

# What does the blessed life look like?

*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: 22 January 2023

Preacher: Benjamin Wilks

[ 0 : 00 ] I'm reading from Ephesians chapter 1, reading from verse 1. 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 to us in the one he loves.

In him we have 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 reached their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

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.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in heaven 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.

Amen. Well, folks, it is for me a very rare thing to ever preach on just one verse.

[ 2 : 04 ] Many excellent preachers have done so through the years, and many do so to great effect today. But it's not the pattern I grew up with. It's not what I have generally found to be most helpful. In my experience, you mostly need a longer section of God's Word to get a sense of the flow of thought of the author.

And you'll have noted that we didn't read just one verse today. It doesn't come in isolation, but rather the verse we're considering today comes at the start of an extended invitation to bless God. Nevertheless, we will today deal almost exclusively with 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.

It's perhaps especially strange to take just one verse tonight, because what most English translations render as a couple of paragraphs, Ephesians 3 through 14.

Paul's original Greek, this is one single sentence. Verses 3 through 14, one sentence that circles round, builds up on what's gone before, explores different dimensions.

[ 3 : 15 ] Like, Paul's enthusiasm is just kind of boiling up and bubbling over and can't be contained. So there is plenty more for us to get to in the future. But the more I reflected on this passage, the more I became convinced that there's plenty to say for today, plenty for us to feed on for the week ahead, just in verse 3.

I didn't want to try and compress this down into kind of sub-points of a broader topic or end up with a very, very long sermon. But rather, we'll just take this verse tonight and deal with the rest next time.

So as we dive into verse 3, let me ask you, what does the blessed life look like? Accompanied by the hashtag, blessed has become something of a social media phenomenon applied to oneself, accompanying photos of the sunset over the Caribbean.

The perfect boyfriend, the perfect outfit, the perfect body shape, the sale offerings at your favorite fashion boutique. Blessed is applied to the sports car, the elegant house, and so on, and so on.

And this is perhaps how we immediately think of blessing, isn't it? The possessions, the experiences, we're blessed to have these things. So is that what Paul means here when he 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.

[ 4 : 35 ] Is that what Paul means? Well, yes and no. Because blessing in the Bible does encompass all kinds of material provision and abundance.

But on the other hand, it doesn't really seem to be Paul's primary focus here in this verse, does it? Now actually what Paul says is, if you want to see what the blessed life looks like, well look at me. Never mind the shipwrecks, never mind the hunger, never mind the beatings, never mind the present imprisonment as he writes this letter. No, Paul says, He is blessed.

And in fact, we can go a step further than that. Paul says, If you want to know what the blessed life looks like, then look in the mirror. Look around at your own life.

See, having said that he is writing, verse 1, to God's holy people, to the faithful in Christ Jesus, he then says here in verse 3, God has blessed us. Now obviously the immediate referent of that us is the first recipients of these letters from Paul.

[ 5 : 43 ] But I'm sure it's not controversial to say. Paul includes in that word us, both you and me today as well. If the phrase, God's holy people, the faithful in Christ Jesus, verse 1, applies to you, then so does this here.

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.

So why are we stopping with verse 3 tonight? Well, I think it boils down to I just can't get past the word every. Each time I read this passage, that little word grabs hold of me and it demands to be dealt with.

So deal with it, we will. There is no other source of blessing, so don't go looking elsewhere. There is no other blessing to be had, so don't wait round for more.

There are no other recipients of blessing, so don't miss out. There is no other source of blessing, so don't go looking elsewhere.

[ 6 : 50 ] Paul says it is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us. Now I suppose there are some who would want to disagree with that statement, to say there is no God, and would say that actually, when you boil it down, to talk about being blessed is actually nonsensical.

Many would say, well, it actually makes more sense to talk about being lucky or fortunate or just this is how things have happened. Good things in life, people would say, are either a coincidence or somebody's hard work, whether it's yours or someone else's.

Well, Paul disagrees with that assessment. Paul says blessing comes from God. He's disagreeing with some people, and then more people, I suspect, more would be relatively okay with the idea of talking about blessing from God, in that many people would say they do have some kind of spiritual belief, they believe in some kind of God, they believe there's more to this world than we can immediately understand with our five senses.

But even with that, there's still a couple of controversies here, and they're important ones. Because the first of them is, which God? See, while many people would say they believe in God, what you find when you scratch just below the surface ever so slightly, what you find is that the God that they believe in isn't the God that's described in the Bible.

But Paul's very clear. It's not just some abstract idea of the divine, which is the source of blessing. No, it is a personal God, the personal God.

[ 8 : 30 ] More specific than that, it's the one who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says it's the God of the Bible who blesses.

No other God, no other source. It is the Father of our Lord and Savior who has blessed us and has done so in Him, in Christ. That's the first controversy, if you like, which God.

The second is, well, I meet lots of people, and I suspect many of you do too, many who are perfectly happy to pray to God, many who would say that they believe in God.

Some of them know their Bibles quite well, but who alongside that will construct their faith with, yes, elements of Christianity, but are also going to go ahead and bring in some Buddhist ideas, some Wiccan concepts, some general kind of spiritualism, and on and on, just taking bits and pieces, saying that they find truth in lots of different places and take the best of each religion and put it together into their personal faith.

So they'll say they've found aspects of Christianity helpful, but obviously there are bits of the Bible that I don't agree with, and well, I've found that helpful too, and so here I am, this is what I believe.

[ 9 : 48 ] The problem is, this is an absolutely exclusive claim, isn't it? See, Paul says that this God whom he worships, he is the one who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

Paul says, it is no good looking anywhere else. It's no good turning to the imam to find help. It's no good looking to Buddha for enlightenment. It's no good devoting yourself to the kind of meditation typically practiced and the spiritual elements that go along with yoga and whatever it might be. Paul says, okay, the stretching and the exercises is fine, but you're not finding spiritual blessings there. If you want spiritual blessings, there is only one place to go, and that is to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You must come to God. There is no other source of blessing. Do not be tempted to look elsewhere. Don't be tempted as a replacement and don't be tempted as a supplement alongside either.

No, every spiritual blessing has been given to us in Christ. The second point is closely related to that. there is no other blessing to be had, so don't wait around for more.

[ 11 : 07 ] Paul says, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. Again, we're on that word, every. Now, just as that means there is no other source of blessing, so too it means there is no more blessing.

There's no more blessing to be had than what you have already in Christ. Christ. Now, what do I mean by that? Because taken one way, that could be quite a depressing statement, couldn't it? Some of us thinking, really? Is this all there is? Isn't there anything better to come? How can you preach on Ecclesiastes in the morning and then tonight say there's no more blessing to be had? Didn't you introduce the letter to the Ephesians saying it was meant to encourage us?

I did. I did. We're getting there. See, there's an extent to which this point is fleshed out properly when we work through the rest of the section as Paul elaborates on what he actually means by saying every spiritual blessing.

But the point here is that all that follows and more besides, all of it is really elements, aspects, outworkings of the one blessing. And what's important is how this blessing is bestowed.

[ 12 : 16 ] See, Paul says we have been blessed in Christ. As far as Paul's concerned, God's saving action in Christ Jesus is the definitive blessing.

It is in and through and on the basis of that one sacrifice once offered, that one definitive day 2,000 some years ago, that one ultimate sacrifice.

Through the finished work of Christ, we are comprehensively blessed. We received and are receiving every spiritual blessing as a consequence of that one thing.

11 times over the course of verses 3 through 14. 11 times Paul is going to use some variant of the phrase in Christ. We're going to look at them more next week.

But for now, here's one commentator's summary. He says, it is in Christ that God has chosen us in eternity. Verses 3 and 4. The Father has bestowed his grace upon us in the Beloved so that we now have redemption and the forgiveness of sins in him.

[ 13 : 18 ] Verse 7. In Christ, the first Jewish believers were chosen to become God's people.

Verses 11 and 12. While Gentile believers were also included in him and were sealed as belonging to him by the Holy Spirit.

13 and 14. Significantly, it is in Christ that God has set forth his plan to unite all things in him or under his headship. 9 and 10. This constantly repeated formula has an essential function in this passage which surveys the whole of God's redemptive plan.

It is in Christ alone that God has blessed men and women from eternity to eternity. See folks, the thing is we were once in Adam but now we are in Christ.

to the Corinthians Paul writes as in Adam all die so in Christ all will be made alive but each in turn Christ the first fruits then when he comes those who belong to him.

In other words if we are in Christ then we have received the fullness of blessing. Some aspects of that blessing we may not yet entirely experience.

[ 14 : 31 ] Some of what Paul is going to express in the coming verses is in a future tense. Verse 10 says some of this is going to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment. So it may not be fully experienced as yet but it is already our spiritual blessing.

We have every spiritual blessing in Christ and that's guaranteed. It's certain. Verse 13 you were marked with a seal the promised Holy Spirit. That's what a seal does isn't it?

It guarantees it says this is authentic this is certain this is going to happen. Our inheritance is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit.

There is no other blessing to be had so don't sit waiting around for more. If we already have every spiritual blessing then it's foolish to be waiting around for the other shoe to drop.

So if you are in Christ at all then you are in Christ completely. You already have every spiritual blessing. Now maybe the clearest application of this principle is that we ought not to suppose that the bestowal of the Holy Spirit is in some way separate to being in Christ.

[ 15 : 44 ] If you are one of God's holy people if you are a Christian then you do have his Holy Spirit within you. You have every spiritual blessing.

And one of the ways this works out is that when we come to God in prayer for ourselves we are not asking for some fresh or different blessing.

Rather we may ask for a fuller understanding of how we are blessed. We may ask for a greater experience of the blessing that we already have. When we come to pray we ask for more of the same, a greater experience, not something fresh and different.

The same is true when we pray on behalf of others for other Christians at least. And maybe in some way this is in danger of splitting hairs, distinguishing between a different blessing and a greater experience of it.

So let me try and summarize why I think this is important. The truth is God's not holding back on you. You already have every spiritual blessing.

[ 16 : 54 ] God isn't a miser doling things out grudgingly waiting for you to come and push him for it. No, you have every spiritual blessing.

He has blessed you. And that means that there are no second class Christians. You don't get to look down on others as being less than you and you don't get to look down on yourself either.

You have every spiritual blessing. Final implication of verse three.

There are no other recipients of blessing so don't miss out. I suppose here we're moving off every a little bit and focusing instead on the word us. 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.

Now the word us here is on the one hand very broad but on the other hand it is not synonymous with the word every is it?

[ 18 : 07 ] He's bestowed every spiritual blessing but he hasn't bestowed it on everyone. There is a sense in which God the Father bestows blessing on all humanity.

We call this common grace. Matthew 5 45 God causes his son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. This is true.

God does in some sense bless all humanity. Life itself is a blessing from God. Daily sustenance is a blessing from God. This is true of all people everywhere. They are in this sense blessed by God.

But what's not true of all people everywhere is that they have received every spiritual blessing. See, however much people may use hashtag blessed, however many things they may have that cause them to feel blessed, the reality is ultimate blessing comes to those who are in Christ.

So every spiritual blessing applies to those, verse 1, who are God's holy people. It applies to the faithful in Christ Jesus. It applies, verse 3, to those who are, in fact, in Christ.

[ 19 : 21 ] Therefore, friends, if there is no other source of spiritual blessing, then it is to the Father that you must look. And that means if you do not do so, if you do not come to him in repentance and faith, if you are not found in Christ, if you don't depend on him alone for blessing, if you don't do this, then you are lost and without hope.

There will not be blessing for you. There will not be spiritual life. None of the glorious declarations of this passage, none of the aspects of blessing that Paul enumerates here, none of it is true of you if you are not among his people.

So any of you, if that's you tonight, if the truth is that's where you find yourself, well it's time to come to him.

It's time to come and to ask for his forgiveness. It's time to come and to stop thinking that you've got everything figured out. It's time to come and listen to the God who knows all things. It's time to stop thinking that you're a good person and instead confess your sins so that you can be forgiven.

It's time to come to Christ. His arms are open wide. Maybe some of you need to hear that yourselves tonight.

[ 20 : 44 ] Maybe too some of us need to reflect on this reality for the sake of others whom we love. There are no other recipients of spiritual blessing than those who are found in Christ.

