

Blessings in Christ

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

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I am assuming that most of us here this morning enjoy being blessed! And just to be clear: We are blessed people! Often, when we think about our blessings, and even when we thank God for our blessings, many times we think in terms of blessings that are physical. We thank God for our homes, we thank God for our good health, we thank God for our families, we thank God that we have good jobs so that we can pay the bills, we thank God for reliable transportation. And it is certainly good to praise God for all of these amazing blessings. The Bible teaches in James 1:17 that, ***“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”*** And so we thank God for those physical blessings. However, the Bible also teaches that many of our blessings are not physical, but spiritual. In other words, many of our blessings (and I would say – the most IMPORTANT of our blessings) cannot actually be seen and measured with the human eye. The most significant of blessings cannot be calculated, cannot be accounted for on a balance sheet, cannot be seen or touched.

This morning I would like for us to start a series of lessons from the New Testament book of Ephesians. And if you know anything about the book of Ephesians, then you know that the book starts as Paul praises God for some of these spiritual blessings. We first learn about the church in Ephesus in the New Testament book of Acts. The first half of Acts tells about the beginning of the church and the ministry of Peter and John. Partway into the book of Acts, however, we read about the conversion of a leading Pharisee by the name of Saul. Saul was immersed in water for the forgiveness of his sins, his name is changed to Paul, and in the second half of Acts we pretty much have a record of Paul’s three missionary journeys. In fact, if you look in our pew Bibles at the very last page, the last page with anything on it, you will see a map of those journeys. And you will find that Paul goes to the city of Ephesus on his Second and Third Missionary Journeys.

He makes just a brief stop at the end of Acts 18, and he promises to come back. And come back he did! He returns to Ephesus on his Third Missionary Journey in Acts 19. He shows up and immediately needs to correct a misunderstanding concerning baptism. He runs into twelve men who were taught incorrectly, so they need to be re-baptized. He goes on to teach and preach for a period of three years. This was very roughly from 53-55 AD. During this time, you might remember how the local magicians burned their books of magic. You might also remember how the local silversmiths pretty much caused a riot over the fact that Paul’s preaching was hitting them in the wallet. Well, after the riot, Paul moved on. He stopped back briefly on his way back to Jerusalem to meet the elders on the beach at Miletus. But as far as we know, he never made his way back to

Ephesus again. At the end of Acts, Paul lands in Rome and ends up under house arrest for a period of two years. It was during this time period that he sends a letter back to the church in Ephesus, what we now know as the book of Ephesians, a book written maybe 5-8 years after the three years that Paul spent preaching and teaching in that city.

And that is where we get back to the idea of blessings. The book of Ephesians starts in this way, ***“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** And then, as we will see in just a moment, Paul very quickly reminds the Christians in Ephesus that they have been incredibly blessed – not with large homes, and cars, and health, and wealth, but with ***“every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”*** Over and over again, Paul uses the phrase ***“in Christ”*** (in fact, he uses this basic idea at least 35 times in the book of Ephesians), and the idea is: God holds nothing back when it comes to blessing his children! And that’s what I would like for us to get out of Ephesians 1 this morning: As Christians, we are blessed! We are blessed in ways that the world around us will never understand. And as Christians, we need to appreciate this. We need to understand what the Lord has done for us. As God’s people here in Madison, Wisconsin, we need to understand what we have ***“in Christ.”*** If you’re using your own copy of the Scriptures, I would invite you to underline all of those times where Paul says ***“in Christ”*** or ***“in Him”*** – quite a few times right here in the opening paragraph. Notice, with me then, Ephesians 1:3-14,

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him ¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Before we get into the meat of this passage, I want to point out something about verse 3. As Paul begins, he pitches this paragraph as basically a list of reasons to praise God. Notice how he says in verse 3, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”*** The word ***“blessed,”*** here, is the basis of our English word “eulogy,” and the word means, “to speak well of.” Literally, it refers to a “good word.” At a funeral, the eulogy part of the service is where we speak “good words” about the person, the eulogy is where we “speak well of” the person. And that is the idea here, ***“We speak well of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”*** We praise God, we speak well of God, for the spiritual blessings he has provided. With this in mind, notice, please, some of these blessings.

I. **Starting in verse 3-6, we find that IN CHRIST we have been given a NEW IDENTITY, WE HAVE BEEN ADOPTED INTO GOD'S FAMILY.**

At some point in our lives, most of us have felt the feeling of rejection, the feeling of being unloved, being picked last for the team, the pain of a broken relationship, the pain of verbal or physical abuse, sometimes even at the hands of a parent. Most of us have at least some idea of what it means to be on the receiving end of being unwanted in some way. In Christ, though, we have been chosen, we have been adopted into the family of God. We were chosen, in fact, ***“before the foundation of the world.”*** In other words, even before the creation itself, God had a plan, and that plan included us. God had a plan for the church, that all of those ***“in Christ”*** would be a part of God's own family.

In Christ, therefore, we are loved and accepted. We have been chosen for adoption. When my sister and her husband first started looking into the adoption process many years ago, she sent me a link to a website with a long list of profiles for various children who were neglected or abandoned by their parents for whatever reason – pictures, a brief family history, names and ages, a list of various emotional and physical disabilities. The website was absolutely heartbreaking, to see this never-ending list of children who were pretty much unloved in this life. You could just scroll, and scroll, and scroll. But then to think: By clicking those links, you could make a choice that would change a child's life forever. And that is what my sister and her husband did. They made a choice and adopted one of those children as their own. At the adoption hearing, the presiding judge let out a sigh of relief and explained that this was one of the best parts of his job, some of the happiest days of his career, to finalize the choice made by those parents who were willing to adopt those children as their own. And that is the picture Paul paints for us here. When we obeyed the gospel, we were born, we were adopted into the family of God, we went from being on the outside to being on the inside, from being unloved (in a sense), to being loved, as a part of God's family. As Christians, we are loved, we have been chosen. What a blessing it is to be chosen by God!

At the end of verse 4, notice the reason we were chosen. We were chosen, so ***“that we would be holy and blameless before Him.”*** The idea is: When we are adopted, the goal is that we will take on the family resemblance. We were chosen so that we could reflect the nature of our Father. And we will get to that a little later in the book of Ephesians; but for now, the emphasis is on the blessing, the blessing of being chosen, the blessing of being adopted into the family of God. We praise God that he has put us ***“in Christ,”*** we praise God for adopting us into his family. What a huge blessing that is!

II. **As we go back and dig into the next few verses, we see another great blessing that causes us to praise God (or speak well of God), and that is: In Christ, WE HAVE BEEN REDEEMED FROM SIN (verses 7-8).**

In verse 7, the word translated ***“redemption”*** comes from a word referring to someone being released upon the payment of a ransom. In 2 Samuel 7:23, God is said to have redeemed Israel from Egypt. So we have the idea of a rescue. When we think of redemption, we might also think of a kidnapping where there is a demand for a ransom. Notice, though, the price that was paid for our freedom: Paul says in Ephesians 1:7 that, ***“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.”*** His blood paid the price to purchase our freedom from sin. Like slaves that have been purchased and set free, the Lord Jesus redeemed us from our sins. He did something that we could not do. Just as slaves in Paul's time could never come up with the price to purchase their own freedom, so also we were powerless to save ourselves, and so the Lord stepped in and paid the price for us. As Paul says, he did this ***“according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us.”*** The price paid is far beyond our ability

to truly understand. His blood purchased our ***“forgiveness.”*** The word ***“forgiveness”*** here is a word that refers to something being dismissed, or released, or sent away. His blood gives us freedom from our sin.

As Paul explains in Romans 6, before we obeyed the gospel, we were slaves to sin. He explains, though, that when we are buried with Christ in baptism, we die to sin. At the point of baptism, that bond of slavery is broken. His blood washes our sins away. As we sometimes sing, “He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay. I needed someone to wash my sins away. Amazing grace! Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay!” We have been redeemed from our sin through the blood of Jesus Christ.

III. As we go back to our text for this morning, we see another blessing in Christ, and that is: In Christ we have been given a PURPOSE FOR LIVING – WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE PLAN (vs. 9-10).

As Paul said in verse 9, ***“He made known to us the mystery of His will...”*** In other words, in Christ, God has let us in on the secret. In Christ, God has let us in on our reason for living. In Christ, God has revealed our purpose. God has a plan for our lives, and that plan is revealed in Christ. In Christ, we have a mission. In Christ, we are part of something much bigger than we are.

We think of the most successful organizations in the world around us: Those that succeed understand their purpose. Locally, we think of American Family Insurance and their mission statement, “To be the most trusted and valued service-driven insurance company.” We think of a company like Epic, “Do Good. Have Fun. Make Money.” We think of UW Health, “Advancing health without compromise through: Service, Scholarship, Science, and Social Responsibility.” We think of an organization like the Madison Metropolitan School District, “Our mission is to assure that every student has the knowledge and skills needed for academic achievement and a successful life.” Organizations that succeed have a clear understanding of their mission. The same is true of us as Christians.

In Christ, we have a purpose. In Christ, the church itself has a mission to accomplish. Our mission is to glorify God. Our mission is to bless God, to praise God, to act on God’s plan for our lives, so that all people can see God living in us. We think about all of the great heroes of faith in the Bible. All of those great heroes acted on God’s plan for their lives. Noah built an ark. Abraham left his home in Ur. Moses led the people out of Egypt. Joshua led the people into the Promised Land. Gideon led God’s people into battle. Daniel stayed faithful to God in a foreign land. Peter walked on water. Paul traveled all over the Mediterranean world preaching Jesus as the Messiah. All of these great heroes understood God’s plan for their lives, and they acted on that plan. In the same way, God also has a plan for us. The question is: Will we act on it, or will we stand in the way?

IV. There is another great blessing we have in Christ (we see it in verses 11-12), and the great blessing here is that IN CHRIST WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN A MOST VALUABLE INHERITANCE.

Personally, I love how Paul says that, ***“we have obtained an inheritance.”*** In other words, this is not some gift that is out there somewhere on the horizon, but this is something that we have right now, ***“we have obtained an inheritance.”*** Looking at this passage as a whole, I am assuming that Paul is talking about our salvation. And yes, in a sense, heaven is out there on the horizon somewhere, but in a very real sense, we are saved right here, right now! And this is something we need to enjoy. This is something we need to appreciate. We are saved – right now! Right now, if we are in Christ, our sins are forgiven. Right now, we are a part of the body of Christ. And in that regard, we are among the wealthiest people on this earth. When it comes to this inheritance God has given to us, there is nothing the stock market can do to take it away. In Christ, our inheritance will never lose value due to inflation. The government will never be able to take it away in taxes.

Nobody can break in our homes to steal it. Instead, our inheritance is eternal, and it is secure. We can decide to walk away from it, we can decide not to accept it in the first place, but once we are in Christ, ***“we have obtained an inheritance.”***

V. **As we look back at our text, we have one more blessing in Christ to consider, and that is: IN CHRIST, WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. **PPT****

In verses 13-14, Paul refers to being ***“...sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance.”*** We have been ***“sealed,”*** then, with the Holy Spirit. These days, we don’t really do a lot of sealing. Usually, things are handled electronically. But in the ancient world, documents would be sealed with a little glob of melted wax, and the sender would then smash his signet ring into that wax, sealing the letter. Several years ago, somebody got me a sealing kit as a gift. I will admit, I did not use it until yesterday. I will admit, there was a slight learning curve. I first had to learn to do this without catching the paper on fire! But it is an interesting process. The signet they got me has an “E” on it. But kings and those in authority would often have this in the form of a ring. They would have a unique design, and the seal was then official. Paul says that when we are ***“in Christ,”*** we are ***“sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”*** When we are in Christ, we have God’s seal on us in the form of God’s Spirit.

Not only that, but we also find that the Holy Spirit is also referred to as being given to us as a ***“pledge,”*** as a kind of down payment. And there are so many ways we could illustrate this. This past Friday afternoon, I delivered a check from my parents to a realtor up here. That check was a down payment, earnest money, to go along with their accepted offer on a house here in Madison. That check told the seller that my parents were serious about making that purchase. In a more lighthearted example, I think of those vibrating pagers that you get at some restaurants. You go in to get a table, there is a wait, and until your table is ready, they will give you that pager. In a sense, that pager is a sign that your name is on the list. In a sense, that pager is holding your spot. Or, we could think about sending in some kind of rebate where the company makes us send in the “Proof of Purchase,” maybe the barcode off of the box, proving that we really did buy the product.

In a similar way, the Holy Spirit, Paul says, has been given as a ***“pledge of our inheritance.”*** The Holy Spirit is our down payment. The Holy Spirit is our pager. The Holy Spirit is our Proof of Purchase. And yes, as we discussed earlier, there is a sense in which we are enjoying our inheritance right now. But in another sense, there is more coming, right? As Christians, we do have more to look forward to in the future. And the Holy Spirit is the pledge, the seal, the down payment, the promise of more to come.

Conclusion:

As we close, as we look back over what we’ve learned this morning, we realize that Paul isn’t really telling us to DO anything yet. He will get to that toward the end of the book, starting in Chapter 4. But here at the beginning, Paul was simply telling this church what they had. Maybe they didn’t appreciate it. Maybe they didn’t realize some of these blessings. And so the apostle Paul had to start out, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”*** He had to start out with a reminder. This is who we are. This is what God has done. In the same way, sometimes today we just need to slow down and let this sink in a little bit. As Christians, we are incredibly blessed!

Here at the end, we as a congregation would like to extend an invitation to those here who are not yet Christians. Over and over again, Paul referred to these blessings being available to those who are ***“in Christ.”*** If

we are on the outside, how do we get on the inside? In Christ is where we want to be! Paul gives the answer to this question in two other passages – Galatians 3:26-27 and Romans 6:3-4. In Galatians 3, Paul said, ***“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*** Did you catch that? We are ***“baptized into Christ.”*** And then there is the similar thought over in Romans 6, ***“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”*** Again, Paul says that we are ***“baptized into Christ Jesus.”*** If you have any questions, we hope you will ask. We would love to sit down and study. On the other hand, if you are ready to be baptized into Christ right now, we would be glad to help. You can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com