

Count Your Blessings

Ephesians 1:3-14

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Ephesians 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”—Jesus. If you’ve studied the book of Ephesians, you know that like many of the Pauline epistles Paul starts with the blessings of the doctrines that he wants us to understand. We can’t live the Christian life unless we know what it means to be a Christian; so out of the six chapters, he starts with the first three chapters on doctrine and what a marvelous way he starts off this epistle by blessing “ . . . God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath”—I want you to notice the tense there, He has blessed us. So many times we’re praying, “God, would You bless me, would You bless me, would You bless me,” and tonight we’ll learn in Ephesians that if you’re a Christian, thus you are in Christ, you are already blessed. God has blessed you.

I love this because it’s one of those areas of the Scriptures where it affirms what all Christians share in common. These blessings aren’t for just the super saints or for the “Deeper Life Club,” or for the super committed Christians, they are for all believers in Jesus Christ. So, whether you know it or not, whether you understand it or not, these are blessings that are yours. Notice that they’re in the realm of the spirit, spiritual blessings; and we can be thankful for all the material things that God does for us, and we can count our blessings. There’s an old hymn that used to have a stanza that said, Count your blessings / name them one by one / Count your many blessings / see what God hath done. Usually I count my bummers, name them one by one; count your many bummers and see what God has not done. But how marvelous when we can meditate and give thanks to God for what He has done for us in “ . . . all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Literally, it would read, “In the heavenlies, in Christ.”

I don’t want to spend too much time on it, but notice in verse 3 it closes with that phrase, “ . . . in Christ.” The reason why we are blessed is because we as Christians are in Christ. This is one of the most important terms that Paul uses for you as a Christian to grasp and understand. The moment you are born again, you are taken out of Adam and you are placed in Christ. That’s your position as a believer, and all of us as believers have that same standing or position in Christ. This is the position of the believer, and then he’s going to go into the walk of the believer and then the warfare of the believer through the book of Ephesians, but you start with your position in Christ—who you are, what all of us have in common because of our position in Christ, so this is the blessings of being in Christ Jesus.

Now, Paul breaks them into three categories. He breaks them into the category, blessings from God the Father; the second category is blessings from God the Son; and the third category is blessings from God the Holy Spirit. These blessings come from our triune God—blessings from the Father, blessings from the Son, and blessings from the Holy Spirit.

Let’s look first of all at the blessings that come to us from God the Father, verses 4-6. Follow with me in your Bibles. Paul says, “According as he hath chosen us in him before the

foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,”—and notice verse 6—“To the praise of the glory of his grace” He starts in verse 3, “Blessed be the God and Father,” that’s a way of praising God or worshiping God, then he closes this section in verse 6 with, “To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” It’s first of all in Christ, now it’s “ . . . in the beloved”—or His beloved Son or some translations have the Son of His love, again being in Christ.

These are the blessings that come to us from God the Father. We could spend weeks on each one, so we’re just going to survey them. Write it down. First, we’re blessed because God has chosen us. This is what’s known as the doctrine of election—God chooses us to be His children, to be saved. Look at verse 4, “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” You talk about a doctrine that people have argued over. You talk about a doctrine that people divide over. You talk about a doctrine that people argue over, this doctrine of election—did I choose Him or did He choose me? Is God sovereign or do I have free will? I believe that both are taught—that God is sovereign, that God sovereignly chooses; and that He picks us by His grace, nothing in us causes Him to choose us, but He’s just by the pure sovereign grace of God, He reaches down and chooses us by His grace.

I know that a lot of people don’t like that. They think that’s kind of a fatalistic view of God and that God chooses some to go to hell and chooses some to go to heaven. That’s not what the Bible teaches. It doesn’t teach that God chooses people to go to hell. The Bible says that God is “ . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,”—to faith, to believe. The Bible says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” so I believe that we have free will, that we receive Christ, we repent, we believe in Him, and we exercise our will to resist God’s grace and say no to the love of God.

You say, “Well, I don’t understand then, did He choose me or did I choose Him?” The Bible teaches both. The Bible teaches that I chose Him, but it was God working in my heart convicting me, convincing me, drawing me, opening my heart, opening my eyes, and then after I become a Christian—this is a family secret, by the way—I realize Jesus said, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,” and the longer I walk with the Lord, the more convinced I am that God in His grace, and God in His mercy, just reaches down and saves us by His grace.

I was running from God, and God began to work in my heart by the Holy Spirit coming and convicting me. He’s called the hound dog of heaven, and I had praying parents. I know they were praying. The minute they started praying for me, it ruined everything. I couldn’t have fun anymore. But that resistance broke down and God, in His grace, brought me to a place of repentance and faith and trust in Him. So, I just rejoice in the idea that I’ve been chosen by God. I don’t wrestle with it, I glory in it. It’s the top of my list of being thankful at Thanksgiving. It’s, “Thank You, Lord, for choosing me.” I wouldn’t have chosen me. I wouldn’t have chosen you, for sure. But the Bible says, “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world,”—1

Corinthians 1:26-29—"to confound the wise . . . the weak things . . . to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised . . . That no flesh should glory in his presence." So, you're a candidate for God's glory. God chooses you because you're a foolish thing, and God wants to get glory in your life in the way He works in your life.

Write down at the top of your list, if you are a Christian, "He chose me." When did He choose me? " . . . before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy"—set apart, I should be a saint, I should be sanctified—"and without blame before him in love." So, this marvelous salvation of God is God's grace and God's mercy and God's hand reaching down and saving me.

The second blessing we have from God the Father is that He adopts us, verse 5. Look at it with me, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Here we have another word that's controversial, "predestinated." In verse 4, we have "election," or God choosing us, and then in verse 5 we have "predestination." They're not the same thing. People get them confused. "Election" refers to God choosing people; "predestination" refers to God's purpose of what He's going to do with those people that He chose. He chooses you and He predetermines what He's going to do with you. It's kind of like, "What do I do with them now that I've got 'em? What do I do with them now that I've chosen them?" He has it all planned out. He has it all plotted out. He's predetermined what He will do with those that He has chosen.

In this text it says that we would be adopted as " . . . children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Adoption here very simply doesn't mean that God chooses you as we would an adoption. It means that God, once you become a believer, places you as an adult son or daughter of God. You don't have to grow up in a sense to be able to enjoy your position as a child of God, you're immediately considered an adult child of God with all the benefits and blessings of being an adult child and all the inheritance that is yours. He's placed you, in that sense, by choosing you, adopting you, placing you as an adult child of God.

Thirdly, I love it, verse 6, "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us"—here it is—"accepted in the beloved"—or the son of His love. So first, He has chosen us; He has adopted us, placed us—hui ÷9v 0 adult sons and daughters of God, we can enjoy the blessings of being children of God; and thirdly, He has accepted us in the Son of His love or " . . . in the beloved." So, I'm accepted by God the Father because the righteousness of God the Son has been imputed to me, and I stand in Him accepted. I can't be accepted in my goodness or my righteousness or by my merits. I can't plead my goodness. I can't bring something in my hand that will earn or merit my favor with God. I'm accepted by God the Father because I'm in God the Son. Someone said, "Near, so very near, nearer I could not be; for in the person of His Son I am just as near as He. Dear, so very dear, dearer I could not be; for in the person of His Son I'm just as dear as He." What a blessing that is!

Rejoice this Thanksgiving to realize I'm chosen by Him, I've been adopted by Him, I have also

been accepted by the Father in Christ in the beloved. And each one of these sections he poses, “To the praise of the glory of his grace,”—his *cháris*, His unmerited favor—“wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

The second set of blessings comes from God the Son. Again, they are trinitarian, verses 7-14. It says, “In whom”—now, he just mentions at the end of verse 6 the Son of His love or His beloved, it’s a reference to Jesus Christ—“In whom”—that’s a reference to Christ—“we have “—here’s our first blessing—“redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; 8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; 9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ”—this is God’s ultimate redemptive plan—“both which are in heaven, and which are on earth”—there’s going to be a total redemption, even of heaven and earth—“even in him: 11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: 12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”

So, we have blessings from God the Father, now four blessings from God the Son. First, He has redeemed us. Count your blessings / name them one by one. First, we’ve been chosen. Secondly, we have actually been adopted. Thirdly, we’ve been accepted. Fourthly, you might say, the first blessing from the Son, is He has redeemed us. Look at verse 7, “In whom we have redemption through his blood,” stop right there. Redemption is one of the key words in the New Testament, and in the Old as well. It’s one of the most important words to understand. It means to be purchased or bought. It means that He went into the slave market and bought us by His death on the cross. “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body . . . which are God’s.” Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! So, Jesus died on the cross to pay the price to buy you, to purchase you. Just as you would buy a slave, He purchased us and bought us with His own precious blood. How marvelous that is. How wonderful that we have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now, that “redemption through his blood” refers to His work on the cross, His substitutionary work on the cross where He died in our place, He took our punishment, He bore our sins so that we could be bought by His blood and we could be redeemed.

Blessing number two from God the Son is “ . . . the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” He’s redeemed us from sin’s penalty, sin’s power, and sin’s presence; and He’s forgiven us. Now, the word “forgiven” carries with it the idea of to carry away. Remember in the Old Testament when they would pronounce their sins, the priest would, upon what’s called the “scapegoat” and they would pray over the “scapegoat” and pronounce the sins of the people, and then they’d release that goat off into the wilderness. It was a reminder that God was carrying away their sins. But they couldn’t fully have their sins taken away until Christ came to die on the cross. It prefigured that. It was a picture of what Jesus would do—carry away our sin. If there’s anything that we should be thankful for, it’s that my sins have been carried away. My sins have been forgiven. Amen?

Do you know your sins have been forgiven? Do you know your sins are carried away? What a blessing to know, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Remember when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming down to the Jordan River to be baptized and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away"—carries away—"the sin of the world." He's the sin bearer. He's taken your sin, He's taken my sin, and He nailed it to the cross and carried it away. How marvelous and how wonderful!

The third blessing from God the Son, He's revealed His will to us. So, He's redeemed us; He's forgiven us; and He reveals His will to us. This is seen in verses 8-10. "Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; 9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure"—God has a purpose, God has a plan. God's sovereign. It's going to be all worked out—"according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth."

Do you know that God has a plan to redeem everything that is affected by sin? Not the devil, not those who rebel against God, not those who refuse to believe in Christ, but the heaven and the earth will be redeemed. Romans 8 says, ". . . the whole creation groaneth and travaileth . . ."—waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. Creation is groaning. It's waiting to be set right. He's going to reverse the curse. He's going to establish His Kingdom. There'll be a new heaven and a new earth, and it'll all be brought back to God's purpose, God's design, and God's plan. The thing that we can be thankful for is God has revealed this to us in His Word. We have clear understanding of where we're going and where the world is going, and we've obtained an inheritance as well. How marvelous that is.

So, we have the will of God revealed to us, and fourthly, verses 11-12, He has made us an inheritance. It says, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance" Now, we will obtain an inheritance, we're going to inherit all things with Christ. But I believe the reference here in verse 11 is actually to the Church, God's people, God's chosen, that we are the inheritance. God the Father is going to give us to God the Son. Remember in John 17 when we were reading Christ's High Priestly prayer, and He kept talking over and over and over about how He was going to give us to the Father and that the Church that He prayed for were gifts to Him from the Father.

I know that's kind of a mind-blowing concept, but you and I as His people are actually given to Christ as an inheritance. It's not we have obtained an inheritance, we are His inheritance. We were ". . . predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Nothing can thwart it. Nothing can hinder it. One day we will inherit all things, and we will be His inheritance, the bride of Christ. How wonderful. And again, it closes, verse 12, "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ." There's the phrase again, "in Christ." So, God the Son has redeemed us, He's forgiven us, He's revealed His will to us, and He's made us an inheritance—a gift from the Father to the Son.

Now, the blessings of God the Holy Spirit, verses 13-14, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye

heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” Now, just two blessings, the list could be quite long from other texts, but there’s two blessings mentioned in this text of Ephesians 1 that come to us from God the Holy Spirit. First, He has sealed us, verse 13; and secondly, verse 14, that He’s given to us as an “earnest” or downpayment, a security.

Go back to verse 13 for just a moment. I believe that it kind of lays out for us how God saves us. It says, “. . . that ye heard the word of truth”—“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” the sermon preached about Christ—“the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed,”—so the order is you hear, then—“ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” I don’t believe that regeneration precedes faith, I believe that it happens the moment you put your faith and trust in God. You are convicted, you are convinced, you’re drawn to Christ by the Spirit, you open your heart in faith. The Bible says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves”—that is, salvation is not of yourself—“it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” The moment you put your faith in Jesus, the moment you trust in Jesus, you are born again—by the Holy Spirit you are regenerated or literally you’re given new life. That’s when that takes place. So, the Holy Spirit seals us as well the moment of regeneration or rebirth. So, conviction, conversion, regeneration, sealed by the Holy Spirit. What a marvelous thing that is. You hear the Word, you believe the Word, “. . . ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”

This “seal” primarily refers to two things. The first is ownership. It’s a stamp of God’s ownership on your life. You belong to Him. Secondly, is security. The seal cannot be broken. God seals you, no one can break that seal. You can’t even break that seal, so you are secure in Christ Jesus. You can rest. That’s something to be thankful for at Thanksgiving. Say, “Pass the mashed potatoes, and I’m thankful for security. If I eat a little too much, I’m still going to heaven.” Sealed, and later on in Ephesians it says, until the day of redemption. No one can break that seal. I’m sealed to the day of redemption. It speaks of ownership and security.

Verse 14 tells us that the Spirit of God who now indwells us, convicts us, regenerates us, seals us, and indwells us. A lot of times we just think, I just accept Jesus, I go to heaven, and you don’t realize all these things God does for you in salvation. Every believer has these things, and the Holy Spirit is come as a guarantee, as we would say a downpayment. It’s also used for an engagement ring, earnest money that you lay down to buy a house and you are going to promise to pay off the mortgage and pay for the house. So God’s earnest, He’s sincere about transacting that deal. He buys you, and as I’ve often said, “What begins with God’s grace will end in glory.” He proves it by sealing us until the day of redemption, and by giving us the Holy Spirit who indwells us, who Jesus said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” We may quench Him, we may resist Him, but He will not go away. If you’ve been born again, He’s permanently with you, so you have this guarantee.

I love this concept that we are given this engagement ring, so to speak, as the bride of Christ, that He will consummate that engagement on that wedding supper of the Lamb when the

Church is caught up to meet Christ in the air, “. . . and so shall we”—forever—“ever be with the Lord.”

You talk about blessing, and here it is. Three times I want you to note three times at the end of each section, verse 6, “To the praise of the glory of his grace;” verse 12, “. . . to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ;” verse 14, “. . . unto the praise of his glory.” Everything God does in saving us is for His glory. Amen? To God be the glory, great things He hath done. He saves us, He chooses us, He adopts us, He redeems us, He forgives us, He makes known His will to us, He gives us the Holy Spirit to seal us unto the day of redemption, and then He gives us the Spirit as a guarantee.

You know, when you experience the joy of the Lord in the sense of God's presence in your life and that taste of the good world to come, that's what it is, it's a little foretaste of what heaven is going to be like. Tomorrow morning when you're tasting your Thanksgiving meal, just remember the blessings of the Lord. Amen?