

We are So Blessed!

Eph. 1:1-14

Intro. Exactly one year ago, we began a series I called, What in the World is the Church? Paul's letter to the Ephesians seemed like a natural springboard for some topical messages. But as we got into the series, the Lord gently reminded me that He calls me to preach in an expository way. **Neh. 8:8** is a great description of what that means. **They** (the Levites) **read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.** The fact is, God has already spoken. We need to hear His Word. My challenge is to make His message clear and to give the meaning so we all can understand and apply it to our lives. But in my haste to get to the practical part of Paul's letter, I did something I've never done before. If reason prevails, I'll never do again. I began our study of Ephesians at **chap. 2.** I skipped **chap. 1** all together! It may be the dumbest thing I've ever done in the pulpit! So here's what I'm proposing. With the two Sundays remaining before Peggy and I enjoy a month-long sabbatical, I want to backtrack and correct my folly by preaching two messages from **Eph. 1.** Is that OK with you? All in favor signify by raising your hand...just slightly. Look at that...it's unanimous!

This morning I hope to make clear and give the meaning to what may be the most wonderful chapter in the entire NT. And to think, I skipped it! I've called the message, We are so Blessed, because of **1:3 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.** I'm assuming you already know the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus while under house arrest in Rome. In **v.1** we see he addressed the letter **To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:** I'm also assuming you know that **saint** is just another term for believer. Down here I see saint Jerry and over there is saint Troy. But **saint** comes from the same Greek word that **holy** and **sanctify**, derive from. It means one who is saved and set apart for God's holy purposes. But in **v.1** Paul adds...these saints are **the faithful in Christ Jesus.** By this designation Paul declares what every Christian should desire to be. We should earnestly desire to be faithful to the Christ who has been so faithful to us!

But here in the very first verse, we find that Paul is writing to those who are **in Christ.** All that follows is true for true Christians alone. The spiritual blessings of **v.3** which are enumerated in the long sentence that extends from **v.4-14**, belong only to those who have been born again by faith in Jesus Christ. To be **in Christ** is one of Paul's favorite expressions. It signifies the essential union between Christ and believers. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. This union is permanent because it was made by God. Unlike things we make, the things God creates, never fail!

In **v.2** we find Paul's typical salutation. **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** Last week we discovered the letter ends with the same blessing. In my backwards way of preaching Ephesians, the letter begins the way it ends, and we already know that because we started there. But **grace** is the method and cause of our salvation. We are saved by God's unmerited favor plus nothing. **(2:8, 9) Peace** signifies a divine sense of wholeness, tranquility, and security. Peace is the result of Christ's salvation. We have **peace** because of God's **grace** to us.

Last Sunday, during our combined SS session, Pastor Robert did an excellent job presenting our challenge to improve in the matter of disciple-making. Our leadership team is fully committed to the task of changing the culture of our church in obedience to Christ's command to ...**go and make disciples...** (**Matt. 28:19, 20**) This command is addressed to every **saint** who wants to be **faithful in Christ Jesus.** When we really understand what disciple-making is, nothing is more natural or healthy than for us to share what we've learned about Jesus with others. We were made for this purpose! But as we set out on this exciting journey of faith and obedience, we need a solid foundation. Like a salesman, we need to be acquainted with and excited about our product. That's what **vs.4-14** do for us. They list the blessings declared in **v.3.** So let's consider how blessed we are to be saved.

We make some awful mistakes as parents. Am I right about that? We're so flawed and broken. Our parenting is sometimes comparable to the proverbial "bull in a china shop!" As children some of us were told we weren't planned. Our birth was an *"accident...an untimely inconvenience...a mistake."* I've heard others describe painful scars they bear because their parents told them they were worthless and would never amount to anything. Some have never been forgiven for mistakes made when they were young and restless. Still others were unloved, abandoned, or told *"when you turn 18, you're out of here... I'm done with you."* That wasn't my experience and I hope it wasn't yours. But that's the damage and scars many bear and these things can't be fixed on the human level. But if you sustained some damage from fallen parents, I've got good news. You can forgive your parents as God has forgiven you. That may be hard to do, but God will help you if you determine to obey Him.

But here in **vs. 4-14**, the apostle declares permanent blessings that belong to every believer... blessings that come from our perfect Father in heaven. If you claim these by faith, they will overshadow any damage suffered from earthly parents. Here we're told our second birth was no accident. It was *planned* by God the Father who chose us for Himself. Our value is underscored because we were *purchased* by God the Son who has forgiven us completely and forever. If that's not enough, our future is secured...we will never be put out of the family...because we are sealed and kept by God the Holy Spirit. We were planned from the beginning / purchased at an enormous price / and God has promised we will be with Him forever. There's no product like God's salvation! His salvation forgives our yesterdays / establishes us today / and assures our tomorrows. We are so blessed!!! So in the interest of knowing our product and praising God because of it...consider these blessings with me.

1. Blessings from God the Father who planned our salvation - vs. 4-6

For he chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Our first blessing and reason to praise the Lord is this...**He chose us in him before the creation of the world.** The Greek verb translated **chose** means just what we think it means. We don't need to know Greek to determine the meaning. It means God *selected* us for Himself from a larger group. He didn't choose you or me because we were so special. So stop congratulating yourself for being Mr. or Mrs. Wonderful! God wasn't influenced by who we are or by what potential we might bring to the table. He wasn't moved by whatever asset we may be to His Kingdom. NO! God sovereignly chose us and made us special by virtue of His choice. The doctrine of election is defined this way, *"An act of choice whereby God selects an individual or group out of a larger company for a purpose or destiny which He appoints."* - Vaughn

Long ago God spoke through Moses to explain to Israel that they were **chosen out of all peoples on the face of the earth, (Deut. 7:6)** In the same way, Jesus said to His disciples, **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. - Jn. 15:16** God intends for this astounding reality to be a great blessing to each believer. The fact that we trusted Jesus as Savior was no accident or mistake. We were chosen for this. If you try to reason it all out, you'll miss the blessing. So, just accept it. In heaven there's no conflict between sovereign election and human responsibility (or the free will of man.) But down here, does anyone understand how the two relate and can be true at the same time? NO! So what! There's a whole bunch of things we can't fully understand because we're not God! Our perception is limited. We see these mysteries of God as through a cloudy window. God doesn't ask us to understand everything. But He does ask us to take Him at His word...and His word is this...**He chose us in Him before the creation of the world.** This is big! It's earth-shaking!

The fact that God would save and include sinners like us in Christ was decided in eternity past before the earth was created! That means you and I were part of His plan all along! And no detail of God's plan can ever fail! God never says "oops."

When God the Father **chose us** (that is, each person who believes), is indicated here...**He chose us in Him before the creation of the world.** But notice why He chose us...**to be holy and blameless in His sight.** Who me?...holy and blameless? And Bob Lang? Yes! This is God's intention...this is God's plan and purpose for all who are **in Christ.** F.F. Bruce made this comment...*"No other way of life is fitting"* for those who have been chosen for salvation. To remain in our sin after Christ saved us is *"like asking the doctor to make us well but asking to keep the cough and the fever."* - Spurgeon. God chose us with the intention of sanctifying or making us holy like Jesus. He has declared us **saints** or holy people, right now...but His Spirit is at work changing us day by day.

Then notice **v.5 - In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ...** To **predestine** is to determine beforehand. So along with the sovereign choice God made before creation, He determined to adopt us into His family. His determination was motivated by His love and beyond that we have no other explanation. God was unmoved by any loveliness or potential we might think we possess! **Jn. 3:16 - For God so loved the world. / Eph. 2:4, 5 - But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.**

In the Roman legal system, an adopted child was given all the rights and privileges that belong to a natural born child. This benefits of adoption are expanded in **Rom. 8:17** says we are **heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.** Everything that belongs to Jesus Christ belongs to us! Consider that the next time the balance in your checkbook is a bit slim. Our wealth in Christ is beyond comparison! I think the apostle John was shouting when he said, **How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! - I Jn. 3:3**

v.5 explains that our salvation is **in accordance with His pleasure and will.** Why did God choose to save us? Why did God predestinate us to be sanctified and adopted into His family?...Why? Because it pleased Him to do so. Period! Everything God does is **according to His good pleasure and will.** The Bible presents history as "His-story." After the Lord humbled the great Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, the man came to his senses and praised the Lord. **Dan. 4:34, 35** say this, **At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"** To argue God's right to do as He pleases is to admit to ignorance of how great our God is. If your god has to answer to people or to any created being...he isn't God!

The grand purpose behind God's plan is stated in **v.6 - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.** Why has God blessed us? Why did He choose us to be included in Christ? Why did He determine beforehand to make us holy? Why did He adopt us into His family forever? Answer... **to the praise of his glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.** Those whom God has saved are main exhibits in the divine showcase. By saving, sanctifying and adopting us...God has put His divine attributes on display for the entire world to see. To say such grace has been **freely given us** means it is given without any outside influence of either restraint or compulsion. Motivated by the love which is intrinsic to God's nature, He was pleased to give us what we don't deserve and could never earn. So these are the blessings that come to us from God the Father.

Divine sovereignty, love, and grace drove the salvation plan from start to finish. The Father chose us in Christ / He predestined us to be holy / and He adopted us into His family. He did all this because it pleased Him to do so and with the intention that His grace might be put on display before the watching universe. If you've trusted Christ as your savior, say it with me... "*We are so blessed!*" These tremendous realities form the foundation of our freedom / confidence / and security. But to really enjoy our salvation, we must lay claim to these wonderful blessings. The blessings declared must be claimed. So these blessings come to us from God the Father. In the next section we find...

2. Blessings from God the Son who purchased our salvation - vs. 7-12

In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

v.7 begins, **In Him**. We find it again at the beginning of v.11. Once again, **in Him** means to be in faith-union with Jesus Christ. Just as Noah and his family were safe in the ark, we are safe and secure in Jesus Christ. Here's what we have if we're saved and secured in that awesome place of being **in Jesus Christ**...first, **we have redemption through his blood**.

Years ago my dad earned Green Stamps for selling Chevy's. Do you remember Green Stamps? Dad would come home from Park Chevrolet with a handful of coupons. Each coupon was equal to half a book. We found a bumper sticker that read, "*Kiss me, I give Green Stamps*"...we pasted it on his bedroom door. At the redemption center we traded these coupons for bicycles, fishing poles, ball gloves and all sorts of good stuff. Maybe that helps illustrate what **redemption** means. By paying a price, an exchange takes place. **Redemption** is related to liberation, deliverance, and ransom. The payment to release us from bondage to sin and death was Christ's blood shed on the cross. He died once and for all. **1 Pet. 1:18,19 - For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.** It's sad that so many try to pay for the salvation Jesus purchased once and for all.

illus. - The thieving carpenter and Novena.

"Jesus paid it all...all to Him I owe...sin had left a crimson stain...He washed it white as snow! Now before His throne...I stand in Him complete... Jesus died my soul to save...my lips will still repeat. Jesus paid it all...all to Him I owe...sin had left a crimson stain...He washed me, white as snow!"

This price Jesus paid to redeem us is the basis for the next blessing...**forgiveness**. If redemption releases us from sin, **forgiveness** releases sin from us. Having paid the price to release us from sin's penalty, God is just in forgiving us completely and forever. Both redemption and forgiveness were accomplished once for all by the death and resurrection of Jesus. And notice...these blessings didn't trickle from God to man like water through a crimped garden hose. They came to us **in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding**. God isn't meager or stingy in dispensing grace. It gushes to us like water from a fire hose. John spoke of this abundance in **Jn.1:16** which says, **From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another**. But some may object and say..."But you don't know how rotten I've been." God does. Yet listen to **Rom. 5:20** - ... **where sin increased, grace increased all the more...**

God has more grace than any of us will ever need! Along with His grace, He gives **wisdom** and **understanding** so we can grasp His plan and see its relevance in our times. We would be groping around in total darkness if it wasn't for the insight God provides. In **Matt. 13:16** Jesus told His disciples...**blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.**

The next blessing is found in **vs. 9,10 - And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.** Having gifted us wisdom and understanding, God has told us what He's up to. He let us in on **the mystery of His will.** He made known to us His plan...His sacred secret. We are privileged to know details that weren't known by the OT saint. For one thing...we know Jesus is coming to airlift us to heaven and perhaps soon. Then when Jesus returns to earth, He'll make everything right. He'll unite everything that's unglued / disjointed / and out of harmony. The main rift in Paul's mind and experience was the division between Jew and Gentile. He addressed that more specifically in **chap. 2. 2:14 - For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two (Jew and Gentile) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...** But on that day, when Christ returns and subjects everything to His righteous rule, even Republicans and Democrats will love each other. No more 21 hour filibusters / vetoes / or government shut-downs. (The other night Jay Leno said, *"I'm not even going to comment on the government shut-down. I'm more concerned that it might start up again!"*) **Isa. 2:4** says, **He (Jesus) will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.** What a day that will be!

As **v.10** says, this will happen **when the times will have reached their fulfillment.** Time isn't circular...it doesn't go round and round like the hands of a clock. Time is lineal. In His sovereignty, God has determined every event along the earth's time line from beginning to end. The **times and seasons** are under His sovereign control. Just as sure as summer has ended and fall has begun, the age of grace will wind down and Jesus Christ will return to earth. The point here is that Jesus has revealed this and much more to us in His Word. We're blessed to know what God has planned.

v.11 - In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will... This repeats the blessing of **vs. 4-6.** But here we see that God the Father and God the Son worked together in eternity past to choose and predestine us according to the will of the Father. This doctrine of election is the bedrock the eternal security of the believer is built on. The fact that we were chosen by God means our salvation predates not only our second birth...it even predates our first birth. Again, we can't explain this... we can't reason it out. But in conformity to His purpose and will, God worked it out so that each sinner He chose for Himself would respond with faith to Christ and the Gospel.

Finally, notice **v.12 - in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.** Just like **v.6,** God's ultimate purpose for saving us and blessing us is that we might **be for the praise of His glory.** God did all this so we might praise Him. Remember how **v.3** begins? **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us...** Why do we sing songs of praise on Sunday AM?...because God has blessed us. Though we deserve nothing, God has lavished His grace on us and given us everything! Like the sinful woman who lavishly poured expensive ointment on Jesus, **Heb.13:15** says, **...let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.** And by the way...if you want to raise your hands as you worship, it's OK with our leadership team. Mayfair isn't like the church that lowered its ceiling fans to discourage hand-raising. I felt our brother Wilson went a bit too far in suggesting a believer is disobedient to the Spirit if they don't raise their hands.

But if God prompts you to do so, it's OK with us. We won't label you a holy-roller or wild eyed charismatic. Worshipping with upraised hands is clearly a biblically endorsed posture and we shouldn't be afraid of it. Worse than being a little energetic and demonstrative in worship is to deserve to be called the "frozen chosen." So these are the blessings that come to us from and through God the Son. God the Father planned our salvation and God the Son purchased it. But now in the final section, we find...

3. Blessings from God the Spirit who preserves our salvation - vs. 13, 14

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

Notice the balance between sovereign election and human responsibility. **v.4** and **v.11** say we were chosen. God selected us as individuals from a larger group. Now in **v.13**, Paul wrote, **you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth.** As they struggle to reconcile sovereign election and human responsibility, some reason this way...What's the point of preaching or evangelizing if God has already decided who will be saved and who won't be? What's the point of prayer if God is sovereign and works out everything **in conformity to the purpose of His will?** Well the point is this...God has commanded us to preach, evangelize and make disciples and we know He has commanded us to pray. We're disobedient if we don't do these things. **Rom. 10:17** says...**faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** And as we know, faith is God's requirement for salvation and God wants everyone to be saved. So even though we can't work it out in our heads, there's no conflict between human responsibility and divine sovereignty. God gifts the elect He has chosen with faith to believe, but they must believe to be saved. Not one elect person will be saved without hearing the word and believing. So just like we find in **Acts 13:48**, evangelism is really a matter of looking for our brothers and sisters! You may need to chew on this awhile. But I've come to believe that *if God hadn't chosen some, none would have chosen Him.* **Rom. 3:11** - **there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.**

But notice the final blessing. **Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.** God's Holy Spirit takes up residence in every believing sinner. His presence in a believer is like an indelible mark that reads, "*child of God.*" Revelation explains the Antichrist will also use a mark to identify those who belong to His kingdom. But the Holy Spirit's presence guarantees our destiny. Note that the Spirit is said to be **a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.** The redemption spoken of here is the final act of God's redemption plan when Jesus comes and our bodies are resurrected or raptured, and glorified. **Rom. 8:23** says...we...who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. The Holy Spirit's presence in us right now guarantees our future...our **inheritance.**

So this is the salvation product. These blessings become ours when we trust Christ to save us. Like the plan of God the Father and the purchase of God the Son, the section detailing the preservation of God the Spirit ends this way... **to the praise of his glory.** The salvation of lost sinners, as amazing and wonderful as this is, isn't the main thing. The main thing is the **glory** of God. History is moving toward a day when the entire universe will recognize and praise the Lord for the glory of His grace. This grand chorus will begin when Jesus returns. But we don't have to wait for the heavenly choir director to strike up the song. Our privilege is to join the concert here and now. We should live each day to glorify the Lord. We should speak and sing His praise every day and in every situation, because our God is great and worthy of praise!