

Practice Resurrection: God's Calling; Our Living

Text: Eph. 4:1

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11 April 2010
Sunday Sermon
Holy light Church (English), Johor Bahru

Sermon Statement

When God's calling and our living fits, we are growing up in Christ: God's calling; our living. We can only appreciate fully the wonderful gifts of God if we are living our lives in a worthy manner.

Text: Ephesians 4:1

^{EPH 4:1} As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.
(NIV)

Introduction

The Sakura or Cherry Blossoms is held in special significance for the Japanese people. The cherry blossom season arrives in the early spring and signifies new life and new beginnings. After a hard cold winter, cherry blossoms indicate the beginning of spring. The winter is over. New life will be springing from the soil. It also signifies new beginnings. This is the season when school begins and when young men and women begin their new jobs and hence their new lives in Japanese society. What is more significant is that the cherry blossoms period is short. The flower buds, blossom and drops within 7-10 days. It reminds the Japanese people that life is short and should be lived in a worthy manner. During the cherry blossom season, families and friends will picnic under the cherry trees and enjoy the blossoms.

Easter is also a time of remembrance. Easter recalls us to remember God who became man to suffer and die for us. The key to Easter is the resurrection. Because of the cross and resurrection, we are now able to live a brand new life. The apostle Paul is very conscious of this. Practice resurrection is living life in the power of the resurrection. In

our text today Ephesians 4:1, he wrote “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (NIV). There are two components to this sentence.

- (1) the calling we have received
- (2) living a life worthy of this calling
- (3) why bother?

(1) What Calling?

Paul explains that in Eph. 4: 7, 8.

EPH 4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men."

Most think it quotes Psalm 68:18 (a psalm of David) with five minor and two major changes.

PS 68:18 When you ascended on high,
you led captives in your train;
you received gifts from men,
even from the rebellious--
that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.

The two major variations are the change from the second to the third person, and the change of direction from having received gifts from men to the giving of gifts to men. However, it is better to think that Paul was not quoting one particular verse of the psalm but rather that he was summarizing all of Psalm 68, which has many words similar to those in Psalm 68:18¹. The essence of the psalm is that a military victor has the right to give gifts to those who are identified with him. Christ, having captivated sinful people by redeeming them, is Victor and gives them as gifts to the church. The battle is Easter and Christ has emerged the victor by his resurrection from defeating death.

What are these gifts or graces that Christ gives to us? Paul have mentioned this in the longest sentence in the New Testament – all 201 words in Greek of it (278 in NIV, depending on your translation) in Eph. 1:3-14

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. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. 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. 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. 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.

^{EPH 1:11} 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.

Now we shall read this and note down what are the things God has done for us (God verbs):

- (1) blessed us with every spiritual blessings (v.3)
- (2) chose us to be holy and blameless (v.4)
- (3) predestined us –adoptions as children (v.5)
- (4) redemption – forgiveness of sin (v.7)
- (5) lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding (v.8)
- (6) made known to us the mystery of his will –salvation for Jews and Gentiles (v.9-10)
- (7) included in Christ – sealed with the Holy Spirit (v. 13,14)

We already received all these gifts from God. So why is there the need to live a life worthy of these gifts? It's already ours. God would not take them back. Why should we live a life worthy of these gifts?

Living a life worthy of this calling

What does living a life worthy of this calling means? What are the practices or components of this life? This life is practice resurrection.

- (1) Be humble, gentle and patient (Eph 4:2)

EPH 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

- Arrogance is a common problem when we gain in experience.

(2) Keep unity in faith (Eph. 4:3-6)

EPH 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- Personality differences
- Ego problems

(3) Put on new self- true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4: 22-32)

EPH 4:22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

EPH 4:25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin" : Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

EPH 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- Temptation of the old self
- Go back to the old ways
- Temptations of old environments
 - a. Truthfulness (no lying) – tell people what they want to hear
 - b. Anger control
 - c. No stealing
 - d. No gossip
 - e. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit
 - f. No unwholesome emotions (bitterness, rage, anger, slander, malice)
 - g. Kind and compassionate
 - h. Forgiveness

(4) Be Children of Light (Eph 5:8-17)

EPH 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:

"Wake up, O sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."

EPH 5:15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

- Expose evil
- Save the lost
- Break bondage – addiction (sex, power, money, drugs, porno)

(5) Be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18-20)

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(6) Submit to one another (Eph 5:21)

EPH 5:21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

(7) Be strong in the Lord (Eph. 6: 10-18)

EPH 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Taking up Our Cross

I will suggest that living in a way worthy of our calling or God's gift is what Jesus means when he calls to us take up our cross.

MT 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for

me will find it.²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Our cross is then to live in a worthy manner:

- (1) Be humble, gentle and patient (Eph 4:2)
- (2) Keep unity in faith (Eph. 4:3-6)
- (3) Put on new self- true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4: 22-32)
- (4) Be Children of Light (Eph 5:8-14)
- (5) Be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:15-20)
- (6) Submit to one another (Eph 5:21)
- (7) Be strong in the Lord (Eph. 6: 10-18)

These are the practices of those who receive the benefits of Jesus' resurrection. They can be considered practices of resurrection or as Eugene Peterson terms them "practice resurrection."

(3) Why Bother?

The fact that Paul has to urge us means that we have a choice.

The appeal to live worthily of God's calling presupposes that God's gracious initiative requires a continuous human response and that his call bestows both high privilege and high responsibility. Believers have been called into all the blessings of salvation and into experience of the power of the God who raised Christ from the dead and who brought them from death to life and to a share in Christ's reign in the heavenly realms. They have been called into the new humanity out of Jews and Gentiles, into the new temple, the one body (cf. Col 3:15, "called in the one body") of the Church, and thus called to be part of God's purposes for cosmic unity.²

Eugene Peterson in the last book of his *Conversations on Spiritual Theology* (2010) *Practice Resurrection* offers an interesting perspective. The Greek word for worthy is *axios*, which is offers a metaphor of a balance. The balancing scales, the *axios*, centers

the Ephesian letter. The letter is designed to keep God's calling (chapter 1-3) with our living (chapter 4-6).

“When our walking and God's calling are in balance, we are whole; we are living maturely, living responsively to God's calling, living congruently with the way God calls us into being.” (Peterson 2010, 32).

Eugene Peterson, Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology in Regent College, Vancouver, Canada one of my favourite spiritual teacher. He has influenced me greatly in my thinking and teaching in spirituality. He is a prolific writing. Peterson is 78 years old and his magnum opus is his 5 book series on Conversations in Spiritual Theology: *Christ's Play in Ten Thousand Places* (2005), *Eat This Book* (2006), *The Jesus Way* (2007), *Tell It Slant* (2008), and *Practice Resurrection* (2010).

Where are we on our spiritual journey? Are we living a life worthy of our calling?

- Some never started on living a worthy life
- Some started but stopped because it is hard
- Some started but compromised
- Some started but backslided into their old nature
- Some continued in carrying their cross daily

Where are you? (time for meditation)

Lessons for us:

We can only appreciate fully the wonderful gifts of God if we are living our lives in a worthy manner; God's calling; our living. We are not talking about salvation here but spiritual growth.

Living in a worthy manner:

- (1) Be humble, gentle and patient (Eph 4:2)
- (2) Keep unity in faith (Eph. 4:3-6)

- (3) Put on new self- true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4: 22-32)
- (4) Be Children of Light (Eph 5:8-14)
- (5) Be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:15-20)
- (6) Submit to one another (Eph 5:21)
- (7) Be strong in the Lord (Eph. 6: 10-18)

Soli Deo Gloria

11 April 2010

¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures (634). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Lincoln, A. T. (2002). Vol. 42: Word Biblical Commentary : Ephesians. Word Biblical Commentary (235). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.