

God's Treasured Possessions – 1 Peter 2:9
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Union Baptist Church – 10/11/2015

I. INTRODUCTION

Well today we're going to take a short break from our Ephesians study, but what we'll be looking at today is very related to where we left off last week, and to the concept I left you with about the central importance of knowing and understanding the depth of God's love for you personally. We're going to be talking today about the new identity we each have in Christ and how we can learn to walk in that new identity. Whereas you used to be a sinner, you are now a saint and God's very own treasured possession. This will help prepare us for next week in our Ephesians study, where we'll begin examining how we can put on our new self.

So I'm going to start today by telling you a story. This story is what you might call a parable, and it has very important applications to each of us personally, so try to pay attention to the spiritual implications as I share it with you. This is my version of a parable I heard from my pastor many years ago. I'm going to tell you about a young boy named Nigel who lived in a faraway country.

II. PARABLE: THE ORPHAN AND THE KING

Now this boy was born to parents who were making some really bad choices. His dad was heavily involved in illegal activity and was making his living by stealing from other people. He was also almost never around and when he was, he was very cruel and abusive to his whole family. Nigel's mom was very unhappy with her life, as you can imagine, and spent all of her time complaining and feeling sorry for herself and trying everything the world has to offer to try and take away her pain and escape from the misery of her day-to-day life.

Now Nigel was the youngest of six children and the family had very little money to provide for their day-to-day needs. Many times they would go to bed without dinner and there were even days when they got no meals at all. Because of this, they quickly learned to roam about the town and scrounge up any food they

could find even if it meant stealing it. Their mother was so consumed with herself and her problems that she just let Nigel and his brothers and sisters roam free with no rules or boundaries. As you can imagine they developed a lot of bad habits and got into a lot of stuff they shouldn't have gotten into. Lying and stealing became a way of life for Nigel and he actually got quite comfortable with it and it felt normal because that's all he'd ever known.

Now Nigel was about 10 years old when his dad completely disappeared and was never heard from again. His mom had also developed a really bad illness and for a year she was barely hanging on to life. After struggling with the sickness for a year her body finally gave out and she died. Nigel was only 11 years old, while his brothers and sisters were all 16 years old and older by this time.

Life didn't actually change very much for Nigel when his parents were out of the picture, because he had already been taking care of himself for many years and knew exactly how to get what he needed to survive. He just continued on scrounging around town, lying and stealing and doing whatever he needed to do to get food and other things he needed. Fortunately he lived in a place where it was warm all year so he didn't have to worry about having a warm place to be during winter.

Now the country where Nigel lived was ruled not by a president but by a King. And the King that was ruling the country when Nigel was 11 years old was a new King who had only been on the throne for a few months. He had inherited the kingdom from a King who had ruled for many years and had ruled very selfishly. The country was extremely poor and yet that King had built up huge wealth for himself and built lavish palaces and storehouses full of gold and expensive things.

This new King, however, was determined to improve the condition of the country and do everything he could to help the poor people rise out of poverty and become productive citizens. One day the new King decided to drive around his capital city and get an idea of what the needs were and where he needed to focus his efforts. He really wanted to see for himself what things were actually like for everyday people and what challenges needed to be tackled. As he was driving slowly around and making observations he noticed a young boy wandering around alone. His clothes were ragged, his shoes were worn through, and he looked painfully thin.

The king asked his driver to stop the car and then he got out and carefully followed the boy from a distance. The king was dressed in ordinary clothes and had disguised himself so that no one would know who he was. There was just something about this boy that really touched the heart of the king, and he wanted to see what this boy's life was like and if there is anyone taking care of him.

The King followed the boy for several hours and he watched as Nigel skillfully stole food from various places and as he looked through trash bins to find food scraps and as he wandered back to a cardboard box that must've been his home. As the king followed Nigel he asked several people in the food markets if they knew anything about this boy. He was told that the boy had no parents and that he spent his days just wandering around trying to find food to eat. Many of the people selling food knew that Nigel was stealing food from them, but they also knew that he was all alone with no one to provide for him, so they let him steal the food without getting him in trouble.

The king's heart was really troubling him as he watched Nigel and considered how difficult his life was. The king thought about his own life back at the palace as compared to the life of this boy. In that moment he came to a decision. He immediately went to the cardboard box that Nigel had returned to. The people the king had talked to in the market had told him the name of this boy, so he said, "Nigel, may I talk to you for a moment?" Nigel was surprised to hear his name and he came out of his box to see who this was that wanted to talk to him.

The king by this time had taken off his disguise and when Nigel came out he immediately recognized him as the king. Fear gripped him and he fell to his knees. He was sure that he had finally been caught once and for all and that he was going to be hauled off to prison for all the things he had stolen over the years. "I'm so sorry for stealing," he sobbed. "I promise I won't do it any more. Please don't take me to prison!" He started crying uncontrollably.

But the King gently put his hand on Nigel's shoulder and said, "Nigel, that is not why I'm here. I know what you've done and I also know the reasons why you've done these things. I know too, how difficult your life is and how much you've suffered. The reason I am here today is to make you an offer. If you let me, I would like to take you back to my palace and adopt you as my very own son.

You can go from living in this cardboard box and spending all day trying to scrounge up enough food to eat, to living in a castle and never having to worry about where your next meal is going to come from. You can also become a part of my very own family and I will love you like my own son. But I won't force you to do this. It's your choice. What do you think?"

Nigel was in disbelief at the words he heard coming out of the mouth of the King. He sat in silence as he thought about the offer the King had made and tried to decide if it was too good to be true. He dried the tears off his eyes and asked the King to repeat his offer one more time. After a few more moments of awkward silence, he replied to the king, "I will accept your offer even though it seems too good to be true."

The king said, "On my honor as king of this country I promise you that my offer is good and true and will not be withdrawn. I welcome you right now as my own son. Nothing you do now or in the future will change the fact that you are my own beloved son."

The King put his arm around Nigel and led him back to his car. Together they were driven back to the palace of the King, where the King led him to his new room. Nigel's jaw dropped as he looked at the beautiful new room he was to call home. It was beyond anything he had ever imagined. The king left for a moment while Nigel explored his new room and jumped on the bed and did a victory dance. Soon the king returned and handed him a brand-new pair of clothes and sent him to the bathroom to get cleaned up. He was told that dinner would be served at 6:00 pm in the Great Hall. And they lived happily ever after. Well, not quite.

For the first few days Nigel was in a dreamland. He explored every nook and cranny of the castle and kept pinching himself to see if maybe it was all just a dream. The king made a lot of time for him and they spent a lot of happy hours together getting to know each other. But through it all Nigel kept having this unsettling feeling that it was all going to be over at any moment. He just couldn't convince himself that it was all going to last and that he really was the King's son forever.

This fear started to show itself at meals when he would secretly take a few extra rolls to stash away in his pockets. He also had spotted some small items in the castle that were worth a lot of money. When no one was looking he took the items and hid them in a secret place in his room. This secret part of his life started to affect his relationship with the King too. He began to tell small lies to cover his tracks and the King began finding it very hard to get Nigel to talk and open up to him. He started to wonder why Nigel was acting so strangely and seemed uncomfortable whenever they hung out together. Other people in the castle had also begun to notice the missing items. The King had been informed of the situation and everyone was trying to figure out who had been stealing.

One day the king decided to go spend some time with Nigel. He went to his room and asked Nigel to get dressed so they could go on a horseback ride together. As Nigel was getting dressed, the King was wandering around his room while he was waiting. He remembered having this same room when he was a little boy and started thinking about that secret compartment he used to have where he would hide things that he didn't want anyone else to find. He decided to go check it out for old times' sake. As he fumbled around and finally got the secret door open, his heart sank as he saw in the compartment all of the missing items that had been stolen.

At that same instant Nigel came around the corner dressed and ready to go. He immediately saw what had happened and realized that the king had discovered that he was the thief. He took off at a run and made his way out of the castle, out the front gates and started heading with all his strength back to that familiar part of town where he had spent the first 11 years of his life. The King ran after him but was unable to catch him before he disappeared into the narrow streets of the poor part of town. He called his driver and they began driving the streets of town looking desperately for Nigel. Eventually he got out of the car and began walking all around and asking everyone he saw if they had seen Nigel.

The sun went down and still the king looked and looked for Nigel. Finally he sat down on a stone bench on one of the narrow, mazelike streets and rested for a moment. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a movement down one of the dark alleys near where he was sitting. He quietly got up and made his way closer to where he had seen the movement. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness he saw the form of a small person sitting on the ground, hunched over, head hanging

down. He called out softly, "Nigel, is that you?" The person jumped up suddenly and tried to run quickly out of the alley and past the King. But the King's strong arms enclosed him and held him tight. Nigel began to cry and beg for mercy from the King and tell him how sorry he was.

The King just held him tight in an embrace and whispered in his ear, "Nigel, you are my son forever. I love you more than you could ever imagine and nothing you can do will ever separate you from my love. Everything I have is yours now. You don't need to steal anything from me. I have given you all things. You have a new identity now. You're not a thief and a liar anymore. You are a child of the King, given authority and power. All your needs are provided for by me. All I ask is that you accept my love and live in it and allow it to bring you freedom from the old way of life you've lived. Believe me when I say that you are no longer a thief and a liar. You are my very own child."

On hearing those words, Nigel relaxed in the arms of the King and allowed the King to lead him back to the palace. The transformation had begun and he finally, in the smallest way, began to accept the permanence and reality of his new position as the son of the King. As time went on, he began to truly believe and understand the King's deep, unchanging love for him, and that understanding brought freedom from his old habits of lying and stealing to survive. He began to believe in his heart that he truly was a child of the King and that belief began to change the way he lived and the decisions he made. Instead of living in fear and lying and cheating to survive, he learned to live in the power and authority of his position as the King's son.

And my friends, God is calling each of us to this same place...Where we begin to recognize and believe that we truly have a new identity, a new self that God Himself has created for us...Where we realize and experience the deep and personal love of Christ and rest in that love...Where we finally accept that God treasures us and wants to spend time with us and in fact has made us His very own precious children...And where that deep and personal understanding of these truths and the closeness of our love relationship with Christ begins to change the way we think and live and act and treat other people.

III. ONCE A SINNER, NOW A SAINT

Ephesians 2:19 tells us:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household...

You WERE a sinner, but you are now a saint and a member of God's own family.

How do you view yourself today? Do you feel more like a sinner or a saint? Are you stuck in the ways of your old self...holding on to bitterness and continuing to walk in your old and empty ways of protecting yourself and dealing with life? Being a saint doesn't mean that we have reached a state of perfection. It means that because of Christ we have a new identity and have been adopted into God's family. It means that God has poured out His favor on us and set us apart for His purposes.

You see, each of us comes to Christ like Nigel. Trying to survive and cope with life on our own and doing whatever it takes to get what we want or need. And it's easy to continue walking in those ways even after we come to Christ because it's all we've known and it takes time for us to truly accept the new identity we've been given. And sadly, many Christians spend a lot of their lives continuing to walk in these old ways.

But 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 gives us a beautiful contrast between our old identity and the new self we've now been given. Paul says there:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

If we're honest, all of us have struggled with some of these unrighteous things in the past and sometimes we even continue to struggle with them in our new walk with Christ. Has anyone coveted anything lately? Has anyone spent time this

week tearing someone else down or reviling them? These are things we need to and CAN leave behind, but we all fail from time to time. But what's important is that being a covetous person or a reviler or an idolater or a thief is no longer our identity...It's no longer who we are. We are now washed, sanctified and justified through Christ and we are God's very own saints and beloved children and His forever treasured possession. The challenge is to learn to walk in that new identity.

IV. FOUR AMAZING FACTS ABOUT WHO WE NOW ARE IN CHRIST

I want to take you now to 1 Peter 2:9 and share with you four amazing facts about who we now are in Christ. Turn with me there in your Bibles if you would.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

So right off the bat I see four amazing facts in this verse about who we are in Christ:

- 1) We are a chosen race. This means that God has hand-picked us out to be his own people. A race indicates a group of people who are of the same nature, kind or sort. And what do we have in common that makes us one race? We all believe in Jesus Christ and have become the very children of God.
- 2) We are a royal priesthood. Now priests in the Old Testament were men who had been set apart to offer sacrifices and service to God. And what's amazing in the New Testament is that every believer in Christ now becomes part of a spiritual priesthood, where we each have direct access to God AND we offer spiritual sacrifices to God. These sacrifices we offer now are not like the physical sacrifices of animals that priests in the Old Testament offered to God. Instead we offer ourselves to God to be used by Him for his purposes. We say, "God, please guide and direct my life and use me to accomplish your will in the world. Grant me the power to choose the ways of my new self and leave behind the person I've been in the past." We also give him glory and thanks and praise in all that we do, rather than taking credit and glory for ourselves. These sacrifices are acceptable to God

because we have trusted in Jesus Christ and been made new in Him. We don't offer these sacrifices in order to earn salvation or God's approval. We offer them because of our thankfulness to God and as His Spirit inside us changes and gives us the power to do what He asks us to do. Notice also that we are a ROYAL priesthood. We are part of the King's household, offering direct service to the King as members of the royal family.

- 3) We are a holy nation. We have been set apart for God Himself. We have been separated from sin and are now devoted to God himself. Our identity is no longer a miserable sinner. We are now saints, not because our behavior is perfect and we never make mistakes anymore, but because God now sees us as holy because of Jesus' Christ. And we are part of a nation. It's not just us by ourselves, but we are part of a huge body of believers that are all working together as one in God's service.
- 4) We are a people for God's own possession. We are each God's own treasured possession. He values us more than we could ever imagine.

V. WE ARE GOD'S OWN TREASURED POSSESSION

Turn with me in your Bibles now to Ephesians chapter 1, verses 18-19, a passage I covered in my very first message on Ephesians. Here the Apostle Paul is praying that those who have believed in Christ will understand three things. He writes:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

I'd like you to notice in this passage the second thing Paul is praying for here. He's praying that we would understand what are the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints. What we see here is that the saints, you and I, are God's inheritance.

Now an inheritance in human terms is usually something of great value that is most often passed from parents to children. So what this indicates here is that God considers us, as His saints, a very valuable inheritance that He is receiving. And Paul wants us to understand the significance of this. This is an inheritance that God considers to be great riches. We, as God saints who have been given

new life through Christ, are considered to be a glorious inheritance that God is receiving.

What this means is that you and I are God's own treasured possessions. Don't ever lose sight of that fact. It's only in understanding the deep love God has for you, and the extreme value He has placed on you, and the power that He makes available to you through the Holy Spirit, that you can begin to truly live the life that God calls you to live. Without that understanding and that close fellowship with God, Christianity will just be a list of rules that you're trying to keep in order to make God happy. Like Paul I pray that God will help you understand how much God treasures you and how much power he has made available to you as you seek to live as He's designed you to live.

VI. OUR PURPOSE AS TREASURED POSSESSIONS OF GOD

So how do we live our lives in light of this understanding of being one of God's most treasured possessions? What is He calling us to do in our day-to-day lives? Turn back to 1 Peter 2:9 and look at the last part of the verse. It reads:

So that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

We've been given a job to do as God's treasured possessions. Our job is to proclaim the excellencies of our amazing God who has taken us from living in darkness to walking in his perfect light.

Previously we were stumbling around blind, rejected by other people, lost, unable to see and understand truth. But now God has opened our eyes to see the life-changing truth of new life and forgiveness through Jesus Christ and a forever love relationship with our Creator. He has made us his own treasured possession and considers us an extremely valuable inheritance. Now our calling as we live in that love relationship with Him and walk by His power is to proclaim God's excellencies to others.

The word proclaim is interesting in the Greek because it has the meaning of telling something completely to others. Not just giving part of the truth about God, but sharing ALL aspects of God. And it carries with it the idea of shouting it

out and sharing it at every opportunity all around the world. It also indicates celebrating God. So our job is to live our lives in such a way that God is being shouted out everywhere we go and in everything we do.

VII. CONCLUSION

As we close today I want to ask Hailey and Isaac to come up here for a second. In your own lives, what would you describe as your most treasured possessions? Maybe you really love your house, or maybe your man-truck is just the coolest thing ever. Maybe you consider your large retirement account as your most important possession. But I think that if we really boiled down to what our most treasured possessions are, we could probably say that our most treasured of treasured possessions are the things we would be willing to die for.

What would you be willing to run back into a burning house and risk your life for in order to save? I like my car, but I certainly wouldn't be willing to die for it? I have some cool family heirlooms and my photo albums are really important to me, but I wouldn't be willing to die to go save them. But if these two little people were in that burning house, you can bet that I would be willing to do everything I could, including dying, in order to get them out.

Please don't ever forget that that's how God feels about you and He even went to the point of actually dying in order to save you and make you His own dear child. You are His treasured possession and He's given you a new identity and is always there loving you and directing you and inviting you to live in that love and make Him your most treasured possession. When you truly begin to understand and live in that love, choosing the ways of your new self and proclaiming His excellencies to others with your life and actions will flow out of you like a cup running over with water.

You see each of us is in the same situation as our friend, Nigel. We've been adopted by the King. The question is: will we still see ourselves as orphans and sinners who have to lie and cheat and do all sorts of wrong things in order to get what we think we need or what we think will make us happy? Or will we accept our new identity as God's own children, saints who have been given new life and new power and who have been given everything we need for life and godliness and who are forever held in the unchanging love of our God and true Father?

I hope that through what we've studied today, each of us is one step closer to accepting and walking in that new identity God has given us, allowing our minds to grow young again and begin making choices that are consistent with who God has made us to be.