

“You Were Made for More”

Ephesians 1:15-23

Series: Made for More

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March 1, 2020

Who am I? A simple powerful question. When I ask this question I hunger to know my identity, my history, my ancestry. Many take DNA tests to uncover their ethnic makeup. By discovering where I came from, I hope to find who I am, what I am, where I belong.

Jay Speights spent most of his life researching his ancestors, combing through public records until he reached a dead end. As an African American he had little hope anyone kept records of his enslaved ancestors. So Jay tried another avenue: DNA testing. Then an unexpected door opened. A year ago this pastor living in Rockville, Maryland awoke at 4 a.m. when his phone buzzed with a message from far away. He read it once, twice, three times before he nudged his sleeping wife to tell her the news. “I’m a prince,” he whispered in disbelief. The man who grew up in New Jersey, lives in an apartment and doesn’t own a car suddenly awoke to the reality that he is descended from the kings of Allada, a region in the West African country of Benin.

A few months later, a priest from Benin visited the seminary in New York, where Speights serves as executive director. During the visit, Speights brought up his DNA discovery.

One of the men from Benin recognized his ancestral family name. “I know your king,” the man said. “Here is his phone number.” When Speights called, the current king of Allada hung up on him. “You don’t cold-call a king, I guess,” Speights said. The second time, the king passed the phone to his English-speaking wife. The queen asked Speights to see photos of his parents and grandparents. She inquired about his motivations — what did he want from them? His response was simple: Answers. “You are a descendant of King Deka, 9th King of Allada who ruled from 1746 to 1765,” she wrote in a message over WhatsApp. “We will be delighted to welcome you to your home, dear Prince.”¹

You are royalty. You are beloved children of the King of heaven and earth. This announcement comes directly from God’s Word – specifically Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. This book is the DNA test which reveals your true identity. Now many find Ephesians a difficult book to unlock and understand – more complicated than cracking the DNA code. In fact, the passage we examine today – printed on the insert in your bulletin – is actually just two very long sentences – what one scholar calls “monster” sentences. When you read this chapter it is very easy for your eyes to glaze over. Yet I can state the message of this whole chapter, in fact this whole book, in one simple sentence: You Were Made For More. You are a beloved child of the King, a creation of the Almighty Creator, who formed and fashioned you for more than you are right now. Unfortunately, like Jay Speights, you don’t know it. Your true, royal identity is hidden. In fact, like Jay’s ancestors four hundred years ago, you were sold into slavery – spiritual slavery. Over the next six weeks our study of Ephesians will reveal how God created you and I to BE More, DO More, GROW More, GO More and WIN More.

¹Marissa J. Lang *‘I’m a prince’: After years of searching for family history, a pastor discovers royal ties to Africa*
Washington Post Feb. 22, 2019

Since Ephesians 1 can be complicated, the insert in your bulletin divides the passage into separate thoughts so they don't all run together. Every time a line starts from the left hand margin it's a new thought. The lines indented below it are based on that new thought and help explain that new thought. To clarify this even more, take a pen and draw a line between verses 2 and 3 and another line just above verse 15. In the margin alongside verses 1 and 2 write "Salutation." In the margin alongside verses 3-14 write "Praise for God." In the margin next to verses 15-23 write "Prayer for the Ephesians." This is a common pattern in Paul's letter – a salutation which states who the letter is from, who it is for and a simple blessing, followed by words of praise for God and a prayer of thanksgiving for the recipients of the letter. Let's skip over the salutation and go right to Paul's praise for God. He begins,

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. Ephesians 1:3

This is the headline which summarizes his "Praise for God" (vv. 3-14). This is a breath-taking announcement. Even though he is praising God, what Paul reveals in the next verses are all about you. If you are in Christ, God bestows on you every spiritual blessing in heaven. Your Heavenly Father unlocks, opens and empties out the spiritual treasury of heaven so he can pour it out on you. What are these spiritual blessings and riches? The rest of the chapter tells you. I list them on the backside of your insert so you can meditate on your God-given treasures. For now, let's turn back to the passage and further subdivide verses 3-14 into three sections. Draw a line above verse 7 and another line above verse 11. Verses 4-6 are about the Past. Verses 7-10 focus on the Present and verses 11-14 look to the Future.

The Past – You Were Chosen and Adopted. Let these amazing words sink into your soul.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. Ephesians 1:4-6

Before the mountains were formed and the seas filled, before the planets revolved and the sun flared to light, before the galaxies swirled and the big bang exploded, before God said, "Let there be light" He thought of you, He chose you. He wanted you to be His. You are not a mistake, an error, an afterthought. You are not worthless or useless. You are not a statistic or a number. He knows your name. He selected you in Christ.

Recently there's a lot of anxiety over Real ID – the special driver's license we all need by October if we want to use it for air travel. There are many horror stories of customers waiting for hours at the DMV only to be told they don't have the proper identification which proves their real identity. With God you don't have to prove anything. He knows your real identity. He knows you and He wants you to be His beloved.

There is a second step in the process of becoming His royal child – He adopted you. Our sin put us outside the family of God. Our Father did not want us to stay out there. So He adopted us into His family through Jesus Christ.

While working with a youth group in Nebraska, Jon and Lori Foote met Amanda—a teenage girl the same age as their son, Wesley. Amanda came from a terribly abusive home and was eventually taken from her parents by the state. She has been part of Jon and Lori's family ever since. After conferring with their two sons, Jon and Lori legally adopted Amanda at 22. Her name is now Amanda Foote. She will even get a new birth certificate! Though they thought of Amanda as their daughter for a long time, something felt different when they left the courthouse. Jon said,

When it was official there was a huge change in Lori and me—sort of like when you see your newborn for the first time. And for Amanda, there was a change in her, too. Now she knew she belonged. She knew we were her parents.

Through Jesus, God's Beloved Son, our Heavenly Father gives us a new name (his), a new legal standing (we are his responsibility and his heirs), and a new family (brothers and sisters in Christ and God as our true Father).² Paul says because of the Father's love for us, it was His pleasure and His will to adopt us. We don't need to allow this world to say and do abusive things to us. So why don't we know we are beloved children of God? That's the second part.

The Present – You Are Free and Forgiven Paul next says,

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. Ephesians 1:7-8

You hear the word “redemption” in church a lot, but what does it mean? Redemption is buying someone's freedom. Slaves were set free for a price. It was impossibly expensive to buy your own freedom. Rarely would another buy your freedom. Yet when Jesus shed His blood on the cross He paid the price to free us from sin. He did this for free. This was “the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.” The debt is cancelled. The chains are broken. The death sentence lifted. The jail door is open. So why do we still live in the cell? We believe the lie sin tells.

Let me tell you about a recent, complex theological movie which explains this: Toy Story Four. The toys from the previous movies now belong to a little girl named Bonnie. On her first day of Kindergarten, Bonnie creates a craft named Forky from a spork, some pipe cleaners, clay and a few wiggle eyes. Bonnie loves Forky as her toy and she wants to take Forky with her on the family vacation. Trouble is, Forky thinks of himself as trash. Every chance he gets he throws himself in the trash can or jumps in a dumpster. When asked why he does this, Forky replies there is warmth and comfort in the dark junk pile. Yet Woody tells him that's how it feels to be loved by a child. Forky finally agrees to return to Bonnie, unfortunately he is captured by some menacing ventriloquist henchmen. It takes the sacrifice of one toy to finally free Forky.

Sin promises comfort, escape, pleasure, relief. Yet it's a lie – a lie that leads us to be captured and enslaved the more we indulge sin. Jesus comes for us to claim us and convince us we are not junk, we are not destined for the dumpster, the trash heap is not our home. He even made the ultimate sacrifice so we might be free and forgiven. Walk out into freedom. Live forgiven. Why? There is something greater waiting. You were made for more.

² Lee Eclov – story used by permission from the Foote family

Future – You Are Sealed and Certain Paul adds,

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1:13

Forky and all the toys know they belong to Bonnie because her name is written on them. When you believe in Christ, Jesus puts His name on you. Now you belong to Him. Yet He also puts Someone inside you: The Holy Spirit. When Jon and Lori Foote adopted Amanda they gave her a new name, new birth certificate, and new feeling inside that she belonged to them.

But God went even further. He gave us something that Jon and Lori can't give Amanda. God gave us his Holy Spirit. In some ways it's like God gives us his DNA. But even more than that, God implants in us his heart, his mind, his passion, his holiness—and people even look at us and say, "My how you bear a striking resemblance to your Father!"³

The Father chose and adopted you into His family. The Son made you free and forgiven by His sacrifice for you. The Spirit is working now to make you into a new creation. Paul says

The promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:14

If you have a mortgage you needed to give a down payment guaranteeing you will pay the rest of the mortgage. One year ago we celebrated how you, with God's help, paid down the mortgage on this building. The Holy Spirit is God's down payment. He deposits the Spirit in your life as the first installment of the spiritual blessings He will give you throughout your life until the final day when you receive your full inheritance in heaven. The more the Spirit fills your life, the more you see the spiritual riches God is giving you now and in the future. Paul prays,

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. Ephesians 1:17-19

The Spirit will open your eyes to discover you are a spiritual billionaire. Open your eyes and see you have Unstoppable Hope in get through daily darkness, Spiritual Riches to face emotional poverty, Heavenly Power to deal with earthly problems. We just don't realize all the spiritual resources the Spirit gives us. Tim Keller writes,

Imagine you're a billionaire, and you have three ten-dollar bills in your wallet. You get out of a cab, and you hand the driver one of the bills for an eight-dollar fare. Later in the day you look discover there's only one ten-dollar bill there, and you say, "I gave the taxi driver two bills." What are you going to do? Get all upset? Demand the police search for the

³ Lee Eclov, op cit.

cabdriver? No, you are going to shrug. You're a billionaire. You lost ten dollars. So what? You are too rich to be concerned about that kind of loss.

This week, somebody criticized you. Something you bought or invested in turned out to be less valuable than you thought. Something you wanted to happen didn't go the way you wanted it to—these are real losses. But what are you going to do, if you're a Christian? Will this setback disrupt your contentment with life? Will you shake your fist at God? Toss and turn at night? If so, I submit that it's because you don't know how truly rich you are. If you're that upset about your status with other people, if you're constantly lashing out at people for hurting your feelings, you have totally lost touch with your identity. As a Christian, you're a spiritual billionaire and you're wringing your hands over ten dollars.⁴

The Holy Spirit gives you spiritual hope, riches and power to deal with the challenges of life. And the Spirit is God's down payment on the greater, glorious riches He has in store for you when you go home in the future.

This week, I challenge you to discover your true identity as a child of the King. Join us each Sunday for the Made for More series. Use the SWORD method to study bite size pieces of Ephesians each day of Lent. Join a Growth Group or start a Microgroup. Join us on The Way if you are new to Woodside. Let's start on the journey to discover our true identity. Let's reverse what the world is trying to do to us. Let's discover we are Made for More.

One year ago, Jay Speights boarded a plane in Virginia and landed in Benin 36 hours later. The family pictures he had sent to the queen were plastered on big blue posters hung throughout the airport. "Welcome to the kingdom of Allada, land of your ancestors," the posters said.

Stepping out of the airport Jay was greeted by hundreds of people dancing, singing, playing instruments. It was a lavish festival. It took him several minutes to realize it was a welcome party — for him. "I thought, 'Wow, this is serious,'" Speights said. "I thought I was going to go, hang out with the family, do some sightseeing. But this was something else." What may have added to the intensity of emotion was that it was his father's birthday. To land there on his father's birthday was just unbelievable. He felt his father's presence was with him. Jay could see him and feel him.

In Benin, a tree once stood near the city's historic slave port from which more than a million people were shipped to the Americas. Before they departed, West African men and women would walk around the trunk up to nine times to shed the life they were leaving behind and accept the bondage into which they had been sold. It was called the "tree of forgetting." Today, the tree is gone, but a historic marker remains. As his newfound relatives watched, Speights walked around the marker nine times in reverse. With each turn, he thought about his ancestors, who were chained and beaten, carried to a foreign place and sold as property. He was angry, he said. And hurt. When he finished his walk, he felt something else, too. A sense of healing.

Before he left Benin the king gave Jay Speights a new name: Videkon Deka.

⁴ Tim Keller, *The Two Advocates* (Encounters with Jesus Series) (Penguin Group, 2014)

It means, “The child who came back.”⁵

This world is not your home. You are a child of the King.

One day you will be the child who came back.

⁵ Marissa J. Lang, *op cit.*