

Ephesians 1:1-4 Blessed in Christ

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn please to Ephesians, Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. By its very nature we're going to move slightly more slowly through Ephesians than we did through Jeremiah.

But we'll read Ephesians 1, 1-14 tonight. We're really considering verses 1-4, those first four verses of Ephesians 1.

But in order to set the context for us, we'll read verses 1-14. Ephesians chapter 1, beginning to read at verse 1.

This is the word of God. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To the saints in Ephesus and our faithful in Christ Jesus.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

[1 : 03] Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world. That we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.

According to the purpose of his will. To the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood.

The forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace. Which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight. Making known to us the mystery of his will.

According to his purpose which he set forth in Christ. As a plan for the fullness of time. To unite all things in him. Things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance. Having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things. According to the counsel of his will. So that we.

[2 : 02] Who were the first to hope in Christ. Might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also when you heard the word of truth. The gospel of your salvation. And believed in him. Were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it. To the praise of his glory. Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired word.

Well let's turn in our Bibles then please to Genesis 15. Genesis 15. Genesis of course the first book of the Bible. The first book of the Old Testament. It's one of those kind of seismic moments in biblical history.

It's one of those seismic moments in Revelation. Where God binds himself to covenant with Abraham. God binds himself in covenant with Abraham.

Since there was no one greater by whom he could swear. The Lord swore by himself. In Genesis 15 here. We're going to see how God's covenant love feeds into what we read in Ephesians 1.

[3 : 12] In just a few moments time. How God's covenant faithfulness feeds into what we read in Genesis. In Ephesians 1. Sorry. In just a moment or two. Genesis 15.

Beginning to read at verse 1. And we'll read the whole of the chapter. After these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. Fear not Abraham.

I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. But Abraham said. O Lord God. What will you give me? For I continue childless in the air of my house as Eliezer of Damascus.

And Abraham said. Behold. You've given me no offspring. And a member of my household will be my heir. And behold. The word of the Lord came to him. This man shall not be your heir.

Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said. Look toward heaven. And number the stars if you are able to number them. Then he said to him.

[4 : 09] So shall your offspring be. And he believed the Lord. And he counted to him as righteousness. And he said to him. I am the Lord.

Who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans. To give you this land to possess. But he said. O Lord God. How am I to know that I shall possess it? He said to him.

Bring me a heifer three years old. A female goat three years old. A ram three years old. A turtle dove. And a young pigeon. And he brought him all these. Cut them in half.

And laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. And when the birds of prey came down in the carcasses. Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down.

A deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram. Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners.

[5 : 03] In a land that is not theirs. And will be servants there. And they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve.

And afterward they shall come out with a great possessions. As for you. You shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here.

In the fourth generation. For the iniquity of the Amorites. Is not yet complete. When the sun had gone down. And it was dark. Behold a smoking fire pot.

And a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram. Saying. To your offspring I give this land. From the river of Egypt to the great river.

The river Euphrates. The land of the Kenites. The Kenizzites. The Kadamites. The Hittites. The Perizzites. The Rephaim. The Amorites. The Canaanites. The Girgashites. And the Jebusites.

[6 : 01] Amen. This is the reading of God's inspired. Inerrant word. Let's turn to Ephesians chapter 1.

Ephesians chapter 1. We're going to consider these first four verses together this evening.

Ephesians chapter 1. And verses 1 through 4. It's fair to say that some correspondence perhaps evokes certain memories within us.

My mother when I was a child kept a scrapbook of every reference to me in the paper. I have to say they were usually sporting references.

Nothing in the court section you understand. Just sporting references to things that I achieved. And when you read that you can kind of go back there. You remember things that are perhaps long forgotten.

But just reading it triggers a certain memory. I was going through my study this week. And came across the documents from being called to be the minister of Dumfries Free Church.

[7 : 05] There are certain things that just evoke a memory in you. That evoke a response in you. And I imagine the church in Ephesus as they received this letter from Paul.

It evoked joy in their hearts. It sparked joy in them. It's such an encouraging letter. Such an uplifting letter to read. There are some things in it that are hard and difficult of course.

But the main kind of thrust. The main kind of theme of the letter. Is joy. It's praise.

It's rejoicing. And as the Ephesians read it. As the Ephesian church reflected on this letter. I'm sure it did their heart. No end of good. It would have given them such an encouragement.

It would have rejoiced their souls. As we come to Ephesians we need to change gear a little bit. We've been used to Jeremiah dealing with large chunks of text.

[8 : 09] We've been used to dealing with chapters. If not two chapters at a time. But as we come to the letter to the Ephesians. We need to realize that we're going to be going very slowly. That Paul's letters are so tightly argued.

If you like. That we need to really slow down. We're going to be moving at a snail's pace. If you like. But we'll be no worse off for that. We want to think about three things this evening.

I hadn't planned this. It was just a sort of happy coincidence if you like. But we're going to have three B's this evening. We had three B's this morning. And we're going to have three B's this evening as well.

Firstly we want to think about the beginning. These opening two verses of Paul's letter. What it is that he's getting across as he begins his letter. Secondly then we want to think about the blessing.

The blessing that Paul announces to them. The blessing that Paul wants to encourage them with.

And see how that applies to us. And then thirdly we want to think about before. When it was that we were chosen.

[9 : 11] When it was that we were predestined. If you like. And we'll see that in verse four. So we want to think first then about the beginning. The beginning.

And we see that in verses one and two. And as we begin our studies of the letter to the Ephesians. We notice firstly who the author is.

It's Paul. The same Paul who at one time had been a persecutor of the church. The same Paul who met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. The same Paul who had made it his name, his mission, his goal.

To destroy the fledgling church. The same Paul whose goal it was to kill Christians. Who was on his way to kill Christians. When confronted with the risen Christ.

Now why did I say all that? Why is it not enough just to accept that what we read here as Paul introduces himself.

[10:08] Why is that not enough? Because when we consider the content of this letter. When we consider the things that we're going to think about. When we consider the things that we're going to read in this letter.

It helps us to remind ourselves of who Paul was. This was no Christian sympathizer.

This was no person who was interested in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was an active opponent. This was a hostile man. And yet as we come to read what we read in Ephesians 1, 1-14.

How do we explain that? How do we explain the change that has come over him? Well quite simply. He's met with the risen Christ. Quite simply his life has been turned around.

By meeting Christ. As we consider his level of opposition. We're reminded. And we wonderfully see here. The great truth.

[11:07] That God had chosen Paul. Long before Paul had chosen God. That this persecutor of the church had become its preacher. God had called him out of darkness into his glorious light.

That's the only explanation we can offer. That's the only way we can know and explain how an enemy becomes a friend.

And we see how Paul describes himself here in verse 1. As an apostle of Christ Jesus. It was Jesus Christ who appeared to him on that Damascus road.

It was Jesus Christ who turned his life around. It was Jesus Christ who commissioned Paul. It was Jesus Christ who sent Paul. It was Jesus Christ who gave Paul the job that he had.

But what does it mean to be an apostle? It can mean different things to us. So it's important that we get a biblical understanding. An understanding of how Paul uses the term apostle.

[12:12] When we hear apostle. We might think of the 12 apostles. The kind of 12 close friends of Jesus. If you like. The 12 disciples of Jesus. Other churches will use apostle.

As someone who has been sent to be a missionary to a certain place. The apostle of wherever. But the term apostle as Paul uses it here.

Gives him an authority. It gives him a right to speak. As we use the term apostle in a sort of strictly biblical sense if you like.

An apostle was one who had seen the risen Christ. An apostle was one who had been commissioned by the risen Christ. With a particular job. With a particular task. And so as Paul says here.

Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ. He's writing to remind the church at Ephesus. That he has this authority. He has this power. He has this commission. From the risen Christ.

[13:11] It was Christ who told him to take the message to the Gentiles. It was Christ we remember who assured. The man who was sent to heal Paul's blindness.

It was Christ who assured him. That he'd shown Paul how much he must suffer for the Gentiles. That was who Paul was sent by.

Christ. That was whose authority Paul taught by. If you like. That was whose authority and by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

That Paul writes under here. In Ephesians. He is an apostle of Christ Jesus. And we need to remind ourselves of that.

As we come to study Ephesians. What we read here in Ephesians. Is no less God's word than the gospels. What we read here in Ephesians.

[14:06] Is no less inspired than the gospels. Our doctrine of scripture tells us. That all scripture is God breathed. And useful for training.

For correcting. And for teaching etc. That men wrote. As they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. That's what Peter reminds us. And why is that important?

Because some Christians today will say. Well. I like to follow Jesus. You know. I'm not really into the Bible. I'm not really into Paul. What I like to do. Is follow Jesus.

I don't like the stuff that Paul has to say. I don't like predestination. I don't like the stuff about women ministers. It's all a bit heavy. What I like is Christ.

Well friends. As Paul reminds us here. He was an apostle. He was once sent by Christ. He wrote these words. Under the inspiration and authority of the Holy Spirit. And we have to deal with them.

[15:08] We have to reckon with them. So the letter is written by Paul. He's an apostle of Jesus Christ.

By the will of God. And it's to the saints. Who are in Ephesus. That's how Paul describes the church. That's how Paul describes the believers in Ephesus.

Those who are saints. Now we're well used to the idea of saints today aren't we? There was a story in the newspaper a few weeks ago. About Prince Charles attending the canonization of the great Roman Catholic scholar.

John Henry Newman. Newman was being recognized as an official saint of the Roman Catholic Church. And to many of us that's what a saint is.

It's someone who's kind of holy. It's someone who has served the church for a long time. Someone who's been officially recognized. And yet Paul writing here to the church in Ephesus describes them all as saints.

[16:13] Those who were struggling along with their faith. They were the saints in Ephesus. Those who were stumbling along at the bottom a little bit. They were the saints in Ephesus. Those who were doing well.

Don't get me wrong. They were the saints in Ephesus. But the whole church. Not the especially holy ones. Not the sacrificial ones. But all of them. As saints.

I wonder if that's how you see yourself tonight. The danger with that is that it sounds a little bit presumptuous doesn't it? It sounds a little bit arrogant. But I wonder if that's how you see yourself in Christ this evening.

That you're a saint of the Most High God. Maybe as we gather tonight you don't feel especially saint-like. You're aware of indwelling sin. You're aware of your own failures.

It's easy not to feel like a saint. In a sense of course we're right aren't we? None of us on our own. Not you. Not me. Can become saints.

[17:17] On our own strength. But tonight we're considered saints because of the righteousness. Because of the holiness of Christ. We see how the saints are described.

To the saints here in Ephesus. Kind of verse 1b if you like. And are faithful in Christ Jesus. To be faithful in Christ Jesus.

That's part of the requirements if you like. Part of the way to ensure that we're living saintly lives. Is to be faithful in Christ.

And what is it that Paul offers? What is it that he writes to remind them of? What is it that he wants them to know? So he's introduced himself. He's told us who the letter's to. And what is it he offers? Verse 2. Grace to you. And peace from God our Father. And the Lord Jesus Christ. There are two ideas here that are very closely linked.

[18:24] Two ideas that are almost kind of interwoven in scripture. The Old Testament idea of grace and peace. Would have been the covenant love of God for his people.

That's why we read what we read about Abram in Genesis 15. God's hesed for his people. God's faithfulness. God's love for his people. In the New Testament I suppose we say that that's grace and peace.

Has been supremely shown in the Lord Jesus Christ. That love, that faithfulness, that obedience to the covenant. Has been supremely shown in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who appeared bringing grace and truth. Grace and truth. Grace and truth.

And as a church that's the gospel we have to offer. That's the good news that we have to share.

That we have grace and peace from God our Father.

[19:34] That peace is possible tonight with God. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. I alluded to it in my prayer.

I don't ever recall seeing the nation so divided. We live in days of seemingly constant discord. It seems and feels like we're falling apart at the seams as a nation.

And against that backdrop what a wonderful message it is. What a wonderful opportunity it is for us to preach Christ. The one who brings peace with God the Father.

The one who brings peace with one another. So that's the beginning then. Paul reminds them who he is.

He tells us who the letter is to. And he kind of introduces some opening remarks. Secondly then.

We want to think about the blessing. The blessing. And we see that in verse 3.

[20 : 33] And as we move into the main body of the letter itself. We notice that there's one word in verse 3 that appears time and time and time again. It's that word blessed or a variation of it in blessing.

It's the same word here that we get our English word eulogy from. Eulogia. When we hear a eulogy at a funeral what are we hearing? We're hearing good words about that person.

We're hearing that person's kind of life story. I've yet to be at a funeral yet where somebody will stand up to give the eulogy. And we'll just completely slate the person who's being buried.

Generally whatever has happened. Somebody will have something good to say about them. And so as here as Paul opens this verse in verse 3. With this word.

With this blessed term. He's encouraging us to speak good words about God. He's encouraging us to wholeheartedly praise God.

[21 : 36] He's calling us to worship God with all that we have. The Father as he puts it of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. And that praise.

That praise. Should be the overflow of our hearts towards God. For all that he's done for us. For all the blessings as Paul puts it that are ours.

Wholehearted praise of the God who sent his son. To be the savior. To be the propitiation. For our sin. I wonder as you read this verse tonight.

What is it that comes across to you? As you're reading this verse. What tone do you imagine Paul's using? Do you imagine him using a sort of dull dreary tone of.

You know blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. No. You can sense the excitement. You can sense the wonder.

[22 : 46] You can sense the praise just flowing out of Paul. Can't you? This wasn't half-hearted. This wasn't run of the mill. This was wholehearted.

This was wholehearted. Deep-throated blessing. And praise of God. And there's a challenge in that for us isn't there?

Because as we gather tonight. I wonder how wholehearted our praise of God is. You know we might say well it's not our national disposition.

Look I'm Northern Irish. I get it. We don't really do kind of exuberant joy like this. This level of excitement and praise may not come naturally to us.

But I wonder has the gospel. Has the grace of God. Has the peace with God. Become so common. So run of the mill. That it doesn't excite us anymore. That we don't overflow like Paul does here with praise.

[23 : 52] Has the coming before the God of the universe. Has the coming before the God who spoke. And things came to be. To sing his praise. Cease to amaze us.

Sometimes they talk about soldiers becoming battle weary. That a soldier has become so used to the sight of violence and death. That they're kind of desensitized to it.

That it doesn't shock them anymore. The horrors of war doesn't register with them anymore. But I wonder tonight friends. If we're in danger of becoming praise weary.

That the blessing of the gospel. The blessing of knowing God. The blessing of sins forgiven. The blessing of coming Sunday by Sunday. Doesn't excite us anymore. Doesn't thrill our hearts with joy anymore.

I'm not necessarily here talking about a sort of charismatic excitement. But an excitement of soul.

[24 : 59] Of spirit. When we approach church. The sense that the psalmist had in those psalms of ascent. As he journeyed towards Jerusalem.

As he journeyed with that great throng of people. Notice how Paul describes what God has done for us.

He has blessed us. In Christ. With every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Perhaps helps us to understand a little bit.

It unpacks for us a little bit. What Jesus Christ meant. When he said that he had come. That they might have life. And have it to the full. Paul here. I think fleshes that out for us. That Jesus Christ has blessed us. That God has blessed us in Christ. With every spiritual blessing. Not that we have every spiritual gift.

[25 : 59] Not that we all have the same spiritual gift. But that we have every spiritual blessing. Why? Because Jesus Christ himself is our head.

Jesus Christ himself knows every spiritual blessing. He is in very nature. God. All things were made through him. And by him. And for him. And as adopted sons and daughters. As younger brothers and sisters of Christ. Everything that he has. Everything that he has. Is ours. I remember when I was at university.

I moved in with a couple of friends. For a short period of time. About three or four months. And there was a pizza hut in Carrick. Just kind of beside where we lived.

And every day they used to do an all you can eat buffet. I think you paid about six or seven quid. And you could well. Eat all that you wanted. Everything was yours.

[27 : 05] Pizzas were being cooked all the time. Optimistically the salad bar was being refreshed every so often. But everything was yours. And that says Paul is what God has done for us.

He's given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. Everything is ours tonight. We can't want. Anymore. But notice how that's qualified. What does Paul say he has given us? Blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. In the heavenly places.

This is no health and wealth gospel. This is no prosperity gospel. This is no promise of long life and riches on the earth. But it's a promise that every spiritual blessing is ours.

In Christ. If you're here tonight and you're a Christian. If you're here tonight and you're faith in Jesus Christ. It's impossible. It's impossible.

[28 : 15] Impossible. To be any more blessed. Impossible to have anything extra. Not necessarily in this life. We may want. We may lack material things.

But we have every spiritual blessing that we need. We've thought about the beginning. We've thought about the blessing. But then fourth. Thirdly tonight. We want to think about before. Before. And we see that in verse four. Verse four.

Paul's going to go on now to outline some of those spiritual blessings. He's going to remind the church in Ephesus of some of the things that are theirs. And we notice as we come to verse four. That the first thing that Paul outlines is that God has chosen us in Christ. God chose us in Christ.

[29 : 12] Before we're told the foundation of the world. Here we see the doctrine of election in its full force. Don't we? Here we see the doctrine of election in its full scriptural warrant.

If you like. Now we'll be here tonight and you're not quite convinced. You're not quite sure about the doctrine of election. You say, well that doesn't allow me any choice.

That sounds like God imposing something on my will. But can it really be any different? Can it really be anything else?

Let's say for a moment. Let's say for a moment our salvation depends on us choosing God. If that was the case then would God be God?

If that was the case that our salvation depended on us choosing God. Would God be God? There could be people whom God wanted to draw to himself.

[30 : 13] There could be people whom God wanted to save. But in their stubborn rebellious hearts they resisted him. If God is to be God. If God is to be all powerful.

Then election is the only real choice. Maybe then you want to say, well. Well, the doctrine of election removes our zeal.

It removes our urgency for evangelism. If they're saved or saved no matter what. Then what's the point of the carol service? If they're saved or saved no matter what. Then what's the point of running the drop in week by week?

If they're elect they'll get saved. If they're not. Then there's no point telling them about Jesus, is there? And yet that's exactly the point. We don't know who is elect.

But God does. The doctrine of election increases our urgency. It increases our zeal, our passion for evangelism. Because we want to see the full number of the elect reach. Because we want to see all those who are elect brought into the kingdom.

[31 : 15] It is, as Paul says here, that God chose us. Not that we chose him. God chose us before the foundation of the world.

Not based on any foreseen faith. Not because he saw those who would come to faith. But he chose us simply as part of his sovereign plan.

It's tremendously reassuring tonight to know that, isn't it? That our salvation depends not on how strong our grip is of God. But rather depends on how strong his grip is upon us.

I'm crossing the road with my children. What do I do? Do I say to them, well, you can hold my hand if you want. You don't need to look.

You don't need to listen. Just go across. See what happens. No. You take their hand and you lead them across. Their safety is not dependent on how strong their grip is on my hand.

[32 : 25] But on how strong my grip is on theirs. Our salvation depends tonight not on how strong our grip of God is.

But rather how strong his grip is upon us. There's a tremendous comfort for us as Christians in knowing that we have been chosen since before the foundation of the world.

To be a treasured possession of God. And notice what we're chosen for. This is the final thing we notice the scene in at the end of verse 4.

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world. That we should be holy and blameless before him. We're chosen to be set apart to God.

We're chosen to be called to him. We're chosen tonight to be holy and blameless. Now in and of ourselves.

[33 : 29] Of course we're not holy. We're not blameless. We're saints not in and of ourselves. But we're holy and blameless in Christ. The perfect son of God.

Who takes away the sin of the world. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.