

**Sermon Text:** *Ephesians 1:3-14 (With emphasis on vv. 3-8)*

**Date:** July 20<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006

**Church Year:** 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Vacation Bible School Theme

Faith Lutheran Church, FDL

### *Discover the Riches of God's Grace*

Would you believe me if I said, that I can tell you, in just one sentence, where to find the world's greatest treasure? No hidden gimmicks, no secret maps or sets of clues to find all the riches this world offers. You do not even have to scour forsaken deserts or search hidden caves for this treasure. What do you think, do you believe me? Just one sentence to discover the greatest riches you will ever need!

The Apostle Paul gave the Ephesians the same sentence because they were searching for the world's riches too. The Ephesians lived in one of the Roman Empire's grand cities, a city with few equals. Ephesus ranked with the likes of Rome, Corinth, and Alexandria. Ephesus had everything: a magnificent harbor that attracted business from through out the known world, a commercial marketplace that was always the center of activity, a booming silversmith industry that employed large numbers of the citizens, a lecture hall where the world's finest intellectuals debated great, grand ideas. There on the slope of Mt. Pion, at the end of the Arcadian Way sat the Ephesus amphitheater that could seat 25,000 people!

But the crown jewel of Ephesus had to be the temple to the goddess Artemis. After all, it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was impossible to miss it, built high up on a hill so you could see it from anywhere in the city. The Ephesians loved their temple to Artemis. A temple filled daily with hundreds of prostitutes, encouraging a culture of promiscuity and debauchery. You couldn't help but walk through the city and find every couple feet another seller of silver statues of the goddess Artemis. The silversmiths just loved the temple too, because the temple was their lively hood. The Ephesians had it all. The riches of the Roman Empire right at their feet.

The Apostle Paul, the writer of this letter to the Ephesians, himself at one time searched just like the Ephesians for riches. Paul, the Pharisee thought that the riches of the world and heaven were found inside himself. He flourished in a world that sought after glitter and gold, power and prestige for their soul's contentment. But none of it brought Paul the riches that his hungry, thirsting soul searched for in this life. He sought after riches in all the wrong places. It wasn't until God blinded him in his tracks on the road to Damascus that he discovered life's greatest, only true treasure. God worked faith in Paul's heart so that Paul saw Jesus.

Where have you been searching? Everyone wants happiness. Who doesn't want happiness? You work painstakingly hard to find happiness in your life and then to keep that happiness in your life. If someone offered us the entire world's riches, we would take it, right? We would crawl through the world's hottest desert or through the world's smallest opening to find it.

We work long hard, grueling hours to save up as much riches as humanly possible. We work those long grueling hours to find life's treasure in 4 star exotic getaways, and impressive technological wonders (all wonderful things), but how long does the happiness last? How long do those things remain our greatest treasures? Until 6 months later the newest model is released? Until a year later someone else discovers some treasure that is better than the one we have in our possession.

When you face a serious illness, does your happiness come from knowing you have the best healthcare money can afford? Your family is torn apart in divorce, your children hurting from the pain of having their mother and father in two different places: does their and your happiness come from knowing you can fill the hurt with buying more things, always outdoing someone else with something grander. You lose your job, you thought your job was secure, you thought that life was all set in place, where is your treasure then? You are in a car accident, you or someone close to you is critically injured in the accident, where is your treasure now that brings your soul relief?

Where is the treasure for the soul that tries to find relief from a sin riddled conscience by trying to be a good person, or by simply ignoring it for years covering it up by one excuse and failed attempt after another? Where is the treasure for the mother or father trying to raise their children on their own? Where is the treasure for the lonely, bewildered soul agonizing over life from a nursing home room?

God in His almighty wisdom knew exactly what we needed to cure sin's agonizing search for riches. God in His almighty wisdom and understanding knew our soul's complaint, ***"In him [Jesus] we have redemption***

***through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." Ephesians 1:7-8***

Our treasure is found in one place, a lowly mountain side named Calvary, where Jesus died on a cross to wipe away all our sins. In Christ, our souls find relief from sin's dreaded curse and condemnation. Here in Jesus we find relief for the aching heart on a hospital bed that longs for true treasure. Here in Jesus, the torment of our consciences find eternal relief. No mere temporary satisfaction, but eternal satisfaction.

We have the forgiveness of sins that is the riches of God's Grace, so much so that here every man comes as a beggar and leaves the richest man! The real question today is why have we been searching, when we already have the greatest treasure?

There is no greater reason to give thanks, except this: God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. This isn't something that is going to happen in the distant future. This isn't something that we have to work for or earn. This isn't something that may or may not happen. But this is fact; the riches of God's grace are ours! ***"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***

Here's the proof: God choose us before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. What that means is this: God choose us to be His treasured possession. Not because of anything we have done or not done. Not because we made a special choice to believe in Him. But because God loves us so much, he sent his son to take away our sins by His death on the cross. Jesus has took away the stain of our sin, and made us spotless, without any blemish, in God's sight.

In love God predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, according to the plan of him who works out everything according to the purpose of His will – God's will is that he wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. God's will is that we know this treasure we have in Jesus. God's will is that you and I will be with Him forever in heaven. God's will is that you and I be made members of God's family through the Water and the Word of baptism. And there by faith, through the work of the Holy Spirit, God marked us as one of his dear blood bought children. Because God has claimed us as His child, nothing can change that. (1 Peter 2:9) The riches of God's grace are ours, a treasure that will not fade or be destroyed. But all the riches of God's grace are ours!

You say you want a guarantee? The Holy Spirit is our guarantee of this treasure. We have the riches of God's Grace - redemption: complete freedom from the world and trials. The final act when we are ransomed from all evil, when even our lifeless bodies are raised for eternal glory to receive our everlasting inheritance, life with Jesus in Heaven.

Have you figured it out yet what is the one sentence I am going to tell you? There is one sentence that is going to show you all the treasure of the world. And it is this: when the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he gave them one sentence that explained the greatest riches they could ever possess. You see, when Paul wrote to the Ephesians, in the original language, Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3-14 was one complete sentence. This one sentence explained the world's greatest treasure, the riches of God's grace. Listen carefully; here is the greatest sentence you will ever know:

***"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. 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 to be adopted as his sons 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. 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 with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 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. 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, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 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, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory." Amen. Ephesians 1:3-14***