

Scripture Reading: Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

“Spiritual Blessings in Heavenly Places”

We are going to spend two weeks learning about spiritual blessings, focusing this week on what these blessings are & then where they are... It is appropriate that these messages come on either side of Thursday when our family will remember the life of Alpert John Hoey! Al was our senior member here at Church of the King and his passing leaves a big hole up here in the front row! However, remembering his life and how we deal with his death will make what the Apostle Paul shared with those Saint at Ephesus so long ago, very real for us today! It should remind us again about that very important question we often ask:

- **Do we really believe what we are being taught in the Scriptures?**

It is comforting to read a familiar passage like the 23rd Psalm... We often reflect on those precious words here at the Table. Yet, when our family read that Psalm together with Al in his final hours it brought home the reality of what the Psalmist teaches... Yes, this side of the Lord’s return we remain in the valley of death because death will be the last enemy to be destroyed, and thus it is something that we must all deal with. BUT, to end with the promise that Al, and all of us who put our trust in the finished work of Jesus, will dwell in the House of the Lord forever gives great comfort in a time of great sorrow.

Those who have not put their trust in Jesus cannot have this promise nor the comfort that it brings...

And it is very sad to see those who have ignored or rejected God in their lives and the lives of their families, turning to such passages in an attempt to find some hope.

- **But, outside of Jesus there simply is no hope!**

And that brings us to what the Apostle Paul is teaching us in this overture to the Book of Ephesians...

As we study this text we must remember that the Apostle began with the praise of God, moved on to the eternal purpose of God, and only then proceeds to speak about the actual blessings that we receive & enjoy. Pastor Lloyd-Jones reminds us that, “the order is of extreme importance. Because of our wretched subjectivity our tendency always is to concentrate at once on the blessing; we always want something for ourselves. The Apostle insists, however, that we start with God and with worship!”

In other words, we should not be like the rude child who bursts into a room demanding that their needs be met immediately with no regard to those present, nor what else might be going on.

- **If on the other hand they enter the room politely, wait for the appropriate time to ask respectfully, they would find that the parent delights to shower great blessings on the child!**

It must be the same with our Father in Heaven if we are to enjoy His blessings.

And I can concur with this observation that Pastor Lloyd-Jones made as well: “I can certainly testify after many years of pastoral experience that the people who give me the impression of being most miserable in their spiritual life are those who are always thinking of themselves and their blessing, their moods and states and conditions.

The way to be blessed is to look to God; and the more we worship Him the more we shall enjoy His blessings.” He continues by saying, “The practical man is NOT one who runs after the blessings, but the man who considers the Source of the blessings and is in touch with that Source.”

- We should note again that he made these observations back in the 1950’s long before today’s self-esteem movements or seeker friendly churches and certainly before the popular prosperity Gospel teachings of our times!
- With that in mind we should see that all that we learn here centers on those blessings being in Christ!

We find the phrase “in Christ” almost a hundred times in the New Testament and a dozen of them we will study over time right here in Ephesians. While the Scriptures teach that the rain falls on both the just and the unjust, we must remember that the spiritual blessings come only to those who are in Christ.

Today we have incredible blessings that come from our medical advances, and like the rain both the just and the unjust can receive care and healing from them. However, in this fallen world we all face death in the end, and there, only those in Christ can enjoy the true spiritual blessings that God gives.

People can believe that this life is all there is, but it brings no comfort when the end comes. People can read clever poems about their loved one being remembered in a rose in the garden wall, but that brings no real comfort & is not true!

The only true comfort comes from knowing that death has been defeated and that Jesus has gone before as the first fruits of those who will rise on the last day to dwell with Him forever!

This is also why Paul can say that we are the most miserable if the truth of Christ’s resurrection is not true... But it is true and thus he can declare in I Corinthians 15:20

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”

- That IS true hope and comfort, but again it comes only to those who are in Christ.

The Apostle Paul here in Ephesians declares that the Father, “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” We will consider that important phrase ‘in the heavenly places’ in more detail next week, but for today I want us to reflect on and enjoy the spiritual blessings of being in Christ. We should note that these are spiritual blessings not because they are unseen or other-worldly, but because that are brought to us by the Spirit of Power, the Third Person of the Trinity that Jesus and the Father sent as our Comforter.

With that in mind let me quickly review some of the various ways that the Spirit blesses us in Christ...

First, we know that we are baptized into Christ and are all made one body in Christ! There would be no Church gathered if we had no individual members, but we also would have no individual members if they did not make up the one Body. This great truth of the importance of the one and the many in speaking about the Church is a reflection of the very nature of our eternal Triune God!

Going on in the New Testament teachings we find that...

We have redemption in Christ!

Things have been made right.

We have Eternal life in Christ!

That is a long time ☺

We face no condemnation in Christ!

Despite what the world the flesh or the devil have to say.

We are made alive in Christ!

We have the promise of life in Christ!

We have the love of God in Christ!

We are babes in Christ!

We rejoice in Christ!

We have an upward call in Christ!

We have the blessings of Abraham in Christ!

We have grace in Christ!

We have salvation in Christ!

We have liberty in Christ!

We are sanctified in Christ!

We are bold in Christ!

We have steadfastness in Christ!

We triumph in Christ!

We have consolation in Christ!

We have that child like faith Jesus spoke of.

Rather than being anxious

God knows where history is going.

Controversial in some circles, but still true!

Unmerited favor: A major theme of Ephesians

True freedom as opposed to license.

We are a work in progress!

Yes, we triumph even in death

- **And this is where the rubber meets the road... Do we believe all of those truths?**

Do we believe that they are true in this life and the life to come?

If we do it cannot help but change how we live our lives...

Not as ones under some sort of bondage or works based salvation, but as those doing the good works that we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in!

The Apostle Paul declares that truth in the second chapter of this Epistle at verse 10 right after he expanded on the tease we find here in the introduction:

Ephesians 2:4 “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

- **Understanding and remembering that we are in Christ changes how we live and changes how we see the circumstances of our lives.**

For example, as we went through the Book of Acts we saw the Apostle Paul spend a good deal of time in jail... From a human standpoint it would be frustrating for a man tasked with taking the Gospel to the vast Gentile world to keep spending time in a jail cell!

- **But Paul knew he was in Christ with all those promises we just reviewed and that changed how he looked at his circumstances!**

In the letter to the Philippians he teaches us this important lesson:

1:12 “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

While it would be easy for us to see those chains as a hinderance to the important work Paul had to do, we should understand that those chains were in Christ because Paul was in Christ, and thus serving the Kingdom! The Apostle is even so bold as to teach that being in Christ moves us toward perfection...

Colossians 1:27: "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. 29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."

Please notice how Paul is careful to avoid some dangerous ditches here: One is to think that we can be perfect in this life. We are presented perfect in Christ before God because it is His righteousness that makes us perfect.

- Thinking we must be perfect in this life is a burden no one should have to bear in this fallen world.

On the other hand, we cannot simply do whatever we want in this life because we know we will be perfect in Christ at the end...

- But, Paul actually says that we are to labor and strive toward that end because it is God who works in us mightily.

We are not our own if we are in Christ and thus we labor and strive to do those good works God has ordained for us to walk in! And finally, being in Christ gives us a heart and passion for the lost...

Speaking to young Timothy the Apostle Paul says at 2 Timothy 1:6:

"Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, 10 but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. 12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. 13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us."

As I mentioned at the beginning, situations like the death of Linda's Dad bring all of these truths into sharp contrast: Do we really believe what the Bible teaches us about being in Christ?

If we do, then we know that Al is now perfect and stands before God in the righteousness of Jesus his Savior.

Linda & I have appreciated the many, many prayers and notes we have received this week and I think Phil Smith captured all of this well when he said in his note,

"It is easy to think that World War II defined Al. But what defined Al was God giving him the grace and mercy to deal with his memories and actions through the blood of Christ."

Many of us have taken great comfort from the very first question and answer in the Heidelberg Catechism and we can rest in knowing that Al has now experienced these truths in both life and in death:

**“Q. What is your only comfort
in life and in death?”**

**A. That I am not my own, but belong—
body and soul, in life and in death—
to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.**

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.”

Communion Meditation: John 6

“26 Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

28 Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”

29 Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.””