

SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN HEAVENLY PLACES

Ephesians 1:3-14

Introduction:

To most people, the great depression of the 30s has been forgotten in the wave of prosperity that followed. Out of those hard times, however, came a story which has a strange ending yet teaches us a powerful lesson.

When a timid old lady approached the first desk she saw in an insurance office in Minneapolis, she was asked what she wanted. With trembling hand, she took from her well-worn purse an old policy and explained regretfully that she was unable to meet the current premium. She explained that it was hard for her to get work and what little she did get was hardly enough to clothe, feed her and keep a roof over her head.

After quick investigation, the clerk recognized that the policy was very valuable. He warned the old lady that she was making an unwise move to stop payment. Did not her husband have anything to say? It was his policy made out to her benefit, he explained. "My husband? Oh, he's been dead for three years," she remarked sadly.

The company officials soon discovered that she was indeed telling the truth. What she didn't understand was that the policy was her husband's and that she was the beneficiary at his death. They were thus obligated to refund the overpaid premiums plus the full amount for which the husband had insured his life in her favor. The money was sufficient to keep her in comfort the rest of her life.

That woman was living a life of poverty, unaware of the wealth that was at her disposal. Unfortunately, there are many Christians today who are much like that in the spiritual realm. They have repented of their sin, been born again, but live with little or no knowledge of all that God has provided for them.

If you have ever played the old board game, Monopoly, you will be familiar with the "Get out of jail free" card. It is used to avoid paying the cost or meeting the conditions of getting out of the jail cell. Many people tend to view salvation much like that Monopoly card. It is seen as simply an escape hatch, a way to avoid spending eternity in hell, but it makes little difference in this life.

This morning we are going to see that there is a lot more to our salvation than just avoiding hell. God has planned for us much more than just an escape hatch from the penalty of sin. In his letter to the church

in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul has given us an amazing picture of the spiritual wealth that we have been given in Jesus Christ.

I want to read verses 3-14 of chapter 1. It is a fairly lengthy passage that contains a lot of material. It would be nice to break it up into more than one message, but there is one problem with that. In the original, when Paul wrote it, he wrote this entire passage as one sentence. If he put it all together, then I think we need to deal with it all together. Let's look at it. *Read 1:3-14.*

That is quite a list of blessings that come to us in Christ Jesus. But I want to deal with them in four main categories or truths that Paul gives us regarding God's work and our salvation:

- He chose us
- He adopted us
- He redeemed us
- He sealed us

He Chose Us v. 4

Read v. 4 again. Election ... predestination ... foreordination. Whatever you call it, bringing up the idea of God predetermining our salvation is a sure way to start a contentious discussion if not an outright war. One of the most controversial theological concepts in all of Scripture is the question of election.

There are two significant points made in Scripture regarding this question:

- Believers were chosen by God. The idea of God choosing people for His purpose goes as far back as the words of Moses to the nation of Israel in Deut. 7:6 - *"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."* In Romans 8:29-30, Paul says, *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."*

- Man is given the choice whether or not to believe. When speaking to Martha at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus said, *"And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."* When the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* Paul replied, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..."* (Acts 16:30, 31). Over and over in the Word we find the idea of "...whosoever..." Whoever believes will have eternal life – John 3:16.

So how do we put those two ideas together? Are we saved because God chose us to be saved? Or are we saved because we believed and put our trust in him? *Discuss the conflict...*

As humans we tend to see it as either/or. It isn't that at all. It is both/and. We are saved because God chose us and because we trusted him. In our human thinking, those two concepts seem contradictory, but they fit together perfectly in God's mind.

Illust. – Arch over the gateway to heaven and eternal life – on one side the words "Whosoever will may come"; on the other, "I have chosen you."

I'm not sure there is a human answer to the question of election. But the Scripture is clear that, as believers in Jesus Christ, we are saved because we have been chosen by God. But what we ought to focus on is why we have been chosen – *"...that we should be holy and blameless before Him."*

The whole reason God has chosen and called out a people for His name, is that He might make a people who are holy and blameless. He chose you to make you holy, that though you, he might show to the world his holiness and power.

So the bottom line is that if you are a Christian today—you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord—then you can be sure that God knew you and chose you before the earth ever existed, because He wants you to be holy and blameless in His sight.

He Adopted Us vv. 5-6

We need to move on – the second important truth in this passage is that He adopted us. He chose us, then he adopted us into his family. He made us his children – *read vv. 5-6.*

What does this all mean? The ESV Study Bible says this: *"God's election of Christians (v. 4) entails his predestining them to something—in this case to adoption as sons (see also v. 11; Rom. 8:29–30). Hence, election and predestination in this context refer to God's decision to save someone. All Christians, male and female, are 'sons' in the sense of being heirs who will inherit blessings from their Father in heaven."*

But all of this is done *"...according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace..."* God's ultimate purpose is not redemption as such but the **praise** of his glorious name through redemption. This thought is repeated several times in this passage. His ultimate purpose is always to demonstrate His glory and power.

God chose us ... He adopted us into his family ...

He Redeemed Us vv. 7-10

Read vv. 7-10. Redemption carries with it the idea of ransoming someone out of the slave market—purchasing someone and setting them free from captivity. John MacArthur, in his study Bible, says, *"The term used here relates to paying the required ransom to God for the release of a person from bondage. Christ's sacrifice on the cross paid that price for every elect person enslaved by sin, buying them out of the slave market of iniquity."*

As Paul says here, that redemption involves the forgiveness of our trespasses or sins. That was done by Him paying the price for our sin, which is eternal death. That was accomplished by the shedding of his blood, giving up his life for ours in a substitutionary death.

"...according to the riches of his grace..." One of the most overwhelming truths about our salvation is the wonder of the grace of God. Grace is that undeserved favor that God shows in reaching out to us and offering us freedom from sin. I don't deserve it; you don't deserve it. Yet out of the riches of his grace, he offers forgiveness. He redeems us, buying us out of the slave market of sin and offering freedom.

Why? Because of our worthiness? No, he does it because it is his purpose and plan to do it. It is his eternal will to bring us into fellowship with himself. He does it, not for our sake, but for his glory.

He chose us ... he adopted us ... he redeemed us. There is one more very important thing...

He Sealed Us vv. 11-14

When God takes us into his family we become his heir. He has promised a wonderful inheritance to his children. Look at what he says – *read vv. 11-14*. We read earlier in 1 Peter some important truths about the inheritance he has for his children - *“to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,” (1Pe 1:4 ESV)*

What a promise – an eternal inheritance. And he has given us a guarantee—a down payment, if you will—to assure us that we will receive that inheritance. He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance.

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul tells us that, *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...” (Romans 8:16-17)*. Imagine being a fellow heir with Christ. As sons of God, we have that wonderful and glorious privilege.

Conclusion

Illust. – Imagine for a moment that you were an orphan, unknown and unloved. You bounced from one foster home to another, and finally ended up in an orphanage, forgotten and alone. You knew there was nothing about you or your life to make you attractive to anyone. All you had ever known was trouble and abuse. But one day a couple comes to that orphanage. They express the desire to show their love and compassion by taking a child as their own. They look at the children there. Then they look at you and say, I want that one. They choose you; they take you home and adopt you. They give you their name. They deal with all hurt and abuse from your past. Not only that, but they go to a lawyer and have their wills redone, naming you as the heir of everything they have.

Friends, that is what we have in Christ. Have you ever really thought about what God did when he saved you? Salvation is not just a “Get out of Jail free” card. It is so much more. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places: He chose you, to make you holy ... he adopted you, to be his child ... he redeemed you, offering forgiveness of sin ... and he sealed you, as a promise of an eternal inheritance.