



Love Incorruptible
“#1 - In Christ”
Sunday, April 23, 2017
Courage Church, Detroit, MI

We are so excited to announce that we have finally closed on our first Courage Church ministry house!

To some of you, this may seem like not that big of a deal... but others of you in here know, this is a REALLY BIG DEAL. This is the first MAJOR STEP in the direction that our church is

moving, and one that did not come easy at all.

It has been 15 months... we have been raising money, and looking at properties, trying to find the right place for 15 months, which has honestly been challenging... Its hard, when you think you have a clear as day picture of what is supposed to happen, and you cast the vision, and even get people to be a part of it... and then keeping that vision alive through seasons of constantly wondering:

“is this EVER going to happen?”

It has been a lot... but today, we own, in cash, with no mortgage or owing any money to any man, our first two unit property and side lot, and we couldn't be more excited... which brings me to the last thing before we really dive in today... WE HAVE A LOT TO CELEBRATE!

please please come on out for Team Night this Thursday. When we say “Team Night” WE MEAN YOU! We want you to be a part of our team even if you aren't on it yet... It is going to be an evening where you will get to hear some of the vision for the upcoming months from Dawn and I, and you will get to hear from different ministry leaders in our church, and kind of figure out “where do I fit in all of this”

because there are tons and tons of places and ways to get involved.

And really, Thursday is going to be a celebration. A celebration that we finally got our house that we have been working toward for 15 months... a celebration that God has been moving in many mighty ways on our behalf here. And there will be lasagna! 7pm. Get there!!!

Now...

Lets get into it!

We are starting a new series today, about the book of Ephesians.

There is something very powerful about this book, and something incredibly timely about this, I feel, in our world right now. In fact, I was texting Pastor Brad in New York today, when he posted something online about how he is studying Ephesians... and it turns out, they are starting a series on the book out there this week too. We didn't plan that, but hopefully we can connect some on it for future weeks which I am excited about.

Ephesians covers a wide range of things, and over the next while, we will go over just about all of them!!! but one of the words that could really summarize the whole book is the word "identity."

You see, we have an identity problem in our world.

and we have it in our *churches*.

and so often, when someone comes into this place, or wants to talk to a Christian and confess their "sins" to them, or whatever... what we tend to do is immediately focus on that thing... that "sin" and we try and work people through behavior modification thinking that "if they can just change the way that they ACT, then their lives will change..."

but the root of so many problems can not be weeded out by changing your behavior... because who you are is always there, whether you mask it or not. The real issue is people don't know who they are!

Even Christians!

They don't know who they are... they don't know what they are worth!

Its an identity issue.

We find our worth in the things that we tangibly accomplish or don't accomplish on this earth. Take me for example... and today I can share this as a "testimony" but many of you have heard me say it as I was walking through it as well... We wanted to get that house.

and I was riding high when we raised the money... I was feeling like the king of the world, like "we are going to DO SOMETHING!"

but then when deal after deal fell through, seriously, I got so down on myself that I was a little depressed. I felt like a liar... I questioned the vision that God gave us... and I felt a bit like a worthless pastor at times...

now that we have it, I think because of that, I can honestly say that God is working, and having the house or NOT having the house does not define who I am...

When I sin... when I screw up... I feel worthless. I feel incompetent to be a pastor at this church... not always... but sometimes... because what I am doing is, I am putting my worth in what I DO. and when things seem like they are not working... I do the same thing... I let myself take the blame...

But what Ephesians says, is that my identity is not found in houses, churches, messages, music, art, and even Godly behavior. It is found in Jesus.

and no book of the bible is more clear about this, than Ephesians. So lets study it!

Most weeks of this thing, we will take on one section at a time in the same way that we did the sermon on the mount last year...

but, today is going to be a little bit different. It will be a bit of introduction and we will jump around more throughout the book.

Mainly, we are going to look at the first four verses of the letter, and the very last four verses on the entire thing... and I will lay a little bit of groundwork for the book, then next week we will begin plowing through it section by section.

Ephesians 1:1-4

Paul, an *apostle* of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

That is how Ephesians starts... Now, turn to the very end of Ephesians...

and lets read how it ends:

Ephesians 6:21-24:

Final Greetings

²¹ So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.

²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may *encourage your hearts*.

²³ Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with **love incorruptible**.

note: Tychicus pronounced: (Tick-e-kiss)

We are naming this series based off the very last thing that Paul says in this book... we are calling it:

Love Incorruptible.

lets pray

It was from the confines of a prison, most likely in Rome, that Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was a hub city... it was was the most important cultural and religious center in Asia Minor, it was one of those cities that set culture, if you will... one author (Mark Driscoll) said it this way: "If Rome was New York City, Ephesus would be Los Angeles"

They would go on to build a huge library there called the library of Celsus - which now in recent years has actually been rebuilt, and you can go visit there and take your picture in front of it.

But Paul is writing to a church in a city that was ahead of its time. So they had a lot to be proud of. A lot to boast in. And a lot to be led astray by! Their was so much idol worship there, it was ridiculous.

It was home to one of the wonders of the ancient world, a temple built to a goddess named "Diana" - known as the temple of Artemis... which was a hub for strange "spiritual activity" - but it was huge! When it was built it was one of the largest buildings in the world!!!

This was not country living... This was a city... they were in the thick of it all.

but I want you to notice something about these final greetings... Paul says that the reason he sent Tychicus was to *encourage their hearts*. It wasn't to condemn them... it wasn't to tell them that things will never get better... it wasn't to put some huge guilt trip on them and a bunch of heavy burdens on them... it was to encourage them in their faith... and to encourage them to keep loving each other and to keep loving Jesus with an incorruptible love.

And I want to look at this from the very beginning, because we are going to get into some pretty heavy stuff over the next couple of months studying this letter to this church in this oh so important city of the world... but its sandwiched by these great words at the beginning telling us that we have been given EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING... and then ending the book by saying “just keep loving.”

Keep going with that “love” thing. Because when life gets tough, love will hold it together. When things fall apart, love is the ONE you can cling too...

When your entire city gets destroyed, Ephesus, in 263 A.D. (because it did) - you are going to need something bigger to hold on to than just the industries your city thought made it invincible, and your false gods who can't hear you...

and your fancy library that is now collapsed...

or your temple of Artemis, that would be destroyed, and then rebuilt, and then destroyed again, and rebuilt... and then destroyed again forever (in 401 AD).

because all that stuff rots... it decays... it burns. They saw it in Ephesus and we see it in Detroit. Strong communities are not built around the things that they have or they do not have, they are held together by their genuine love for the people who are a part of it...

as 1 Corinthians 13 says, LOVE NEVER FAILS. So Paul ends this whole book by saying “keep loving each other, and LOVE GOD, with LOVE INCORRUPTIBLE.

This word “incorruptible” is not a word that is used much. There is not a really Hebrew equivalent for it, and its only used a small handful of times in the bible.

and what it means is: “the inability of an organic substance to breakdown or decay” - or another way it is defined is: “not subject to death or decay”

Think about how significant this is!

We already know love never fails... love by itself.

So now add to something that *never* fails, this word incorruptible... something that can't die... something that is not subject to decaying... to rotting. To losing its fire...

Paul is saying that there is a love that will never, ever waver. Its so strong, that it absolutely can not be broken. And that is the kind of love we must have. That is the end of the whole book. Thats the conclusion. Not just love. Love that is not even capable of dying.

But you will NEVER be able to understand a love like that, if you don't first understand WHO YOU YOURSELF ARE, and what JESUS DID TO MAKE YOU THAT!

Look again at how Paul starts Ephesians:

Paul, an *apostle* of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places

Before He ever tells Ephesus that they need to love with love incorruptible, first Paul tells them Jesus LOVED YOU THAT WAY! --- "JESUS GAVE YOU EVERYTHING!"

You have it all!

You are blessed!

and it is not because of anything have you have done! Its all because of Jesus... There is a very specific phrase that Paul uses in Ephesians over and over... and it is the phrase "in Christ" - in fact, He uses these two words together or a very similar variation like this 43 times in these 6 short

chapters. (depending on your translation) - meaning 43 times He explains that it is by what Jesus did, that we have our power... it is by what Jesus did that we can know right from wrong, and have healthy lives... and have eternal salvation...

There is nothing that you have done or could do that could ever merit these things, it is not because you deserve it... but Paul is so consistent to say "look at what Jesus did for you!"

Its amazing.

See, this is what Paul does with the book of Ephesians. It is broken up into 6 chapters... chapters 4-6, you will see when we get there, are probably the most practical books in the entire bible for what the Christian walk is all about, and it really is amazing.

There is A LOT in there about the church. About the job of the church, and the parts of the church...we will spend a lot of time on that in coming weeks because it should SHAPE HOW WE LIVE... there is A LOT in there about marriage, and about how marriage relates to the church. There is a lot in there about anger. and handling problems among communities, and not letting the wrong words come out of our mouths.

There is a lot in there about the type of lives Christians should live, There is stuff in there about guarding what we let into our minds. There is stuff in there about parenting, and that relationship between child and parents... and relationships between employers and employees in the workplace.

The famous passage about "The Armor of God" is even in there... the things that you do to prepare for going to battle in the spiritual realm.

It is just totally practical stuff that we will have a good time going over...

But you don't get to a single practical thing until chapter 4.

Before He ever told them how to act... he told them WHO THEY ARE.

Chapter 1-3 is all about Jesus. It is all about Salvation. It is all about being chosen.

It is ALL ABOUT WHAT JESUS DID FOR YOU!!!

Before you get into anything that you can do to live FOR GOD, which will make your life way better here on earth... before any of that, Paul takes half the book just to remind the Ephesians just what Jesus did FOR THEM.

Its almost as if Paul knows that *before* you can ever really start living life in an intentional and practical way for God and toward others, first you need to know what Jesus did for you.

Because truthfully, apart from the gospel, in the scheme of it all, what good is it to resist evil? Why not live how you want... What good is it to restrain your anger? 100 years from now, why does any of that matter, if there is no gospel?

and because we don't completely understand the gospel sometimes even now... we still let those things into our lives because we forget that we are children of God. We have an identity problem... did you notice, that the first time that Paul addresses the church here, He calls them "saints?"

Not because they are perfect... because they aren't... but because they are "In Christ." Your identity has to be completely wrapped up in Christ if you will ever live out the practical things to come in the second half of the book.

Not only that... but the things Paul describes in chapters 4-6 are completely impossible without chapters 1-3... without salvation by grace alone, through Jesus Christ... but with Christ, we are totally empowered to live the best kind of lives!

So Paul takes the first three chapters to talk about what Jesus did for us... Chapter one teaches about about salvation, the way that God see's it... kind of from His perspective... and His unending love for us.

Chapter two changes it up, and makes it more about us... and shows us how without grace we are all dead in our sins... and we are following the course of this world.

Chapter three actually ends with a prayer for spiritual strength, and I think it is so appropriate... because that prayer ends like this: (3:20-21)

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

We all know this verse... we love this verse... Jesus can do anything! But what is so amazing about it, is IT IS THE CONCLUSION to this huge section that says "Jesus ALREADY DID EVERYTHING"

if you realize the gravity of what the first half of the book says... you realize, "of course Jesus can do anything... He overcame the cross... He overcame the grave..." - He has already done exceedingly more than we could even hope or think...

and it ends the way any prayer would end, with the word: AMEN.

This has come to a close. This amazing description of just how much Jesus did for you, on account of nothing at all that you did, but simply because God looked down on man... on broken people, who hurt each other... and betray each other, and kill each other... who deny God by their words and by their lives... who even put Jesus Christ himself on the cross and killed Him...

He looked down at our broken worlds here in Detroit,

and said He: they are worth it.

They are worth it. You are worth it... somehow, I was worth it. We didn't deserve it... but we were worth it to Jesus... and there is nothing more powerful in all the world to put your identity in than that... Jesus says YOU ARE WORTH IT... and He said with His life.

“I *can* do it, and I *did* do it, because they are worth it.”

and that is the FINAL word.

Then chapter 4 begins with this word:

THEREFORE.

Because of everything Jesus did... now that you COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND THAT... lets gets to you.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4:1-3)

Because of all that Jesus did for you, I URGE YOU... walk in a manner worthy of it. Walk in a manner that is reflective of Jesus...

walk with gentleness... with humility... with long suffering...

bearing with one another in love... EAGER TO MAINTAIN UNITY.

How good is that?

Bearing with one another in love... LOVE INCORRUPTIBLE...
when someone else is driving you crazy... bear with them in love...
when someone is struggling with something, bear with them in love...
when someone you are in community with has hurt you... bear with them in love.

be patient... be gentle... be eager to maintain UNITY because even though we are different parts, we are part of the same body... and we can never go where we are going without each other.

but please listen... especially if you are in this place and you have been hurt over and over again by others... maybe by the same person...

let down by the ones you are supposed to be able to rely on... hurt by the people you are supposed to be able to trust...

especially if you are in this place and you so desperately want to find healthy community but community to you has always felt like a love that is fleeting... that is expecting... that is based on *you doing something*... you have to wonder, really:

What does it *really* mean to have a love that is incorruptible?

and beyond what I just said... what we just read in Ephesians about bearing with each other no matter what... I can say what else I think it means for us...

it means that when someone you love does something that most people would think "that's enough to stop loving that person!" - you keep loving them.

it means that when someone takes a different view about something than you do, you don't stop loving them... you don't stop seeking community with them... Even the political issues... even the things that you think are the most important...

don't let your love get corrupted by an idol.

Seriously... anything that you think is more important than Jesus, that thing is an idol. and when you create gaps between you and other people, you don't look like Jesus. Jesus met all kinds of people in all kinds of weird places and he threw himself in the middle of where THAT PERSON WAS so that He could reach *them*. That is LOVE INCORRUPTIBLE.

It means MY FEELINGS TOWARD YOU ARE NOT SWAYED WHEN YOU CHANGE.

it means that if someone says they don't even want anything to do with Jesus... YOU KEEP SHOWING THEM WHAT JESUS LOOKS LIKE by the way that you are in consistent in their lives...

but the number one thing to remember, is this is a love that we are supposed to have toward God first and foremost... and it means all of the things we read about in chapter 4... it means we are patient... when we don't feel like God has shown up... we keep believing He is there.

When we don't get the house... we still are faithful to the calling... WE STILL HOLD ONTO THE PROMISE. We still keep serving people and loving people and doing every single thing that His word insists that His children will be doing.

I want to show you one more thing... from the last book of the bible, and I hope this helps you this morning. It was written to the same church... the church in Ephesus... but this time it is Jesus speaking through the Apostle John:

Revelation 2:2-5

“ **I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance**, and how you **cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.** ³ I know you are **enduring patiently** and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have **not grown weary.** ⁴ **But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.** ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent**, and **do the works you did at first.** If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you **repent.**

Do you see this?

In Ephesians 4, Paul told them to be patient, and they are patient. They are bearing with one another in love and they have even gotten better at spotting the false prophets... the ones who are actually there to do harm... They haven't grown weary... but I have this against you...

you have lost the love that you had at first.

The one thing that Jesus has against the church in Ephesus when John writes them is:

they have lost their first love.

They have lost the love that was *supposed to be* incorruptible.

It was supposed to be so strong, that it would never go away. Because if Jesus really did all that for us... how would our love FOR HIM, or even for others, be wavering?

Its really easy to start something well. To hit the ground running...

because emotions drive us... high moments drive us... they are how we were able to raise so much money toward the project that we just completed this weekend... our first ministry house...

someone casts a great vision of what could be... and you want to buy into it... but there is a reason that the bible talks so much about patience, about long-suffering... about the valley moments...

because our timing is not His timing... and it almost never happens the way that we see it... and when life isn't going exactly the way that you thought it was going to go, it becomes very easy to lose that first love. Lose the reason you used to wake up in the morning, the thing that keeps you going...

I was there...

I've spent way too much of my life living high and low based on whether I am succeeding or failing... I have spent way too many hours stressed about things beyond my control... because when the pressure turns up... I forget who I am...

I forget who I belong to... I forget I was worth it.

I forget that if we never got that first ministry house, ever... if I never accomplished a single thing for Jesus, ever...

I was still worth it to Jesus.

You will always let go of patience, when you look to yourself.

and in life, if you aren't locked in on who you are in Christ, ALL THE TIME... it can be very very easy to forget who you are... and when that happens... just like the church in Ephesus... you will lose your first love.

SO lets keep our eyes on Jesus.

and may it never be said of the church in Detroit that we have lost our first love... and may we always see ourselves, every day, through the eyes of the one who stares down at us in every single moment and says:

THEY ARE WORTH IT.