

Ephesians 1

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[0 : 01] Good evening, it's great to be with you this evening. If you've got a Bible, I'd like to open it at Ephesians chapter 1 and verses 1 to 14.

Ephesians chapter 1 and verses 1 to 14. We're going to be looking at that tonight. You need to forgive me, I'm loaded with the cold and my eyes are watering like mad.

So if you see me bringing out this hanky and wiping my... It's either because I'm sweating like mad or because my eyes are watering like mad. Ephesians chapter 1, is this too loud? Is this alright? Ephesians chapter 1 verses 1 to 14. Paul writes, this is the word of God. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and 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 in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

[1 : 20] 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 blessed us in the beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us 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.

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, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

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.

Amen. This is God's word. Let me just pray before we look at this. Father, we come before you, Lord, humbled and in awe of who you are.

[2 : 50] Father, we thank you so much that even though we are fallen, sinful creatures, Father, we're here tonight only because of your grace and your love which you've shown us through your Son.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks to us and so, Father, we pray that you would speak through your word to us tonight and encourage us and build up our hearts and help us to stand firm in our faith.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. A TV programme, Doctor Who. I'm sure most of you know what it is and will have watched it at some point in your life.

The few times I've watched it myself, the TARDIS, the Doctor's time travel machine, has totally fascinated me. And it's fascinated me because from the outside, the TARDIS just looks like any other police telephone box.

There's nothing unusual about it, nothing impressive about it, nothing significant. From the outside, it just looks like an old, ordinary police telephone box.

[3 : 54] But it's not until the doctor opens the door and you get to go inside and see that it's not just an old police telephone box, but it's something far greater than that. It's not until your eyes are opened and you get to see inside that you get to see the significance of it, that it's much more than an old police telephone box.

Well, friends, in a similar way, it's the same with the church and the gospel, isn't it? The church and the gospel often don't look that impressive, do they? Often it doesn't look as if the gospel is making

much impact in the world, nor does it always look as if God's plans and purposes are being worked out.

And it certainly doesn't seem as if the church is where the action is really happening, does it? But Paul has written his letter and certainly the first half of this letter to encourage and strengthen the Ephesian believers by reminding them of the riches they have been blessed with in Christ.

God's plans and purposes are being worked out in this world despite the fact that how it looks to us at times. God's plans and purposes are being worked out in this world through the gospel to unite all things in Christ.

And the church is where God is displaying this and making known his manifold wisdom to rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. And so Paul in this passage blows the Ephesian believers away with what God the Father has done for them in Christ.

[5 : 28] He sets out before them God's eternal plans and purposes for the universe. He leads them in praising God for his glorious work in them and for uniting them to Christ by grace. And he's writing to remind them and encourage them that they are part of God's plans and purposes because of their union with Christ.

And he does that because he knows that we're prone to forgetting and prone to getting discouraged and disheartened by the lack of sight that we have. Now Paul went to Ephesus during his second missionary journey and he stayed there around two and a half years.

Ephesus was a huge place with a big population and a lot of wealth. It was also a place full of dark magic arts and idol worship. And there was a massive idol worshipping community in Ephesus who worshipped the goddess called Artemis.

Now Artemis had supposedly fallen from the sky and people thought that she was from heaven, a god, the saviour of the world. But in reality it was just a massive rock which they carved the goddess out of.

But not only was the idol worshipped, it was also used for profit by some people. They made smaller shrines and sold them onto the people in Ephesus. So they could worship not only at the temple but at home as well.

[6 : 48] But through the preaching of the gospel by Paul and others, the word started to take root and bear fruit in Ephesus. People were turning from the idol to serve the true living God.

And because of this, the people who made a living from selling Artemis merchandise started losing profit and eventually started a riot because of it. Luke writes in Acts 19 verse 23, about that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the way.

In other words, it was mad mental mayhem. There was no little disturbance there. But in the midst of all that chaos, a church was started.

And now sometime after all that and after Paul had left Ephesus and now in prison, he's writing this letter to encourage and build up the believers in Ephesus who are finding their Christian life hard and difficult in their present surroundings, feeling weak and inferior to the massive and impressive-looking idol Artemis looming over them in the background.

This goddess who was worshipped by more than 50,000 people in Ephesus and even further abroad. Compared to the small and not-so-impressive community of believers who follow Jesus, they felt intimidated and small.

[8 : 04] At times they could hear the deafening chants of the thousands who would go to the temple and proclaim, great is Artemis, great is Artemis, great is Artemis. And I wonder how they felt when they heard those chants and I wonder what they thought too.

Perhaps, have we got this right? Is this really God's plan? We seem so small and weak, but they look so big and strong.

Is this really where the action is? They probably felt how a lot of us feel today. intimidated, disheartened, and discouraged.

Today we are in a similar position in the church, although our contexts are a bit different. We don't have a massive temple looming over us and intimidating us. But we live in a similar society full of idolatry, immorality, a world that is totally against the gospel of Jesus Christ and his church.

We live in a similar position where it's very easy to get discouraged, disheartened, and down because the church can look very insignificant and unimpressive in comparison to the world.

[9 : 11] In comparison to the impressive looking things the world offers is the gospel doesn't always seem to be making much impact, does it? It doesn't seem like this is where the action really is.

The church doesn't seem to be significant or impressive in the world's eyes. If you went outside now and told someone you could take them somewhere where the real action in the world is happening and you brought them here, they would think you're having a laugh, wouldn't they?

They would think you're half your nut. They would say you've got to be joking the church. Jesus, there's no way this is where the real action is happening.

It's out there in the world. It's certainly not here. Nothing's happening in here. Friends, we also might be tempted to think this at times as well throughout our Christian lives.

I know I am. Like the Ephesians we can be tempted to think that action is in more impressive looking things and places. But as I said, Paul has written this letter to these discouraged, disheartened, downed believers to encourage them and strengthen them.

[10:19] He wants them to stand firm in their faith to be built up and to know God better. He wants his readers to have their eyes opened to the unseen realities and blessings of being in Christ and to see that God really has blessed them with every spiritual blessing through their union with Christ.

And this letter's here for us also to encourage and strengthen our hearts so that we stand firm in our faith and to remind us that the church really is where the action is.

Look at verse 10. Verse 10's a key passage, key verse in this passage. Through the gospel, God is working to unite all things together in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.

Being in Christ, being joined together with Christ is where the action truly lies, friends. Because in and through Christ, God is working for his glory and declaring to the world and his universe his power, authority and reign.

And Paul says that statement 12 times in this passage. In Christ, in him, through Jesus Christ, in the beloved, to ground us and affirm us in our faith because Jesus is the centre of all that God is doing.

[11:42] And to be in Christ or to be united to him means to have a personal relationship with him. It belongs to him to be joined to him and to look at him as saviour and Lord.

It's a bit like marriage as Paul tells us in chapter 5 where two people become one and are joined together. They are united as one and share in each other. And so it is with us in Christ.

And because of that union we share in all the eternal blessings in him. There's no greater union that we can have than having union with Christ.

And what better way to encourage the disheartened believers in Ephesus than telling them they are in Christ. They are part of the action. Whether they feel it or not or even at this point realise it, they are part of God's eternal plans and purposes for this world because of the simple fact that they are in Christ.

Because God had set them apart and chosen them in him. The action isn't in the more impressive or successful realities around us in the world. Celebrities or other religions that more people follow.

[12:52] Successful businesses people with money. The real action is happening in the thing that the world hates and the unimpressive thing in the world's eyes.

The action is happening right here in the church through the gospel of Jesus Christ. What better way to build us up and to help us stand firm in the midst of pressure to stand firm in our faith than to hear of the great blessings and realities of being in Christ.

So let's look at this amazing beginning to Paul's letter together then. Begin to be in awe and wonder of the blessings we have received in Christ and through our union with him. Well first of all Paul begins with his usual greeting in his letter and greets the Ephesian believers here in a very encouraging way and addresses them as the saints who are in Ephesus verse 1 he writes Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now in Paul's letters when he says to the saints and faithful in Christ are those sanctified in Christ he means those who have been set apart those who are holy because of what God has done for them those who are possessed by God and indeed that is what Paul goes on to expand on in the rest of the passages he goes on to tell them how this came about and the same can be said of all those who are trusting and have put their faith in Christ as saviour they are called saints holy ones set apart by God through Christ but we are not saints in the sense that some think of saints Paul doesn't mean those eerie pictures of guys in stained glass windows who are made out to be almost unhuman and spiritual giants people who no one can relate to and who make us feel crushed because we think we'll never be as spiritual as them that's not what Paul means here when he says saints

Paul means they are saints in the sense of what God had done for them it's real people Paul is saying this to here people who struggle who fall and people who are sinners and so often wander it's people like us which Paul says are the saints they are the spiritual ones every Christian past, present and future are saints everyone who is in Christ is a saint it's not just the spiritual elite and so Paul goes on to explain how they became the saints in Ephesus in the rest of the passage look at verse 3 being in Christ means you have every spiritual blessing Paul writes 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 if you're here as a Christian tonight it doesn't matter how long you've been one it could be 5 minutes 5 years or even 50 years every spiritual blessing is yours in Christ you have been given them you have them all

[16:00] God the Father has blessed you abundantly with everything that you need but note what Paul means here is not that in Christ we have been or will be blessed with every material blessing again it's not what some people say today come to Jesus and everything will be great and you'll have health wealth and prosperity we all know that's nonsense don't we because some of us who are here tonight are skint some of us don't have the best health and some of us are not prospering are we but that's not to say that God doesn't bless us now in particular ways he does but that's not Paul's concern here so what does Paul mean here when he says we have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing well it's not material blessings it's so much more glorious than that the spiritual blessings that Paul is talking about here are in the rest of the passage but notice that these blessings are in the heavenly places literally the heavenlies which is not heaven but the unseen realm where the spiritual powers and authorities dwell they are unseen realities which we have received through our union with Christ which is important to know and be reminded of because we don't always feel or necessarily see the blessings visibly but nevertheless they are still realities all the great riches that Christ have been given to us because we have been united to him

Christians are the most blessed people who walk this earth and I hope that encourages you tonight if you're a Christian here tonight you're the most blessed person who walks this earth well in the rest of the passage we see what these blessings are look at verse 4 where Paul encourages us with a past blessing we have been lovingly chosen and adopted in Christ all the blessings of salvation are ours because God has chosen us in Christ before the dawn of time before the world was created even before the foundation of the world that's a mind-blowing thing to think about isn't it?

God had his mind before any of us were even born or thought of before anything was ever made when it was just God Father, Son and Spirit he had chosen us in Christ how can that be you might think because God is God and well that's the wonder and majesty of God's sovereignty and election isn't it?

and the more you think about it the bigger and bigger it gets we can never here and now I don't think fully understand or take that in but simply to be in awe wonder and praise of it and I think that's what Paul wants to happen as we read this he wants us to be in awe and wonder and amazement of God but notice that this is not a mechanical thing God doesn't just randomly choose people he doesn't put his hand in a hat full of names and pick one out and that's the next person nor does he see something in us that makes him think we deserve such electing grace and mercy and to be adopted into his family if we think that there's something good in us that would make God choose us and we've got the wrong end of the stick friends as we find out in chapter 2 we are dead in our trespasses and sins without hope and enmity with God and disobedient to all his ways and what following the prince of the power of the air who is Satan that was and is the sad state and predicament of being outside of Christ sorry my nose is running now that's bogging in it so there was and is nothing in us that God can or could see that would make him want to choose us so what did make him want to choose us well we see it here don't we look at verses 4 and 5 again it was his love for us someone said predestination rightly understood as the most comforting and enriching and thrilling of all truths he goes on to say what an answer this is to the rootlessness of life for a man to discover that in Christ he is rooted and grounded in everlasting love to get through to ultimate reality and find not nothingness but a smiling father who has lovingly chosen him it was God's will it was God's purpose and it was to the praise of his glorious grace to shower upon us his love and choosing predestining and adopting us and his purpose and result in all this was for us was that we would be holy and blameless before him scandalous thing about all this friends is not that God has predestined elected and adopted some in his kingdom but that one day you believer

who deserve nothing but wrath and judgment will stand before God and because of these things you have received and been blessed with in Christ and through your union with him you will be welcomed by your heavenly father with open arms you will be welcomed into your heavenly father's home because you have been chosen and adopted in Christ isn't that great secondly verses 8 and 7 and 8

Paul encourages us with a present blessing we have been graciously redeemed and forgiven not only has God lovingly chosen us and adopted us he's also graciously redeemed us through Christ Paul writes in him we have notice the present tense there we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace with which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight friends the world sees the cross as being one of the most foolish things to have ever happened they don't want a saviour who looks weak who is unimpressive and had to die to save them the world wants someone who is strong who looks strong and impressive someone who looks powerful who can overcome anything and conquer but they can't see that the cross of Christ is where the power of God is it's there the wisdom of God is shown Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 18 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

[22 : 28] God in sending his son Jesus and him dying on the cross in our place with his blood being poured out and him hanging on the cross there the pure and just wrath of God was laid and directed straight upon him but it wasn't for his own sake that he died or for his own sin it was in our place it was our shame he took and it was our sin which was laid upon him and what happened when we walk away free we stand before the Lord justified holy and blameless in his sight the God who we were created by and for and created to know but were alienated from and ignorant of whose word we disobeyed and rebelled against we have now been reconciled to him through Christ's death and the cross for us it's breathtaking to think is it not that the God that we offended and rebelled against gave up himself to be a ransom for us that's what it means to be redeemed to have redemption it means to be bought with a price it means to buy back what is rightfully yours and what a cost it costs what a price it costs to God who lovingly chose us and adopted us cost him his own son this grace which has been lavished upon us

Paul tells us brought us this redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses every command that God gave us that we walked over every loving thing that he did for us that we despised and rejected every trespass that we made has been forgiven in Christ and again hopefully and I prayerfully hope that that helps someone here tonight again helpfully someone said by his death on the cross Christ has justly purchased his back for God at the cost of his own blood he has dealt with our guilt to bring his pardon he has overcome the cosmic forces of darkness which bound and enslaved us he has died to the reign of sin that mastered us and has risen in triumph over all his and our enemies he was our great exchange as the hymn says bearing shame and scoffing rude in my place condemned he stood sealed my pardon with his blood guilty vile and helpless we spotless lamb of God was he full atonement can it be hallelujah what a saviour in him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses again a good friend sent me this one day

God took the place of the guilty enduring in himself the condemnation for sin when a cry went up before him that sin must be covered he gave himself in Christ Jesus God almighty came and took our human nature precisely in order to put himself in a position where he had blood to shed and a soul to pour out to death to redeem us friends in here in Christ here tonight you have that now you who are in Christ and have been united to him have that now redemption and forgiveness in Christ finally we can see in verses 11 to 14 Paul encourages us with a future blessing of a guaranteed inheritance I read a story once on the internet two homeless guys who used to live in a cave in Hungary they used to walk the streets looking for scrap metal that they could sell for pennies but this pair of penniless down and outs this article described them one day when roaming the streets were approached by a stranger and were told that they had just inherited a four billion pound fortune from a relative of theirs who just died and you can imagine their reaction can't you they were overjoyed well friends we were like those pair of penniless down and outs before we had nothing we were so poor before God we had the scraps of this world but now because Christ died for us and because of our union with him we have a glorious inheritance but that inheritance friends is not a four billion pound fortune it's better so much better than that look at verse 11 in him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all

things together according to the counsel of his will now the inheritance that some get today is just stuff which will all decay it will all perish and will one day fade away there is no guarantee that it will last one day it will be gone and be spent that four billion pound that those two homeless guys inherited will one day be gone either they will spend it or they will die and it will go to someone else and they'll spend it it isn't guaranteed really is it but look at the

Christians inheritance look at the inheritance of those who are in Christ in verses 13 and 14 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 a guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory friends this inheritance of ours in Christ is guaranteed when we heard the gospel and believed in Christ we were sealed by the promised Holy Spirit and given the promise of this inheritance the Holy Spirit is a stamp of approval on our lives and the seal by which we will receive our inheritance inheritance but what is this inheritance well really it's all the blessings that Paul's spelled out for us here in this passage but simply put it's eternal life that's what Jesus said himself didn't he in John's gospel all who come to me will receive eternal life and just as that eternal life is found in him so is our eternal security because we have been predestined by the will of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will and what is the will of the father who sent his son what Jesus said in John chapter 6 this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up in the last day that's how it's guaranteed friends all this we have received in Christ and because of our union with him isn't that so encouraging to be reminded of doesn't that build us up in our faith there's nothing greater to hear is there than God the father in love sent his son to die on the cross to shed his blood so that we his rebellious creation might be united to him through his son and receive eternal blessings we constantly need reminded of that don't we of the effect the gospel has had on our own lives why because as I said at the beginning often we don't see the effect the gospel is having in our world which makes us think that the gospel is having no effect at all but here just like when the doctor opens the door of the TARDIS and you get to go inside and see that there's a much bigger picture it's much bigger than what you think so Paul does here and reminds the Ephesians and us of the glorious blessings we have received in Christ to remind us that God's plans and purposes are being fulfilled in this world through the gospel

[30 : 27] God's plans and purposes to unite all things in Christ things in heaven and things on earth are being worked out and friends where's the evidence of that well it's in the church isn't it it's in the church where lives have been changed and transformed by the gospel just as we've looked at lives which have been blessed by every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places and have been truly united to Christ my friends I know at times it doesn't seem like the gospel is having much impact on the world around us I know we aren't seeing many coming to Christ in our churches every week but nevertheless every time we preach proclaim and share the gospel although we can't see it God is at work God is at work every time we talk to somebody about Jesus Christ and about the gospel every time so brothers and sisters be encouraged and don't be deceived by the lack of sight that we have take courage and boldly proclaim and keep on sharing the gospel of Jesus

Christ in this world because as we do this as we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in this world God's plans and purposes to unite all things in Christ are being fulfilled to the praise of his glorious grace let me pray heavenly father we thank you so much for these promises that Paul spells out for us here in Ephesians 1 father we thank you so much that you have united us to your son and father we thank you for the encouragement that we have from that that we are part of the big plan your eternal universal plan to unite all things in Christ things in heaven and things on earth and father we praise you for these great blessings in Christ's name we pray amen