

A Blessed People

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[0:00] Now let's pray. Our Father God, thank you for this book, Ephesians! And as we begin looking at it today, we ask that you expand not only our minds, but most of all our hearts, as we take in what a magnificent God you are.

May the words of my mouth today be to the praise of your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Now, a few years back, maybe around 2011 or so, there was a Sunday school dinner-type thing happening here, if my memory serves correctly.

Now, the people who were involved in Sunday school ministry here at BEMKEC were coming up, and they were sharing their testimonies and words of encouragement with one another.

Now, I was there with my parents, and I saw, you know, my Sunday school teachers coming up to share. And then there was me.

Me, right? Me being so intelligent, prepubescent me, decided that it was so important, because I knew I was such an amazing little Sunday school kid to come up and give my sharing as well.

[1:24] Now, did I have anything good to add? Not really. So, I just thought to myself, you know, just go up and say thank you to the teachers, and thank God, you know, that they are willing to put up with me, us, willing to put up with us.

But once I got up there, somehow, in my infinite wisdom, I think I decided to say something along these lines. Thank you to all the teachers for teaching us all those good Bible stories.

But I don't think I learned that much, because I always knew the Bible stories, and I always knew the answers to your questions. You can laugh if you want to laugh.

It's fine. But, you know, that's amazing, right? I'm really eternally grateful to my dad for calling me out on my stupid pride that evening.

To this day, I still think of that and cringe sometimes. But on a side note, I get to fix that this morning. So, truly, thank you to all my Sunday school teachers for putting up with me.

[2:31] Because without you, who knows where I'd be today. You know, we can all gawk at that, because it's so bad, right? It's so cringy.

We know that as Christians, all praises, rightly, are due to God alone. I mean, that's why we're all here, isn't it? So, what more fitting way for Paul to begin the book of Ephesians than with praise?

Now, I don't know if you got that sense as you heard the passage read to you just now. Verse 3, praise be to God. Verse 6, to the praise of His glorious grace.

Verse 12 and 14, to the praise of His glory. So, imagine for a moment with me a leaky tap, right?

There's water dripping, and the pressure behind the tap, it grows and grows and grows until the tap can't hold that pressure any longer, and it bursts forth. And now imagine, behind that tap is all the roaring rapids of the Niagara Falls.

[3:39] Nothing can plug that tide. There are not enough buckets to contain that flow. You know, that is what the Apostle Paul is like with his praise.

See, it's not very obvious in our English translations, but verses 3 to 14 are actually one long sentence in Greek.

No full stops. So, the Apostle Paul just can't contain himself. He just keeps going on and on and on in praise.

However, I suspect that's not typically our posture, is it? You know, certainly, we can come to church on Sunday and we are happy to sing the praises of God, but for most of us, praising God during the rest of the week isn't something we're quick to do.

Why is that? See, I wonder if it's because we're all a little bit like that little old me, struggling and seeking self-praise, seeking vanity, self-glory.

[4:54] We may not be as blatant as I was about it, but that's simply because as we get older, we just get better at hiding it. And that self-focus, friends, it taints our praise.

It's why we can shout, praise God, thank you God, when we get good grades or when we get a raise. But we go quiet the moment life doesn't go our way.

And deep down, brothers and sisters, we know that that's not quite right. So how can our praise go from this tepid trickle to this overflowing fountain?

How can we be like Paul? After all, remember, he is writing from prison, not exactly the best of circumstances, and yet he still praises.

It's amazing, right? How did he manage that? And Ephesians 1 tells us, it's because the apostle Paul knows what he has in Christ.

[6:07] Doctrine leads to doxology. His doctrine leads to his doxology. Knowing who God is and what he has done for us will lead to ceaseless praise.

So today, Paul invites every single one of us to come along with him and to be reminded of what our God has done. And he invites us all to respond appropriately with ceaseless praise.

So take a look with me at verse 3. 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.

That right there, friends, is the big picture of Paul's praise. See, God the Father has given Christ his Son, who is our Lord, and Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

Now hear that again, every spiritual blessing, not a little, not some, not even a lot, God has freely given us all the blessings he can give.

[7:31] But you may ask, how? How am I blessed when life feels more like dry desert than shady oasis? Now bear with me for a moment, because to answer that question, we must first be clear what the apostle means when he says spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms.

Now firstly, that phrase spiritual blessings, they're not called spiritual because they only concern our souls. They're called spiritual because they come to us through the Holy Spirit.

And secondly, that phrase in the heavenly realms, now that tells us that these blessings are not merely material blessings here on earth today.

they belong in the realm that is unseen, full of spiritual realities. This realm is where many spiritual powers are opposed to God, and we'll discover that later on as we continue reading Ephesians. But friends, here is the first bombshell truth. Christ, our Lord, reigns supreme even in those heavenly realms. And my brothers and sisters, when we are united with Christ, we are blessed in that reality too.

[8:58] See, that's what's so incredible about who we are now in Christ. We are one new people by God's will, and we are a blessed people.

Because every single spiritual blessing of the Holy Spirit has been given to us by the Father if we are in the Son. God withholds nothing.

See, we've been blessed beyond anything our minds could comprehend. And to summarize, we've been blessed for the Father has called us to be His children even in ages past.

We've been blessed for the Son redeems us by His blood today. we've been blessed for we will spend an eternity under God in glory.

And we've been blessed for we have the Holy Spirit who seals us for that glorious future. All of this to the praise of His glory.

[10:05] Now, Paul's going to begin to unpack all of that for us, and we begin with the Father.

Read with me verses 4 to 6. For He, that's the Father, 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 in the one He loves.

Now, are there any Back to the Future fans here? Back to the Future, right? You know, Paul has just shown up in his time traveling DeLorean, but he's not taking us to 1955.

He's taking us way back, right? Before creation. Before there was a single molecule in the universe. And who do we find there?

There's God. God. Yet, even then, friends, before we existed, God had Christ and He had us in mind.

[11:24] For the Father of all creation had this purpose in mind, to predestine for adoption to sonship all of us through Christ.

Christ, how mind-blowing is that? Even before creation, you and I were blessed.

Now, being adopted here is not getting the leftovers, right? For the Ephesians, who were in a Roman culture, being adopted was understood to be attaining the same legal rights as natural-born children.

See, adopted children were true, genuine heirs, as would be any biological child. So, in other words, friends, before we even existed, the Father decided to make us His sons and daughters through His divine Son, Jesus.

And notice, He chose us to be holy. He didn't choose us because we were holy, right?

[12:38] So, we don't actually deserve this in the slightest. And yet, He makes us His children. And in Christ, we are now heirs of everything that He has promised.

So, friends, what greater blessing could we ask for? But we have to ask, why? Why did God do this? Was it out of loneliness?

Was it out of boredom? No, friends. Look again at the passage. Feel those words, God does this in love, in accordance with His pleasure, with His will, out of His glorious grace, He gives us the status of children of the Most High, freely, in the Son He loves.

You know, I cannot fathom a love like that. But let me try. Imagine that you are going to adopt a child. Now, normally, you'd have no idea how this child would turn out, but imagine that somehow you did.

Imagine you knew this child was not going to turn out to be some doctor. He wouldn't be someone who would happily stay around the house as you age.

[14:08] He wouldn't be someone who would reciprocate your love and your care. No, no, this is someone who's going to turn out to be a criminal, a murderer, a thief, an adulterer.

someone who, despite all that, would blame you when things go wrong, who would demand his inheritance and leave the house as soon as possible, someone who would take all your money and your time and your love and selfishly spend it on things that he knows you hate, someone who curses you when you try to discipline him, someone who rebels at everything you say.

Now, would you still adopt that child? Would you still have that child's name in your inheritance? I don't think so.

That would be crazy, wouldn't it? And yet, and yet, God did that for us. That is what he willed to do. He didn't do it because he was out of options or because he needed us. He did it because he wanted to. It's out of the overflow of his love, that same pure love, that same eternal love that he has for the son.

[15:41] God lavishes that love on us and he desires to draw you into it forever. Friends, God truly, truly loves you.

Brothers and sisters, if you've ever doubted that God loves you, let this truth reassure you. I understand that it might be the first time that some of you have heard of this doctrine, the doctrine of predestination or I'll be calling it election now on.

And some of you might have a few questions, you know, that's completely natural, so it's Q&A; time. Now, first question, but didn't I choose God?

Answer, yes you did. Your choice was real. You are responsible for your choices. You know, this passage also affirms that in verses 12 and 13.

You put your hope in Christ. But at the same time, friends, this passage tells us something deeper. See, as Jesus himself said to his beloved disciples in John chapter 15 verse 16, you did not choose me, but I chose you.

[17:03] So, the doctrine of election is not something that John Calvin just invented. It's right here in the text. God's sovereign choice and our free will fit together is a mystery that theologians have wrestled with for centuries.

We still argue about it today. It's not easy to understand, but nevertheless, the scriptures teach both. So, we must wrestle with it.

But, brothers and sisters, as we wrestle with it, we begin to deeper comprehend God's love. Now, second question, but does this mean that I can live however I like?

Answer, no. Because, look again at verse 4. He chose us, what, to be sinners? No, he chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight.

So, now, notice that election isn't this license to sin, it's actually a call to holiness. Being made children of God means we ought to inherit that family lifestyle.

[18:20] So, to be holy and blameless is to be like Christ, who himself did not sin. It points us to our final glorified state.

So, how should we live until then? On a journey of daily repentance and Christ-likeness, for that is what we were predestined to be.

Or to paraphrase the evangelical scholar F.F. Bruce, he says, the predestinating love of God is seen more in those who live holy and Christ-like lives rather than by those who try to understand it by logic and just won't stop talking about it.

And the third question, so election kind of makes me extra special, right? Again, no. The doctrine of election is grounds for great humility and praise, not great boasting.

See, if knowing that God has predestined you only makes you proud, if it causes you to feel superior to your brothers and sisters in Christ, if it causes you to start fights and quarrels among the body, then I'm sorry, I just don't think you get it.

[19:48] Because God did not choose you upon any merit of your own. You contribute nothing. How could you when he chose you before you existed?

I mean, did God choose Abraham for his faithfulness? Well, he was a liar and he slept with his servant to try to rush God's plans. Did God choose Israel because they were great and powerful? No, friends, they were slaves and they grumbled in the desert for 40 years. And likewise, my brothers and sisters, you and I were not chosen because of our merits.

So rather than boast, be humble, praise God for his electing love that has stretched out of eternity past. You know, I want you all to pause for a moment now and close your eyes, like really close your eyes, I can see from up here.

Remember, our holy God will not tolerate a single sin. So think about your life. Really think about it, who you are, your past, all you've done, all you've said, all you've thought to yourself.

[21:01] You have that picture? Now, ask yourself, why did God choose me to be his child?

Why did God choose me to be his child? God you? Brothers and sisters, there really is only one answer.

And if you're in Christ, one day you will stand before God the Father and you can ask him yourself, why God? Why me? And he'll tell you, my child, it was my great pleasure and will to do so because I love you.

There is no greater love than this. You can open your eyes now. Wake up someone if they're sleeping next to you. So the next time you ask yourself, how am I blessed?

Why does God deserve my praise? Remember this, the magnitude of God's love for you infinitely exceeds whatever merit you bring to the table.

[22:13] You contribute nothing. you gain everything. That is God's glorious grace poured out of his sheer love. Does that love not cause you to swoon?

How can you not fall for a God such as this? Paul tells us the right response in verse 6, to the praise of his glorious grace.

So praise the Father for that. And now having shown the blessings in ages past from the Father, Paul goes on now to show us the spiritual blessings that we have in his son.

Let's look at verses 7 to 12. In him we have the 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 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 to unity all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

[23:23] 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.

See friends how do rebels become sons and daughters? You know we've just seen that God chose us in love purely by grace but our sin is still very much a problem.

That rebellion eternally separates us from a holy God and before we can stand holy and blameless before him that sin must be dealt with. Well praise God for something has been done.

Our predestination comes to us today by Jesus Christ the beloved son who blesses us with redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins.

We say that word redemption a lot right? It's kind of lost its meaning. That word means to deliver something by payment of a price. Today it's kind of like saying come to my pharmacy get a free gift

right?

[24:42] But it used to specifically refer to the ransoming of slaves. That's what it's describing when it says the son has redeemed us.

In accordance with the father's will, the son redeems us from our slavery to sin. And what was the payment? His precious blood.

You know, what do we do to receive this precious blood? Verse 12 puts it simply, we who were the first to put our hope in Christ.

That's it. Put your hope in him and become a recipient of redeeming blood. He who started a good work in you, right?

There's no other way to put that except grace. It's this gift that's offered to you, not a reward for your good works. And Paul describes this best for us in verses 7 to 8.

[25:44] He calls it the riches of grace that God lavished on us. Those words are so emotive. Don't they paint this picture in your mind of a generous father gleefully sharing all he has with his children?

Brothers and sisters, this is such an important truth that we have to hear again and again and again because we live in a world that keeps telling us work harder earn your keep you have to perform to be seen and to be valued like have you ever heard Christians say this to you before God helps those who help themselves I'm sure you've heard that before right that's not in the Bible don't be deceived it's not biblical you see friends that worldly!

thinking really poisons the Christian mind have I done enough this week to please God did I read my Bible enough to draw nearer to God am I repenting correctly am I worshipping God rightly so he can feel my presence but the gospel my friends it liberates us from such tiresome pursuits the gospel tells us stop fighting to reach God God has reached you first God has chosen you first God has given himself!

first our friends God helps the helpless that's the Christian message so come freely to Christ and put your faith in him freely surrender your sins to him cling onto the finished work of that cross only the true son of God who lived in perfect accordance to the will of the father can make that atonement for our sins and only as he gives his righteousness to us as his precious blood is shed on that cross for us can we attain to sonship before our holy father but friends in Christ we don't just see our blessed redemption we also see the ultimate meaning and purpose of the universe so remember how before creation God had in mind Christ and us somehow it gets even better see in verse 9 God made known to us the mystery of his will now that word mystery doesn't imply there's something deep here to decipher because in

Ephesians a mystery is actually something that God has revealed what once was secret is now revealed in Christ we have been blessed with this divine revelation through Christ he lets us in on his grand plan so Paul now takes us from before creation to ultimate future when the times reach their fulfillment and what becomes of creation then verse 9 again according to God's good pleasure which he purposed in Christ God is going to bring to unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ!

[29:20] heaven and earth will find its way under one glorious good king now just ponder that for a moment because right now our world feels so chaotic doesn't it?

But one day there will be no more tears no more hostility no more pain no more suffering and friends that's where you and I are headed for we will all finally be reconciled to God as God's adopted children we will find our meaningful end or maybe our true beginning eternally singing the praises of God our Father and Christ the Son so think back again to what makes you praise God you know it's not wrong to praise God when you get the good great or when you get rightfully so we should thank God for every good gift but when we consider what the Father has revealed in Christ when we realize that this is where the eternal plan of God is ultimately headed don't these worldly blessings just seem so small in comparison so don't let short sightedness hamper your praises for God our exams our careers they're not the center of the story Christ is and has always been the center of the story aren't we so blessed that our place in Christ's story is secure nothing else can provide that security nothing we do can give us a seat at God's heavenly table nothing but Christ and his gracious redemption for the forgiveness of sins to the praise of his glory and so as we praise the son we finally now also come to ask this question how do we know as Christians that we will come toward that glorious future now this passage gives us two key assurances we find the first in verse 11 it's not us it's God yet again it's God who presently works notice the present tense all

things in conformity with the purpose of his will so he who started that good work he will see it to completion but secondly he gives us the third person of the Trinity the Holy Spirit verses 13 to 14 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 with 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 glory you know something uniquely sets Christians apart from the rest of the world and that's the Holy Spirit who resides in us so all these previous spiritual blessings we've just read about are now applied onto our lives and the Holy Spirit he does so much to bring the Father's will to pass firstly he presses the word of God upon our hearts as we hear the message of truth he makes our stony hearts become fertile soil upon which we receive the gospel and it bears fruit that's another key spiritual blessing we have we engage with it every

Sunday and sometimes we don't even realize it without the Holy Spirit's work on our hearts try as we may the gospel would fall on death ears everything I'm saying would fall on death ears but praise be to God that through the Holy Spirit he writes that gospel now upon our hearts secondly the Holy Spirit seals us in the ancient world a seal was like a mark of ownership it's like branding a cattle right like branding a cow or a bit like a chop on an official document it says this is genuine and this belongs to me that's what the spirit does he marks us as God's very own so here's what that means for you some days you won't feel much like a Christian you'll mess up again and you'll wonder whether God still wants you on those days remember friends you are

[34:04] God's precious possession do you realize how grand that is in the Old Testament only Israel had the privilege to be called God's treasured possessions but by the Holy Spirit now all people Jew and Gentile can become God's treasured possessions did you notice that subtle development in the text in verses 11 to 12 the apostle says in him we who were first and he's referring to Jewish believers and that develops in verse 13 and you also were included in Christ and there he's talking about Gentile readers and both of these things culminate in verse 14 our inheritance!

And thirdly he is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance something like the down payment on the house you've not paid for the whole house yet but nevertheless that house is yours and so the Holy Spirit is now this guarantee that we will partake in this glorious future our inheritance even though we may only experience it in part so friends what a blessing it is to know that by the Holy Spirit we will see that inheritance nothing friends not natural disaster not disease not poverty not AI apocalypse not Satan or his demons nothing can thwart God's will what God has predestined in ages past what the son has preciousely purchased with his blood and what the Holy Spirit seals for us will come to pass these great spiritual blessings are ours today and they are as unchanging as God is unchanging by that Holy Spirit we will see God face to face and we will praise him evermore to the praise of his glory so how are you all feeling now if you forget everything you've just heard I hope you can at least remember this brief summary that I will borrow from John Stock Ephesians has just given us the how and the why of God's new people how did we become one new people according to the good pleasure of God's will and why did he make us his people for the praise of his glory and grace if you're a non-Christian today please seriously consider what you've heard this is

God sovereign enough to control all things past present and future yet gentle and loving and kind using that sovereign power to call people to himself God is offering you that grace in his son he is offering you the assurance of the Holy Spirit not because you've earned it but out of his great love you can't save yourself from sin but God can if you'd like to know more you can talk to whomever brought you here or come and find me or the elders after service but if you're a Christian already you might be asking now how do I apply this to my life today and while it's good to not just be hearers of the word and doers of the word hear this Paul will indeed have much to say about how we are to live our lives later!

And as you hear of all that our great triune God has done for us I hope you found a renewed sense of awe and wonder at the big God we worship and by God's grace if you've ears to hear and eyes to see then friends let your praises roll that's your application praise God praise him live your lives out of praise and thanksgiving to God and your actions will follow our gracious loving heavenly father has given us all spiritual blessings the likes of which we could never comprehend nothing can compare so like Paul we can turn away from our sinful pride we can turn away from our selfish wills

our drive for self glory and look to our great triune God who lavishes on us all these things out of his love so to end

[39 : 21] I want to invite all of us to do something that this passage is calling us to do I want to invite! all of us to stand and together we are going to read a short doxology in light of what we have heard and then I will close in prayer so let's all stand and together as one we will read on the screen there will be three slides just to let you know let's read together the first one praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for in Christ he has poured upon us every spiritual blessing he calls us to be pure and blameless children and chose to do so before he created us out of his sheer pleasure and love to the praise of his glory praise be to the eternal son Jesus Christ our Lord for in him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins one day all creation will be united under

Christ to the praise of his glory and praise be to the Holy Spirit who helps us understand and receive the word of God and has sealed us as God's treasured possessions until the day we stand before the throne of God where we will sing for endless days to the praise of his glory amen let's pray our dear heavenly father we thank you that by your great delight pleasure and love you invite us to call you our father thank you for sending your beloved son Jesus whose blood on that cross paid the price for our redemption and thank you that the holy spirit seals us as your possessions until that great day when we will praise you forever more help us all to live lives praising you day after day come what may and may our praises now as we respond in song be pleasing to you in Jesus name we pray amen