

Praise God That We Are His (And He Is Ours)!

Ephesians 1:11-14

Introduction

Did you know that you are a treasure seeker? In fact, the question is not *if* you are seeking—but *what* you are seeking. God made you to find your treasure ultimately in Him. And that is what the very first human beings did until the serpent convinced them that their treasure was in the Creation rather than the Creator. Ever since then, fallen man has sought treasure in just about everything under the sun. You name it—and people are seeking it. We could spend a lot of time cataloging all the things that people are seeking. But I think that is already pretty obvious. You can essentially boil it down to **four “B”s**: **[Slide 1] Beauty; Brains, Braun, and Bucks**. These are the values that are constantly idolized by fallen human culture. Turn on the TV—and you will see one or more of these featured on any given program or commercial. The message is: If you sufficiently acquire one or more of these—you will like *yourself* and *others* will admire you. The problem with this kind of treasure though is that it has an extremely short shelf life. Today’s hot actress is tomorrow’s “Whose that old woman?” Today’s celebrated athlete is so quickly forgotten—recognized only by people who collect sports cards or who specialize in sports trivia. That is why God told the prophet Jeremiah these words: **[Slide 2]**

“This is what the LORD says:

“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom

or the strong man boast of his strength

or the rich man boast of his riches,

but let him who boasts boast about this:

*that he **understands and knows me.....**” Jeremiah 9:23-24a*

The world thinks that the epitome of success is deciding what your treasure is and then being able to successfully pursue it. But God is saying that *He alone* is our treasure. Do you know what that means? That means that the greatest tragedy in life is not that a person didn’t get to pursue his treasure. Or that he tried and failed to obtain it. It is when a person pursues the *wrong* treasure—and succeeds!! Jesus put it this way: **[Slide 3]**

*What good is it for a man to **gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?** Mark 8:36*

So here is the question I want you to think about tonight. *“What’s in your wallet?”* What is *your treasure*? Remember, we are *all* treasure seekers. But how often do we stop and really ask ourselves: What am I actually seeking? One of the things about our hearts that God points out in Jeremiah 17:9 **[Slide 4]** is that it typically deceives us. When asked—what are you seeking, it is capable of offering the biblically correct answer—even as it carries out a very different agenda. God goes on to say in the very next verse **[Slide 5-Jer. 17:10]** to explain that *He alone* is the heart knower. We don’t even know our own hearts—but He does! And He graciously allows us to understand our wrong thoughts and motives as we examine ourselves through the x-ray vision of His Word **[Slide 6-Hebrews 4:12]**.

Illustration: When your heart desires something, it is operating *so naturally* and *so quickly*, you don't even have to think about it. Let me illustrate. Have you ever picked up a Better Homes and Garden magazine or some circular from Home Depot—and before you know it—you *feel discontent*? There could be as much lust going on in your heart as a person reading a Playboy Magazine. Why? Because all the desires that were in your heart started to activate when you saw that remodeled kitchen or those latest *De Walt* power tools. Unlike pornography which is intrinsically wrong, there is nothing necessarily wrong with those desires. But just like the sexual lusts that drives the craving for pornography, even legitimate desires are always looking for a way to become the *ruling influence* of your heart. And if you let them, those desires will quickly take over and become the functional gods of your life. They will control you and cause you to reorder your priorities and reshape your agenda. So how do you know when that is beginning to happen? What are the telltale signs that desires are becoming idols? [Slide 7]

- When you get a *rush* when you are pursuing them (Isaiah 57:5a—Talks about how the apostate Israelites *burned with desire* for their idols). Example: Cameras. Computers. Cars. What gives you a rush?
- When you *brag* about them more than you boast in the power and goodness of the Living God (Psalm 97:7—where the psalmist rebukes those who boast in their idols). Who do you brag about?
- When you become the *servant* of that idol. (2 Kings 17:12 talks about serving or worshipping idols. But what does that necessitate? Idols are helpless. That means they are a lot of maintenance. And that means you will become emotionally exhausted from all the times you got angry when someone bumps your idol or fearful when something threatens your idol). What desires have you employed in their service? What makes you angry or fearful. Answer that question accurately—and you will probably be staring at one of your heart's idols.
- When you *sacrifice* to your idol. What you serve will eventually demand that you sacrifice to it. In many cases, it was their *own children* that the Israelites sacrificed for their idols (Isaiah 57:5b). Sound familiar?

No all this is going on inside you and you are hardly aware of it. To put it another way, your mind is like a VCR which is actually a series of pictures placed side by side and moving in front of your eyes at the rate of 30 frames per second. This all happens so rapidly that it gives the illusion of motion. But if you take the remote, you can actually freeze frame any picture and notice the subtle differences between each frame. What God's Word does is help you to freeze frame what is going on in your thoughts and motives and begin to break it down and understand what is ruling your life at any given moment.

Where desires—even legitimate desires—are starting to rule your heart and deceive you into looking for the wrong treasure, the Word of God is able to help you repent and redirect your thoughts and motives toward the *One True Treasure* of your heart.

That is what this Ephesians 1:3-14 is all about. It is showing you your *real treasure*. It is calling you to give up pursuing the cheap costume jewelry of your own desires for the incredible treasure you have in Christ! But before we read it, let's pray and ask the Lord to open our eyes to His treasure. **[PRAY]**.

[Slide 8] C.S. Lewis once lamented that our biggest problem is not that we are so dissatisfied—but that we are too easily satisfied with the wrong things. I remember when I was younger, I found it easy to be satisfied by things that really had little value. **[Slide 9]**. Like when I would go to the store with my mom and would always bug her to give me a quarter so I could put it in one of the machines and get candy or some trinkets. **[Slide 10]** There was always the thrill of putting that quarter in and wondering what treasure would come tumbling into my hands. **[Slide 11]** My kids aren't much different. **[Slides 12-14]**. Even though they are starting to grow out of those years, they still enjoy a little “treasure” now and then.

But what may be tolerable and even normal in children becomes a tragedy in an adult. For when an adult is dazzled by what is essentially junk, he or she misses the beauty of the real treasure—of which the junk treasure was at best a *cheap* imitation. One of my jobs as a parent is to teach them to appreciate the things that are truly valuable **[Slide 15-21. Move through these quickly]**. Not that they will ever possess much of this sort of jewelry stuff in their lifetime—but to appreciate the exquisite beauty of real treasure! And to mature in their sense of what is ultimately valuable.

We are no different when it comes to the things we live for and the treasure we seek. While Jesus commends childlike faith, he does not encourage childlike discernment. He tells us to aim for the treasure in heaven. Paul tells us to set our hearts on things above. Here in Ephesians, He explicitly tells us about the treasures we have in Christ. Just listen to these diamonds of God's radiant treasures He has given us:

Ephesians 1:3-14:

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. **[Slide 22]** 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. **[Slide 23]** In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. **[Slide 24]** 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. **[Slide 25]** 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. **[Slide 26]** 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, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having

believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. **[Slide 27]**

Did you catch any of that? That is some treasure! Unfortunately we read over such texts so quickly that we don't even begin to absorb all that it means. So let's review. Paul writing this section in the form of a praise hymn is praising the triune God for all He has done for us. He begins in verse 4:

[Slide 28] Praise God for election. Praise Him for choosing us! Sin had so badly damaged us—we never would have chosen Him had He not chosen us. We'd still be gawking at the junk jewelry! In verse 5, Paul continues:

[Slide 29] Praise God for adoption. Praise Him that He not only chose us, but that He chose us to be His sons—with all the rights and privileges of our firstborn brother, the Lord Jesus Christ! We aren't just servants saved from wrath—we are God's dearly loved sons and daughters! In verse 7, Paul continues:

[Slide 30] Praise God for redemption. Praise Him that He has saved us from the penalty of our sin. That He sent His son to give His life and to become our scapegoat, thereby completely removing the penalty of our sin—and guaranteeing victory over the power of sin—and eventually removing us from the presence of sin. In verse 9, Paul continues:

[Slide 31] Praise God for His amazing plan. Praise Him for writing the script and staying with the script that from beginning to end has Jesus Christ as the main character, the hero, our Savior and King. Praise Him for a story with more than a happy ending—but that is itself *unending* and will go on for eternity the very refrain we hear three times in this passage—*To the praise of His glory!*

But before we look at the last jewel in this treasure, I want to ask you another question. What have you been treasuring lately? How has this treasure been impacting you? Have you even allowed it to impact you this week? Some of you may be thinking—well I took down a few notes. And we talked about it a couple of times at home. And I have even personally thanked God for His redemption and His amazing plan a couple of times recently.

That's good. But have you made these treasures *your treasure*? Have you allowed them to engage you in a way that they became more than abstract concepts? Where you personalized them and made them *yours*? Remember what I said earlier in the message. Everyone is a treasure seeker. Everyone! You cannot be seeking treasure and be human—or alive. In this sin-cursed world, there is a tug of war going on in your heart and it involves the rope of your affections. God gives us passages like this to pull our affections toward Him and all that He has done. To move these truths from doctrine to devotion. From concept to worship. How? I want to steal a page from the OT. You remember in the OT, the Israelites frequently were seduced by the false gods of the Canaanite people that dwelled around them in the Promise Land. Probably the peak of this idolatry came during

the reign of Aha and his pagan wife, Jezebel, who introduced a very aggressive Baal worship. One day, the prophet Elijah announced a showdown—a contest between Baal and Jehovah. And on that day, Baal got completely outclassed. God showed himself to be the One True God as He rained down fire from heaven and completely consumed the sacrifices that Elijah had set up before Him.

I am not suggesting you build an altar. I am suggesting that you have a contest between the desires that struggle for the control of your heart—and your personal knowledge of the Living God. How do you do that?

You take these truths about God and you begin to compare them with the attributes and promises that your desires try to use to enlist your worship. Remember—your heart is deceitful. Your desires are deceitful (Eph. 4:22). They always oversell themselves. They are like ads that promise you beachfront property in Florida—which you find out later to be some alligator infested piece of ground just outside the Everglades.

Let's try an example or two:

1. You are going absolutely stir crazy with cabin fever. You have never seen so much snow in a winter and you think you are going to freak out if you even dream about another snowflake. But not to worry. You have been saving a little money and in a couple of weeks, you are going off to warm places where you can mock the snow by laying out in the sun, building little sand castles with your kids, eating out at a couple of 5 star restaurants with your spouse. And you absolutely can't wait. You are even secretly praying that if the Lord was planning to come back this week—that He would hold off until April! Then this week, all hell breaks loose with your budget. First one of the kids falls down and totally messes up his braces—and you had already met your dental deductible. Cost: \$2,000. Wow. But you say: We can still do it. We'll cut out the one day fishing excursion. And we'll eat out at MacDonalds a few more times than we planned. We can still do it. But then on Thursday, the engine in your mini-van dies and it is one year past warranty. And the cost to repair it is looking like \$4,000. As the guy at the service department tells you this, you aren't even listening. You are watching your dream vacation sink slowly in the sunset.

And being the devotee that you are to this desire, you have a little praise service on the way home. But it doesn't sound like praise. It sounds like anger and frustration as you argue with God about *His* messing with *your* vacation! God why this? Why me? Why now? We really needed this vacation! And for the next two days, you are impatient, irritable and downright ornery with everyone from the boss at work right down to the dog you kick at home.

That is when you need to wrestle with these promises and like Jacob, not let go until you get a blessing. What needs to happen is a contest between the idol vacation—and the One True God. Call it a beauty contest if you like. And as you do, watch your vacation come down the runway and honestly look at her

attributes. Oh vacation—you really are pretty. I love to lie down and the beach and feel the warmth of the sun on my back. I love fun memories with the family. You really are a lot of fun. Then take a long look at all that God has done for you in Christ has Paul has recorded it here. NO vacation chose you before the foundation of the world. In fact, the god Vacation made you pay a lot—perhaps in interest if you also used the god of credit to pay the vacation god. But God chose you! NO vacation ever adopted you into a family and gave you all the rights and privileges of a family member. But God did! No vacation ever laid down its life for you and redeemed you from sin in every form. But Jesus did. No vacation ever offered you the hope that no matter what happened—*all* your necessary provisions would be covered—totally guaranteed! But the God of an amazing plan has. If you are creative, you can even learn to mock the idol of vacation like Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal. Hey vacation, you're pretty cool. But will you come and escort me when I die? Will you be there to take me to heaven? Will your ticket be able to get me to the gates of a city more beautiful than anything I have seen in your travel guides? Will you have someone there waiting for me who has connections with the ruler of *that* city? THIS IS REAL STUFF, FOLKS!

The problem is—we don't take the time to read the fine print either way. We ignore the fine print of our desires for a vacation and expect it to take on godlike features. And we ignore the details of what we have in Christ—and therefore miss all that He could be to us when the vacation doesn't meet our expectations. *So have a beauty contest.* And ask the Lord to give you eyes to see who He is and what He has done. The competition will be absolutely no match for *His* beauty. It will eventually prove to be junk jewelry. But His promises are like diamonds! And you can do the same thing with any desire that would try to take over the throne of your heart and give you a reason to give up on pursuing your treasure in Christ.

Example: Desire for peace and quiet after a long day at work.

I trust you get the idea behind this. These truths are wonderful. But they are not yours until you own them—until you make them personal. That is where you start to catch a glimpse of their beauty. That is when you start getting excited like a fan watching a slam dunk contest. That is when God begins to dazzle you with all that He *alone* is!

But there is one more praise in this section I want to touch on for a couple of minutes—just before we observe the Lord's Table. [Slide 32]. In verses 11-14, Paul says: Praise God that we are *His* possession! Look again at verse 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....” The NIV translation does not entirely capture that first phrase. [Slide 33] Let me read it in the New English Translation or the NET Bible: *“In Christ we too have been claimed as God's own possession.”* [Slide 34] In Deuteronomy 32:8-9, God states:

8 When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
when he divided all mankind,
he set up boundaries for the peoples
according to the number of the sons of Israel (or sons of God acc. to LXX and Qumran).
9 For the ***LORD's portion is his people,***
Jacob his allotted inheritance.

An incredible verse. It is saying that God divided the people's of the earth and placed them under the jurisdiction of His heavenly assembly. But Israel was His *special* possession. Israel uniquely belonged to God. Paul is noting that. But then note what he quickly adds in verse 13:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.....”

Not just Jews, but Gentiles. All who are in Christ are the special possession of God! How is that a *blessing*?

Illustration: [Slide 35] Back in the 70's and 80's there was a very popular trend. “Property of” T-Shirts.