

New Life

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[0 : 0 0] So, we're starting a new series in Ephesians, and I'm reading the first chapter of Ephesians, which is always a pleasure.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms of every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will, the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the richness of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And 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 will have reached their fulfillment, to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ.

[1 : 2 4] In him we have also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him, who works everything out in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance and to the redemption of those who are God's possession, the praise of his glory.

For this reason, and there's a lot of reasons there, ever since I've heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks to you, remembering you in my prayers.

I keep asking the Lord of, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may he give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

[2 : 5 4] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Amen. So we're starting a series looking at the book of Ephesians. The first title is New Life.

What is the center of our lives as Christians? We would all answer, I'm sure, that it is Christ. Paul, in this first chapter of Ephesians, concentrates on Jesus Christ, what he has done for us.

Now, this chapter is full of some of the most well-known and quoted parts of the Bible. I'm sure some of you were quoting along with me as I was reading it. And we could spend a whole series on Ephesians looking in depth at this one chapter.

Indeed, Martin Lloyd-Jones preached 37 sermons over a year on this first chapter. And the book of his sermons is over 400 pages long. So there's a lot to cover in my 25 minutes or so.

[4 : 05] But it is so full of so much great news of Jesus. As there is so much to cover in just the first part of this chapter, I will not be looking at the second part of this chapter, which is a shame, because it is one of the most beautiful and powerful prayers ever written.

But there's not time in the time I've got to give it the attention it deserves. And even in this passage we're looking at, verses 1 to 14, I will still be able to touch on some of the major themes that Paul covers here.

And they all relate to the new life we have in Christ Jesus. And this new life refers to the life we have in the realm, in the kingdom, under the lordship and the influence and leadership of Jesus Christ.

Now, when Paul wrote this letter, this particular passage, verses 3 to 14, he was so, so excited about what God had done in Jesus, that it's actually only one sentence in the original Greek.

So when I read verses 3 to 14, I should have taken a deep breath and just read it all out in one breath. He was so excited about what God had done in Jesus. But what does this life in Jesus, this new life in Jesus, consist of?

[5 : 44] So God, Paul addresses it to God's holy people, to God's saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus. Paul is writing to the saints, the people who know Christ in Ephesus.

Now, we do not need to have done remarkable things or perform miracles to be called a saint. We're saints because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross and because we are faithful in Christ Jesus, the sinless one.

That's why we're saints, not because of what we've done, because of what Jesus Christ has done. We read that God has blessed us in the heavenly realm to every spiritual blessing in Christ.

So we are a blessed people. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing which can be found in heaven. So what blessings are these?

They must include the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But also the gifts of the Spirit, which include wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

[6 : 58] But we need to be reminded that these blessings come from God. It is God who has blessed us in Christ Jesus. Again, not anything we have done or we can earn.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. In him we are also chosen and being predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

So we are chosen. You've been chosen. I've been chosen. We are chosen by God in Christ Jesus. The word Paul uses here is the same word used when God spoke of choosing Jesus after the transfiguration.

When the disciples went up and saw Jesus transfigured into this bright person, they could hardly see him. God said, this is my son whom I have chosen.

[8 : 05] The same word. God chose his son to do his work on earth. And God has chosen us in Christ to do his work on earth now.

And this is the very center of our hope. Like Israel in the Old Testament, we are a chosen people. And like Israel, we were not chosen for any good in us.

And Peter was talking about his remembrance of what it was like going to school for the first time. He's got a good memory. But mine's better because I'm older. So it's all right.

But one of the things I can remember at school is we used to pick teams. It might be for football. It might be for cricket.

It might be for catch. It might be for, well, in those days it was kiss chase. I'm not sure they do that anymore. Not that I ever did that.

[9 : 08] But anyway, I lived on a Denmark hill estate, some of you might know. And in the middle of that estate, there's a green. We called it the circle because it was a circle, you know, very prosaic.

And the gang of us used to go up there and play football, jumpers for goalposts, literally. And, again, you used to have two captains.

They used to pick people. And, of course, when you pick people in those days, you picked the fastest, the strongest, those who were skillful, those who could save goals, those quickest, those you know would be good for your team.

And it might be the same if you're picking a team for a quiz night. You want to pick those who are clever. It's those who know things. You want people who don't know things. Well, that is the complete opposite of what God does for us.

He didn't choose us because of anything we are or can do or might do. He chose us because he loved us. And that was the same for Israel.

[10 : 19] Because Israel was not chosen because they were more numerous than other peoples, for they were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved them. So we were chosen before we could do any good or any bad, before the foundation of the world.

So before we could do anything, we were chosen in Christ. In love, he predestined us. It was God's love that chose us. Now, it used to be the case when someone was baptized in this church.

I'm not sure whether it still is. I hope it is. We were given a verse. And the verse I was given when I was baptized, nearly 60 years ago. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit.

John 15, 16. And that has stayed with me ever since I've been baptized. It's helped me through some difficult times, some hard times. Times when I thought, you know, is God there?

But I held on to this truth that God chose me. So he won't let me go. But he didn't choose me just for that.

[11 : 32] He chose me to bear fruit. He chooses you to bear fruit. Fruit that will last. Now, the Jews were chosen not because God just loved them, but to be the bearers of God's promised salvation to the world.

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. God chose the Jews so that the Gentiles might know the God that they worshipped.

But the fruit here that Paul is talking about is that we should be holy and blameless in his sight.

The fruit of living in Christ is to be holy and blameless in God's sight. The word holy has this meaning of being different or separate. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

The Sabbath is different, separate from the other days of the week. The Israelites were to be a holy nation, different and separate from the nations around them. The vessels used in the temple were holy and were separated from the vessels used in daily life.

[12 : 42] Most of all, God is holy. I am the Lord, your God. Concentrate yourself and be holy because I am holy. So as a people of God, as those chosen in Christ Jesus, we should be different to the world in which we live.

The way we speak, the way we live, the way we react to the things of this world and the people in this world. We need to be different. People need to be able to say, look how they love one another.

Look how they love others. But not only different, not only holy, but we should be blameless. Now, that's a bit difficult. None of us are blameless when it comes down to it.

But the word blameless really means unblemished. It's a word relating to sacrifice. There was only an unblemished animal that could be sacrificed to God in the Old Testament.

Then Hebrews, the writer of Hebrews says, how much more then, after talking about all the animals that were sacrificed, he said, how much more then, was the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God.

[13 : 51] It was only an unblemished sacrifice that was acceptable to God. It was only the unblemished son of God that was able to deal with sin. So we have to try to be unblemished, blameless in the sight of God.

And the only way we can do this if we are in Christ Jesus, the only blameless, sinless one. And again, verse 5 makes it clear it was in love and his pleasure and will that God predestined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ.

And verse 11 tells us that it was entirely due to God's purpose and plan. We have been chosen, and this is amazing, to be in a relationship with God through Christ.

God wants his people to be in a relationship through him, through what Jesus Christ has done. And we come to this word predestination, which scares many people, and many preachers shy away from it.

But the word is there in the Bible, and we need to address it, but not today, because we don't have time. It's a whole other sermon. But all I would say is that because we've been predestined by God, we are safe and sure in our salvation.

[15 : 05] Jesus said, I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all.

No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one. Because you've been predestined, because you've been chosen, no one can snatch you out of God the Father or God the Son's hand.

We are safe and secure, whatever Satan may throw at us. And we are predestined to be adopted.

Again, this is about relationship, relationship with God. At the time when Paul wrote this letter, adoption meant becoming part of the family in the same way as the children born to that family were part of that family.

When a Roman family adopted someone, they were completely and utterly in the same way as the blood siblings in that family. So in an amazing way, we are children of God in the same way that Jesus was a child, the Son of God.

[16 : 15] And again, we're not chosen just to sit down doing nothing. We're chosen for a purpose. And this is to praise God for the glorious gifts he's given us, the gifts in particular, his grace, his undeserved love which you have in Christ Jesus.

And to praise God, which you've been doing this morning, for his glory. We read in Revelation, the host in heaven worship God saying, Amen, praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever.

Amen. That is part of our reason for being chosen in Christ is to praise him. In him we have redemption through his blood which is of God's grace that he lavished on us.

So we are redeemed through his grace. We are a redeemed people, a people for whom a price has been paid. For a person to be redeemed for slavery, a price had to be paid to the slave's owner.

The word used here is the same one used for the difference of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The price paid them was the blood of a lamb on the doorpost of the Israelites and the firstborn of the people, the Egyptians.

[17 : 33] For those of us who were slaves to sin, a price had to be paid to redeem us. And as the old hymn says, there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.

He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. It is through the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross of Calvary and only through his blood that we can be redeemed and set free from the life of sin we were in.

Again, it is nothing of us, nothing we can do, nothing we can say, nothing we can bring before God. It is all of God who lavished, made to abound, poured out his grace on us.

God doesn't deal in small things. When he gives us grace, he lavishes it on.

He gives them more than we need, more than the bound poured out. A grace which is sufficient to cover all our sins. And so with all mystery 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 reach their fulfillment to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

[18 : 48] Wisdom here is our thoughts, the knowledge of the most precious things, human and divine. Understanding is practical working out of that wisdom, how we choose what to do or what not to do.

So we need both the wisdom to know what is right and the understanding of how to do what is right. Here mystery is not something that is hard to understand but it's something that has been secret but has now been revealed.

Jesus said, I praise you Father Lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children, revealed them to us. What's this mystery Paul was talking about here?

It is that God will bring unity to everything in heaven and earth under the lordship of Christ. Christ came to bring this unity which is only possible because death and sin have been defeated by Christ on the cross and this is what God purpose is for his purpose in sending his son to earth.

And you are also included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, when you believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance to the redemption of those who are God's possession the praise of his glory.

[20 : 08] We are saved by the gospel and sealed with the spirit. You also were included Paul says. Paul was writing as a Jew who knew that God had chosen his people but Paul was chosen by God to bring the gospel to the Gentiles so he is saying to the Gentile Christians in Ephesus along with the people of God the Jews you have been included in Christ.

We are part of that chosen people of God starting from the beginning of the Bible up to now. But how? How did this happen? How we've included? It's when we heard the gospel the truth of God's love for us in Jesus Christ and when we listened to it and believed it.

The gospel the truth about Jesus and what he has done must be proclaimed as Paul said to the Romans how then can they call on the one they have not believed in and how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard and how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

It doesn't just be me standing up here preaching or other preachers it's all of us have got a purpose to talk that's all it is talk about Jesus and what he has done for us.

And Paul then uses two wonderful pictures of our salvation we are sealed with the Holy Spirit a seal then was used to assure that the person getting the package of where it was had the package to come from where the package to come from and to whom it belonged it was a seal saying this is a true letter from this person and because the seal is there you know it's something you can rely on.

[21 : 54] And so the Holy Spirit is a sign and assurance a seal which shows that we belong to God the Holy Spirit in our hearts and our spirits show that we belong to God not only sealed with the spirit but the spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance the inheritance of the Jews was the land of Canaan and they were set free from slavery to obtain this inheritance they took 40 years before they obtained that inheritance and in all that time they were led by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night assuring them that God was with them and the guarantee that they would get their inheritance in the end.

Now our inheritance is sometimes thought of as heaven but it is a lot more than that. Our inheritance is a new heaven and a new earth in which God and Jesus will be on the throne.

His presence and grace will be throughout the new heaven and earth. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away and the spirit is part of this promised inheritance.

He is God's own presence with these people. He is our guarantee. A guarantee again this means a part payment a deposit of a purchase paid in advance as a guarantee the whole price will be paid in due time.

So we have in the spirit a foretaste of the time when we enter into the fullness of God's blessing. Let's take two main thoughts away from this morning.

[23 : 31] One is about the Trinity. It's been said that the New Testament does not preach the Trinity but you only have to read this passage to be clear that God is three in one. It is God the Father who has blessed us who chose us before the foundation of the world and destined us to be his children.

The same God is the Father of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ and all our blessings are in him. Blessings from God but in Christ. We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit who is our guarantee of blessings to come.

Truly a God who is three in one. But finally in Christ. In Christ is the most important phrase in this passage. It's used about eleven times.

As believers we have this new identity in Christ. A new self-understanding based on this new reality that we are in Christ. And this is in every aspect of life and transform us.

So this passage tells us we are saints in Christ Jesus. We are blessed in Christ Jesus. We are chosen in Christ Jesus. We are adopted in Christ. We are lavished in love in Christ.

[24 : 37] We are redeemed and forgiven in Christ. God's will is revealed in Christ. Everything is centered in Christ. We are part of God's good plan in Christ. In Christ we praise God.

We have an inheritance in Christ. It's no wonder that Paul was so excited when he was writing that he could not draw breath. We too should be just as excited that we are a people in Christ with all that that means and all that that brings.

I pray that you will go in peace and in Christ and show him to the world that needs him of his own. Thank you. Amen. Amen.