

# Adorning the Gospel

## Opening Prayer:

*Our Father and our God, we bless Your holy name this morning and endeavor to bring to you hearts filled with devotion as we meditate on your Word and Your goodness to us. Help us now to **grow** in grace and knowledge of our sweet savior Jesus, as we trust Your Holy Spirit to lead us in to all truth. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.*

Please open your Bibles to the book of Ephesians, and then be ready to turn to Titus later.

## I. **This morning's devotion is titled Adorning the Gospel and the thing that inspired me to talk about this is a tree in my front yard.**

- a. There are many fruit trees at my house, mostly apples, some stone fruit. They they're productive, they provide at least a year's worth of applesauce.
- b. My favorite tree, though, is one that was a bit of a mystery for a while.
  - i. It's small, old, and gnarled. It's been pruned to within an inch of its life by a previous gardener; the woodpeckers have drilled it topped to bottom.
  - ii. It is, in fact, a bit pitiful.
  - iii. But in the Spring, this one tree explodes with big, magenta blossoms. The other fruit tree flowers in my garden are white. Not this one, it's ablaze with deep red flowers.
  - iv. Every time I pass by the sliding glass door of my kitchen, it catches my eye. And more often than I should, I step outside just to take in its unique beauty.
  - v. Since I've lived there, it's **only** ever produced blossoms, or so I thought.
- c. That old tree adorns the landscape of my yard like no other.
  - i. Its flowers last all Spring. Gorgeous blossoms that tell me it made it through another winter. That alone brings me great joy.
  - ii. There's just something about a garden in springtime that reminds me of redemption, a future and a hope.
  - iii. Something about a garden, and the cool of the day, that stirs my affections for God....But that's tomorrow's devotion :-)
- d. The other thing about this tree is that the bees find it every year too, which made me start wondering maybe it did do more than just blossom. Those rich red flowers, their pollen getting scooped up by the bees and carried away.
- e. So I did some research, and it turned out that my little scarlet beauty was the lowly crabapple tree.
  - i. But I came to find out that crabapple trees are, in a word, *awesome*.

- ii. They are the KEY pollinators in any orchard
  - iii. Growers plant them specifically so that the other apple trees will successfully bear abundant fruit in the Summer and Fall.
  - iv. It also turns out that the crabapple tree IS producing fruit, but it's so small at the base of the blossoms, that they just look like little rosehips. But those little fruits remains on the tree all winter long and provide food for the birds, when other food is so hard to find.
- b. Isn't that interesting...beyond the blossoms, you can't see any of that happening on the tree itself. But that sweet little crabapple tree is promoting and supporting fruitfulness all around it, all year long.

## II. I look at that tree and I think: That's most of us...

- a. Nothing terribly extravagant. Beautiful in our own ways. Endeavoring to bloom where we're planted, like the well-watered tree of Psalm 1. Desiring to be faithful in the little things that maybe no one sees.
- b. God calls faithfulness in those little things the good work of adorning the Gospel.

## III. Let's read from Ephesians chapter 2. I'm going to start at verse 8:

*8) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9) **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast. 10) **For we are his workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* (Ephesians 2:8-10)

- a. A couple of notes on this passage. You'll notice a three-fold reference to *works*.
  - i. The first is that we're saved NOT as a result of works, but through the faith that is given us.
  - ii. The second, and what's really on display here for me, is God's work, or the fact that God has already worked.
    - 1. By creating *you*. If you are a Christian, **YOU** are God's workmanship.
    - 2. And He created you in Christ Jesus. He formed (or, reformed) you spiritually. We call it regeneration because it represents a complete transformation. It's your union with Christ.
  - iii. The third reference to works in this passage is that though we are created "**for good works**," God has *already* prepared those good works "*beforehand*."
    - 1. I'm so relieved by that. It's not up to me to invent my own good works, they originate from God.
    - 2. What **is** up to me is to remain in Christ. What the Bible calls "**abiding**" (or dwelling) – meaning to attune my heart to Jesus in the dailyness of my life, remembering that He is the vine and I am the branch, and that my life is hidden in Him. **Stock to stem.**

### 3. Adorning begins with abiding (John 15:5).

4. Because as we honestly live from that union, Jesus makes Himself known. From the practice of abiding we bear much fruit.
5. That's where Paul picks up in this verse in Ephesians with the word "walk."
  - a. "**Walk**" in the Bible is a wonderful word. It's a big word, but a simple word too.
  - b. It's "peripateo" and it means to make one's way in;...to pass one's life by; to make due use of opportunities.
  - c. It carries the idea of simply arranging yourself around something *that's already there*.
6. So, we *walk* in these good works by arranging ourselves around them...making due use of ordinary opportunities before us.
7. **God** ordains our days and fills them with good. In other words, our days are filled with *God at work*...

***Philippians 2:13*** "...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure"
8. The *routine* tasks of our days are the fulfillment of the good works God prepared in advance for us to walk in.
9. And so it is, we adorn the Gospel. But those adornments were prepared by God, which means that in a sense, we can say it's **God** adorning the Gospel – but He does it through you, in your ordinary, daily walk of faith.

#### IV. That brings us to our next verse, and this one comes from the book of Titus, chapter 2. I'll begin at verse 7.

*(7) Show yourself in all respects to be a model of **good works**, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, (8) and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. (9) Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, (10) not pilfering, but showing all good faith, **so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.** (11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, (12) training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, (13) waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, (14) who gave himself for us to **redeem** us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession **who are zealous for good works.** Titus 2:7-14*

- a. Verse 10 says, “that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” That’s one of those verses that takes me aback every time I read it. I mean, how is it possible that the “doctrine of God our Savior” – that is the Gospel message – could be adorned by any man, or woman?
- b. Because of what we’ve been looking at: it’s GOD who adorns it...through us.
  - i. But before we go any further, a comment on the fact that you may have noticed verses 10 and 11 are addressed to bondservants.
  - ii. You already know that in this passage certain groups are addressed specifically: older men, older women, young women, younger men, and then bondservants. Of these groups, only the term bondservant applies to all believers.
  - iii. This title of bondservant – “doulos” in the Greek – is a favorite self-designation for the apostles. James claims this title for himself in the opening verse of his epistle (Jas 1:1). As do Peter, Jude, and John (2 Peter 1:1), (Jude 1:1), (Rev 1:1).
  - iv. On top of that, Paul repeats that he is Christ’s doulos throughout Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Titus.
  - v. The term is used over and over in the New Testament to refer to the believer, and the Hebrew equivalent is used over 250 times to refer to believers in the Old Testament.
  - vi. I think we can safely conclude that the Lord wants us to understand ourselves in this way. After all, as bondservants **we** have been purchased from the slave market of sin by the precious blood of Jesus – redeemed for a greater purpose, freed from one master to gratefully serve Another.
  - vii. United to the God-Man Jesus Christ we have become **His** bondservants.
- c. And as you walk in ordinary good works, adorning the Gospel, you’re casting beauty on both the message and the Messenger.
- d. You’re embellishing the Gospel with honor.
- e. Gerard Manley Hopkins captured this dynamic in his poem titled “As *Kingfishers Catch Fire*” famous for its final lines that include the phrase:
  - i. “For Christ plays in ten thousand places”
  - ii. Here is that passage in context...
 

*...I say móre: the just man justices;  
Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —  
Chríst — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces*
  - iii. Christ plays in 10,000 places because **YOU** play in 10,000 places.
- f. Or, to paraphrase Paul, “that in all respects [you are] a model of good works...so that *in everything* [you] may adorn the Gospel.”
- g. If we’re able to adorn the Gospel in EVERYTHING, as this verse says, that **must** include the simple, modest things of our day.

- h. My prayer this morning is that you are hearing the peace-filled message that every step you take consciously abiding in Christ is the beginning of good work.

**V. Whatever you do...**

- a. Are you in a child-raising season that seems invisible, even though it is utterly consuming? Let me remind you...in Christ, whatever you do...that's good work.
- b. Are you in season of bearing public fruit in ministry, or in your chosen vocation? Glory to God, that's good work.
- c. Maybe you're in the third-third of life, a part of what my seminary professor Dr. Eyrich described as Caleb's Corp, wondering which mountain you will claim for the Lord. That's good work.
- d. Whichever it is, be diligent to remember that primarily, it is in the natural and ordinary progression of our days, wherein we make due use of moment-by-moment opportunities that we adorn the Gospel...showing forth faithfulness in the ordinary.
- e. There is no greater or lesser. Everything. A cup of cold water. A kindness to a child. Jesus Himself says these seemingly small things are comparable to ministering directly to Him.
- f. *Optional: Every Moment Holy: Liturgy for Diaper Changing.*

**VI. A Final Note:**

- a. How many of you went out to see the Super Bloom in Lake Elsinore?
- b. We were driving home South on the 15 one Sunday at the height of the spectacle.
- c. It was a madhouse. Highway patrol, hours of stopped traffic, cars scattered and parked everywhere...on a major freeway.
- d. For poppies. People came from everywhere, the city couldn't handle the crowds wanting to see the beauty. Those poppies nearly shut down the city of Lake Elsinore.
- e. There are pictures of the Super Bloom from space! It's perfectly visible.
- f. Flowers in the California desert drew multitudes. "Disneyland-sized crowds" the news reported. Why?
- g. Because it was an uncommon sight. It was a magnificent sight. The poppies adorned an otherwise ordinary landscape, transforming it in to something stunning. The Super Bloom.
- h. That's my little crabapple tree...That's us, as Christ causes us to bear fruit, walk in good works, and adorn the Gospel. Little image bearers walking in the light.
- i. I'm not going to ask you to look around, but if you did, you'd realize you're sitting in the middle of God's super bloom.
- j. As Gandalf says in the Hobbit movie, "I found it is the very small deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love."
- k. On any given day, as we adorn the Gospel in pure, simple devotion to Christ... **We** are God's super bloom, bearing witness to Him who changes the landscape of our lives and the world around us.