



## ARE YOU BLESSED?

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Ephesians 1:1-14  
First Message  
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As we begin this series covering texts from the book of Ephesians, we will start by laying a foundation for how believers live their life in Christ.

The question I want to ask you this morning is this: Are you blessed? Do you consider yourself already blessed, or are you still seeking to be blessed? People say they are blessed because they have a good job, a successful business, a satisfying marriage, their children are doing well, or they have good friends. What about people who have lost their spouses through death or abandonment, those whose children are not doing well, who are suffering from grave illnesses, whose business ventures have failed? Has blessing eluded them?

People feel blessed because of physical and tangible experiences that result in happiness, success, pleasure, or status. But we are building on shaky ground if this is why we feel blessed. If our sense of well-being is based on what we can see, touch and feel, we can miss the blessings of God that Paul speaks about in Ephesians 1.

Let's read what the apostle says about the state of being blessed. Ephesians 1:3:

**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, (Eph 1:3, NASB)**

Although Paul was under house arrest in Rome when he wrote these words, he considered himself blessed. Here he blesses God and proclaims a blessing to every one who is in Christ.

The word "blessing" conveys the notion of being endowed with the potential for true life, real joy, and sustainable well being. Paul's immediate concern is for Gentile believers who might be tempted to view themselves as less blessed than their Jewish brothers. He wants to correct their faulty reasoning so that they will become the saints that they are called by God to become.

Isn't that what we want, to be blessed? We especially want to feel blessed by our fathers. That is the story of Jacob's life. Jacob deceived, manipulated and conned his way through life to gain blessing. He stole the blessing from his brother Esau. He outmaneuvered Laban in order to bless himself with flocks and herds. He wrestled with the Lord and clung to him until he blessed him. Most of us are like Jacob: we do everything in our power to bless ourselves.

But that is what God promises to do for his people – to bless them. When God called Abraham out of the land of Ur, he promised him that he would bless him and that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Paul says that this promise is fulfilled for every one who is in Christ – not just some believers, but every saint.

The two phrases "in Christ" and "in Him" occur six times in the first fourteen verses of this book. God is a Father who blesses. He is the source of true blessing in life. The blessings of Christ are different from what we may be seeking, but they are what we truly desire. They are not physical but spiritual, not visible but invisible, not a part of the earthly realm but part of the heavenly realities.

Some years ago I had the privilege of visiting the great museum in Cairo. Among the exhibits on display were artifacts found in King Tut's tomb, discovered by Howard Carter in 1922. Carter had been looking for the tomb for several years, and time and money were running out. He knew the location of the burial chamber, but it was covered by the desert sands. Just as Carter was about to give up, a windstorm exposed part of the tomb, and archaeologists began to excavate the site. They drilled an observation hole in the wall of the tomb, and the first one to look inside was Howard Carter. As he put his eye to the hole, he remained silent. He just looked, seeing at last the fruits of years of searching. Finally, someone asked him, "What do you see?" "I see wonderful things," he replied.

The heavenlies too contain wonderful things: the blessings of God that are ours in Christ. I want to highlight five of them this morning. The first blessing is that God chose us.

**just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:4-6)**

God chose us, he elected us before the foundation of the world. Before there was one star, one tree or one animal, God chose us. He predestined us, deciding beforehand that we should be his sons and daughters in Christ.

God did not choose us to be servants, slaves or sec-

ond-class citizens. He chose us to be his sons and daughters. We did not deserve it. How could we, when we weren't even born, and the world had not yet been created? In life we earn promotions, degrees and other advancements through our own efforts, but we do nothing to earn God's choice of us. God chose us before we ever entertained the thought of believing in him.

And what is the blessing of being chosen? It is the gift of worth, of significance. "You are not an accident, you are a divine choice" (Henri Nouwen). The blessing is that God knows our names. So we can join with that little girl who prayed, "Our Father who art in heaven, how did you know my name?" The blessing is that we do not have to sing, with Janis Ian: "To those of us who knew the pain of Valentines that never came, and those whose names were never called, when choosing sides for basketball." We have significance and value because God chose us.

I was struck by the following headline in the newspaper a few weeks ago: "Michelangelo Work Discovered." Timothy Clifford, a visiting museum director from Scotland, was searching through some old drawings of lighting fixtures in a storeroom at the Smithsonian Institution's Cooper-Hewitt collection in New York. In the collection he discovered a drawing of a candelabrum that experts agreed is a work by Michelangelo. The drawing was purchased with other works for \$60 in 1942. Today it is worth around \$12 million.

If we think we have no value, we need to think again. We are more precious than a Michelangelo. We are God's priceless possession, based on what God did in choosing us before the foundation of the world to be his sons and daughters.

The second blessing that Christians possess is redemption in Christ.

**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.** (Eph 1:7-8a)

The word "redemption" describes the process by which slaves were set free following the payment of a price. The blood of Christ is the payment for our freedom, and the result of that is forgiveness, the letting go of all our sins. I got a speeding ticket in college once. I went to court to plead my case. I took no money with me; I hoped the judge would let me off the hook. He didn't. He pronounced me guilty. In my youthful brashness I imagined that if I had no money he would have to let me go. But no. After sitting and stewing for a bit, I called a friend who came and paid for my release. On a much grander scale, believers are redeemed through the payment of a price. God chooses, Christ redeems.

What does that mean for everyday life? The blessing is the gift of forgiveness, the gift of freedom. We no longer owe anything for our sin. We do not have to feel guilt or shame or despair or regret. The burden has been lifted and we are free. We wake up every morning

feeling cleansed. I have to say that I don't know how people live without the blessing of redemption!

One of the joys of working with our singles here in church is observing the transformation that takes place in the lives of young people through redemption. They have been living in the world and making all kinds of mistakes, but then God takes over their lives and they experience freedom. He begins to use them and bless them. The past never determines the future for those who have found redemption in Christ Jesus.

The third blessing is the mystery of God's will, which he has made known to us.

**In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.** (Eph 1:8b-10)

A mystery is something that is concealed. But the word here denotes something that is impossible to know: a mystery that is to be discovered only through revelation. The Bible speaks of many mysteries: the mystery of Israel, the mystery of the kingdom of God, the mystery of the resurrection, the mystery of the gospel, the mystery of lawlessness, the mystery of faith, the mystery of godliness.

Here Paul talks about the mystery of God's will, which is the summing up of all things in Christ. This is the revelation of the "mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past" (Rom 16:25). Christ is "the mystery of God." In Ephesians, specifically, the mystery of God is, "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel...the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God" (Eph 3:6,9).

Throughout history, God has been managing and administering the plan which he formulated before the beginning of time. And when the fullness of the time came, God revealed his plan in Christ. In Christ, God is creating a new family, a new body, a new humanity, a new temple.

What does this mean for Christians? We are blessed with the gift of revelation and insight into the hidden mystery of God. We are part of God's purpose and destiny. God's thoughts have been revealed to us. Have you ever been part of an inner circle that was privy to some mystery and you had access to inside information? Imagine sitting in on the President's inner circle. Well, believers in Christ are blessed with a revelation that is far greater than any of these.

The fourth blessing is the gift of purpose.

**In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ**

**would be to the praise of His glory.** (Eph 1:10b-12)

In this complex sentence the phrase I want to pick up on is, “we have obtained an inheritance.” I believe the “we” here refers to the Jews. They were the first to hope in Christ. In Christ they claimed their inheritance. We think of an inheritance as something we will get in the future; however, the word here can mean to give or receive an inheritance.

As God’s people, the Jews were called out to be God’s inheritance or his possession. Listen to these Old Testament texts: “For the LORD’s portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance” (Deut 32:9). “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen for His own inheritance” (Ps 33:12). “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5-6a).

In verse 11, Paul speaks to this fulfillment with regard to the Jews. But in verse 14 the word “inheritance” is applied to Gentile believers as well. Gentiles and Jews together become the spiritual seed of Abraham. They become God’s people, God’s possession, created and called for God’s pleasure.

Christians are blessed with the gift of purpose and destiny. God chooses us so that we can be his possession. God created us for himself. This text declares that we are meant to fill a need that God has. It’s amazing to know that in some inexplicable way, God not only wants us, he needs us. He thirsts for us and yearns for us until his thirst is satisfied. “There is a property in God of thirst and longing...he hath longing to have us” (Dame Julian of Norwich). Robert Browning said that we are being formed as the vessel which will “slake God’s thirst.”

This passage gives me a tremendous perspective on life. We often think that life begins with us, but here we learn that life begins with God. Life isn’t all about what we are doing, but what God is doing. It’s not about where we’re going, but where God is going. We are not possessing, we are being possessed. This is extremely helpful, because we can easily lose our way. Life begins in God and it ends in God.

The fifth blessing is that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

**In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.** (Eph 1:13-14)

The “you” here is a reference to the Gentiles. The

blessing is that we are sealed with the Spirit of promise. Paul says that the Spirit is a seal, a promise, and a pledge. A seal is a mark of ownership and authenticity. Livestock and slaves were branded with a seal to indicate to whom they belonged. The Spirit is a promise, in fulfillment of Joel’s word, spoken in Acts 2:17, “‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind’” (Acts 2:17, from Joel 2:28).

Finally, the Spirit is a pledge, a down payment, the first installment of what is coming. The word “pledge” was used of an engagement ring. In the Spirit, God gives us a foretaste of our wedding with the Lamb.

Believers are blessed with the gift of assurance. The Spirit is God with us, and the promise of his commitment to us. At times we get distracted, near-sighted, despairing and doubtful. We have difficulty remembering our purpose and destiny. The blessing of the Spirit is that he reminds us who we are, whose possession we are. He encourages us with a foretaste of our future home, and assures us that God is faithful to his promise that he will see us through. I don’t know how people live without this assurance in the midst of fallen humanity, with all the pain and heartache and suffering that we are called to endure.

These then are the blessings of God. We are chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sealed by the Spirit. We have revealed to us the mystery of the gospel, and we are partakers of God’s eternal plan to have a people for his possession.

Why did God do all of this for us? Three times in the text Paul says, “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (verse 6); “that we...would be to the praise of His glory” (verse 12); “to the praise of His glory” (verse 14). Once again we learn that we are created by God and for God. We are to exhibit God’s glorious, abundant grace, with the result that all creation will raise their voices in worship and praise to the only true God. John Stott comments: “The glory of God is the revelation of God, and the glory of his grace is his self-disclosure as a gracious God. To live to the praise of the glory of his grace is both to worship him ourselves by our words and deeds as the gracious God he is, and to cause others to see and to praise him too.”<sup>1</sup>

My daughter once said to me, “Dad, I’m not great at anything. I’m good at some things, but not great at anything.” People put a lot of effort into being great at something or other in order to find meaning in life. We want to be blessed. But here Paul reminds us that we are called to live to the praise of His glory. Can anything be greater than that?

Are you blessed? As far as the tangible, visible indicators of success and prosperity in this world are concerned, some of you are blessed and some of you are not. But if you are referring to the intangible, invisible, eternal blessings of heaven, then every believer is blessed beyond measure. We don’t all look the same.

We're not all rich and brilliant. But, whether we are black or white, rich or poor, married or single, we all have the same blessings from God and we share these with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

If you could choose today between the blessings of earth or the blessings of heaven, which would you choose? Behind door #1 lie power, prestige, success and wealth. Behind door #2 lie significance, forgiveness, enlightenment, destiny and assurance. You can't choose both. If you choose door #2, however, then you are blessed indeed.

In this beautiful passage from Ephesians we discover that in Christ, we of all people are blessed beyond measure. What a wonderful foundation for life this is!

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1. John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979), 50.