

# You're Much Richer Than You Think - Part 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] One of the deepest movements of the human heart is the longing to be rich. In the Broadway musical Fiddler on the Roof, which has become now a classic film, the lead character, Tevye, who's an Orthodox Jew living in Tsarist Russia, is talking to God one afternoon as his chores are winding down.

Dear God, Tevye prays, you made many, many poor people. I realize, of course, it's no shame to be poor, but it's no great honor either.

So what would be so terrible if I had a small fortune? And then he sings, if I were a rich man, yubby-dibby-dibby-dibby-dibby-dibby-dum, all day long I'd divvy-dibby-dibby-dum, if I were a wealthy man, I wouldn't have to work hard.

And then goes on to sing about building this big house with all kinds of rooms and tall staircases, and about filling his yard with turkeys and chickens and geese and ducks, and the joy his wife, Golda, would have in being wealthy and a normal double chin, as he says.

A proper double chin. I don't know what he means by that. And the sweetest thing of all, that I'd have time to sit in the synagogue and pray, and maybe have a seat by the eastern wall, and I'd discuss the holy books with the learned men several hours every day.

[ 1 : 41 ] Then Tevye concludes by praying. Lord, who made the lion and the lamb, you decreed I should be who I am. Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if I were a wealthy man?

The apostle Paul, who knows what it means to be a sojourner in a foreign land, says to Tevye and to every other human being who wants to be wealthy, Oh, Tevye, I have good news for you. In Christ, in Messiah, we are rich, men and women. Then Tevye, in Jesus Christ, in Messiah, the words of Scotiabank's slogan, announce the good news of the gospel, You are richer than you think.

Now I know that I'm conflating lots of centuries and geographical locations in saying that, but I think that's what Paul would say to Tevye and to us. You are richer than you think.

Or, more faithful to what Paul opens up for us in his letter to the Ephesians, You are much richer than you think.

[ 2 : 59 ] In relationship with Jesus Christ, in Messiah, in the heavenly places, we discover that the sum, vast, eternal plan is to make us very rich.

Our text today and next Sunday is Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3 to 14. In the original, in the Greek, it is one long sentence.

It's one of the longest sentences in the Bible. Paul will have other long sentences in the rest of Ephesians, but nothing as long as this. 202 words in one sentence.

Opening up for us the every spiritual blessing, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ blesses us with in Christ in the heavenly places.

Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3 to 14. The words are printed in your order of worship for you.

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 : 12 ] Just as He chose us before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

In Him, we have redemption through His blood and forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us.

In all wisdom and insight, He made known to us the mystery of His will according to the kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of times.

That is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose, who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance with a view to the redemption of God's own possession to the praise of His glory.

[ 5 : 42 ] Lord, living God, we believe that You enabled the Apostle Paul to think these thoughts and to write these very compressed and compact words.

And now in Your mercy and grace, I pray that You would help us understand what he wrote. And even if we can't understand what he wrote, would You help us actually live in the reality the words are describing?

For we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. One long sentence. But not a rambling run-on sentence like you English majors and teachers want us to avoid.

Andrew T. Lincoln, in his commentary on Ephesians, observes that each thought of the sentence builds on the previous one, sometimes explaining, sometimes elaborating, sometimes supplementing, sometimes contributing something new, and sometimes picking up again what had already been said.

Lots of people have tried to find a structure to this long letter. And it is possible that the long sentence can be broken down into three sections. You likely heard or saw the thrice-repeated phrase, to the praise of.

[ 7 : 13 ] Verse 6, to the praise of the glory of His grace. Verse 12, to the praise of His glory. And verse 14, to the praise of His glory.

And it is possible that that thrice-repeated phrase breaks the long sentence into three sections. By the way, this clearly tells us that ultimately, everything God does for the world in Jesus Christ will lead to worship.

Since it all is manifesting who God is, since it is all manifesting His glory, it by nature, ultimately, ignites and releases worship.

Now, some see in this possible three-fold breakdown of the long sentence a Trinitarian structure. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Verses 3 to 6, up to the first, to the praise of, Paul speaks of God the Father as the source or origin of all the spiritual blessings.

Verses 7 to 12, up to the second, to the praise of, Paul speaks of God the Son as the agent or the sphere or location of the every spiritual blessing. And then, verses 13 to 14, up to the third, to the praise of, Paul speaks of God the Holy Spirit as the seal of every blessing, as the one who makes it all happen.

[ 8 : 37 ] Now, as attractive as that might be, I do not think it is that neat. I don't find a neat order to this. For one thing, God the Father is involved in all three sections.

Indeed, God the Father is the subject of most of the finite verbs in this long sentence. And for another, God the Son, Jesus Christ, is involved in each of these three sections.

The phrase, in Christ, or some equivalent, is found in nearly every subordinate clause. Verse 3, every blessing in Christ. Verse 4, the Father chose us in Christ.

Verse 5, the Father adopted us through Christ. Verse 6, the Father freely bestows grace on us in the beloved, in Christ. Verse 7, in Christ we have redemption. Verse 8, through His blood, Christ's blood.

Verse 10, the Father is summing up everything in Christ. Verse 11, in Christ we have obtained an inheritance. Verse 12, we who were first to hope in Christ. Verse 13, we who are sealed in Him, in Christ.

[ 9 : 40 ] So, I do not think there is a nice, neat structure to this one long sentence. And the reason is, I think, that Paul is so caught up with the riches of the gospel that he is writing or dictating as fast as he can this outpouring of praise, this torrential outpouring of praise.

He is so freshly captured by the gospel of Jesus Christ and the wonder of it that the words and the ideas simply tumble one after the other.

Like what happened to Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. When he discovered what God was doing in the birth of his son, he spontaneously broke out in song, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has visited us and accomplished salvation for his people.

Or like the Virgin Mary, when it finally dawned on her what was happening to the world in the birth of her son, she spontaneously breaks out in praise, my soul exalts the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

When the gospel gets hold of you, you just have to sing. But whereas both Zachariah and Mary focus on the blessings God has given to Israel, Paul focuses on the blessings God has given to the whole world.

[ 11 : 04 ] His vision goes beyond one nation to all the nations of the world, which he will then unpack later in the letter. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

Spiritual blessing. Not simply as over against material blessing. But spiritual in the sense of made real by the Holy Spirit.

New Testament scholar Gordon Fee suggests that every time we come across this word spiritual in the New Testament, we are to think Holy Spirit. That it's the Spirit who has these gifts.

Now, not every time. Like in Ephesians 6.12 where Paul refers to the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Clearly, that's a different kind of spirit.

But in this long sentence that begins the letter, I think Dr. Fee is right. Paul is not simply juxtaposing spiritual blessings over against material blessings as though God did not want to give material blessings.

[ 12 : 08 ] Paul is referring to the blessings God the Holy Spirit makes real in God's people's lives. In Christ, in the heavenly places, we are richer than we think or feel.

Much richer. It's just that the blessings are not that obvious. We can't see them with our unaided intellect and emotions.

We need a new set of glasses. We need an alternative reading of reality. A reading of reality that is shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is in Rome, in jail.

But in Rome, in jail, he's also in Christ, in the heavenly places. And under arrest, in Rome, he is arrested by the true location of his life, in Christ.

and he's arrested by the state of being in Christ. Richer than anyone in that jail would have ever known. Much richer. In his long sentence, Paul celebrates only a few of the every spiritual blessings given to us.

[ 13 : 21 ] He names seven. Chosen before the foundation of the world, predestined to adoption, redemption, forgiveness, insight into the mystery of history, and expansive inheritance, and sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Now, each of those blessings is worthy of many sermons on their own. Blessing number one. verse four.

Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world. Just as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Paul begins by jumping into the deep end of the pool. Or is it actually that Paul begins by emerging out of the deep end of the pool?

The verb translated choose is *electsato*, which comes into our language as election. Paul will use this word again later in his letter, halfway through the letter in 4.1, where he says, I, the prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, elected.

[ 14 : 44 ] elected. I exhort you to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been elected or chosen. Now, why does he begin with this blessing?

Why does he begin with being elected before the foundation of the world? Because, for the apostle Paul, this blessing expresses the wonder of the gospel.

He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Paul's salvation is not grounded in himself. Paul's salvation and all that means is grounded in the free, sovereign, gracious choice of the living God.

It's what startled him from the beginning of his journey. It's what startled him from that day on the road to Damascus. Paul, then Saul, was engaged in this campaign to stamp out what he considered all this blasphemy and all this nonsense Christians were saying about Jesus of Nazareth.

He's engaged in a campaign, in a terrorist campaign, to wipe the name of Jesus off the face of history. But to his surprise, this Jesus is alive and comes to him and claims him for his own.

[16:03] And from that day on, Paul is gripped by the fact, the liberating fact, that his salvation is not grounded in anything he did or did not do.

His salvation is grounded in God's free, gracious, sovereign choice in Christ. God chose to love this man and make him his own. It's the wonder of the gospel before the foundation of the world chosen. Now, I know that all of this raises a whole bunch of questions. I can see it in your eyes. Questions that lead to issues with fancy words like double predestination, reprobation, infralapsarianism, superlapsarianism, eternal decree, and all kinds of other fancy words.

And I know that greater minds than mine, I've got this little mind, and I know these greater minds than mine over the centuries have tried to understand this and nobody gets it all together.

People like Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, people like John Calvin, whom he is either adored or despised, depending on how you read him, people like Martin Luther, John Wesley, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, Karl Barth, who emphasized that we can't understand election apart from Christ, that Christ is both the one who elects and the one who's elected, that Christ is both the God who elects and the human who's elected.

[17:35] There are so many nuances and caveats to this blessing of being chosen in Christ that one can get a severe headache trying to get some coherent doctrine out of it.

So I find that what I have to regularly do is just step back and focus on what is clear in this first blessing Paul celebrates.

You see, for Paul and the other biblical authors who speak of it, God's election of us in Christ before the foundation of the world is good news. The truth of election causes Paul to bless God, to bow his knee, to stretch out his hands and to offer him God his very self.

This tells me that as I try intellectually to understand all this and go down a road where I'm no longer stirred to worship, I'm on the wrong road.

Any right understanding of election will always lead a human heart to worship. We know that no one chooses God.

[18:50] No one of our own free will chooses to know and love and follow the living God. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, quoting the psalmist, says, there is none righteous, no, not one.

There is none who understands. There is no one who seeks for God. Oh, we all seek for something, for something to fill the emptiness in the human soul, for something to ease this existential ache, but no one of our own free volition seeks the one true living God.

No, not one, says Paul. Therefore, unless God seeks, no one is going to be found. Unless God chooses, no one is going to be saved.

I like how New Testament scholar Harold Horner puts it, the only natural destiny of us all is separation from God. It is the sheer grace of God that allows any person to have another destiny. Now, I know it raises all kinds of questions, but this we know, unless God chooses to win us, all of us remain lost.

[20:09] The old hymn puts it so well. I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my souls to seek Him, to seek Him seeking me.

It was not I who found, O Savior, true. No, I was found of Thee. What's also clear in Scripture is that God's choosing does not necessarily imply God's rejecting.

Now, I know that's a natural thought, but Paul does not go down that road in Ephesians. For example, God chose Israel, right? But God's choosing Israel did not imply that He was despising and rejecting the other nations of the world.

Quite the contrary. God chose Israel in order to bless the other nations of the world. So, to Abraham God said, leave your country and your relatives and I will make you a great nation.

I will bless you and you will be a blessing and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

God's choice of Abraham was unto the blessing of the nations.

[21:24] when Jesus chose twelve disciples He was not thereby rejecting the other people who were drawn to Him. He was choosing these twelve so He could do a unique work in them which would result in blessing all the others.

When Paul tells the Corinthians that God chooses the foolish of the world and not the wise, that God chooses the poor of the world and not the rich, the intention is not to say God then rejects the wise and the rich.

Rather the intention is to show the world that no one comes to know God because of worldly status. God's election always has an outward other oriented goal.

God chooses out of the world to bless the world. Am I making sense? Paul names chosen before the foundation of the world first because this is where we find our security.

Our salvation is not grounded in ourselves. Our salvation is not grounded in anything we did or do or in anything we did not do or do not do.

[ 22 : 36 ] It is not even grounded in God's foreknowledge of what we might do or not do. Our salvation is grounded in God's free, sovereign, gracious choice of us in Christ.

Blessed be his name. Now, what Paul emphasizes in this long sentence is the reason for the election.

And that's where he wants us to focus. That we may be holy and blameless before him. Holy. I know that many people bristle at the word holy.

But there's no need to bristle. Holy is what the living God is. The angelic choir says it three times, always three times, holy, holy, holy.

Because that's what God is. And that's what God made us to be. It is what all of us deep down in our soul want to be, even if we do not know the word.

[ 23 : 38 ] I know this true of every person I meet. Every person wants to be holy. holy, pure, clean, clear, whole.

To be holy is to be whole, like the whole God. Who does not want to be holy? The Holy One chooses us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

The vast eternal plan, to use Tevye's word, is that we be made holy. Now, note carefully, God does not choose us in Christ because we are holy and blameless.

God does not choose us in Christ because we're trying to be holy or blameless. God does not choose us in Christ because God foresees that one day we might be holy or blameless.

Being holy is not the ground of the choice, it's the goal of the choice. Before the foundation of the world, the plan has been for us to be made holy like the living God, clean and clear and whole and full of light and beauty.

[ 24 : 58 ] Stephen Walsh, who's an actor living in Calgary, has put together a sketch that involves Jesus and Peter by the Sea of Galilee. Peter had told Jesus to cast his net on the other side of the boat and he would catch fish and when he did, Peter and his friends couldn't even hold the catch in.

Peter then falls down at Jesus' feet and says, depart from me for I'm a sinful man, O Lord. The encounter with the Holy One awakens Peter's awareness of unholiness.

Stephen then has Peter say to Jesus, go away from me Jesus, because I will make you dirty. And then Stephen has Jesus say to Peter, no, you will not make me dirty, I will make you clean.

And he does. Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. We are richer than we think or feel, much richer.

Blessing two, verse five, in love he predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ to himself.

[ 26 : 15 ] There's that word again, predestined. Don't let it bug you. Don't get hung up with all the questions that it raises. Here, Paul's fundamental declaration.

In Christ, we have a destiny. It's not up for grabs. We've been destined to adoption. Now, in the Roman world, a wealthy man would want to pass on his wealth to an heir.

And if he had no son of his own, or if his son or sons were in bad relationship with him, he would then choose one of his trusted servants, who would then become a son and an heir, to whom he would give all his wealth.

Can you imagine what the servant felt when adopted? From rags to riches overnight. No longer servant of Mr. Wealthy, but now son of Mr. Wealthy, and heir of Mr. Wealthy's wealth.

God, predestined to adoption through Christ to himself. Now, in this case, God the Father has a son, the beloved as Paul calls him.

[ 27 : 20 ] And in this case, God the Father is very pleased with his son. So, God the Father doesn't need to go looking for someone else to be the heir of all of his wealth. Out of sheer grace, God makes other sons and daughters who, out of sheer grace, get to get in on the deal with the beloved.

Theologian J.I. Packer, living here in Vancouver, argues in his classic book, Knowing God, that adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel. Packer especially emphasizes, which is surprising for a reformed theologian, that adoption is a higher privilege than justification.

justification. Justification is a primary privilege of the gospel. No two ways about that. For just in justification, God the judge declares that sinners are not, never will be liable to the death their sins deserve because of the substitute of Jesus Christ.

Yet, says Packer, this is not the highest blessing. Adoption is higher because of the richer relationship with God involves. Here's how Packer puts it.

Justification is a forensic idea conceived in terms of law and viewing God as judge. Adoption is a family idea conceived in terms of love and viewing God as father.

[ 28 : 48 ] He goes on, in adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship and establishes us as his children and heirs. Closeness, affection, and generosity are at the heart of this relationship.

And then he writes this, to be right with God the judge is a great thing. Amen? But, to be loved and cared for by God the father is great. There is so much in this blessing we could pursue.

We'll have to do that another time. For now, rejoice in what Paul is celebrating in the fact of this adoption, that through adoption we enter into and participate in the relationship at the center of the universe.

Jesus, before the foundation of the world, there was this relationship between a father and a son. The relationship was so alive, so pulsating with life, it too was a breathing, a person, the Holy Spirit. And we were made to enter into and participate in that relationship. Jesus is the only natural son. He's the only natural son of the child of God.

[ 29 : 51 ] And out of love, he comes to us and he takes us home to the father's house. And by his spirit, he enables us to know his father so deeply that we pray the way he prayed, Abba, father, predestined to adoption.

Why did he do it? According to the kind intention of his will, says Paul. Or more literally, according to his good pleasure. Get this.

What pleases the holy God, what brings the holy God, great pleasure is to bring human beings who are not yet holy into this eternal relationship at the center of the universe.

It's going to take a lifetime to figure out what all that means. We are richer than we think or feel.

Much richer. Blessing number three, verse seven.

In him we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of our trespasses or transgressions according to the riches of his grace. Redemption.

[ 30 : 58 ] In Christ we have redemption. Now, this is not just another synonym for salvation. The word has a very particular meaning. It's not referring to salvation in general, but to a particular kind of salvation.

As Leon Morris of Australia points out to us, whereas in our time we hear this word redemption and think in religious terms, people in Paul's day would have heard the word redemption and thought in non-religious terms.

The verb form of this word simply means to loose. And to loose in all kinds of ways. The loosening of clothes, the loosening of tied animals, and so on.

And it was especially used of loosening of human beings from captivity to one sort or another.

Loosening slaves, loosening prisoners, loosening political hostages, loosening people from financial debt, oh, praise the Lord, loosening people from oppressive governments, and doing so by the payment, some kind of payment, releasing slaves, releasing hostages, releasing debtors by paying the price of redemption.

In him, we have redemption through his blood. Now, at first, naming this blessing may seem like kind of a diversion from the flow of this long sentence.

[ 32 : 28 ] Chosen to be holy before him, adopted to be children, and then redemption. It almost feels like Paul has just sort of randomly grabbed another blessing to talk about, but the more you think about it, that's not the case.

We have redemption. Points us to the human condition apart from grace. We have redemption. Points us to the fact which we all know, but seldom really think about, namely, that apart from grace, we are in bondage.

Apart from grace, we are in captivity. And unless we are loosened, unless we are released from this bondage, we cannot enter into and enjoy the adoption and election.

in order to actually live in this adoption and election, somebody has to set us free. This, too, is one of the deepest movements of the human heart, the longing for freedom, as we see played out before us right now in Tunisia, in Egypt.

Humans long to be free. And what Paul is wanting us to see in this long sentence is that the bondage is much worse than a dictator or corruption or injustice.

[ 33 : 49 ] We are held in bondage by much stronger forces and powers, by sin and evil and darkness and death. What we need is redemption from those powers.

And what Paul is celebrating is that in Jesus Christ we have just such a redemption through his blood, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ we are released. How it all works is beyond the scope of this morning's message.

What Paul is celebrating here is that when Jesus Christ shed his blood on a Roman cross we were released. Released from everything that holds humanity captive.

By his blood we were released from the curse of the law. By his blood we were released from the compulsion of sin. By his blood we were released from the lordship of these unseen powers in the heavenly places.

By his blood we were released from the lies that snare human hearts and minds. By his blood we were released from the finality of death and therefore from the fear of death.

[ 34 : 53 ] Son of man says Jesus that's his favorite self designation. The son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

He came to pay the price to set us free. In him we have redemption. And now we belong to him. In Paul's day what people redeemed they then owned.

And what Jesus redeems he then owns. He comes and sets us free from all that holds us in bondage so that we can belong to him and enter into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Well that's enough for today. Boy. We'll pick it up there at this point around the Lord's Supper next Sunday. We are richer than we think or feel.

Much richer. 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.

[ 35 : 59 ] Chosen before the foundation of the world. Destined for adoption. Redeemed. And a whole lot more. Let us pray. Oh dear God.

How can we adequately respond to what you have shown us this morning? How can we adequately give thanks to you for what you've done for us in Christ?

It seems to me that the only logical thing to do is to say here I am. I surrender. I welcome your choosing me.

I welcome your adopting me. And I welcome your redeeming me. By your grace help me live in the riches of your gospel.

This we pray in Jesus name and for his greater glory. Amen. besar Sonja and God internacional Angie and we may askden you God have us and may