

Saints and the Kingdom of Christ and God

EPHESIANS 5:3-5

We'll be reading from Ephesians Chapter 5. Our text today is going to be verses 3-5 but we'll start with verse one as a sort of handing off of the baton from J-T from last week and set the context for our sermon.

Let's pray first...

A long time ago, there was a Kingdom. This kingdom had no palaces or throne rooms. No courts or quarters. It was simply, magnificently a Garden. In all the world and in all the time since, there has never been a Garden like this one. It would be quite fair to say it was Paradise. This Garden was filled with every plant and living creature you could imagine. In the center of the Garden stood a tree that bore a fruit that no one alive today has ever seen. This Garden did not just happen to be but was intended to be. You see, there was a Gardener that created all of the plants, the trees, the water, the sky, the flying things, the running things and even the crawling things, including spiders.. Everything was perfect.

In this Garden there was a man. And in this Garden there was a woman. The Gardener even created them. The man from the ground and with his breath, and the woman from the man and from his rib.

The man and the woman had everything they could ever want and nothing was lacking to make them truly happy. And most of all, the Gardener would walk and talk with them everyday. So they had everything the Garden offered but more than anything, they had friendship and fellowship with the Gardener. The Garden was perfectly suited for the man and the woman and they were perfectly suited for the Garden. They were happy, content and satisfied.

Of course, we know how the story goes. The man and the woman were deceived by the Serpent. He told them that if they did just one thing that they were told not to do, that they would be just like the Gardener. And what's better than being with the Gardener? Why, being just *like* the Gardener, according to the Serpent.

But it was a lie. The truth was, they were already created in the image of the Gardener. But it was too late. Sin had destroyed their ability to live in the Garden. The Garden was

no longer suitable for the man or the woman. And they were no longer suitable for it. And, so, rather than destroy the man and the woman who were no longer able to live in the Garden, the Gardener sent them away. Never to return to this Garden.

Outside of the Garden, the man and the woman found that they no longer had everything or really anything they needed to be happy, content and satisfied. The Lie they believed always asked for more...and more...and MORE.

As the number of men and the number of women grew, so did their desires and ambitions. Sin had made it so that nothing they tried would satisfy them. No amount of power, or status, or learning, or gain was ever enough.

The Truth was, what the man and the woman wanted...what all men and women really want is to be back in the Garden, to live in the Kingdom. Really, to be back with the Gardener. Where all the needs, wants and desires are truly met. Where they would get what the heart most longs for to be happy, content and satisfied.

But the Gardener had already decided to begin a new Garden. One created from a single Seed. This Seed would be perfect but the only way it could give life would be to die and to be buried in the ground. But from this death and burial, would come a resurrection springing forth a new life that neither disobedience or sin; not even death could take away or destroy. This new life would be the beginning of a new Garden, a new Kingdom.

This Garden would take time to grow and develop.. And before any men or women could live in this Garden, they would need to be transformed to be able to live and thrive in the new Garden, this new Kingdom.

In this new Kingdom, only those who would put their faith in the Seed, the center of the Garden, would be able to or even capable of living there. But not as mere visitors. They would be heirs of the Kingdom, beloved children of the Gardener King.

Like the first Garden, the truest of our needs would be fully met and satisfied. Unlike the first Garden, this new Kingdom would last forever and for all time.

This is why we read Ephesians 5:

5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:3-5

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

The Gospel is the good news about WHO God is and WHAT God does. The good news is that God changes/transforms WHO we are and WHAT we do. The Gospel is not what you do but what Christ has done.

We see this throughout the new testament, that the writer will almost always spends lengthy amounts of time at the beginning telling us WHO God is, WHAT he's done and then tells us WHO we are BEFORE telling us what we used to do and what we should now be doing.

So, since Paul does it for the Ephesians, I'm going to start there with verse 1 to remind you of something that we absolutely need to be grounded in or we'll miss the important part of our passage today.

5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

WE ARE BELOVED CHILDREN

Therefore, as beloved children, be imitators of God. [more here]

If you were here last week, J-T showed a little video of kids imitating older people. Did you notice that it was mostly imitating how they walked? If we were to walk like Christ in love..what does that look like?

Verse 2 tells us what walking in love (for each other) looks like: Give up ourselves for each other as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Take a minute and picture that in your mind - beloved children imitating their Father in love and doing for others what Christ has done for us.

This is the core of preaching the Gospel to yourself: *What has Jesus done for me (treated me, reacted to me, responded to me) so that I can go and do the same to others.*

Now, let's look at our passage:

Ephesians 5:3-5

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

In chapter 4. Paul says to be “renewed in the spirit of your minds and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God”. He then gives them a list of behavioral identities that they ought not to do/be because they are no longer that but they are instead this.

Our passage is another list of things they ought not to do but again, first reminds them of who they are in Christ. Never get the order wrong. Because WHO Christ is and WHAT HAS done, then you are and then you do not do those things anymore, instead: be imitators of God, as dearly loved children.

So let's look at what we ought not to do:

Sexual immorality. The word is **porneia**. Fornication for you old school King Jamesers. Harlotry. Adultery and incest. Idolatry of the body. Either yours or someone else's. The reader at the time would have understood it to mean any type of sexual experience outside of heterosexual marriage. It comes from the root word of porneuo (porn-yoo-o) meaning to act the harlot, that is to *literally* indulge unlawful lust (of either sex) or *figuratively* practice that form of idolatry. (In my study, there are DOZENS of verses that address this topic so it is of intense importance for an imitator of God).

Next we have “all impurity”. All means all manner of, any kind of, as many as, whatsoever and every sort of way. So all means all. Impurity is uncleanness whether physically or morally.

Finally, covetousness. This one is a bit harder to explain because it centers around intent. It means avarice - an excessive or insatiable desire for something that is not yours. Greediness to the point you are willing to lie, cheat or steal to get that thing.

Here's what the Ephesian would have heard:

Any type of sexual experience outside of covenant marriage, whether literally or figuratively done; any type of moral or physically uncleanness of in any way whatsoever; if anyone intentionally and excessively craved something that did not belong to them to the point where they would lie, cheat or steal for that thing: these type of behaviors should even be named among them.

Why? Because they are **Saints**. That's our Smarty Word today. Paul once again reminds them of their identity, who they really, truly are now. Saints.

Church. The same is true of us. Of you. If you are in Christ!

Here's what we need to hear:

Any type of sexual experience outside of covenant marriage, whether literally or figuratively done; any type of moral or physically uncleanness of in any way whatsoever; if anyone intentionally and excessively craves something that did not belong to us to the point where we would lie, cheat or steal for that thing: these type of behaviors should even be named among us because it is unbecoming of our new identity as Saints, dearly loved children and imitators of God.

Jesus didn't do it. We imitate Jesus. We don't do it. We are saints.

I'm going to channel my inner-Jim, my inner-pediatrician. What do you think would happen to a child if you told them from age 2 to 10 that he was worthless, rotten and no good? How likely is he to turn out to be worthless, rotten and no good?

You see where I'm going with this don't you? I think this is why Paul repeats the same formula over and over again. He is constantly reminding people of who God is and what He does which changes who you are and then, reminding you of who you truly are, he then tells you how to act.

I sometimes wonder if we struggle with sin and identity so much because we have not yet gotten good at reminding each other of our new identity.

Imagine if we really understood and did what Paul does. What if we address each other as Paul addresses the Ephesians. As saints. Saints mean an awful thing. Not the way

we use that word but in the sense of a thing full of awe. Something sacred - physically pure and morally blameless.

Maybe you're thinking what I've been thinking: I've been called a lot of things but physically pure and morally blameless is not one of them. True...but Jesus has. Right?

And that's what God sees when he looks at us, He sees his Son. He sees...saints. Remember what Jim said, the Gospel is not what I do but what Jesus has done. There's no room for self-righteousness here. We're only imitators. Not initiators. Jesus is the initiator. Right, Jim?

Saints. This is gonna feel weird. To think of ourselves as saints. But it's not our name. I'm not Dan Saint. You're not Alyssa Saint. But it is our identity. It is our true state of being in Christ and what the Father sees because by faith He sees Christ in us. It is who we are in Christ. J-T called it a fundamental shift in our identity.

Because we are dearly loved children, we imitate God by not having sexual immorality, impurity or covetousness even named among us. That no one in our community even mentions these things as being characteristic of any of us.

This doesn't mean we don't struggle with these things. But it also means we are not characterized by them, protect them, excuse them or lie, cheat and steal to maintain them.

You'all with me so far?

Okay, good. Cuz I'm going to meddle a little bit here. I need to because of the culture we live in (which by the way, with the exception of the internet, was very much like the Ephesians' culture). This particular sin seems to creep its way in. Strike that, it does not creep anymore - it is bold and prideful and rampant and accessible, in the church, work and home. And what used to be more prevalent toward men, is now growing among women. So I want to address a little more in detail this idea of porneia.

Porneia is that junk drawer term that covers any and all types of sexual activity outside of covenant marriage between a man and woman. The law (which we know is meant to tell us what God is like) says: "Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Yeah, but I didn't actually do anything...

*Matt 5: 27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. 31 "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of **sexual immorality (PORNEIA)**, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

And if you still think that somehow you can make the case that your particular sexual sin is not actually sin (*I can't help it, it's the way I am; I just have such a strong drive that my spouse can't keep up; it's a bad habit - no, picking your nose is a bad habit*) if that's what you use to say your sin is not sin then the burden is on you to prove that your behavior:

- Glorifies God
- Imitates God
- Is walking in love
- Is loving to your spouse or your savior (especially if you are married and a man, because coming up in Ch 6 Paul says you are called to love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up...ch 5 v2...a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

I do also want to, briefly, address addiction. I know that's real. I know that the chemical pathways in your brain can be rewired where breaking this can feel impossible. But I also know that Paul was writing to Gentile Ephesians who were subjected to everything we are today. And I also know that the Gospel really is the power of God for salvation. I clearly can't get into unpacking all that today or here. But there are men in the church that are willing to walk with you if you are willing to walk with us.

J-T said something last week. He said: you cannot do the right thing for the wrong reasons. I want to add to that: You cannot do the wrong thing for the "right" reasons...which are your reasons. Do not try to do theological gymnastics to make your sin acceptable. It is unbecoming for a saint.

There is grace. We have a gracious heavenly Father. But He is also holy and He has given us Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit and the body, the church, to point us back to ***the Christ who HAS, so that we CAN*** be imitators of God. With me?

Alright. Let's move on, saints... Verse 4:

4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

For the saint, it is out of place for there to be filthiness coming out of our mouths. No obscenity or shameful speaking. Foolish talk is buffoonery (that should have been our smarty word) or silly talk. (You know what? Let's just give the kids a 2nd Smarty Word!) Buffoonery. Even saying it sounds silly. Really quite precocious. If you say it loud enough. Nevermind. And that, kids, is buffoonery. This can mean sarcasm, being overly and obnoxiously witty, innuendos and having a smart mouth. Ouch, that hurts. I am so good, naturally gifted as it were in buffoonery and silly talk. And I love Jesus but I also cuss a little.

But as I studied, I was quite happy to learn that Paul isn't being a prude here but he is, in light of the context, referring to the obvious coarse talk and vulgarity but also the kind of speech that would hurt someone, tear them down, ridicule them or demean them.

And that I can totally get behind. I remember years ago, I would tell stories that were really quite funny but they were at the expense of my wife. While I and those around me found the story quite hilarious, it hurt my wife. It created disunity. She really helped me understand that it's only funny if both people think it's funny.

Paul says that type of speech is out of place, similar to verse 3 that this type of thing ought not to even be named among them, it is unfitting. He says what should characterize you is...Thanksgiving.

And what an odd contrast that Paul offers. You would expect that if you are not to talk filth and foolishness, the opposite would be cleanliness and wisdom. But he says that you should instead offer...thanksgiving. We are to be characterized by heart-driven verbal thankfulness.

Why?

Luke 6:45

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Romans 10:8-10

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

What we do with our words matters because it reveals what is in our heart.

You see, to be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, does not just affect what we do, but what we say!

This one hurts too because I am by nature a skeptic and a complainer. I have to constantly do a spiritual gut check and remind myself all the time and preach to myself the Gospel of just how Good God is, and that everything I have is a Gift from Him. That I don't have to do things but GET to do things that glorify Him.

Are you thankful? Does your identity as a Saint allow you see all the Christ has done, is doing and will continue to do? Do you see Christ as the ultimate blessing and if you had nothing else, could you be characterized as a thankful person?

For me, being the complainer I am, this is hitting me way harder than I thought it would. I'm beginning to fast from griping and complaining. I say beginning to because it is such a habit for me. I have to take hold of the grumbling thoughts and realign my thinking to say: “How can I thank God for this?”

Here's the thing, when we are filled with thanksgiving, when we start to really imitate God, as dearly loved children, it leaves no room for filthiness, foolish talk or crude joking. No buffoonery.

Still with me? Good. Because...

5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

“For you may be sure of this” is a poor translation for “You know you know this:” Like “what I’ve said to you you already know and what I’m about to say is really pretty obvious, right?!?”

If you are CHARACTERIZED by this, if you **are** a sexually immoral person, an impure person, a covetous person...not a SAINT but an IDOLATER...you have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

“Inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” is not just receiving mere assets like an estate of someone who has died. No. This is ownership, with full rights and privileges and participation in the kingdom of Christ and God. You don’t receive this when someone passes. You receive it because Christ has died and now lives!

Kingdom of Christ and God refers to both the kingdom already and the kingdom not yet. This is an inheritance that we are already receiving the benefits of, and the down payment is the Holy Spirit, which we’ve already seen in Ephesians.

So that’s our text. And to be honest, I didn’t really have a good way to end it but I had all these little points and mini-applications of Gospel Wisdom written down and so I think I’m just going to share them and trust that God will use some of them to encourage you, exhort you and perhaps even admonish you.

The call/command is simple: Imitate God. We don’t/can’t do it apart from our new identity as saint, dearly loved children.

This is why we avoid sexual immorality, impurity, greed and foolish talk: because it is un-Godlike. Those things do not characterize Saints, which is what we are now.

We cannot inherit a kingdom that we are incompatible to live in. Unless we adapt (or sare transformed) we would be unable to “breathe” in the new world.

If I know, without a shadow of a doubt, that in a short time I will have everything my true heart desires, then I won't settle for anything less.

We live different, we speak different, we think different, we love different.
Because we are different.

Holiness matters. Yes, there is grace. Thank God there is. But because of grace we GET to live differently. GETTING to do something is far more powerful than HAVING to do something.

We are SAINTS who give THANKS as ones who have an INHERITANCE IN THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST AND GOD.

When we engage in pornia or covetousness, what we are saying is that we do not believe God is enough, that he can't really satisfy what our heart desires. There is only two possible conclusions to this: one is that we need to repent and turn toward God who is always near if we are in Christ or the other is that our heart does not truly desire God but rather desires only the flesh.

There are really only two identities, meta-identities, that one can have: Saint or Idolator. :

Mature Saints | Immature Saints | Saint-looking Idolaters | Immoral Idolaters

The important part is not what we don't do...the important part is that as dearly loved children, who get to imitate God, we are saints whose lives get to be characterized by thanksgiving because we are heirs with Jesus in the kingdom of Christ and God.

The new Kingdom is coming. The Kingdom of the Gardener King is both "already" and "not yet." The Kingdom of Christ and God refers to God's sovereign rule and reign over all creation, emphasizing both a present reality and a future fulfillment. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was at hand during His

earthly ministry (Mark 1:15). However, its full realization is something believers await (Matthew 6:10; Revelation 21:1-4).

The Kingdom of Christ and God is characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy not by sexual immorality, covetousness and buffoonery, which is idolatry. This reflects the moral and ethical standards of the Kingdom, emphasizing inner transformation and godly living. We are being transformed so that we can be suitable for the new Kingdom.

God's sovereignty and rule are central to the Kingdom of Christ and God. It denotes God's supreme authority over the universe (Psalm 103:19) and His active reign in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). As Saints, we align our wants and desires to that of our Gardener King.

The Kingdom is redemptive, bringing salvation and deliverance through Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:13-14). Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are pivotal in inaugurating the Kingdom, defeating sin, and reconciling humanity to God (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

The Kingdom of Christ and God is eternal and unshakeable. Unlike earthly kingdoms, it cannot be destroyed or overthrown (Daniel 7:14; Hebrews 12:28). It endures forever and is the ultimate hope for believers.

It transforms lives and societies, calling for repentance and new birth (John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38). This is why we are characterized as Saints and can no longer be characterized by idolatry. That's why our speech is saturated with praise and thanksgiving because of all that He has done, all that He is doing and for all that is to come! This is why, as beloved children, we get to imitate God, to love and sacrifice for each other.