

We Are Blessed *(Eph. 1:1-11)*

Pastoral Prayer,

Oh Father, today we declare your glory, your wonder, your righteousness, your perfection, your holiness ... and we admit we have none.

We were sinners ... we were (as the Apostle Paul writes) "by nature children of wrath" we were hopelessly lost!

But then You came and not only revealed to us our lostness You caused us to see what Jesus had done for us and gave us the faith to believe.

... you drew us up out of the pit of sin, you put our feet on the solid rock, and you put a new song into our heart!

Redeemed! O how we love to proclaim it!

You are God, you are good, you are merciful, you are full of grace ... Your loving kindness is better than life!

We are not worthy, but You are, and we are blessed!

We have received so much grace and so many mercies from You we believe that You will never forsake us, regardless of the hardships, you will not abandon us.

No matter how hard we have fallen; You have always picked us up; bound our wounds and called us Your beloved children.

But Lord, if I am being honest, the truth is we sometimes forget.

Through the darkness, in the troubles and storms of life we sometimes fear that you will forsake us.

We know from the Word of God that you never will ... but at times our faith is very weak.

Oh Lord, comfort Your children this morning.

If anyone here is in doubt, or fear, or feeling hopeless ... Lord give to them an assured confidence and perfect rest in the Lord their God.

Lord that we all would grow in the confidence of our faith in Christ!

That we would all commit ourselves to live our lives in service to you!

That our times alone with you would be sweet, and pure, deep and vibrant!

That we would pray with power and effectiveness!

That when we bow on our knees to pray ... hell would tremble.

Lord, we know we cannot build your Church ... but You can ...

So, Oh God of heaven, Our God, build in this place a mighty and glorious church!

Raise up spiritual champions from this place!

Give to Mt. Zion Church a fresh anointing of the Holy Ghost so that all of its members may be engaged in serving You

... so that there will be no lack of teachers in any of our Sunday Schools and Bible studies; no lack of singers in our choir; no lack of workers in all our efforts for Your kingdom.

... give us a superabundance of workers for Christ!

May our motives never be anything but for Your glory!

May our tongues never be the carriers of complaint, discouragement, nor gossip!

Make us divine encouragers to one another and people of grace!

Finally Lord, help us this morning as we worship together and give to everyone a sense of Your presence, power, and purpose!

O God, our Awesome God abide with us and manifest Yourself to us today!

We ask this In Jesus Name, Amen!

Sermon (Sept. 11, 2022)

Today we embark on an incredible journey through Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians.

The Apostle Paul was the first person to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the city of Ephesus ...

... his first visit lasted only a few weeks, but he returned later and stayed for almost 3 years.

When Paul first arrived in Ephesus his ministry and preaching was so effective and powerful that Luke tells us in the book of Acts 19-21 that it split the synagogue, prompted a book (scroll) burning and started a riot.

Paul's bringing the good news of Jesus Christ into the virgin territory was cataclysmic.

... the gospel of Jesus "terraformed" the entire region of Ephesus changing its culture, its laws, and its people.

What was it about the gospel that was so transformative and culturally shaping?

- It redefined who people were.
 - o Instead of being creatures who were born, lived here for a while and then gone forever like any other beast of the field ... the gospel tells us there is an eternal purpose behind our existence.

- Instead of political and geographical boundaries the God of the gospel rescues people from all nations, tribes, and tongues and "in Christ" make them a new people and a new nation ... a new kind of family.

- Christianity is not about people becoming gods ... but the story of how God became man so that he might adopt us into his family and give us His inheritance.

Every other religion, in the history of the world, offers ideas of how we might become this or that ... how we might achieve this or that at some future point ...if we do these things.

... In Christianity God tells us **who we are already** because of what **He has already done**.

... But yet, all of us, if we are not careful, can get caught up in the vicious cycle of trying to do more (or something else) just so we can be good enough.

Our world is filled with millions of self-help books, self-improvement podcasts, and self-actualizing programs.

And most of us (especially in our 20, 30, 40, 50's) find ourselves in the middle of this cacophony of voices telling us who we are or who we should be ...

... and here we are spinning around thinking, *“who am I supposed to be” ... “what am I supposed to do,” “why am I not as happy, healthy, thin, wealthy, and beautiful as those people”*

... quite frankly it's enough to drive you to suicide ... and it has some people.

... rather than deal with all these voices some people just retreat into becoming, drunks, work-a-holics, or addicts of some other kind.

The letter to the Ephesians is the opposite of all of that.

Instead of a litany of things to do Paul begins with 3 full chapters emphasizing all that **God has done for us** in Christ Jesus ...

... and I must warn you some **people aren't going to like what Paul has to say** because it takes all the power and credit away from US and **gives all the power and credit to Jesus!**

... and only after Paul tells us what God has done for us does he then tell us (in the last 3 chapters) we can **do an become** because of what God has done for us.

There is a danger in starting with all the “**doing**” stuff before first knowing **who we are**.

I grew up in a church where I went away every week discouraged and defeated because all I heard was what I **needed to do more of** or **stop doing**.

... to be honest there were a lot of weeks I just wanted to quit forever!

Here in Ephesians in the first three chapters every verb (with only one exception) every verb is in the **indicative...**

... Paul keeps hammering home verse after verse: this is who you are, this is who you are ...

... then (and only then) in chapter 4-6 Paul transitions to the **imperative verb** Do this, behave this way, act this way ...

Let’s read the first 11 verses of Ephesians.

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: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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, (Eph. 1:1-11)

Notice in verse 3.... “Blessed us with every spiritual blessing”

The word “Blessing” in the New Testament, doesn’t mean what we think it means today.

[We say, ‘bless your heart’.] ... more of a verbal pat on the back.

But here in the New Testament “blessing” is closer to “shalom.”

Blessing means **every delight and benefit you would ever need or long for.**

... and Paul is saying that if you are a Christian then you have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing.

To better understand who God says we are, we need to ask and answer four questions.

- How are we blessed?
- Why do we need to be blessed?
- How do we receive this blessing?
- How do you know you have every spiritual blessing?

1. How Are We Blessed?

Becoming a Christian doesn't **just mean** we

- have a king to obey (though we do)
- an example to follow (though we do)
- or even that we have a Savior to be grateful for (and we are grateful for Jesus Christ).

It's all those things but more ...

Notice these phrases in the text:

- In Christ
- In Him
- In the Beloved
- In Him we have redemption
- In Him we have an inheritance

When we are saved, we are put **IN HIM** so that everything He has becomes ours!

- a. To be **IN CHRIST** is to be **united** with Christ.

This word “united” is a marital word ...

I am united ... married to Heather. All that I have is hers, and that she has is mine ...

What does it mean to be “united with Christ?”

Paul says in Romans:

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall also be united with him in a resurrection like his (Rom 6:5)

“united in his death” ... here is what that means

When you are redeemed, God then treats you as if you had hung on the cross and had paid the full penalty for sin yourself.

... you are united with Christ in His death

Paul also says “united in his resurrection” ...

When you are redeemed, God sees you a having victory over sin, death, and hell.

b. We are united in Christ’s death and resurrection

... Based on this Pauls says we receive every spiritual blessing because we are:

- In Christ
- In Him
- In the Beloved
- In Him we have redemption
- In Him we have an inheritance

Every spiritual blessing is given to us because we **belong to Christ and we are in Him.**

2. Why Do We Need To Be Blessed?

Paul says that God has:

- He chosen us in order that we would be **holy and blameless**
- He predestined us for **adoption in His family**
- In Him we have **redemption**

So here it is: we need every spiritual blessing because:

- a. we are **unholy**
- b. we have **shame**,
- c. we are **fatherless**
- d. we are **unredeemed**

This is what the Word of God says about us. ... and we subconsciously we know it ...

... I mean **unless you are a sociopath** you know you aren't always the smartest person in the room.

... you know you aren't always what you **should** be ... or **ought** to be.

On some level every one of us knows that we are lacking ...

... we know we are insufficient ...

But what do we do?

We try to **compensate**. We try to **reassure** ourselves that we are complete ...

So, we work hard at trying:

- to be beautiful
- Smart
- Powerful
- A good parent
- A devout religious person

We spend so much of our lives on the task of trying to fix ourselves ...

... we try to achieve in all these other things that society and the world tells us we are supposed to achieve (instead of Christ)

... and these things don't satisfy, they beat us down, they enslave us.

In ministry I've observed ministers:

- Usually if a minister will be **sad** if he isn't doing well ... (well in the sense that his peers define it)
- If there is some person hindering his ministry—he will get **mad**
- If the minister feels that his ministry is being threatened, he will become **anxious**

This is usually indicative that the minister is trying to use his work as a way of ... **compensating, reassuring, fixing** himself ...

This is true of anyone ... in situations where things/job/relationship don't go well any one of us can find ourselves on an emotional rollercoaster ride ... tense ... angry ... threatened ... filled with fear.

Why? Because so much of what we are doing is rooted in **compensating, reassuring, fixing** ourselves ...

Truth

If you love anything more than God then that thing is your real God and not only will it **dominate** you, the “ups and downs” of it will **wear you out** and **drive you into** the ground ...

Here is why this happens ... you need to be redeemed ...

Why do you need every spiritual blessing ... because when you have every spiritual blessing...

... you will so look (not yourself or your earthly achievements) but to Christ for significance, purpose and meaning ...

3. How Do We Receive This Blessing?

Notice these words in the text:

- Blessed
- Chose
- Predestined
- Lavished upon

How do we receive this blessing?

- a. God has **lavished** it upon us.

Now, notice the pronoun that follows every one of those words; **us**

US ... that is very important.

If I see Jesus forgiving, loving, serving, dying **only for others** ... that crushes me.

... but if I see Jesus forgiving, loving, serving, and dying **FOR ME ... IN MY PLACE ...**

... that means that Jesus has taken away **FROM ME the penalty for what's wrong with me ...**

... that means that Jesus has come **FOR ME –and I am accepted**

I am:

- Chosen ... and loved.
- Predestined ... because I'm loved
- I am loved and Blessed
- I am so loved that God has Lavished upon Me all these spiritual blessings!

My sin and shame **are forever gone** therefore I don't need to be the smartest person in the room.

- I don't have to make myself significant,
- I don't need to find comfort in power
- I don't need to find reassurance in achievement

I am chosen, I am predestined, I am blessed, God has lavished upon me his blessings

... I am mercifully and infinitely loved by God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- b. We are **eternally loved** by God; therefore, we are **forever free!**

4. How Do We Know We Have Received Every Spiritual Blessing?

In verse 6 there is a wonderful phrase.

6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:6)

That phrase, it is also found in verses 12 and 14 and Paul is expressing his personal feelings about what God has done for him ...

... we need to be like Paul.

How do we know we have received every spiritual blessing ...?

... because you don't just believe it in your head ...

- a. It is **glorious** to you.

That's how you know you have redemption... It is glorious to you; it captures you heart ...

... you want to sing about it

... you rejoice in it.

And this *“praise of His glorious grace”* is not just the way we know we have received every spiritual blessing ...

... **this is how those spiritual blessings work their way into our lives.**

The story of redemption is the story of how one (Jesus) who gave his life to save others.

This idea of someone sacrificing their own life in order that others might be saved is powerful ...

We find this theme in history, in books, and even in life

This is the story of flight 93 on that fateful day Sept. 11 back in 2001.

There is no more powerful narrative ...

... It's even in Harry Potter ...

Harry asked Dumbledore why Voldemort couldn't touch him, and Dumbledore said, “Because your mother gave her life for you.”

Such sacrifice captivates our imagination.

And even further not to just read about it in a novel or fairy tale ...

...But, to know that is exactly what Jesus Christ has done that for you so that you might have eternal glory and love ...

When you realize that Jesus has given all that He is and has to save you ... that will change the very center of your life and heart.

... and when you embrace that, the things that you used to consume you will no longer **drive you** and **captivate you**

... I said, **God's glorious grace will captivate and capture you!**

... and when that happens YOU WILL CHANGE!

(Eph 1:3-6) 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, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

That is powerful!

Pause ...

Won't you give your heart to Jesus today?