

Song Service by Stephen Bautista

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ February 17, 2013

FIRST DEVOTION - Ephesians 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

This last week I went to the Gem and Mineral show with my daughter Grace. I'm not really much of a gem or a mineral type of guy, but it's a big event, and I've heard a lot about it, so I decided to go and check it out. There was a lot of stuff to see, and I only went to one of the locations. Not only were there rocks, not only were there minerals, there were a lot of fossils too. Some of the neat ones had the outline of a full skeleton of a creature long since past away. A lot of the fossils were for sale, but were way out of my price range. What was in my price range were some little polished rocks from different countries. I found one from Zambia, the country where I was born. I thought that was pretty neat.

The passage that we have before us from Ephesians, reminded me of the rocks that I chose at the gem show. **He chose us in him before the creation of the world.** So if you just imagine God choosing you and me, just like I chose those rocks at the gem show. Those rocks didn't jump out at me and say "pick me, pick me." And neither did we for God. I made my decision on what rocks to get based on where they came from and how they looked. God made his decision for us before we were even born. He made his decision for us before the world was even created. We did not choose him, he chose us. He chose us **to be holy and blameless in his sight.** This is the love of our great and awesome God. Amen.

SECOND DEVOTION - Ephesians 5:25-27

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Those rocks that I selected at the Gem show were nicely polished. I know that isn't how they came out of the ground. But someone took the time to dig them up, wash them off, smooth them, and then polish them so that they sparkled and shined. As I said that was one of the reasons that I wanted to get them. That way I could also let my daughter Grace play with them and not worry about her getting too dirty.

In this second Ephesians passage for today, we see the washing that God did for us. **He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.** So God chose us, and then he made us holy. This passage talks about how he did that. It was **Christ who loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy.** This Sunday we begin our 6-week Lenten journey, remembering Jesus' journey to the cross. It was his love that drove him to that cross. It was his love that led him to come down to earth in the first place to save us.

And how do we make this ours? It is **Christ who cleanses us by the washing with water through the word.** This great promise, this great love is made ours through the saving waters of holy baptism – where water combined with the Word washes our sins away in that baptismal font. This great promise, this great love is made ours through the hearing of the Word of God. **Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.**

Faith is what connects us to the promise of God, to the life of Christ. And through faith we are presented before God as holy and blameless. Even more smooth and more polished than those rocks that I bought.

THIRD DEVOTION - Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately, I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Perhaps many people remember the song that goes along with the story, "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he, he climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see, as the Savior passed that way, he looked up in the tree, and he said, Zacchaeus, you come down, I'm going to your house today, I'm going to your house today."

What an unusual thing for Jesus to do. It would be more unusual than if I would go and eat with a convicted felon. The tax collectors of Jesus' day were detested by the Jews, they extorted money from their fellow Jews and often made quite a lucrative profit. It is no wonder that people were surprised that Jesus was going to this man's house to have a meal. Jesus should have spent his time with the good citizens of society, with those who actually tried to keep God's law. But Jesus points out very clearly that it is not those who are well that need a doctor, but those who are sick.

How often might we forget that point? It's very easy for us to say, "Jesus died for the world – including all the 'bad' people." But do we really believe it? Do we really live that way? It's a whole lot easier to hang out with our friends after church than to go up to that person we don't know, or that person that we may not like. It's a whole lot easier to gripe and complain about that co-worker, or neighbor or celebrity, than to actually remember that God died for them too.

We aren't much different than those people we complain about. And we would be fools to think that there was no one who ever murmured about the things that we have said and done. But it is because we were sinful that God came down to save us, he has come to bring salvation to our house, just like he did to the house of Zacchaeus.

FORTH DEVOTION - Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

What are some of the things that come to mind when you hear the word “sacrifice”? Perhaps your mind goes to the sacrifice you have to make by helping your wife or mother finally write out those “thank you” cards instead of spending a lazy Sunday afternoon in front of the TV. Or maybe you sacrifice eating healthy by scarfing down that calorie ridden Big Mac. Maybe you are sacrificing something for Lent – like sugar or soda.

The Old Testament Israelites knew a thing or two about sacrifices. God's law was filled with sacrifices – sacrifices in the morning and in the evening, sacrifices during different times of the year, sacrifices to make you clean, sacrifices for the individual and sacrifices for the nation. But all of those sacrifices were never intended to take away sins. What Paul is saying in the book of Romans is that those sacrifices were intended to point to the ultimate sacrifice, Christ. Christ's sacrifice is God's mercy that Paul talks about here in Romans chapter 12.

Therefore, I urge you, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices. Paul isn't talking about the sacrifice you make by coming to church instead of sleeping in on a Sunday morning. He isn't talking about the money that you toss in the offering plate. He isn't even talking about the time spent knocking on doors in Rita Ranch. Oh certainly those things are included. He is talking about much more than this, he is talking about your whole lives – from sun up to sun down. **Everything you do, do it to the glory of God.** Take out the garbage to the glory of God, wash the dishes to the glory of God, go to school or work to the glory of God, pay your taxes to the glory of God, work out to the glory of God. All of this is your spiritual acts of worship.