

## **Sermon: Sun 11 August**

### **Ephesians 1.3-14**

Note for leaders: it might be a good idea to bring along some sheets of paper with the text of Eph 1.1-14 printed on it for people to scribble, on as discussed below:

Some possible Small Group questions:

1. Is there a verse or idea that really encourages you from Ephesians 1.3-14; and tell us why.
  - Leaders' note: try to draw people out here, to understand why a verse/idea is important.
2. This passage is a celebration of all that God has done for us in/through Christ. Go through the passage (on the paper provided) and underline every instance of "in Christ" or "in him" or similar - report back, noting each one and what is being described as our lot in Christ.
  - Leaders' note: there are 11 instances, plus "in the one he loves" (1.6). FYI, there are 39 instances of this phrase throughout Ephesians; it is a major theme.
3. The emphasis in this passage is on what God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) has done for us. Go through the passage and underline the verbs (e.g. blessed us, chose us, etc) that describe God's action. Report back to the group, noting all that God has done for us.
4. Why is it important that the very existence of the church, our adoption, redemption and sealing, originates in the eternal will and purposes of God (note explicit reference to this in 1.5,9,11).
5. The church is a central concern of this letter; Ephesians is written to a local church and constantly describes and addresses God's holy people in a corporate sense. Go through and underline all the instances of "we", "us", "our" and "you" in 1.1-14. Report back, saying what each instance says about the church.
  - Leaders' note: all instances of "you" in this passage are 2nd person plural (i.e. "y'all" or "all of you")
6. Phillip talked about how Ephesians calls for a movement from understanding our faith in very personal, individualistic terms (i.e. what God has done for "me"), to seeing ourselves as located within the community of God's people and seeing God's purposes being worked out through that community. Talk about some of the challenges of this transition, especially for highly individualistic Kiwis.
7. The passage calls four times for the church to give praise/glory to God for all He has done for us (1.3, 6, 12, 13), and in fact says that this is God's actual purpose in bringing the church into being (1.12). Why is it so important that God's grace toward us results in praise and honour and glory being given back to Him?
8. Outside of Sunday morning worship, how does the church bring praise and glory to God?

#### **Leaders' Note: Predestination**

It is important to ensure that the evening is not sidetracked by discussions about predestination (and especially its relationship to evangelism &/or free will). If this topic is raised, there are a couple of points to note that arise directly in the passage:

1. Within a Biblical worldview, predestination is a call to worship, to give glory to God (1.11-12). This point is so often lost when talk of predestination descends into theological speculation and disagreement.
2. Paul has no sense of there being a conflict between God's election/predestination, the need for evangelism, and free will. He can, in the same breath (1.11-13), speak of predestination and right alongside that the preaching of the Gospel ("you heard the message of truth") and human response ("we put our hope in Christ... you believed..."). These issues are not in conflict with each other in the Biblical worldview; if we can't understand how they fit together it is OK to acknowledge that (there are limitations to human understanding of the ways of God). The unfathomable benevolence of God toward us is best seen as leading to worship not theological speculation (beyond reasonable limits).