

## The God Who Kneels

Ephesians 1:1-14

This morning we're starting a sermon series on the Book of Ephesians. **We're calling the series simply 'Worthy'.**



The title of the series comes from Ephesians 4:1, "Lead a life **worthy** of the calling to which you were called." That word "worthy" is the very interesting Greek word, "Axios." This word has a lot going for it, including the way it looks in all capital Greek letters. Check it out.



Axios mean's "worthy"



When I showed this Greek word to Aaron Larson, our new Director of Singles Ministry, he jumped up out of his seat and said, "Dude, that's awesome! That's gonna be my new tattoo. I need to talk with my wife."

It's does look super cool in Greek but I'm pretty sure it wasn't just the way it looks in Greek that got Aaron all fired up about having it tattooed on his body. Aaron was all fired up because of what "axios" means.



Today we're starting a twelve-week sermon series on the Book of Ephesians and right in the middle of that letter from the apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus he uses this word "worthy". Ephesians 4:1 says, "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you were called." Over the next twelve weeks we're going to unpack what that means. How do we live lives that are worthy of what has been done for us in Jesus Christ?

The first half of the book of Ephesians is about how we are made worthy of being in a relationship with an absolutely good, glorious and holy God. And the second half of the book is about how we live lives that reflect that we are really beginning to understand the magnitude of what has been done for us in Jesus Christ.

I think I'm like a lot of people. I bristle at the notion that I need to be "made worthy". It think I'm a pretty good guy. I do a lot of good things for people. If anyone should be worthy, in and of himself, it ought to be me. I'm a pastor. But if I go down that path, if I don't grapple with the fact that in and of myself I'm not worthy to be in a relationship with God, I will never understand what God has done for me and is calling me to be and to do.

It's true that every human being is of tremendous value to God. We are worth a lot to God. Every single person who has ever lived or is living or will live in the future on this planet is of tremendous worth to God. Every single one of us, after all, is created in the image of God. But it is only Jesus Christ who can make us worthy to live in the loving, holy presence of our God. If we don't understand this, we will not understand almost everything else Paul says in this book. If we miss this critical point in our understanding of the gospel we will miss the life Christ has envisioned for us.

I don't know whether you know this or not, but the gospel of Jesus Christ is first bad news before it is good news. The bad news is that we have a need we can't fix on our own. If you and I will stop and think about that for just a few minutes, if we will be honest with ourselves we know, and we have always known, that there is something not quite right at the core of who we are. Sometimes we don't let ourselves entertain that fact. We only see the evidence of that nagging reality in the ways we're living our lives. All of us, to some degree or another, try to make ourselves worthy, and we do that through all sorts of strategies.

We take good things like our work, our families, our achievements and try to make them ultimate things in order to establish our worthiness. "Hey, look dad, here's my report card. See, I am worth something." "Hey, mom, I cleaned my room, I put the dishes in the dishwasher, I took out the trash, I'm deserving of your thanks, your affirmation, your love. Or I've at least earned the right for you to no longer be ticked off with me." Our grades, our academic achievements, our financial success, getting married, having children are all good things but when we use them to establish our fundamental worthiness we're in for

trouble. Those are all good things but when we take good things and turn them into ultimate things in order to prove that we are indeed worthy of being included, of being respected, of being loved and accepted by others, those things cannot bear the weight of what's going on at the core of who we are. We end up crushing some really good things when we seek to establish our ultimate worth from those things.

I co-lead a Monday night college-aged group with Chris and Gloria Shomo and some fantastic young adults. We meet almost every week at the Shomo's home in Town. On one Monday night we were all super excited about heading out to the backyard to play what is, in my humble opinion, the best backyard game ever invented. You'll have to ask me later about that amazing game created by the Vikings!

I had taken my shoes off when I entered the Shomo's house so I needed to put them back on to go out in the backyard. I still have a lot of mainland-friendly shoes. You know the ones with shoelaces. I do own some slippers but no slip on shoes. So I decided I needed to sit down to put my shoes back on to go outside. I was so excited to get out in the backyard that I decided it was a good idea for me to sit down on the Shomo's particle board slipper rack by the front door. This slipper rack was great as long as it was used for the purpose for which it was created. It was designed to neatly store a couple of pairs of slippers at the front door. It was not designed to be a bench for adults to sit on. It had a good purpose. I tried to make it do something it wasn't designed to do. And I crushed it. I smashed it to smithereens. As I sat on the floor surrounded by the remains of the slipper rack, all of a sudden I realized that everyone was staring at me. Gloria Shomo, who is one of the kindest, most gracious people I know just looked at me trying to figure out what just happened. Who in their right mind would sit on a tiny slipper rack? Well you're looking at a person who would try and sit on a slipper rack. For the next 30 minutes I replayed the destruction of the useful piece of furniture in my head and I couldn't stop laughing. I was embarrassed that I had done something that stupid. And it cracked me up because it is always hilarious to see a pastor destroy some furniture in a church member's home.

Here's my point. The slipper rack was designed for a good purpose. It was not designed to hold the full weight of my life. When I decided to test its capacity to hold my weight, I crushed it. That's what we do with other really good things in our lives. We try to put the full weight of our lives down on our jobs, our relationships, on marriages, on children, on academic success, on athletic prowess, on good looks and a ton of other things. And eventually, every single time we end up crushing those things because they were not designed to hold the weight of our lives. In an attempt to establish our worthiness we end up crushing a lot of really good things. Parents crush children when they try to establish their worth through the achievements of their kids. Women and men burn out by working 60, 70, 80 hours a week in an attempt to get recognized by their employer. None of those good things, children, spouses, friends, work, athletic achievement can bear the weight of our lives. Those good things cannot resolve the crisis at the core of our lives, which is a wild hunt for a sense of value and worth.

Here's the genius of the gospel. Jesus Christ makes us worthy. What he's done on the cross on our behalf is transferred to us, as a gift, and we are made worthy when we entrust our lives to him. If we build our lives on the worthiness that Christ gives us then we can live lives of greater love, service, freedom and joy. It is Christ and Christ alone who can make us worthy. It's that realization that got Aaron Larson so fired up about the word "axios". It's the realization that Jesus Christ has made him "worthy" that made Aaron want to have that word tattooed on his body. Jesus Christ has made him worthy. It's not about anything Aaron's done. Jesus Christ has declared him and made him worthy.

The book of Ephesians pivots around this word "worthy". In broad general terms, the book of Ephesians is divided into two parts. Paul is going to first tell us who we are in Christ. This is our true identity. Christ

has made us worthy to be in a relationship with God. We are not worthy until Christ does that. We cannot make ourselves worthy of being in relationship with a perfect, holy God. That's the penultimate word of the gospel. That's the second to last word of the gospel. It's bad news. We need to hear that bad news because it's the foundation for our ultimate liberation. If we can hear the bad news of the gospel we can begin to stop trying to make ourselves worthy on our own because we can't. We can start to build our lives, our relationships, our work on the last word of the gospel, which is good news. It's the best news the world has ever heard. Christ can make us worthy. He can settle that question once and for all. In him we are worthy. Period. Done.

I was talking with a friend of mine the other day and he said, "It's like becoming a husband or a dad (he's become both those things in the last year). At some point he was neither of those things. Then he got married and boom, he's this thing called a husband. Then he and his wife got pregnant and 9 months later he's dad. There was a point in time when he became a husband and there was a point in time when he became a dad. That is who he is. That's his identity. It's settled. He's a husband. He's a father. He told me that when those realities dawned on him, he realized he has no idea of how to be either one of those things. (I know that's not totally the truth in his case). He is now going to spend the rest of his life, learning what it means to be something he already is. That's exactly what Paul is talking about in his letter to the Ephesians. Jesus makes us worthy to be in a relationship with God as a sheer gift of grace and now we will spend the rest of our lives learning how to live our lives in ways that reflect that Christ has indeed made us worthy.



The image we're using for this sermon series is a painting by Ford Madox Brown, a 19th century English painter. It's called Jesus Washing Peter's Feet. I find this painting evocative of what stands at the heart of the book of Ephesians. Jesus will make Peter worthy by his act of service on the cross. When he washes his disciples feet on the night before he is crucified, Jesus is pointing to what he's going to do to make Peter worthy of a relationship with God.





I love the focus, and the love with which Jesus washes Peter's feet in this painting.



I also love the confusion on Peter's face. He's struggling to receive this act of service and yet Peter sits there and allows Jesus to serve him in this way. Some of you have had this same look on your face this morning as I've been talking.



I also love all the other responses of the disciples in this painting especially the one on the left. Could this be John?



That young guy in the painting is already unlacing his sandals to get ready for his turn to have his feet washed. Some of you are unlacing your shoes or kicking off your slippers already. You're eager. You're ready for Christ to declare you worthy.

One of the many things that has impressed me about the LDP students and graduates that I've met though our association with Compassion International is the deep gratitude each of them seem to have for what has been done for them.

Michelle Tolentino, who grew up as a Compassion child in the Philippines and then went to college as student in Compassion's Leadership Development Program has grown into a remarkable disciple of Christ. Michelle, like so many other LDP graduates that I've met, has such deep gratitude for what others have done for her. And that gratitude is leading Michelle and others to live generous lives of service. They know they have received so much and they can't do anything else but find ways to give back to others.

I think many of the graduates of the LDP program reflect the main theme of the Book of Ephesians. They recognize what has been done for them in the name of Christ and they are now seeking to live a life that is worthy of the gift that has been given to them. It is a generosity that is born, not only because of the gifts and the support they have received from their sponsors, though that is super important. It's the life they have found in Christ that shapes and motivates their lives.

In February of this year, Michelle Tolentino, Chris Kanemura and I led a short-term mission team from our church to the Philippines to learn more about the ministry of Made in Hope. Made in Hope partners with local ministries seeking to care for children and women caught up in human trafficking. At the end of that trip, Michelle Tolentino and her good friend Raf, who is also a graduate of Compassion LDP program, organized and led a conference for pastors and ministry leaders in Davao City, in Mindanao. The hearts of these two women amazed me. These are two of the strongest, most focused and generous disciples that I know. I want to give you a window into a heart that has been shaped by gratitude for what Jesus Christ has done for her. Here's a brief video that describes a little bit of what our team did in the Philippines this last February. **(Show Made in Hope video.)**

That's what a life of gratitude looks like. That's why it is so important that all of us, who are followers of Christ, understand what has been done and is being done and will be done for us in Christ. We are not worthy in and of ourselves. Only Christ can make us worthy and he does that as a sheer act of grace. It's a gift we receive when we simply ask Christ to come into our lives. Don't miss this step. You cannot grow as a follower of Jesus until you understand that only Christ can and has made you worthy to be in a relationship with the Living God.

OK. Let's take a quick look at today's text. In the first 14 verse of chapter 1 the Apostle Paul make some incredible statements. He tells those who have entrusted their lives to Christ, that God has blessed them with EVERY spiritual blessing that God has to give. Not just some of the spiritual blessings he has to give. EVERY spiritual blessing. And WHERE has he blessed them? In the only place where those spiritual blessings can be found: IN CHRIST. God has made us, who once were not worthy of these blessings, worthy of them and that is completely the work of Jesus.

In Greek, verses 3-14 is one long sentence. Again and again as Paul makes the point that God has a plan and that plan for the world is Jesus Christ, Paul reminds us that these spiritual blessings are available in only one place: in Christ.

Eph. 1:3 **Blessed be** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed us, (WHERE?) in Christ** with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places, 4 just as **he chose us in Christ** before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 **He destined us for adoption as his children (literally, his sons) through Jesus Christ (I'll explain that in a minute)**, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us **in the Beloved**.

In verse 5 Paul says that we have been adopted as his children. Literally it is that he adopted us, women and men, as his sons. I'm and advocate for the use of inclusive language, so that men and women are

rightfully included. The literal translation of this verse is actually radically inclusive. When Paul wrote these words, only sons could inherit the family's wealth. So when he says, that both women and men have been adopted by God as sons he is saying something that upended the culture of his day. God has adopted men and women, boys and girls to belong to him and to be heirs of all that he has. That's the gospel of Jesus Christ. Men and women are co-heirs with Christ. They are equal before God. Don't forget that. You're going to need that later in the book of Ephesians.

Verse 7 **In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things **in him**, things in heaven and things on earth.

The world may seem out of control but Paul tells us that God has a plan and that plan is Jesus Christ.

Verse 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 **In him** you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

In him, in Christ we are made worthy. Only in Christ can we be made worthy of all the spiritual blessings that God has to give. That stands in radical contrast to what first century Jews believed and what our culture affirms today. We live in a culture of merit. We think we are worthy when we earn it. But the problem with that is that we can never do enough to merit the worthiness we long for.



I've called this sermon, The God Who Kneels because that is exactly what God has done in Jesus Christ in order to make us worthy. He has knelt down and served us. He has come all the way down from his glory in the heavens and shown us who he is, a servant. If you have entrusted your life to Jesus Christ, God has made you worthy and you can put the full weight of your life down on Christ and he will hold you up. You can't crush him. He's no slipper rack. He's a rock that can support the weight of your life and mine. By the way, I bought the Shomo's a new slipper rack and you CAN sit down on this one without crushing it.

Are you tired of trying to establish your worth through everything else but Jesus Christ? You can stop doing that. All you need to do is admit that there is something not quite right at the center of who you are. You can acknowledge the fact that you've been trying to establish your worth through your relationships, your job, your achievements, your looks. Those good things can't bear the weight of your life. But Jesus Christ can. You can entrust yourself to him and when you do, he will call you worthy.

Pray.