

A PRAYER FOR KINGDOM LIVING

Colossians 1:9-14

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INTRODUCTION

I want to start us off this morning with a question: *Have you ever found yourself surprised, sort of taken aback, at who you are and what you've become?*

I have. I actually find this to be a recurring thing in my life. It usually begins with me simply being surprised by my name, the very sound of my name – Brandon. BRANDON. Brandon Eggar? For a moment it feels as if I am thinking and talking about someone else, someone remote and distant, and then it hits me – I'm Brandon. I'm Brandon Shane Eggar, son of Bill and Nancy Eggar from of all places, Odessa, TX. I'm Brandon Shane Eggar, husband to Neechia, father to Addisyn, Will, Owen and Corbitt. I'm Brandon Shane Eggar, associate pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, resident of San Antonio, TX and therefore a Texan and an American. I could go on with such a description.

But here's the point...these sorts of strange and often surprising thoughts are thoughts that are clunking around in our heads all the time, for they're thoughts that define us and give reason for why we do what we do. They're thoughts about identity and behavior and those two are meant to go together, the one (identity), at least normally, is meant to lead to the other (behavior). For at our most consistent, what we do flows from who we are.

And that's one of the truths that this prayer of the Apostle Paul is seeking to get across...it's a prayer that's meant to lead us to a similar 'Identity Experience' that I described a moment ago, that's intended to bring about surprising thoughts about who we are as followers of Jesus, about our identity in Christ, an identity, that if we take the Gospel's word for it, runs deeper and is more secure and filled with more worth than say our identities that are formed by family heritage, social status or ethnicity. What these words of the Apostle Paul are intended to do root us in the deep truth of our ultimate identity as ones who belong to a Kingdom beyond our wildest dreams and to a King beyond our imagination. What these verses say is this: Being a Christian means finding your true self, not first and foremost in yourself, but in Jesus, in him who came into the world not to rule with an iron fist, but to renew an enslaved people through his obedient and loving sacrifice. What Paul wants us to wrestle with is the truth that in Christ we've been given a Kingdom Identity, an identity that is now to shape the way we live. And the way Paul wants us to wrestle with this is through the lens of prayer, his prayer that our Kingdom Living would begin to match up more and more to our Kingdom Identity.

KINGDOM IDENTITY

Do you remember the conversation that took place in **Alice in Wonderland** between Alice and that strange caterpillar? Do you remember his question to Alice? What was it? *'Who are you?'* To which Alice responded, *'I hardly know, Sir, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then.'* Alice and the caterpillar are having a discussion about identity, Alice's identity, an identity which at present, due to all her fluctuation in size, was in a state of confusion. Alice wasn't clear on who she was in the present. As she goes on to say to her strange inquirer, *"I can't explain myself, because I'm not myself, you see."*

I mention this little exchange because what I want us to see is that apart from a Kingdom Identity you and I are like Alice, confused about who we truly are, about our purpose and meaning. And because this is so, we're fond of going from one identity to another, hoping that we'll find one that'll 'fit,' that will give us a sense of security, that will give us a sense of meaning and significance, that will make our lives worthwhile. And even when we think we've found it, it doesn't take long until we find ourselves disappointed and in turn becoming dissatisfied and confused all over again concerning who we are and what we've become.

We long for a stable identity, an identity that carries with it value and meaning, that says we and our lives matter. We long for it because we're human, originally created with value and meaning but somewhere along the way this was lost. Ever since then humanity has been seeking to create an identity for themselves that will truly satisfy, but rather than being satisfied we find ourselves shortchanged. It's here that God comes in, comes with a Jesus-centered word, saying that if you give yourself and your unsatisfying identity to me then I will give you something new, a new identity, that will give you clarity about who truly are, that will provide you with the significance for which you truly long. What God has made available in Jesus is a Kingdom Identity, an identity that is stable and full of meaning because it's found in Jesus, found in the one of whom Paul says a little later in **verse 17, 'that in Him holds all things together.'** Friends, only in Jesus can our lives hold together, apart from Jesus our lives fall apart. You see, to the degree that our lives and our identities are rooted the Kingship of Jesus, are in his Kingdom, to that degree will our lives hold together and be full of meaning even in the midst of set backs and turmoil; for you see, what makes you fall apart is not what happens to you, but how you react to it. Trials and difficulties will come and the question is, 'When they do will you fall apart or will you hold together?' For, and this is Paul's point, how you react is dependent upon whether or not you've found your identity and security in Jesus and in his Kingdom. If you're not holding together, then you need to get into him and under his rule, you need to give yourself, all of yourself, to him in faith, for the Kingdom Identity he gives is what you need and long for most...an identity that says to you directly and clearly in the midst of

whatever it is that you're presently facing that you've been *qualified*, *delivered*, and *forgiven*. It says that you've been qualified...qualified by the Father to enter into the Kingdom of the Son he loves. The great news of the Kingdom is that you've been pre-qualified by God's grace. We hear that term a lot these days: "you've been pre-qualified for this credit card", or this auto loan or this mortgage...and we've learned to leery of these things and rightly so. The pre-qualification of which Paul speaks is the Real Deal. It's not junk mail or gimmicky advertising. No, it's your treasure, it's your life, it's the truth about you in Jesus...God has qualified you.

This word...*qualified*, which is found in *verse 12*, is a word that means '*made fit*,' or '*made worthy*.' What Paul is saying is that God has 'worthied' you. He's done so not on the basis of your achievement, or your status, or your ethnicity, but solely because of his pleasure, because of his grace. My friends, what this text is telling us is we don't possess a Kingdom Identity because we've earned it or qualified ourselves for it, or because we've worked our way up the ladder to God. No! We have it because God came down the ladder to us in Jesus and has made us fit, made us worthy in the worthiness Jesus; made us worthy to receive the inheritance of a fully renewed life in a fully renewed world that is fully surrounded and shaped by the love and glory of God. Our identity in the Kingdom, and in Jesus, means that we've entered into the realm of new creation, a new creation begun in Christ's death and resurrection and new creation to be completed in the future at Christ's return, a new creation that carries with it this qualification, as well the wonderful biblical words of deliverance and forgiveness. This is what Paul says in *verses 13-14*, when he says, '*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*.' The reason you and I can never qualify ourselves for a Kingdom Identity, the reason we're not worthy in ourselves, is because in ourselves, we're enslaved and deserving of God's displeasure. Now listen, what these verses are saying is that if our identity is formed outside the Kingship of Jesus the best it can be is a distorted identity; distorted because of its inability to bring about what we long for most, and that is life and meaning and true happiness.

On our own we're enslaved. The image that Paul wants us to be reminded of is that of the nation of Israel living in bondage in Egypt, where they were driven hard by an unrelenting task-master, where their life was characterized by shackles, sorrows, fears and futility. Theirs was an existence of constant striving, yet without semblance of satisfaction. They were slaves. And what the Apostle Paul is telling us in these verses is that outside of Jesus and his Kingdom our identity is that of a slave; a slave to a dark power that dehumanizes and distorts us to the core; that shrivels our humanity to almost non-existence. Well, you might say I don't feel like a slave. I mean I'm an American, I'm free, what do you mean that I'm enslaved? What I mean is this: that apart from the Kingship of Jesus you and I are enslaved to a dark and sinister power that turns us in on ourselves. We're chained up to the

belief, to the lie, that life really is all about me and my desires, that life is about my own personal pursuit of happiness to the exclusion of God and neighbor. We're enslaved to the insatiable need to be happy with a happiness that we've pre-determined and defined – a happiness that ironically, keeps us demanding, irritated, and unsatisfied when it's not maintained or found. Why is this? It's because our pre-determined happiness is nothing more than a pipe-dream. Happiness that has its primary reference point the self is actually a non-existent happiness. Here's what I mean...self-centered happiness doesn't exist because humanity was not created to find pleasure in pursuing self, but rather to find pleasure in loving God and our neighbor. Outside the Kingship of Jesus and our lives (and hence our identities) remain on the treadmill of pursuing a shrunken, unsatisfying, self-centered happiness, a happiness that says, 'If I could just have...and fill in the blank, then my life will be better, then I'll have more security, then I'll be important, then I'll be needed, then I be truly happy.' But it's a lie. It's a trap. It's sin. It's bondage. Outside the Kingship of Jesus we are enslaved, but inside the Kingship of Jesus our chains have been loosed and we've been delivered from the domain of darkness and been forgiven of all the junk that characterized our self-centered lives and kept us separated from God, who is our life. If your identity is found in Jesus then a move has been made, a move from slavery to freedom, a move from guilt to forgiveness. In Jesus our identity is one of having been transferred and given a fresh start. No longer are we citizens of the kingdom of Slavery and Sin and Self-Pursuit, but we're citizens of the kingdom of Light and Freedom and Forgiveness, the Kingdom of Jesus.

Qualified, Delivered, and Forgiven. This is the Kingdom Identity, your Kingdom Identity now on the basis of what Jesus has done for you. And what has he done for you? Well, remember how I said a moment ago that apart from Jesus our lives fall apart, but in Jesus they hold together. The only way this can be true for us, us unworthy, enslaved, and sinful people, is if the one who holds all things together comes apart for us, is undone for us. And this is exactly what has happened on the cross, when Jesus came apart physically and spiritually for us. The King died, Jesus was ripped apart, so that we could be qualified, freed, and forgiven. Jesus didn't go the route of self-seeking, rather he sought you unto death in the pleasure of obeying his Father, so that in turn he could give you a new identity, a Kingdom Identity that says **you are worthy, that your're delivered, and you're forgiven.** But now the question comes, 'What are you to do with this Kingdom Identity?' Well some of us would be content to take it down to Hobby Lobby, pick out a beautiful frame for it, and then hang it on our wall, so we can simply look at from time to time. But these verses won't let us do that, will they? No. Paul doesn't spell out our Kingdom Identity so we can simply glance at it from time to time, but rather he prays to the King that we would grow into it as time goes by. This is what he's doing in *verses 9-12*.

KINGDOM LIVING

He's praying that the followers of Jesus would mature, grow more and more into who they already are in Jesus. It's a request to God that he would enable us to conduct ourselves in such a way that our living would match up with who we are by his grace. Paul's prayer is that there would be coherence between our Kingdom Identity and our Kingdom Living.

Look at what he prays, he says, *'I'm praying that you may be filled with knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk (live) in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. I'm praying that you will strengthened with all power, according to God's glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father...'* This is an intense prayer for Kingdom maturity, one that'd be good for us to learn so that it shape the way we pray for ourselves and for one another.

What exactly is Paul praying for? He's praying for three overarching things. He's praying that those with a Kingdom Identity would be **FILLED WITH KNOWLEDGE, STRENGTHENED WITH POWER** and finally, **LIVE GRATEFULLY TO THE FATHER**. Knowledge, Power and Gratitude...that's a succinct picture of what it looks like, of what it means to live out our Kingdom Identity.

You see, a person who is having their identity shaped by Jesus' Kingdom is one who's first of all *'being filled with the knowledge of God's will in a spiritual wisdom and understanding'*. Kingdom living means growing. It means being engaged in a process of maturing, maturing in knowledge, in the knowledge of what God wants for you as one who belongs to him and his kingdom. That's very important for us to grasp...for Kingdom Living is not a one time thing that you arrive at it all at once. No, it's a process of growing in the knowledge of what the will of the King is with greater and greater clarity. How are we to do this? We're to do it only in and by his God's Spirit and his Word. We do this as we submit and saturate ourselves in the Gospel, in the Word of Christ. Later on in this same letter, Paul will tell the Colossians, *'Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.'* It's as we are being filled with the word of Christ that we're being filled with knowledge of his will, of what he wants, in all Holy Spiritual wisdom and understanding. The Spirit and the Word: Simply put, this means listening and learning, by the Spirit and in community, to apply God's Word to this or that part of your life. But notice this is not some abstract, theoretical book learning that only fills the mind, but never moves the heart to love or the hands to action. No. It's knowledge that is personal and intimate, knowledge that brings about love, first and foremost love for God. Here's how the process is to work in our heads and hearts and lives...as God fills us the knowledge of what he wants for us by his word and Spirit, what's to begin to happen (slowly, of course, remember it's a process) is that we are to become less and less concerned for our immediate pleasure (remember the distorted

identity of self-seeking happiness), and instead we're to become more and more concerned with what pleases the King, with what it means to walk in a manner worthy of King Jesus who has called us into his Kingdom by his grace. This is why true knowledge of God and of his will is always personal and a matter of love. Let me put it this way, if the knowledge of God were nothing more than an impersonal, an abstract exercise in learning, then it'd be perfectly natural to remain indifferent to God and his ways and it'd be understandable why one would relate to following God and his ways as nothing more than a dutiful obligation. But what Paul is saying to us here is that as we grow in the knowledge of God and his will that knowledge in turn produces a greater love for God and his ways; it produces a desire to please him, it actually becomes our joy to please him. It's the principle of one gaining pleasure as he gives pleasure. In other words, it means finding our pleasure in pleasing God, finding our pleasure, as the text tells us *'in bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God.'* What pleases God most is seeing his word and his Spirit be so rooted in the lives of his people that a Gospel Garden of love and service begins to grow, a garden full of fruit such as generosity and compassion and forgiveness, fruit that honors the King and his Kingdom and that, by God's grace, continues to grow more and more in the personal, loving knowledge of God. Simply put, pleasing God looks like being rooted deeper in the love of God day after day and year after year until the day that we see our Lover face to face.

Again, this is a process. It's a long, arduous process that is full of setbacks and difficulties, and of trials and temptations, and of heartache and pain. My friends, maturation in the Kingdom does not come automatically. It doesn't come naturally. It's as if our true selves, our true identity in Jesus, is like a tiny seed planted in the ground and there are numerous obstacles that would keep us from growing and entering more fully into the life of Jesus. And those obstacles would prevail if it weren't profound and creative power of God at work in us. As we're told *verse 11*, our growth in our Kingdom Identity only comes as we're *'strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might.'* Apart from the almighty, creative power of God in our lives Kingdom Living would be an impossibility. Therefore, Paul prays, and we are to pray that God would strengthen us and enable us to live a life worthy of him in the midst of difficulties. Don't be disappointed when God, in answering your prayer, doesn't rid your life completely of difficult circumstances and trying people. For, you see, the power of God isn't given to us to make our lives easy, but rather it's given to us to enable us to endure impossible situations and be patient with impossible people. It's given to enable us to stand firm when it seems as if everything in us and around us is seeking to knock us down and turn us away from the one who qualified us, delivered us, and as forgiven us. It's given so that we can stand there resolved not to give up or give in, and to do so, with more than just a stiff upper lip, but with joy, trusting that whatever comes our way our God is for us in Jesus and will be with us in the midst of the difficulty and will use

whatever comes our way for our growth in him. Never forget that the very power King Jesus exercises to hold the cosmos together at this very moment is the very same power that holds you together in the midst of whatever it is that you're facing today and it will continue to hold you together. Only because of him can we endure, and be patient with joy waiting for him to bring us to himself fully and finally.

Knowledge, Strength, and lastly **Thanksgiving.** You know, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the climax of Paul's prayer for the Colossians is his prayer that they *'would give thanks.'* And it's not only the climax of his prayer, but his primary theme throughout the letter. He tells them in *chapter 2, 'to abound in thanksgiving.'* In *chapter 3* in the space of three verses he encourages the church to be thankful three times concluding in *verse 17, 'And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father.'* Thanksgiving! Did you know that we were created by God to give thanks? Did you know that we've been redeemed by Jesus so that we would learn to be thankful once again. The point is this: as we grow in our Kingdom Identity, the overwhelming response of our lives should be overflowing gratitude in our hearts to God. If you're really growing in the knowledge of what God has done for you in Jesus, that he's qualified you for his Kingdom, that he has and is delivering from an unsatisfying self-pleasure and that has brought you into his realm where you find your pleasure in his pleasure and that he has forgiven you of your sins so that you can be made whole once again, then your heart will go out to him in generous gratitude and thanksgiving will characterize your life, will beautify your life. Growing in Kingdom Identity means turning more and more away from a life of self-centered 'woes is me' to a glorious 'Thank You' to him. If I could it succinctly, the grace of God is given so that we might live gratefully, and as we do so our gratefulness extends to the glory of God. Grace, Gratitude, and Glory. Are you thankful to the Father this morning? When was the last time you said, 'Thank You' to him for all that he's done for you in Jesus? A simple question with profound implications.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion...Example: Grandpa