

Count Your Blessings (Ephesians 1:1-14 & Psalm 103:1-12) 03-Sep-2017 ¹

So this morning we begin a new series on the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. So it would be great to have your Bibles opened up to Ephesians chapter 1 and we're looking at the first 14 verses.

There's the usual outline in the bulletin for you to jot down some notes.

Let's ask God for His help in understanding this morning

Context

The letter is written by the Apostle Paul

And it's quite remarkable that the Apostle Paul wrote anything at all in the Bible - given his background

Paul - was formerly known as Saul - he was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, and yet also a Roman citizen - he describes himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews - and very conversant in the Jewish law being a Pharisee (Phil 3:5)

Saul was dedicated to persecuting the early followers of Jesus - having them rounded up and put in jail and executed. Saul was pretty much a terrorist in today's terms.

Until he met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus in Syria - and became a committed follower of Jesus!

It was the dramatic transformation - Saul the terrorist becomes Paul the Apostle - and Jesus gives Paul the job of bringing God's message of Salvation through Jesus into Asia Minor and into Europe!

Paul establishes churches in the region, visits them and also writes to them to encourage them

The book of Ephesians is a letter to one of those churches - in the city of Ephesus - modern day Turkey

[Powerpoint 1-Map]



[Explain the Map]

Intro (vv1-3)

So as we look at verses 1 to 3

[Powerpoint 2-Intro]

V1 confirms that Paul is the author of the letter - and note Paul's credentials

He is an Apostle (a called disciple of Jesus)

Called literally by Jesus Himself on that road to Damascus

And it wasn't Paul's idea - it was God's idea - God's will

The recipients of Paul's letter are God's holy people in the city of Ephesus

Holy people here literally means saints!

And holy - means set apart for God's service

How are the people of Ephesus holy?

It tells us at the end of v1

By having faith in Jesus Christ

So anyone who has faith in Jesus - is considered a holy

So all of us here this morning - believing in Jesus - are saints!

Forget about St. David, St. Andrew or St. Mary Mackillop - we are saints if we follow Jesus

And the whole point of what Paul's going to tell us this morning

Is to explain why we are saints...

As we'll see in a minute

But first he gives his readers a greeting in v2

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Grace and peace

Those 2 words basically sum up what Jesus brings us

Grace - is God's undeserved favour - human kind is basically sinful and deserves punishment for disobeying God - but God shows humankind grace - undeserved favour - and sends His Son to fix sin

Which leads to peace - peace between God and humankind

Which brings Paul to say in v3

That God the Father should be forever praised for sending His Son Jesus

We should be forever grateful that the Father allowed His Son to come and die for the sin of the world

Why should we be forever grateful?

Because as Paul explains in v3 God has...

Blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Blessing here comes from the Greek word - where we get eulogy from

And it means "to speak good of". And since it's God doing the blessing here - it is like God has spoken or pronounced good things for US -

And these good things - these blessings are only possible because of Jesus

And notice they are spiritual blessings

Spiritual being the part of us that is designed for eternity - the part of us that is made to live with God forever

But we can only have these spiritual blessings for eternity through Jesus - and not through anything we have achieved of ourselves

And we can see their eternal (everlasting) spiritual blessings because Paul says they our blessings in the heavenly realm - and the heavenly realm is everlasting

It's like we are taken into Heaven - here and now - by having these spiritual blessings because they are all spiritual blessings which last beyond our earthly life and go on into eternity in Heaven...

So what are these spiritual blessings?

Verses 4 to 14 tell us

And they are blessings that involve

- God the Father

- God the Son
- And God the Holy Spirit

Blessings involving the Father (vv4-6)

Let's look at the blessings from the Father first.

[Powerpoint 3-Blessings Father]

We are chosen by God

He chooses us first - we don't choose Him

And see v4 - He chose us before the creation of the world

So it's not like we are an afterthought - He not only chosen us before we were born - but before the world was created

God is in control - God has a plan for each one of us

And when he **Chose us** - v4 says He chose us to be Holy and blameless (literally without blemish and without fault)

How can we be Holy (a Saint) and without blame?

How is that possible - since we continue to sin?

It's only possible because of Jesus - because when God looks at us - it's like He actually sees Jesus standing in front of us - and so He sees us like Jesus - without blemish and fully holy - we basically take on Jesus' holiness

This is also only possible because of God's love for us - see the end of v4

Which He showed as He **predestined us for adoption** into His family to be one of His children - again only possible because of Jesus

We need to clarify a couple of terms

Predestined means God decided beforehand that we would be part of His family
- again it's His idea and not ours!

And **adoption**

When a couple adopt a child - that child becomes part of the family - and that child is treated the same as any children that the couple have already given birth to - and that child has all the same privileges.

And it's the same in God's family - because of Jesus - we become God's adopted children and we receive the same privileges of God's own Son!

Why would God do that?

Because of His good pleasure and will!

Basically because He said so and because it's a great idea to Him!

And because it says in verse 5

Because of His glorious grace

His undeserved favour on us - even though we haven't earned his favour - or deserved His favour - He shows His favour to us and accepts us as His own

Blessings involving the Son (v7-14)

How is it possible for God to choose us, predestine us as adopted children and show us grace?

It is only possible we keep saying - because of Jesus the Son

So what blessings does Jesus, the Son, bring?

Well - our sin and rebellion against God - separates us from God - breaks our relationship from God

To use a football analogy - our sin has us on the wrong team - on the losing team-
 And we need someone to come along and pay a transfer fee for us - and get us on
 the winning team - so someone has to pay that transfer fee and get us on the
 winning team again

[Powerpoint 4-Blessings Son]

That's where Jesus comes in - see v7 - **Jesus redeems us** - he buys us back into
 God's winning team - but it cost Jesus - His life blood - His sacrifice on the cross
 - it meant Him - taking our blame for being on the losing team - not playing well
 for God at all - and getting further and further away from God's standards. But
 Jesus was prepared to take our blame - our punishment - and die for it - so we
 could be on God's winning team again!

And it's Jesus' blood shed on the cross that brings us another spiritual blessing
 See v7 still

Forgiveness - literally the Greek means - being released from imprisonment - it's
 like we are in jail because of our sin and rebellion against God - and Jesus' blood
 shed on the cross - is a 'get out of jail free card' - we get a full pardon for our
 sins - no questions asked - no punishment - no reminders of what we did wrong - all
 forgotten

And again this forgiveness is all part of the Father's grace - v8 - which He
 lavishes on us!

Which brings us to another spiritual blessing we have involving Jesus, the Son.
 See verses 9 and 10 - God has **revealed his will and purpose to us** - by sending
 Jesus - who remember is God's Word in flesh form - this Word of God came and

lived and spoke and taught what is required of His followers. This Word also explained God's purpose to bring back those lost from God - and that this Word - Jesus - would be the one to bring everything together in Heaven and on Earth - all under His Kingship - because He is King of Kings and Lord of Lord's - and because everything was created by Him and through Him and For Him - AND - He holds it altogether. Paul says this is a mystery - we are given some details in the Bible - but exactly how and why God would do this - only He fully knows. And we don't necessarily need to understand every detail - but just praise God that He has done it!

And because God has revealed His will and purpose to us - through Jesus.

We have the spiritual blessing of having an **inheritance** - see v14 -

An inheritance is something we get left to us by our parents or family members when they die

I'm sure some of us here today - have had an inheritance - it might have been money or some family heirloom

We will only have that inheritance until we die - unless we've already used it up
But we certainly won't take it with us when we die

But when Jesus died - he left us an inheritance that lasts beyond this life on earth

Because of what Jesus did on the cross - we inherit forgiveness

Because Jesus didn't stay dead - but was raised 3 days after His death - we inherit eternal life - living with God in Heaven forever

We have that inheritance left to us - right now - it's ours!

Just by believing in Jesus

And we take that inheritance with us into Heaven

It's a spiritual heavenly blessing - the inheritance of the sure hope of eternal life with God

Blessings involving the Spirit (vv13-14)

[Powerpoint 5-Blessings Spirit]

But how do we know we actually have these spiritual blessings?

How do we know Jesus has redeemed us? Forgiven us? Revealed God's will to us?

And how do we know we have this inheritance of eternal life?

How can we be sure?

Well that's where the Holy Spirit comes in

Paul says in v13

That when someone hears the message of truth about Jesus - when they hear how they are saved from sin through Jesus' death - and when they believe in Jesus

That person is **sealed with the Holy Spirit**

It literally means that as a person believes in Jesus

God places His mark of ownership on them - we are His

It's like we have a barcode label on us - saying God's son - God's daughter - hands off!

And Paul goes on to say that this seal of the Holy Spirit is a **guarantee** - see v14

I don't know about you but I often buy stuff with guarantees - 1 year, 2 year etc.

Have you ever noticed the thing always breaks just after the guarantee has expired!

Well the Holy Spirit's **guarantee** is not like that - it's a rock solid guarantee as Paul says in v14 - because Jesus has bought us back - He's paid the deposit so our inheritance of eternal life is guaranteed - and the Holy Spirit - is authorizing that full payment for our sin has been taken care of by Jesus -

It's like we go to the layby counter to collect our goods that we've lay byed and we go to pay the balance - and the lady at the counter says - it's yours to collect - no payment required - it's paid in full - someone came in the other day and paid it.

Jesus has paid for our eternal inheritance in full

That's spiritual blessings in a nutshell!

Available to us now.

Response

With those spiritual blessings in our hands

We surely need to respond - don't we?

[Powerpoint 6a-In Jesus only]

1. Firstly, these spiritual blessings are only available because of Jesus - so as a bare minimum - we need to believe that Jesus died for our sin to be forgiven - and He rose again - so we can have that inheritance of eternal life. If we haven't made that commitment to believe in Jesus - today's a good day to it!

[Powerpoint 6b-Thanks and Praise]

2. Second, whatever else is going on in our life right now - if we believe in Jesus - those spiritual blessings are already ours right now - it's like we're

participating in the Heavenly realms as Paul puts it - already! So let's be giving thanks to the Lord God - and praising His glorious grace!

[Powerpoint 6c-No black dots/Count Blessings]

3. Third, let me show you this. [Show paper with black dot]. What do you see? [Accept answers]. It's easy to focus on the black dot in our lives - and miss all the pure white space with God's blessings. We often don't spend enough time counting our many blessings from God. Counting the Spiritual blessings we have just talked about this morning and counting the many material and general blessings God gives us every day. Instead we focus on the black dots. So I encourage you friends, as you reflect on this morning's talk - that in your quiet times at home - write down some of those blessings. And praise God for them!
And count those blessings one by one...

Let's pray...