

In Jesus

As I have said before, most of my sermons are based on text suggested by the Revised Common Lectionary. If I had to estimate the percentage of sermons coming from the RCL, I would say more than 80%. Today will be one of the exceptions. A few weeks ago, as I was preparing another sermon, I read through the text that we will use this morning and the proverbial light went on and I knew that I needed to follow that call.

This morning we will spend most of our time in the first chapter of Ephesians. Ephesians is a pastoral letter that is often attributed to Paul. Some of the earliest manuscripts do not address the church at Ephesus so it is possible that this was a letter that was circulated to several congregations. It was also written while Paul was in prison (60-62 AD).

Before we get too scholarly, we will break from the technical discussion on this letter to the church in Ephesus. As I mentioned earlier, this message presented during another sermon preparation. It set my mind on the fact that we often think about and study the fruit of the spirit and other manifestations of Christian living. We focus on those actions we do or should do that may help to identify us as Christians. Yet, here in the first chapter of this letter, we are told about multiple blessings we have when we are in Jesus.

Before we read our scripture, let's attend to one more piece of instruction. When we read the word blessing(s) in this chapter, it is the Greek word εὐλογία or eulogia from which we get the word eulogy. It also carries the meaning of benefit, generosity, blessing or bounty. So, as we read the word suggesting that we are blessed, think that God has generously given something beneficial to us.

Let's read through this chapter together.

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.*

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, (Ephesians 1:1-3 NASB)

Paul is sitting in prison and is not the least concerned about his situation as he writes to the believers. He extends grace (unearned favor) and peace from God. He then tells us that we receive blessings in Christ. These blessings are not limited. In fact, he says **every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places*.**

We could stop right here and know that we are in God's favor when we are in Christ. Paul does not stop here. Much of the rest of this chapter is spend enumerating some of the blessings (benefits) we receive by being in Christ.

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love (Ephesians 1:4 NASB)

In this one verse, we find at least three blessings which we receive. First, we are blessed because God knew that we matter. He knew that in Christ, we are chosen and were chosen before He ever said, "Let there be light."

Second, we have the blessing of being holy and blameless. No, we are neither unless we are in Christ. Yet, in Christ, we are now worthy to serve God.

Third, we are in the love of Christ. This is the ἀγάπω (agapaho) love or the highest form of love. It is self-sacrificial love. We are in the love that caused Jesus to go to the cross for us.

Reading the next verse, we learn that God knew throughout eternity that He would adopt us to be His children.

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Ephesians 1:5 NASB)

Here is another blessing. God has already been through the decision process and chosen each of us to be His child. In doing this, God shows His kindness and love for us. Again, we really need to understand this is personal. He chose you and me. Don't let the universal concepts cloud the fact that His decision to adopt us is personal.

As we read on into the next verse, we find something that should make us feel warm and cozy.
to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:6 NASB)

We have the blessing of acceptance. We all may have experienced or seen the disappointment when a person is not wanted for the team. Perhaps a person is rebuffed by the person on whom they had a crush. Here, we learn that we are blessed by the grace of God. This grace is freely given to all who are in Christ (the beloved). Doesn't it feel good to be accepted by God? Let's read the next two verses and we will find even more blessings.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished (*abundance*) on us. In all wisdom and insight (Ephesians 1:7-8 NASB)

Before we start to count our blessings found in this short section of scripture, please note where God lavished something on us. In the original language, that carries the thought of giving in abundance. God is not stingy.

One blessing that we may not dwell on is that we are redeemed through His blood. Without this, we would still be slaves to sin leading to eternal death. We cannot buy ourselves only the blood of Christ can do that.

With the fact that Christ bought us through His blood, we come into another blessing. Our sins are forgiven. When I pause to reflect on this, I think of the third verse of that great hymn *It is Well with My Soul*:

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought! —

My sin, not in part but the whole,

Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

If that isn't a blessing, we need to stop here and work on our heart.

Our redemption from being a slave to sin and the forgiveness of our sins are all because God poured out (lavishly/abundantly) His grace on us. His unmerited, unearned good will is poured on us in Christ Jesus. It is a supply that will never be depleted.

We now read verse on in this chapter.

He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 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. (Ephesians 1:9-10 NASB)

We live in a world that is filled with war, suffering, and disease. It is a world where Satan seems to have the advantage and is bringing about all manner of evil. We see bad things happen to good people. Yet, we have the blessing of knowing God's intention. God has given us the answers and solutions to the world problems. They are found in Christ.

Oh, preacher, that is a rather simplistic answer. Is it? Has the world tried Christ? At best, only a relatively small percentage of the world population can claim to be Christian. So, don't tell me the answer cannot be found in Christ. God assures us that His intentions are in Christ.

All of God's plans and intentions will play out at the proper time and in the proper way. If we are in Christ, we will see it happen.

Another blessing is found in the 11th verse.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11 NASB)

We have the blessing of an eternal inheritance. Remember that passage from Revelation where we are told that there will be no more tears, pain, suffering, or death? Remember we are told that all of the old things have passed away and everything is renewed? That is the inheritance that we have awaiting us who are in Christ Jesus.

Let us continue reading.

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, 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. (Ephesians 1:13-14 NASB)

We have been blessed to hear the good news of Christ. Most of us have been blessed to hear the gospel many times. Hopefully, most of us have heard the gospel it has led us to salvation.

We then received a blessing that was not available to the prophets. They knew of the promise and spoke of that promise. We received that promised blessing—the Holy Spirit has been given to us as a seal of our promised inheritance.

As we wrap up this morning, let us now drop down to the 18th verse and read.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:18-21 NASB)

Paul prays that we might see that we are blessed to have a hope that is unshakable. We may put total reliance in that hope. Within this hope, we need to see that we are blessing of tremendous value.

Jesus bought us when we were slaves to sin. He presented us to God as worthy based on the price that was paid. Then God gave us to Jesus the Christ as a reward for His work on earth. Jesus cherishes us. Isn't that a blessing worth remembering?

One final blessing we need to note is that we are of the one who raised Christ from the dead. In Christ, this is the power that is present in our life today.

Are you blessed?