

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters
Sermon Series - Focus On What Drives Us
Sermon Title - Focus On Making Christ Known
Sermon Text - Ephesians 3:8-11
Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction:

Look at the wounds that give me life, Grace flowing from His side
No greater sacrifice

Those words certainly ring true for me! I was so lost and so broken as a human being. But when I realized what Jesus had done for me on the Cross, everything changed and my new mission in life became to let others know the joy of forgiveness that I had found! I wanted to make Christ known! The man God used to write much of our New Testament, Paul the Apostle, also had a powerful change in mission once he met Christ! His new mission was to make Christ known! Let's pray and we'll see why making Christ known is such a powerful core value for our church and for each of us as individuals. Pray!

Three weeks ago we talked about the core value of...

Knowing Christ!

Two weeks ago we talked about the core value of...

Becoming Like Christ!

Last week Dr. Reggie Ogea preached a powerful message on focusing on what matters and he did an awesome job of showing us ways in which the New Testament Church did that. One of the things he said mattered to the New Testament Church was evangelism and it happens to be our third core value...

Making Christ Known!

We are going to focus on that today, because making Christ known is a core value that drives Northshore Church! It's a huge part of why we started Northshore Church in the first place! Remember our Purpose Statement says...

It is our purpose to see the One who gave His life for us exalted and the ones He gave His life for transformed!

In order to do that we must make Christ known! Today we will be looking at portions of Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus. Let me say this about Paul: One of the things that impresses me about Paul and his conversion is the fact that he had the world by the tail before he came to Jesus. He had power, position, influence, and he was climbing the ladder. But when he met

Jesus everything changed! It was a night and day difference! He walked away from it all! Paul goes from throwing people into prison for making Christ known to being thrown in prison on numerous occasions for making Christ known! He goes from a position of power to being at the mercy of the very people he had once shared power with. What would possess a man to give up power, possessions, prestige, and prominence and lose the things he had worked so hard to achieve? It would have to be something more valuable than all of those things put together! What could be that awesome? How about forgiveness! Freedom from guilt! Genuine love! Eternal purpose! Joy that passes all understanding! Getting to know the Messiah, Jesus Christ! Paul discovered the reason the people he had been throwing in prison wouldn't deny Jesus at any cost! He had not only seen the light, he had seen the truth and the truth had set him free! In fact he said this in our text for today...

Ephesians 3:8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,
Ephesians 3:9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.
Ephesians 3:10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,
Ephesians 3:11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And there you have our 310 value...

Making Christ Known - Ephesians 3:10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known...

And the wisdom of God was that salvation for humankind would no longer be dependent on human effort, but on God's amazing grace. And that fact was to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord! One of my favorite verses in the Bible was penned by Paul at the inspiration of The Holy Spirit when he said in Romans...

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

With that in mind, I am going to use portions of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, as a template, along with some additional supporting Scriptures to develop...

A theology and rationale for making Christ known

So let's jump in there with Ephesians 1:1-6 and we'll discover that...

People need to know that God chose to love them before the Creation of the World!

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Ephesians 1:2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

Ephesians 1:5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

What does this mean? If we are predestined to be saved or to be lost then what is the purpose of making Christ known? Does it even matter that we make Christ known if it is a forgone conclusion before we are even born whether we make it to heaven or not? Well, it's not a foregone conclusion. God's sovereign knowledge of what we're going to do doesn't cause us to do what we do. If that were the case we could blame God for every wrong thing we do, and we can't! When Paul says God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ, and that He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight, we are given a glimpse into God's purpose and God's will. God has already appropriated spiritual blessings for us in the heavenly realm and desires to transfer those blessings to us in this worldly realm. In fact the Model Prayer or the Lord's Prayer states this...

Matthew 6:9 "This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

Matthew 6:10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

People need to know that sin prevents them from being all God created them to be!

When Paul says...

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

Paul is stating and showing God's will for us! God chose for us to be holy and blameless in His sight, He predetermined this to be His will for us. However, while we know this is God's will for our lives, none of us have lived up to that standard because as he had previously written in the Book of Romans...

Romans 3:23 ...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

So God's will and purpose for us was impacted by our sin and our inability to live up to God's Holy Standard!

People need to know that God has a plan to deal with their fallen condition and they have a choice!

God in His wisdom and great love had a plan in spite of our failures! The verse that follows the statement that all have sinned and fallen short says...

Romans 3:24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Does that mean that all will be saved and that none will be lost? No, because we have a choice and Paul makes it clear in the next two verses of Romans 3...

Romans 3:25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

Romans 3:26 he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Those who have faith in Jesus are justified! Now let's continue with Paul's words in Ephesians...

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

Ephesians 1:5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

In love He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will! And we see God's will clearly in the words of Jesus...

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Notice it doesn't say that God only loved certain people in the world, or just the Jews who were God's chosen people, no it says clearly that God so loved "the world." In other words, God prechose, and predetermined to love everybody, but not everybody would choose to accept His gracious offer of love and forgiveness. In fact we read these words in 2 Peter...

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But not everyone comes to repentance. Some walk away. But here's the deal, we've been called by God to let people know they have a choice and God truly loves them and wants to save them, to forgive them, to give them purpose in this life that goes far beyond just surviving or having an abundance of things and to give them eternal life!

People need to know that when they accept the will of God in their lives by receiving Jesus, it brings glory to God and transformation to them!

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

God gets the praise because it was through His glorious grace found in Jesus and not by our own goodness that we are saved. In fact Paul continues his powerful message of salvation in Ephesians...

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Ephesians 1:8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,

Ephesians 1:9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

Ephesians 1:10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Wow! So powerful! We are redeemed through His blood and our sins are forgiven in accordance with the riches of God's grace! I'm so glad it's in accordance with the riches of God's grace because He is abounding in Grace and Mercy and that is made possible because of the perfect life Jesus lived! According to the Jewish understanding of blood, life was in the blood! And so if someone lost their blood, it was understood that their life blood flowed from them. So when Jesus shed His blood on the cross, His life blood flowed from Him, His perfect life blood and that life blood is applied to those who are willing to let God lavishly cover them with the righteousness of Jesus!

People need to know that it is by grace through faith in Jesus that their lives here on earth and their lives in eternity are saved!

Paul is about to mention predestination again. But remember, predestination means that God pre chose to love us, and decided beforehand that it is His will for us to be saved, but watch what Paul says to clarify that we still have a choice...

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,

Ephesians 1:12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,
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.

Did you notice that those who put their hope in Christ are “the praise of His glory” and that...

Ephesians 1:13 ...you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

When you believed you were marked as His child, not you are His child because you were already marked! Salvation happens when you believe, not when you get baptized or when your good works outdo your bad deeds. It's not when you joined the church and certainly not when you got your act together! If my salvation depended on that I would be in big trouble, because I still don't have everything together! I just love the way Paul put it in Ephesians 2. He talks about how we were reveling in sin like the rest of the world and were by nature objects of God's wrath...

Ephesians 2:4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,
Ephesians 2:5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.
Ephesians 2:6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,
Ephesians 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
Ephesians 2:9 not by works, so that no one can boast.
Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

And what are those good works?

We need to know that much of that good work is for us to make Christ Jesus known to the world!

God wants to show the world the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus! And boy when I look at my life all I can see is His grace, His mercy, His love, His forgiveness! I mean, I'm still amazed that He could love me and I'm amazed that He would forgive me, and I'm amazed that He would accept me with all my sin, my shame, my mess, my struggles, and my weaknesses! It's not like I had a lot to bring to the table when I came to Jesus! What could I possibly bring to Jesus that He didn't already have? Only one

thing...my heart! And that's the one thing Jesus wanted! And that's the one thing He desires for anyone who is lost. He wants to love them and for them to love Him in return. He made it clear to the world that His kingdom was not of this world but was a kingdom of the heart.

Luke 17:20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,
Luke 17:21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

It's a kingdom of the heart and when Jesus becomes the treasure of your heart then your life will begin to change as well! Your life will change in such significant ways that you will have a burning desire to make Christ known. That's what happened when Paul came to know Jesus. He had been persecuting the church and throwing Christians in Jail, but when his heart changed his life and his purpose in life changed! And while Paul wasn't perfect, people sure saw the change! Paul's mission became one of reaching out to the Gentiles. While he loved his Jewish brothers and sisters and wanted desperately for them to be saved, his calling was to the gentiles. In fact, Paul said this...

Ephesians 2:11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—

Ephesians 2:12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

We should all be saying "thank You Jesus!" It's because of the precious blood of Jesus we are no longer far away and have been brought near! Having said this, Paul goes on to share his calling from God to make Christ known. Paul says...

Ephesians 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

Paul says for "this reason" he was reaching out to the Gentiles. What reason was that? The reason was that Jesus had died on the Cross and made a way for both Jews and Gentiles to be made right with God! We couldn't keep the letter of the law and it was not that the law was bad, it was that we were weak and sinful and unable in our flesh to fully keep the law. But neither could the Jews. You see, even God's chosen people couldn't keep the law given to them! We all need God's grace! Every last one of us! Paul is in prison, but he's not complaining about his circumstances or the conditions of the prison, he is solely focused on his mission to make Christ known to the gentiles! Paul says...

Ephesians 3:7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

Can you see how and why Paul's new mission and vision from God was to take the message that changed his life to the ones who needed the same life changing message? Paul, who once thought he was a big deal and super spiritual and self-righteous, now says this...

Ephesians 3:8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ,

Ephesians 3:9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Ephesians 3:10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,

Ephesians 3:11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How powerful is that! And here's something to understand, when you humble yourself to the Lord, He will lift you up and use you in powerful ways to accomplish His divine purpose and will! And we know that His purpose and will is that others come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior! And one of the reasons we are compelled to let them know is...

People need to know that God is approachable!

Ephesians 3:12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Do people in this old world need to know that if they admit they are a sinner in need of God's love and mercy, that through Jesus they may approach God with freedom and confidence? Absolutely they need to know this! And God has called us to let them know! Paul then tells his readers not to worry about his imprisonment and gives them some amazing encouragement by continuing his prayer that he had begun in verse in 3:1.

Ephesians 3:13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

Ephesians 3:15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Ephesians 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

Ephesians 3:18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

Ephesians 3:19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

He prays that we will be strengthened through The Holy Spirit, and that Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith! That we will be rooted and established in love! That we will have power, together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ! A love that surpasses knowledge! How is all of this accomplished in us? How can we even begin to effectively make Christ known? Paul tells us...

We need to know that it is through God's power that we can do the work He has called us to do!

Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Ephesians 3:21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

We make Christ known by the words we say and by the actions we live out. Now I know there are some people who might say, "But Pastor Larry, telling people about Jesus is what you do for a living and it comes naturally for you. It's different for me!" Well let me respond, God has called me to a life of ministry, but a huge part of that ministry is to equip you to do the ministry God has called you to do! If the world has to depend only on those who are in vocational ministry to hear or see the gospel, that's a tragedy in the works, because there aren't enough of us to reach the world. You know people that I'll never know or even meet. You live your life in places I'm not called to go or to live.

Now I'm going to end my message in a peculiar way. I thought about sharing with you some of my most exciting times of sharing the gospel that had great outcomes. But I need you to know that I'm still learning how to share my faith with others and how to exercise faith in Jesus in everyday life. I need you to know that I don't always get it right either, but God is gracious and never gives up on us and will help us learn if we are willing to learn! So here we go, a lesson learned the hard way.

So Friday a week ago, Andrew and I were returning from a conference on becoming effective, Godly leaders! It was powerful and life changing! We boarded our plane in Santa Ana California for Houston, Texas to catch a connecting flight to New Orleans but our flight was delayed because we were totally packed and we exceeded the weight limit for that runway. The pilot said we would have to go to the end of the runway and burn off some fuel to lose some weight. Then about 20 minutes later he came back on and said air traffic control had decided to send us another direction on the runway and with a headwind there would be no need to burn off fuel. But that would take some time as they altered other planes' flight patterns to accommodate our situation. We were finally in the air but about 45 minutes late. So now our connecting flight in Houston was questionable because it was in a different terminal and we'd have to take one of the sky trams to get there. When we landed there were several more delays in getting down the taxi way to the terminal as they had to move other planes out of the way. Once we finally got to the terminal we were standing, and waiting. Andrew was already in the aisle and I asked one of the lady's behind us where she was going. She said South Africa. She only had about 10

minutes to catch her next flight like us. We talked for a moment. There was another lady across the aisle one seat up and she was seated anxiously waiting as well. I was in front of the lady from South Africa, and as the line moved in front of me Andrew had to go because he was already in the aisle and was looking forward and didn't see what was happening behind him. In that moment I simply followed, but as I did the lady in the seat across from me started to get up at the same time and I said something like "excuse me, sorry," instead of waiting for her or offering to let the lady behind me go first, I eased on by to catch up with Andrew who was leading the way to our next gate. I remember seeing The lady's face who had started getting up and she seemed irritated. It all happened so fast and in that moment I was not my normal self allowing everyone else to go first. I guess sometimes it's easier to be nice and let others go first when there's not going to be a major personal sacrifice involved. I was so focused on not missing our flight. However, within moments I felt awkward about the situation but I was running full speed to try to catch the connecting flight. We made it to our plane just in the nick of time or so it seemed. But then the plane just sat there and we got a message that they were holding the plane for others. So it ended up that we didn't have to run so fast after all. That's when the guilt of it really began to hit me that I could've been such a better witness to those around me had I exercised faith and said something like this, "I'll say a prayer for the Lord to work this all out so that we all get to our flights so you gals go ahead I'll catch up with my friend!" But I didn't do that, and the heaviness that hit my soul as I was sitting on the other plane, took me to a place of despair and sadness. To make it all worse, I had given the lady behind me a card and invited her to visit my website to listen to my music. I felt like such a hypocrite. So you can see the scenario was a perfect set up for me to feel really bad. Andrew could see that something was bothering me and asked if I was ok, thinking that the marathon we had just ran had me feeling winded! I told him what had happened and that I felt so bad and he tried to encourage me and shared a Scripture with me. I continued to pray and ask the Lord to forgive me numerous times but still felt the guilt. Through that process I began to think about the advice I usually give others when they're dealing with guilt, but that didn't work either! I woke up the next morning after arriving home with the weight still heavy on my soul. I prayed about it again and then opened my Bible app and read the verse of the day which says...

Psalms 42:1 "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God."

I then proceeded to read the entire chapter and at the end of the chapter I read this verse...

Psalms 42:11 Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

After this I turned to read the devotion for the day in My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers and here was the title...

Taking the Initiative Against Despair

Here's what it said...

“Rise, let us be going.” —Matthew 26:46

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples went to sleep when they should have stayed awake, and once they realized what they had done it produced despair. The sense of having done something irreversible tends to make us despair. We say, “Well, it’s all over and ruined now; what’s the point in trying anymore.” If we think this kind of despair is an exception, we are mistaken. It is a very ordinary human experience. Whenever we realize we have not taken advantage of a magnificent opportunity, we are apt to sink into despair. But Jesus comes and lovingly says to us, in essence, “Sleep on now. That opportunity is lost forever and you can’t change that. But get up, and let’s go on to the next thing.” In other words, let the past sleep, but let it sleep in the sweet embrace of Christ, and let us go on into the invincible future with Him.

There will be experiences like this in each of our lives. We will have times of despair caused by real events in our lives, and we will be unable to lift ourselves out of them. The disciples, in this instance, had done a downright unthinkable thing— they had gone to sleep instead of watching with Jesus. But our Lord came to them taking the spiritual initiative against their despair and said, in effect, “Get up, and do the next thing.” If we are inspired by God, what is the next thing? It is to trust Him absolutely and to pray on the basis of His redemption. Never let the sense of past failure defeat your next step.”

Boy I needed that! Sometimes all we can do is admit to God we can’t undo or fix what we’ve done, so in humility we have to ask God to clean up our mess!! He knows how to do that and He will if we will let Him! Why did that matter to me so much? Because it is important that we make Christ known and how we do that is important as well! We may have missed some opportunities in the past, but let’s all commit to doing a better job of Making Christ Known! Let’s pray!