

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, quite a lot has changed in a week. Enormous things have happened, but one of the biggest things that happened is the transition we're making this morning.

Because if you were here last week, we just got out of Egypt, and today we're just going into Ephesus, which is a massive change. We've changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

We've changed from narrative to epistle. We've changed from the covenant community being Old Testament Israel to it being the New Testament church.

We've changed continents from Africa to kind of the bridge between Europe and Asia. We've changed country from Egypt to Asia Minor, or if you're a 21st century person, Turkey.

And we're going to study Ephesians, and Ephesians is my favorite letter. So I am so excited to be able to start it off for us this morning. It is a majestic letter.

[0 : 59] It's an enormous letter. This is what John Mackay, he's Scottish, but he was the former president of Princeton Theological Seminary said. To this book of Ephesians, I owe my life.

At the age of 14, reading it for the first time, I saw a new world. Everything was now fresh. I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people.

I loved God anew, and Jesus became the center of everything. I had been quickened by this letter, and was now really alive. And when he came to Edinburgh in 1948 to lecture at New College, he spent a whole autumn term preaching on the book of Ephesians, and this is what he wrote.

Ephesians is the greatest, maturest, and for our time most relevant of all Paul's works. For here is distilled the essence of the true Christian religion, the most authoritative, consummate compendium of the Christian faith.

This letter is pure music. What we read here is truth that sings, doctrine set to music. Now one of the things I love to do, being the pastor of this church, is to sample the many coffee shops there are in Brunsfield.

[2 : 20] I have particular favorites, and depending on who I'm meeting and what the purpose is, we'll go to a different place. So if it's a normal meeting, we'll go to Costa. If it's a breakfast, we'll always be at Project Coffee.

If it's a difficult meeting, we'll go to the chocolate tree. And what I've discovered in the chocolate tree is that they sell chocolate cake, which is underwhelmingly small.

You get it, and it's like this little triangle. And you think, 3.70 for that. And do you know what? I've been there four times.

Because you're all quite happy people, so the chocolate tree is not needed that much. And I can never finish it. This tiny little triangle of chocolate cake, and I have a voracious appetite.

And I can never finish it because it's so rich. It's so sweet. And it is so chocolatey. And if we're not careful, Ephesians can be like the chocolate cake from the chocolate tree.

[3 : 23] That we can't finish it. Because it's so densely packed. So full of great theological things. And so we're going to have to go steady.

We're going to have to take small bites at a time. And we're going to have to chew it properly, or else we'll have indigestion that will last us till well after Easter. So we've got to go careful.

It is densely theologically rich. It is like a doxological death by chocolate that is loaded with doctrine. We're going to be here for 12 weeks.

We're going to do it in two chunks. And we're going to have a great time and learn wonderful things about the Lord Jesus. But if I say to you, Moby, what do you think of?

If I say, Moby, what do you think of? I dare say you're thinking of one of two things. And it will be largely dependent on your age. If you're seasoned, you'll be thinking Moby Dick.

[4 : 20] The big white whale, the arch nemesis of Captain Ahab. And the book written by Herman Melville. That great American author. Or if you're young, or trendy, or both, you'll be thinking of Moby, the New York-based electronic music DJ.

And if you're not thinking of either, you just missed. You're just kind of middle-aged and you missed both things. And the really interesting thing about Moby is his proper name is Richard Melville Hall. It's his real name. And the reason his real middle name is Melville is because he is a distant relative of Herman Melville, the one who wrote Moby Dick. That's free. You can bring that up over lunch. But what you may not know about Moby is that Moby is a Christian. And he was on the front cover of Relevant Magazine. And this is what it said.

Moby, why he loves Jesus but not the church. Moby, why he loves Jesus but not the church. And this is an incredibly prevalent view in our day.

[5 : 36] We really like what Jesus has to say, but church is a bit of a hassle. We really like Jesus, but hanging out with his people is a bit too much effort.

And what we need, if we're not going to be Mobyites, that's a new word, is we need the book of Ephesians. Because the book of Ephesians tells us that we cannot love Jesus but loathe his bride, the church.

Have you ever had that in your life where you have a friend who gets married to someone you don't really like and it's just awkward? Every time you have them around for fajitas, it's just really tense. And Ephesians tells us we can't do that. If we love Jesus, we've got to love and invest and be part of his bride, the church. We can't just have one-dimensional Christianity that it's me and Jesus. We've got to have three-dimensional Christianity that it's me and Jesus. Me and Jesus' people that I'm called to belong with. And me and Jesus and Jesus' people pressing out into the world.

[6 : 42] Three dimensions. And so we need Ephesians and it's going to be so helpful to us. Ephesus at the time of writing is a big metropolis, about 300,000 people.

It's the most important city in the Roman province of Asia Minor. And it is the cultural melting pot where east meets west. Dominating the city skyline is the temple of Artemis.

Do you remember in Acts 19 when they chant for three hours, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. And it's a church that Paul knows really well.

We have more about Ephesus over a longer period than any other New Testament church. Paul brings the gospel to Ephesus in Acts chapter 19.

Luke gives it more column inches than any other city in Acts. We then have in Acts 20 the tearful goodbye between the Apostle Paul and the Ephesian elders when they gather at Miletus.

[7 : 47] We read in 1 Timothy 1 that Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to curtail and combat false teaching. Then by the time we get to Revelation chapter 2, we have a progress report from Jesus himself.

And he says three things about the church. He says, And then probably the most helpful thing we have is this book of Ephesians, this letter that Paul penned to the church sometime when he was in prison.

And it is an incredible letter. It's probably a circular letter meant for all the churches in Asia Minor. This verse we're going to read, verse 1, where it says, To the saints in Ephesus.

That's probably a later edition as the early manuscripts don't have that. So it's probably a circular letter, but it becomes synonymous with Ephesus. And it's a letter of two halves that we're going to see.

The first half, chapters 1 to 3, a doctrine. The second half of duty. Or exposition and then exhortation. Or what God has done and then what we must do.

[9 : 11] And therefore we're going to fill our lives full of the Lord Jesus. And then we're going to work out what that looks like Monday to Saturday. The letter seeks to shape the believer by reminding them how wonderful God's work is in Christ.

How significant their unity is in Christ. And what living for Christ looks like in life. So let's dig in. Let's get to work. And start reading and not talking. It is a bit like Saving Private Ryan. If you've seen that film, there's no kind of warm-up. The first thing you see is this enormous battle scene. It's like that in Ephesians. There's no warm-up. What we're reading today is like the biggest vista of salvation history you could ever hope to see. And so we're going to have to really concentrate and hold on to our hats.

It's also one massive sentence what we're going to read. Verse 3 to verse 14. There's not one iota of punctuation anywhere. It's almost like Paul just gushes it out. But we're going to have to breathe because I can't do it in one breath.

[10:23] Martin Lloyd-Jones preached 27 sermons on these 11 verses. And we're going to be done by 25 to 1. This is what Paul writes.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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. 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 for adoption to sonship 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.

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.

[11:30] 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 reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under 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 put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, when you 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 glorious grace.

Well, doing that in one breath would just about kill you, I think. The first thing we see is blessed.

Verse 3 is like the big sentence, the big theme, the thesis that he's going to unpack in the following verses.

It is a doxology. He says, this is who I am, this is who you are, and his big headline is praise. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[12:55] He's doing this to worship God. Praise is mentioned four times in this chapter in verse 3, in verse 6, in verse 12, and at the very end in verse 14.

And it's a funny thing, isn't it, that in our world, people praise the funniest things. So I thought I was going to be quite middle-aged and order some new kitchen utensils. And the only kitchen utensil I really know how to use is the wooden spoon.

So I was reading a review on Amazon.com, and this is what one woman wrote about wooden spoons. The spoons arrived promptly and in excellent condition.

I put them to work straight away. They are absolutely marvelous. I'm overjoyed with my purchase. They enhance my cooking experience no end. I don't know how I survived without them for so long. These spoons are my savior. The best £2.20 I've ever spent. It's incredible praise, isn't it? It seems so pathetic. And yet what Paul is praising in this letter is the only rightful person in all the universe that we should praise.

[14:10] There's an amazing wordplay going on. That word praise at the beginning is the word blessed. So literally it says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing.

We bless God, we speak rightly of Him, because He's poured out so much blessing on us. He has literally given us the kitchen sink. Just poured it out and poured it out.

And therefore, and therefore, Paul says, speak rightly, speak adoringly about you. We bless Him because He's blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

And He's done it in the heavenly realms. He's done it in the heavenly realms. Now what does that mean? It's a word exclusive to Ephesians. It is a way of saying this isn't the only reality.

There is a spiritual reality above this physical reality. A larger reality exists where Christ is already exalted. Where believers participate in His victory and where spiritual forces are opposed.

[15:18] Though believers live physically on this earth, they receive spiritual resources and their identity from this higher plane. That's what it's talking about. Spiritual realm.

Heavenly reality. Literally the heavenlies. That's what Paul is praising God because He's been included and blessed in that realm.

And so he unveils four massive blessings. And the first one is this. Chosen and adopted. They're in verses 4, 5 and 6.

For He chose us. Verse 5. He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. Now when we talk about words like choosing and predestination, some people's blood pressure spikes. They want to throw things. But I don't think that it is that unusual in the Bible, this idea of choosing. I think we see it all over the place. Abraham isn't having a quiet time in Ur of the Chaldeans and suddenly thinks I'd really like to be the progenitor of a great nation.

[16:26] And I'm going to leave Ur and go to a land that I don't know. God sovereignly chooses. I don't think Noah is studying nautical engineering at Napier University in the middle of the Saudi Arabian desert.

He says, I think I'd really like to do a little project and build a big ark. even though it's not rained before. God seems to sovereignly choose. Moses, as we saw in our Exodus series, isn't chilling in the desert of Midian and thinks, at the age of 80, I should really set about the emancipation of my people in Egypt.

God meets him in a burning bush and says, I've chosen you. Gideon isn't thinking, I really like to beat up to Midianites. He's hiding in a hole as a big wimp.

David isn't the front runner for ascension to Israel's throne. He is from a farming family in the redneck part of Israel with seven more impressive brothers and yet God seems to choose.

Jonah isn't attending a Friends of Nineveh peace rally and decides going as an envoy to Assyria would be a good idea. Not at all. He's a bigoted, nationalistic, Israelite supremacist.

[17:39] God says, I've got a job for you. I've chosen you for this task. Levi isn't sitting at the dock at the tax booth in Galilee collecting the money owed to the Roman government from the fishermen and yet Jesus walks straight up to him and says, follow me.

Seems there's some sovereign choosing. Yes, they obey but it seems that God has taken the initiative. Even Paul who writes these words knows this to be true.

He's not journeying to Damascus to attend a Christianity Explored course. He's going to put people in prison to beat some up and kill a few if necessary and yet Jesus meets him and says, I've got a job for you.

There seems to be on the face of it some sovereign choosing. From the mouth of Jesus in John 15, 16 you did not choose me but I chose you.

Same for you and me I think. If we're believing in Jesus today yes, we put our trust in Jesus but it seems that he initiated it.

[18:51] He was pursuing us by his grace. That's a really good thing I think. It's almost a much nicer feeling to be the chosen rather than the chooser.

It's always nicer to be the one proposed to certainly less nerve-wracking than to be the one proposed to rather than the proposer. And that seems to be what Paul is talking about here.

That God has initiated he stepped towards each of us to offer grace. relentlessly pursuing us. And he started about this plan before the creation of the world.

Now I don't care how old you look. You weren't there before the creation of the world. God has been in this initiating phase stepping towards each of us in grace.

that we might put our faith in his son. Notice that he's chosen us for a reason to be holy and blameless in his sight. That as we accept this grace he sets about work to change us to transform us justifying us giving holiness objectively but then changing us sanctifying us to make us holy subjectively.

[20:12] notice in verse 5 it is in love. We're not talking about a mechanical celestial lottery the motivator for this is because he loves us and he's chosen us and he's stepping towards each of us.

Notice as well this idea of adoption. Adoption is always at the bequest of the parents I think. There are many children who just force themselves on two adults and say adopt me.

And God says I've adopted speaking of children God says I've adopted you. I've adopted you for a purpose and adoption in this culture is a big deal.

It's not only status being brought into a family but it's also vocational. That you always do what your father did. If your dad was a baker you were a baker.

If your dad was a fisherman you were a fisherman if your dad was a carpenter. You ended up a carpenter. Just put your hand up if you do the same job your father or mother did. Not many.
[21 : 21] A few. More than I thought. But in this culture you did what your father did. And so Jesus is the son par excellence because he says I only do what I see my father doing.

I only do the work that I see my dad doing. And so when he adopts us as sons he adopts us to do what he's doing. To put his character on full display.

To mirror what he's like to the watching world. God. I've adopted you to sonship to display what I'm like. What does this look like? Well surely the first thing is that we're always stepping towards people in grace.

No matter who they are. Not because they're meritorious or virtuous but because we're reflecting what God is like. That he steps towards us. The first great spiritual blessing that Paul says is that we're chosen and adopted by God.

Second spiritual blessing and these are less controversial so we'll spend less time. Is that we're redeemed and forgiven. We don't really have the concept of redemption in our world.

[22 : 31] I guess the closest we get is when you buy your laptop back from cash converters. Or you get your wedding ring back from the pawnbrokers if it's gone really bad. Either way.

Redemption though is absolutely tied to slavery. And the problem we have when we think of slavery is we think of American colonialism. But in the Roman world you could become a slave for a number of reasons.

One would be military conquest. But the main way you became a slave is you became bankrupt. So if I was living in Ephesus I'd think I'm going to open a perfume shop.

And I open it in downtown Ephesus and it goes really well for a while. But then competition increases and demand decreases and the bills rise and there's more going out than coming in and I can't cope I can't keep up.

But I can't declare myself bankrupt because there's no bankruptcy laws. I can't call in the receivers. I have to sell myself into slavery until I've paid back the debt that I owe.

[23 : 37] And the only way I'll get out is either that I pay the debt back myself or somebody pays it for me. This is exactly what has happened in the gospel.

That we by choice and compulsion have sold ourselves voluntarily and absolutely into slavery of sin. We've accrued an insurmountable debt that even given all eternity we could never pay back. And yet God steps towards us in grace and he pays it for us but he doesn't do a bank transfer. He doesn't use his mobile phone to ping it. He pays with the costliest resource in the whole entire world.

He pays with the blood of his own son. And as he dies our death in our place for our sin he holds out to us forgiveness and life.

Spiritual blessing number two is redemption and forgiveness. Putting grace on glorious display God is that good.

[24 : 46] Now perhaps you're here this morning and you don't know this Jesus you don't know what it is to be redeemed and forgiven and actually if you're honest you think I don't really need it. I'm not really a sinner God could really have no beef with me.

I'm really not a slave. Well I want to lend you the church for a week. I want to lend you the church to put a display up of your life and we're going to display it all.

We're going to display every thought and attitude idea and word you've said. We're going to plaster the whole thing. It's a good job we've got such a big church because some of you look quite old.

Now there'll be some bits that you really want to show people.

Look at this this is where I got my five metre swimming badge. Look at this this is where I got grade eight on the cello. Look at this this is where I made my first fajita. There's some bits that you'd be really proud of and say come on in and see this.

There'd be other stuff that you would be appalled if people saw thoughts that you'd had things that you'd done. The Bible will call that sin. It's not just being judged by a human authority it's being judged by a holy God whose standard is perfect.

[25 : 59] If that's us there's even one square inch of the wall we would want people to see. We need Jesus. We need redemption and forgiveness.

Number three disclosed and revealed. Look at verse 10 look at verse 9 rather he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good purpose which he purposed in Christ to be put into

effect when the times reach their fulfilment to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

It's the word mystery you see is where we sometimes go wrong. He's not thinking Hercule Poirot Miss Marple or Sherlock Holmes. It's not that kind of mystery. It's a secret that's been concealed that has now been revealed.

It's something that can only be known by being disclosed. Christ. And the Bible says that now we know that mystery now we're copied into the memo we're now in the divine loop and know what all the world is about and where it's heading.

Spiritual blessing number three is that we have seen the whole picture. We've seen how it started and where it's heading. We're privy to the entire eschatological plan of God's.

[27 : 16] It's again such good news. Because from the ground zero of our lives it seems like it's all out of control. Seems like the news isn't getting better.

Human wickedness seems to be getting worse. Seems like it's running amok. That there's no one at the helm of the universe. We see ISIS and Ebola and Ukraine and Jihadi John and Greece and the financial collapse and cancer and Syria and Darfur and Iraq and Afghanistan and Charlie Hebdo and child poverty and child soldiers and child abuse and the Danish cafe atrocities in North Korea, corruption, broken promises and a widening poverty gap and on and on and on and we think it's out of control.

And yet Paul tells us that it's all heading somewhere. It's all heading to the point where God's patience is exhausted and he sends the Lord Jesus and the ultimate aim is to bring to unity all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

That's where it's heading. To the time and place where God enforces the rule of his son to rule over absolutely everybody, absolutely everywhere. And the glorious thing is because he's made known that plan to us we can be on board with that plan before it happens.

That's what happens in the church. This is like a microcosm showing what the future is going to look like. What draws us all together? The fact that Jesus reigns.

[28 : 47] He reigns in each of our lives and as he reigns in each of our lives he draws us together in a family. The best apologetic for the church is the church.

The people looking in go what a diverse group of people who seem to hang out as family and yet not many of them are related to each other biologically. And as the world sees that they go there is something different.

Paul tells us the reason that's attractive is because that's where it's all headed. To the point where everybody who loves Jesus is gathered together where he rules and reigns.

Unity is not an optional byproduct of church. It's an absolute necessity that we cling to Jesus and cling together.

because it makes Jesus look glorious. Brings praise from our lips. Spiritual blessing number three is disclosed and revealed and lastly sealed and guaranteed.

[29 : 50] Do you see it there? When you 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.

This is good news. This is good news. Because when I believe in Jesus the Holy Spirit comes and dwells within me as the resident boss of my life.

And as he comes he molds and shapes me and he gives me perseverance and things like that meaning that I will get to the end. Meaning that I can have absolute certainty.

When I believe in Jesus I'm sealed by the Holy Spirit who dwells within me who's not going anywhere and will ensure and be able to keep me until the very end like a guarantee.

Like a deposit. Like paying a bit of something up in advance but quite a big chunk because you paid for it in the blood of your son and you have this guarantee which means that there will be a collection day at the end when it's all brought in.

[31 : 00] Now I know what we think of guarantees. Even John Lewis. We root around for the receipt. Still within guarantee and you take it and you hold the two things and look apologetically towards them and just hope they're going to say yes or no whether the deposit and guarantee is still available.

This guarantee is absolutely sure. It's lifelong. It'll last you all of your life. And if we will but trust in Jesus sealed and guaranteed and welcomed forever by God.

I went down to see Ruth last Monday. So frail and so weak and yet so steadfast in her love for the Lord. Because she had absolute confidence that it wasn't how hard she could cling to him. It was how much he was holding on to her. Because she knew what it was to trust Jesus to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and to be sealed and guaranteed. Which has been cashed in just yesterday. And she is welcome forever in the Lord Jesus. It's great spiritual blessings here.

[32 : 18] Chosen and adopted. forgiven and redeemed. And what are we to do with it?

Well we're to praise God. We're to thank him that he's been so good and gracious and kind to each of us. This isn't meant to be theological ranting. This is meant to spark our hearts and kindle praise from our lives.

The second thing is all over this chapter is in Christ in the beloved in him eleven times in him in him in him and therefore what are we to do?

Well if we want to take hold of these spiritual blessings more and more it's about walking closer and closer with Jesus that all of our lives would be found in him all of our lives would be lived for him that he would take everything from us because he alone is worthy.

Therefore how do we take hold of this and become praiseful people? By being in him and fully in him. Here's number three. We have absolute security.

[33 : 28] God has chosen in the past keeps us in the present and he'll get us through to the end and therefore it frees us to live risky, bold, outrageous, radical lives for him.

To go out there and be the sons that he's called us to be to put his character on full display to the world. To be gracious and loving. To disclose the plan of God to anyone we come into contact with. Because we're free. Finally and fully free. Free to be the people that God has called us to be. Living life in the light of these spiritual blessings.

And therefore I think we can simply say with Paul. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed each of us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing.

Let's pray. Father God you have been so kind to us.

[34 : 40] You've been so good to us. Father you've loved us even though we were unlovable. You chose us even though no one else would ever choose us.

Because you love us that much. Therefore Lord may this love be at work in our lives. May your spirit that lives within us be changing us and equipping us and enabling us to put your character on full display.

Father we love you and we want to praise you more so keep these things fresh in our lives. Sear these truths on our hearts. And Father may we realize afresh today that we are free to be yours. Maybe for the first time. Or maybe for the hundredth and first time. Father come and take your place in our lives we pray. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.