believers and enjoyment by God.

There's an interconnected image that comes in chapter 2. Read Ephesians 2:8 - 10.

Verses 8 and 9 unequivocally state salvation is only through personal faith in Jesus Christ. There's nothing that any human being could do to achieve the right relationship with God and have his sins forgiven. We're totally dependent upon the gracious gift God has given. We simply need to receive it, having repented of our sins and in our trust in ourselves or some other method as the way to heaven.

V. 10 brings us the picture of God's workmanship. The word is only used one other time in the New Testament. That comes in Romans 1:20. There it says it's translated as "what has been made." It refers to God's original creation.

This helps unravel what this word is attempting to convey. It has the idea of a work of art. Now, some modern art seems more like paint that's been splattered on a canvas. My grandkids could do it or your pet dog could do it. We might treasure them, but they aren't going to hang in the Louvre Metropolitan Gallery of Art.

We should focus on the more recognizable works of art that have stood the test of time. Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa. It's been described as "the best known, the most visited, the most written about, the most sung about, the most parodied work of art in the world" (*Lichfield, John (1 April 2005). "The Moving of the Mona Lisa". The Independent*). It took him four years to paint the slightly smiling woman even though the original is 30 inches by 21 inches because he constantly tweaked the painting and some say he didn't really finish it. It's kind of amazing since it took him three years to do the Last Supper which is 15 feet by 29 feet. Another master artist was Michelangelo who is known mainly for his sculpting but was convinced by the pope to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It took 4 years to depict scenes from the Bible with a central focus on 9 from the book of Genesis. The most widely known one being the creation of Adam. This masterpiece covered 46 feet by 133 feet.

Michelangelo was once asked what he was doing as he chipped away at a shapeless rock. He replied, "I'm liberating an angel from this stone."

If we want to go closer to home we could travel out to South Dakota to see the presidents on Mount Rushmore. It took sculptor Gutzon Borglum 14 years and 400 men to carve the faces which are about 60 feet tall.

Another idea behind the word workmanship is a poem. Many of us didn't like the poetry unit in English class – having to read poetry or write a poem. And yet most people like listening to and singing songs which is poetry set to music. It takes a lot of creativity to make a poem or song that's memorable, that lasts through the years.

We are God's masterpiece. God devoted his energy and talents into creating us. As pastor Tim Keller asks "Do you know what it means that you are *God's workmanship*? What is art? Art is beautiful, art is valuable, and art is an expression of the inner being of the maker, of the artist. Imagine what that means. You're beautiful, you're valuable, and you're an expression of the very inner being of the Artist, the divine Artist, God Himself. You see, when Jesus gave Himself on the Cross, He didn't say, "I'm going to die just so you know I love you." He said, "I'm going to die, I'm going to bleed, for your splendor. I'm going to re-create you into something beautiful. I will turn you into something splendid, magnificent. I'm the Artist; you're the art. I'm the Painter; you're the canvas. I'm the Sculptor; you're the marble. You don't look like much there in the quarry, but I can see. Oh, I can see!" Jesus is an Artist!" And you beloved are His crowning achievement, His masterpiece!"

We are of inestimable value. We're his specially designed creation since we're made in his image. The Lord thought making us as believers, the church was a great idea. We're his workmanship.

This refers to the act of saving us, of making us a new creation. He removed our stony heart and gave us a heart of flesh. Chapter 2 verse 1 said we were dead in our transgressions and sins. We were delivered from that state by God's grace when we placed our faith in him.

The son of the founder of Our Daily Bread ministries used an insightful analogy. "In nature, lightning and thunder present a striking illustration of the relationship between faith and works. When lightning flashes across the sky, we know that the roar of thunder will follow. Without lightning, there would be no thunder, because the one is the cause of the other. Likewise, good works always accompany saving faith, because one causes the other. In the same manner that thunder contributes nothing to lightning, good works add nothing to our salvation. Rather, they are the "sound" of faith and will follow every genuine conversion experience. The one without the other is not the real thing. Genuine faith is always evident by what follows—a life of good works" —R. W. De Haan

Verse 10 gives us God's program about how we're to live as a result of our salvation. Salvation isn't merely saying a prayer or signing a card or having Salvation has a beginning point but is to be a continuing process throughout the life of believer. They're to give evidence of what has taken place. We're not saved by good works but for them. Good works don't help us become saved but they offer proof of the salvation. They're the fruit we're to show. They're an intended consequence.

God has prepared this new kind of life for those who are his. It's his plan. It's part of the new nature, the new creation, the new masterpiece.

One of the main actions of good works is love in action. It's also the motivation but it's better understood as acts like serving.

The new head of Institute of Creation Research, Randy Guiluzza, wrote an article titled *How Beautiful Is the Body of Christ*. One of his main points is *The Church Loves Like Christ*. He uses John 13:34 and 35 as the basis: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; As I have loved you, that you also may love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We're to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. He didn't have to get saved to become in the right relationship with God because he was in a right relationship with God. He could immediately invest himself in good works which included telling people about how they could come into a right relationship with God but also did good to better their existence on earth.

Back to Mr. Guliuzza. He elaborates on the command, tells how non-believers view it and provides illustrations of how it's accomplished, "Non-Christians recognize this distinguishing behavior from the church's earliest days. Vincent Carol and David Shiflett's telling book *Christianity on Trial: Arguments Against Anti-Religious Bigotry* details that early Christians were immersed in a culture in which "mercy and pity were pathological emotions," and, therefore, Christian mercy and sacrificial love - especially to strangers - were "revolutionary ideas." It adds that our Christian ancestors persevered even though:

Others viewed such practices [loving charity] with mockery. The pagan writer Lucian (130 - 200), very much of man of his world, was slack-jawed over the beliefs of those Christian misfits, easily seduced by con artists. “The earnestness with which the people of this religion help one another in their needs is incredible. They spare themselves nothing for this end. Their first lawgiver put it into their heads that they were all brethren!”

Then Guliuzza offers an illustration from when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. That winter was a time of terrible sickness, and horrible misery yet the Pilgrims showed Christlike love. Governor William Bradford gave this first-hand account. “So as there died sometimes two or three of a day...[so]there was about 6 or 7 sound persons who to their great commendations, be it spoken, spared no pains night nor day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their own health...made their [the sick and dying] beds, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them. In a word, did all the homely and necessary offices for them which dainty and queasy stomachs cannot endure to hear named; And all this willingly and cheerfully, without any grudging in the least, showing herein their true love unto their friends and brethren; a rare example and worthy to be remembered.”

Even more remarkable was the way they treated the sick crew members of the Mayflower even though these crew members had mistreated the Pilgrims. Bradford relates,

[The Pilgrims] yet aboard showed them [crew members] what mercy they could, which made some of their hearts relent, as the boatswain (and some others) who was a proud young man who would often curse and scoff at the passengers. But when he grew weak, they had compassion on him and helped him; Then he confessed he did not deserve it at their hands, he had abused him in word and deed. “Oh!” (saith he) “you, I now see, show your love like Christians indeed one to another, but we let one another lie and die like dogs.”

“The value of a church is not in its longevity but in its love. The success of a church is not in its size but in its service to the people and the community. We are a people founded by a person who never established a church or built a building or led a finance campaign to build impressive buildings. Our leader just came and served and then died for the good of others. I suppose that would be a pretty good mission statement for a church, but one I am not likely to see” (James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community: Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love*).

Friends...family...well done this week and weekend...as the evidence of your love for Christ has been super noticeably on display...by loving others in the family of God and those who aren't...through serving...by praying, conversing, grieving with, recall memories, preparing food, kitchen duty, parking, set up, clean up, sound system, playing music...the list goes on.