

Every Spiritual Blessing in Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 May 2023

Preacher: Emily Hatton

[0 : 00] Good morning. I remember when my brother and I were younger and being the older sibling by two years, my brother Ben would often be the one who was in charge of the TV remote, hiding the sweets we'd been given to share, stopping me from getting into a room. And he'd be like, what's the special word? And I would go through all the annoying things that he might have chosen to be the special word, such as Bath City football is the best, Emily smells. Honestly, I really had to get into the mind of my big brother. And then eventually, worn down, he'd go, duh, the special word is please. The special word was as simple as that. And really, it should have been quite obvious to guess. Now, the more I read through Paul's various letters in the New Testament, the more I think that if he had a motto or a tagline or even a special word, it would have been saved by grace through faith in Christ. Saved by grace through faith in Christ is, at least for me, the overarching message that comes through any of Paul's writings. And for good reason, it's gospel truth. We are indeed saved by the amazing grace of God, as demonstrated in the death of Jesus and our faith in the truth of that sacrificial love. In Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8, Paul reminds us that we are saved by grace through faith, not by our own effort or work, but as a gift from God. And as we read

Romans, we see the constant reminder that none of what we have received in Christ is by our own works, but by the great love of God. The fact that we are saved by grace through faith and blessed by grace through faith in Christ is huge. It means that we cannot and do not have to earn or deserve the blessings of God. We just have to be fully persuaded that Jesus Christ is Lord and he came to save us. A couple of years ago, I came across a book called Sit, Walk, Stand by Watchman Nee, a book that reflects upon our position in Christ as explored in Ephesians. The title Sit, Walk, Stand refers to us sitting with him in the heavenly realms, walking with him in our lives in the world, and standing firm with him in spiritual battle, in the spiritual realm. Now, when I pulled the book off my bookshelf in the hopes that it would have something profound for me to share this morning, it became apparent that I didn't actually make it even halfway through the 83 page book, which I actually do really recommend. But as I started to read it,

I found what I was looking for straight away, because these words from Watchman Nee are so good. He says, most Christians make the mistake of trying to walk and able to be able to sit, but that is a reversal of the true order. Our natural reason says, if we do not walk, how can we ever reach the goal? What can we attain without effort? How can we ever get anywhere if we do not move?

But Christianity is a strange business. If at the outset we try to do anything, we get nothing. If we seek to attain something, we miss everything. For Christianity begins not with a big do, but with a big done. Thus, Ephesians opens with the statement that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. And we are invited at the very outset to sit down and enjoy what God has done for us, not to set out and try to attain it for ourselves. I love the line, Christianity begins not with a big do, but with a big done. Our walk with Jesus and the blessings that we receive in him aren't about going and doing things that will earn us points to get into heaven.

It's what he has already done for us. To go back to the story of my brother and his special word, to get access to all that God has to offer us is as simple as to say, yes, please.

[4 : 43] So our passage today comes from Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 to 14 and is titled Every Spiritual Blessing in Christ. I'd love to encourage you if you have your Bible or the internet to keep the passage open in front of you because we'll be referring back to it today. But before we launch in, I just want to briefly unpack what we mean when we're talking about the word blessing.

To me, this is one of those words that we often use in church, but if I was asked to define the word blessing, I'm not quite sure how I would do that. Now, I'm really in awe of those preachers who can whip out their Greek to English dictionary and tell you what something means when we look at the

original Greek translations. So I am delighted to take this opportunity to take the moment to unpack my very, very limited understanding.

of the original Greek when we look at the word blessing. Blessing is a direct translation of the word eulogia, where we get the word eulogy, a speech or a piece of writing containing great praise for a person, most often after they've died. The word eulogy comes from the word logos, the word for word. In the case of our passage today, eulogy is God, the act of God speaking good things over us.

We only have to look as far as the creation of the world in Genesis 1 to see that there is immense creative and loving power in the voice of God. And if God is speaking good things over us, as he is in our passage today, then we can know with absolute certainty that these things are going to be very, very good. Verse 3 says, 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. Praise be to God who has spoken good things over us in the heavenly realms with every good thing in Christ by grace through faith. And let's note here that Paul writes that we have been blessed in the heavenly realms. The really cool thing about this is whilst, yes, we will experience the fullness of these blessings in the eternal life in heaven, God couldn't wait till the end of time. So he's given us a foretaste of them now. The message translation of verse 3 says, He is the Father of our Master Jesus Christ and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. He doesn't wait, but he takes us there now. So that his blessings can be a reality, for us now. And how do we know this? Because in chapter 2 verse 6, it says,

God raised us up with Christ and seated him with the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Hear the use of the tenses. This is not just a future eternity thing. This is a now thing because that's how much God loves us.

[8 : 03] But what are these blessings, these good things to which we have alluded? Well, if we look at the passage, we see that he chose us to be holy and blameless. He's adopted us as sons and daughters, giving us belonging in his family. He's freely given us grace. He's redeemed us and forgiven our sins.

He's given us wisdom and understanding, included us in his plans and purposes, included us in Christ. He saved us, marked us with his seal, and he calls us his. And all of this is according to his good pleasure. And that's a lot, isn't it? So let's just take a little look closer at some of these things. Now, I'm not an especially competitive person. I am about as sporty as a cucumber. And I'd much rather have a fun time than focus on a win. But get me playing articulate, which is a taboo-like game where you have to explain words without using the words. And my competitive side comes out. Rules will be adhered to. I will do anything I can do to be on the winning team. And in fact, I will most of the time try and choose my team to be the one that I think will win. I love the game. But when Paul talks in verse 4 about God having chosen us, this isn't a, I choose you because you'll be a success, or you're not going to mess up as much as her. So you can be on my team. I choose you to have my spiritual blessings.

This is Jesus at one in the beginning with God the Father and the Holy Spirit choosing humanity, hoping that humanity will choose him in return. And that's why verse 13 talks about being included in Christ when we heard the gospel and being marked when we believed with a seal. In Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we receive spiritual blessings when we respond to Jesus by choosing him with our own yes. And verse 11 talks about being chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works everything in conformity to his will. To me, this is a reminder that God chose me, chose us, knowing that we would make mistakes, we would mess up, and we would cause his plans to go skew with.

He chose us before the creation of the world, knowing that on the cross he would still choose us to be, as verse 4 says, holy and blameless in his sight. The cross is a symbol full of emotion and meaning, and it's Jesus saying to each of us, I choose you every day. And so he freely gives, freely lavishes on us his spiritual blessings. And as he does so, perhaps a helpful picture for you is Jesus patting the seat next to him saying, come on, this one's on me, and the next, and the next, for eternity. You can have it all.

[11 : 19] And you might be asking yourself, but what does he want from me in return? Well, we've already noted that we can't earn these gifts, and we know that we don't deserve them.

Jesus wants our yes. He wants our love. John 3 16 says, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, so whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life with him.

God so loved the world that he gave himself in Christ so that we could have a relationship with him, so that he could give freely and lavishly. We know from all the rom-coms, all the movies, all the books, that reciprocated love has a much more powerful effect in the world than unrequited love. A love that goes both ways and is an unstoppable force. It gives to the world around it. It changes the atmosphere and the dynamics within relationships. Reciprocated love is powerful, and it's what Jesus' heart longs for. He longs for us to love him back, to acknowledge what he's done for us, what he's given to us, to use it, to move in it, and to share it.

I was recently, actually just last week with the youth, reading the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. This is a parable, or a story with a meaning, that Jesus tells about a father and his two sons. [12:56] The youngest son asks for his inheritance early, effectively saying, I wish you were dead, to his father. And he goes off squandering his newly acquired riches in biblical days of Vegas until there is nothing left. A famine comes upon the land, and in his poverty, the youngest son lives in envy of the pigs that he's feeding. Eventually, he realizes that he'd be better off returning home to his father and his older brother. So with his tail between his legs, he goes home practicing his speech, which we can find in Luke 15, verses 18 to 19. He says, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Make me like one of your servants. As he's walking home, his father sees him in the distance. He picks up his robes. He runs towards his son. The son starts his apology speech, but the father doesn't let him finish.

He takes him home, puts a ring on his finger, marking him with that Ephesians 1 verse 13 seal, saying that he belongs home. And he prepares a fattened calf for the celebrations that his son is now home.

Home where he can share in the blessing of belonging, of being forgiven, being called a son, and being given security once again. And doesn't that sound a bit like our passage from Ephesians today?

See, the prodigal son or the lost son represents each of us before we turn to Christ. And he received his inheritance in Christ, the riches of Christ and the blessing of the celebration of coming home to Christ. The older son couldn't see it. He was crossed because he believed that he'd been remaining there all along. And that he didn't think the younger son deserved the blessing or the celebration. The older son felt that he'd earned it. But the spiritual blessing that we find in Christ aren't about earning or deserving. They're about what Jesus has already done for us.

[15:18] The special word to receive the father's love and blessing for the younger son wasn't, I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy of being called your son. Make me like one of your servant. It was simply, can I come home? And when we ask that of Jesus, he will always open up the door, open up his arms and say yes.

Jesus' words are echoed in the father's words in the parable. Let's have a feast and celebrate for this son of mine was dead and now is alive again. He was lost and is found. Isn't this amazing grace? That we can be certain that even though we daily play the part of the prodigal son in the ways that we speak and act in ways that go against God's will, God daily chooses to play the part to be the father who welcomes us home again, open arms and full of his blessings.

And he does this because he loves us, because he delights in lavishly blessing us, his beloved children in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. In Christ, our inheritance is guaranteed, verse 14, despite our mess because Jesus, in Jesus, we are chosen to be holy, blameless, redeemed and restored children of God who are blessed freely and lavishly because we have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus. So every spiritual blessing in Christ, what does that mean for us? Well, what good news we have, what good news we have, that our faith begins not with a big do, but with a big done.

That in him is grace and freedom, that all we have to do is say a special word. Jesus, I love you and I am all in.

Father God, we thank you for these spiritual blessings that we receive in you. Thank you that you love to lavish these blessings on us, even though we don't deserve and cannot earn them.

[17:46] Would you stir our hearts this morning to turn once again to you, to receive your ring, your seal of belonging, knowing that you are celebrating over each and every one of us. Thank you that the blessings you freely give us are not because of who we are or what we've done. In fact, they're despite that.

Thank you that you give them because of who you are and what you've done. Amen.