

March 8, 2009

# THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

## *Blessed in the Beloved*

### Ephesians 1:3 – 14

This first chapter of Ephesians is so full, so weighty, so deep that I feel more than inadequate to preach through it. And if I was counting on my intellect or wisdom to accurately explain and expound everything here we'd be done before we began. But I am not counting on myself this morning. I am counting on the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to speak these deep truths to your hearts. If it depended upon me, we'd all be short-changed. But as Paul wrote in verse 3: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*, Ephesians 1:3 And one of those spiritual blessings is wisdom and insight. And so trusting in God, and the power of the Holy Spirit and His word of truth, we will venture out a little more into the depths of God in Ephesians.

In this first section, verses 3 – 14, we see Paul lay out three main areas of blessing : ***the Father's work of love in election; the Son's work of grace in Redemption; and the Holy Spirit's work of power in sanctification.*** And these all are the blessings of verse 3 which tells us that as saints of God in Christ we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Literally that should read ***in the heavenlies***. This is a favorite phrase of Paul's here in Ephesians that he doesn't use in any other letter. *'...according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places*, Ephesians 1:19b-20

Paul tells us that Christ is now seated in the heavenlies. And I think the fact that Christ is seated speaks to the reality that **His work has been accomplished**. All our present blessing springs from His finished work. Obedient to His Father's will, Christ came from heaven to secure our salvation by taking on human form and dying on the cross, shedding His blood for our sins, crying out, 'It is finished'. And then the Father raised Him up to sit with Him at His right hand where He is today – in the heavenlies. We will spend more time on this phrase in later messages because Paul uses this unique term at least five times in this letter. One reason I think he does that to point us to the fact that everything that is blessing in our lives has its origin and substance in heaven. That is, what we taste down here of the Father's love and the grace of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, and so many other blessings, are merely reflections of the reality in the heavenlies.

For the last two weeks we have looked at the blessing of **the Father's work of love in election**. That is, we have been **chosen in Him** before the foundation of the world and **predestined to be adopted into the family of God as His sons**: *even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.*

If I might just say one thing here about adoption. Adoption was first in the mind of God. It is not a human idea. Adoption was in the plan of God from the beginning. It was not an afterthought or a good remedy for a bad situation. Adoption was in the heart of God from eternity past – where God loved you and chose you and planned for your eventual inclusion into His family as a full-fledged member – not a second-class citizen. There are couples today who for various reasons are cannot have their own biological children and turn to adoption, and may think that this is a second-best choice. And I want to say that this is not a way of making the best of a bad situation – it actually mirrors the love of God toward us. Those who adopt should keep in mind that just as our adoption is to the praise and glory of His grace – so should their adoption be. And just as He adopted us so that we might make much of Him – so we need to teach the children we adopt that they were adopted to make much of God.

Those are the first two blessings. Paul goes on now to talk about the blessing of **the Son's work of grace in Redemption**; *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace*, Ephesians 1:7 First of all **we have been redeemed**. I don't think we can fully appreciate the scope of that blessing unless we have a distinct realization that we were slaves. This is directly opposed to the idea that all men are born free – they're not – they're born slaves. Slaves to sin and death and hell and Satan; slaves to the world and the flesh. Slaves to appetites and lusts that are bent on wrecking humanity for God.

The Bible teaches that without Christ all men are born into slavery and what we need is a Redeemer – someone to come into the slave market and buy us out of slavery. And that is what Jesus did. *'... You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.'* 1 Corinthians 6:10 If we as chosen, predestined sons of God, are not our own – then why do we act as though we were? To be redeemed is to be bought out from one master to serve another. We are not our own – we have been bought from one master whose intent was eternal destruction – to serve another master whose intent is eternal joy.

Not only are we redeemed, but all **our sins were forgiven through His sacrifice of blood on Calvary.** His blood on the cross brought us peace with God as it says in Colossians 1:20. His blood justifies us as Paul tells us in Romans 5:9. His blood has brought us – once estranged and far from God – near to Him as it says in Ephesians 2:15. His blood purifies our conscience and sanctifies us to God as Hebrews tells us. **And His blood has washed away and forgiven our sins.** And again we are reminded of the heavenly reality of His blood by looking at our own..

One incredible quality of the blood in our bodies is that it cleanses us. **Blood sustains life by carrying away the chemical by-products that would kill you if not dealt with.** As the muscles in your body work, they convert oxygen into energy, and produce certain waste products called metabolites that are flushed away instantly in the bloodstream. Individual red blood cells, traveling slowly inside narrow capillaries, simultaneously release their cargoes of fresh oxygen and absorb waste products (carbon dioxide, urea, and uric acid) – again, cleansing the cells of harmful agents. Your blood courses throughout your body continuously cleansing and renewing and sustaining life. Things in this earthly realm were intended to reflect the realities of heaven.

And the washing away of our sins by His blood is all part of the grace that is more than enough to cover our offenses. That is what Paul was referring to when he says: *'...which He lavished upon us...'* Ephesians 1:8a God lavished His grace on us – that is, He gives more than enough to meet every situation and circumstance. That is what **lavished** means here. **It means He will spare no expense to see that His will is carried out.** Paul told the Corinthians: *'And God is able to make all grace abound [be lavished upon] to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work'* 2 Corinthians 9:8 When I am tempted to think that at this particular time, in this instance, in this circumstance, God is not enough – the words of that old hymn start ringing in my ears: *He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater; He sendeth more strength when the labors increase; To added affliction He addeth more mercy; To multiplied sorrows His multiplied peace.* **His grace has been lavished upon us.**

This next little phrase in verse 8: *'...in all wisdom and insight...'* really ought to begin the next sentence – so let me read it as it appears in the NASB: *...in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.* Ephesians 1:8a-10. The blessing here is **the revelation of the mystery of God's will.** Would you like to know the will of God? The will of God is a mystery to everyone who doesn't know Him. It is foolishness to men without Christ.

In fact it is only those who have embraced Christ that have any wisdom or insight themselves. Romans 1 tell us this: *'For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools'* Romans 1:21-22 Outside of God there is no wisdom or insight. That is because in the will and plan of God – everything in heaven and on earth – visible and invisible – will one day be subject to Christ. The word Paul uses here is a Greek word that means **'to bring everything together under one head'**. This is a big thought here. It means that all of human history: all the wars, all the times of peace, empires rising and empires falling, governments and nations, cultures and peoples – everything has been a preparation for, a planning and thinking for, an arranging and working for the the goal of God – **everything subject to Christ.** Or as C.S. Lewis said: **"History is a story written by the finger of God."**

Paul had in mind here the subjection of every other will to the will of God. This goes back to Genesis where Adam in effect said, 'My will be done' and from that moment on mankind was plunged into the dark room of ignorance and foolishness. This is the number one issue with people – who's going to run this ship? Do you know what 99% of church squabbles are about? They are about control – who is in charge. But in the wisdom and insight of God, to demonstrate His goodness and glory, He had already determined to bring everything together at the right time under the headship of Christ. **God's will is that everything in heaven and on earth will be subject to Christ.** How about you? Have you subjected yourself to Christ? If you have – eternal joy. If you haven't – you **will** one day in eternal regret. One day the bible says, *'every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'*

It signifies too, that **the meaning of everything is found in Christ**. The entire universe is to find its meaning and relevance in the Son of God. All the conflicts, all the competing and warring factions, all the loose ends and discrepancies and estrangements are resolved in Him. He is the meaning of the universe. And it is only when you surrender to Christ that everything finally makes sense.

The next blessing Paul lists is **the blessing of the inheritance**. *In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will*, Ephesians 1:11 What this says is that by virtue of the Father's choosing, the Son's redeeming and the Holy Spirit's working – we are set up to gain a most unimaginable inheritance. I say unimaginable because quite honestly I really can't imagine what absolute joy and satisfaction looks like. I have moments of joy – moments when I can say I am satisfied – but the promise of the inheritance we have in Christ is eternal, unending joy and satisfaction. Where all our wants and needs and ambitions are not shot through with selfishness and greed and personal envy. Where every desire is a legitimate one and every lust a perfect one and every aspiration is bent toward Christ. Where we are living in the reality that it is all about God and not about me. *'...so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory*. Ephesians 1:12

Finally Paul comes to **the Holy Spirit's work of power in sanctification**. *In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory*. Ephesians 1:13-14 We have been chosen by the Father in Christ – redeemed by His Son – and to complete the deal, we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Sealing is a work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification because it is His sealing that sets us apart from the unbelievers. God's plan for us includes assurance of salvation – that we would feel secure in His love and sure of His power to save. Everything else in this world is unstable and unreliable – our health, our family, our jobs, our nation. But God's desire for us is that we would have unshakeable confidence in Him. **And in His wisdom, all the uncertainties of this life should only work to threaten our confidence and security in everything but God**. He is the only sure thing.

When you heard the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him – two things transpired: you were sealed by His Holy Spirit, and you were given a guarantee of final salvation and your inheritance in Christ. So what does it mean that we were sealed? In Matthew 27:66 the word is used to describe the sealing of the tomb of Jesus. The religious authorities were concerned that Jesus' disciples would come in the night and steal His body and claim that He rose from the dead. And in Revelation 20:3, God throws Satan in a pit and seals it so he can't get out. **So the first meaning of sealing is to lock something up**. In Romans 4:11, circumcision is called the seal or sign of righteousness by faith and so we understand that the **second meaning of sealing is a sign of authenticity**. And finally in Revelation 7:3, the people of God are sealed by God to protect them from the coming wrath on the world. **And so we see the third meaning of sealing is protection**.

So if you take these meanings and put them together, I think we begin to get an idea of what Paul is talking about here. If we are locked up, so to speak, by the Holy Spirit, I think that means that we are His forever and nothing can take us from His hands. People argue all the time about whether our salvation is conditional on our behavior or not – that is can we lose our salvation. I think this is one of the strongest texts to indicate that those whom God saves are saved eternally. **It is as though the Holy Spirit locks us up to faith and obedience and locks out ultimate unbelief and final disobedience**.

Secondly, if the Holy Spirit Himself is the sign and seal of our authenticity – then we will see and others will note, the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. There will be evidence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There will be a kind of honesty and integrity about us that marks us as belonging to Him. **When people see us, they see Christ**. And thirdly, if the Holy Spirit's sealing is our protection, **then all the forces of evil in the world or in the heavenlies cannot overcome us**, because they would be taking on God Himself. We can be confident that all that comes to us, comes through His hands first.

Finally, the Holy Spirit not only sets His seal on us but by virtue of indwelling us, becomes the guarantee that we will endure to the end and obtain that inheritance that Peter said is *'imperishable, undefiled and reserved in heaven for us.'* A guarantee as it is used here, essentially meant an initial payment that guaranteed the final installment. We need to understand that our salvation is **a past fact** – *[God] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began*, 2 Timothy 1:9; **a present reality** - *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*. 1 Corinthians 1:18; and **a future hope** – *[you] who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*. 1 Peter 1:5 The Holy Spirit reveals Christ to us and makes His work in redemption real to us, perfects us in love, holy and blameless and seals us forever as belonging to God.

What is God saying to us here? I hear Him saying, ***'You are mine, I have chosen you and predestined you; I have redeemed you and sealed you by My Holy Spirit and given Him as your guarantee of a sure and certain inheritance, because I am committed to magnify the glory of My grace in your salvation. You are blessed in the Beloved.'***

This is the gospel. This is the good news of the gospel. Are you living in the good of the gospel? Are you spreading the good news of the gospel? If you are trusting in Christ this morning then you can be sure that the destiny of your life was born in the eternal will and love of God in eternity past, and that the direction of your life is growing into an absolutely sure and glorious end, and you have been graced in the Beloved with all the blessings of God necessary to take you to glory.

If you have no assurance this morning that God has set His love on you and called you and destined you for adoption as a son of God and heir of Christ, then I invite you to respond to the lavish grace of God in Christ and kneel at His cross in repentance and receive His forgiveness for sins and know the love of God that has secured your destiny in the Beloved.

*Our good and gracious Father,*

*Grant that we would see and savor the goodness of the gospel; know the joy of peace with You; rejoice in our redemption and in being justified from all things; revel in Your great mercy and grace in choosing and adopting us into Your family, delivered from the coming wrath and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise for a sure and certain inheritance in heaven. I pray that we would never cease to marvel at Your mercy and Your might. Awaken dead hearts to the joy of Your salvation and grant the repentance that leads to life. May we experience the lavish proportions of Your grace in all our lives and spread that grace to others. Awaken compassion for those rushing headlong to eternal misery because of unbelief and as those who have been made eternally glad in You, may we live to make the nations glad in You we pray in the powerful name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

***May the Lord bless you and keep you  
and make His face shine upon you.  
May the Lord be gracious unto you;  
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you  
and give you peace.***