

God Gives Life

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[0 : 00] Good. Let's go. Ephesians chapter 1. You should have a black hardcover Bible in front of you there. And if you can turn with me to page 949. We're starting, as Chris and Matt said, a new series in Ephesians tonight.

Nine weeks covering the next couple of months. And I'm very excited about this series because Ephesians has always been one of my favourite books. It's deep. It's rich. And if you're a big picture person like me, it's really the big picture view of what Jesus has done for us.

Scholars have always loved this book. John Calvin, if you know that guy, 500 years ago, Ephesians was his favourite book. So it's a privilege to be able to take you through this. We're going to have a couple of preachers taking you through over the next nine weeks.

And as Matt said, if you want to get involved in a community group, you can go deeper still. You should have a sermon outline as well. If you don't and you want one, there are more out on the table there.

You would have passed on the way through. Thanks, Chris. Get one of those if you want to take notes. So much more than a youth pastor, this guy.

[1 : 23] Alright, so we're at Ephesians chapter 1. And before we get into it, I'd like to pray for us. So let's bow our heads and we'll get stuck in. Dear Lord, thank you so much for the book of Ephesians.

Thanks that over the next nine weeks, God willing, we will make our journey through the book. I pray that you would encourage us through this time to trust Jesus, to love him, to know him better. I pray that if there are people here who don't know you, aren't trusting in you, don't know what it is to be redeemed and saved and forgiven by the blood of Jesus, that they would come to you, even tonight.

I pray that you do this by the power of your spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Alright, so let's start at verse 1. We're just going to go verse by verse through 14 verses here to see what God's got for us. So let's go to verse 1 and 2. Paul writes this, So just a little bit of background here.

[2 : 41] We see here that Paul wrote this letter. He wrote much of the New Testament. He was an apostle writing to the churches in Ephesus. It's a region in Asia Minor. And there's a group of churches there that he's writing to, just to encourage them.

And the thing about Ephesians is, as I've said before and I'm going to keep saying, is it's really a big picture view of what Jesus has done. This is where Paul talks about the cosmic effects of Jesus' death on the cross.

So it's a massive, big picture view. The camera really pulls out and Paul dives in. And he talks about practical things in this letter like marriage and work and stuff like that.

But his main point he wants to get across is the big picture view of what Christ has done. And what I'm going to be saying week by week is that this book is really about grace.

It's about grace. It's about how God lavishes his grace on us, as he'll say in this passage tonight. It's about how God saves us, not because there's anything good in us, but because he is good.

[3 : 48] Because he is loving. That's why he saves us. This book is all about grace. Another word for grace is gift. And so we're going to see how God gives gifts right throughout this book.

We're going to see how he gives life, hope, grace, power, unity, light, roles, strength. And he gives them to all people. He doesn't just give them to Jews. He doesn't just give them to people of a certain nationality, a certain socioeconomic status, a certain gender.

God gives these things to all people who trust in Jesus for their salvation. If you want to go a little bit deeper in terms of background, theme, authorship, purpose of the writing of this book and so on, I'm going to recommend this book to you.

It's called The Letter to the Ephesians, funnily enough. It's a commentary. It's by Peter O'Brien. I think this is really good. It's not too weighty. It's not too complex.

If you don't like books this thick, you can get one of the paperback commentaries on Ephesians, like Tyndale or one of those, the Bible Speaks Today series. They're all good too.

[4 : 52] So get yourself one of these. It'll be worth it for the next nine weeks. As we look into Ephesians as well, if you join a community group, we go into a little bit more of the background and introduction and that kind of thing.

But the big idea is that this book is about grace, about God's grace to us. So it's really appropriate then that Paul starts his letter in the introduction by saying, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the big idea. Let's keep going through verse 3. He says, 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.

What do you think about blessing? What does it mean when someone says, God bless you? I'm feeling very blessed at the moment. I've just had a week off.

The last week I went away with Renee. It's my wife sitting there in the fifth row. And we went away. We took a week off together. And we got friends who have a house in Lawn.

[5 : 58] And so we went down there and just enjoyed a week away. And just, I mean, it was brilliant. Actually, the sun was shining down there for some reason. It's in some kind of other dimension.

But there was some sun there. And so we were at the beach. We were on these long hikes up. There's waterfalls up in the hills and forests, National Park. We ate heaps of food, like big breakfasts.

And it was just a beautiful, beautiful time away. And so I regularly, during that time away, thought, I'm a blessed man. Big breakfast and a wife.

And expecting a child soon, all the more reason to feel blessed, right? People say, count your blessings. And it's a good idea for us to think about how God has blessed us.

And they're all great things. Hiking and eating and wives. They're all good things. But seriously, the real blessings, Paul is going to tell us, the real blessings are the big picture cosmic blessings of redemption and forgiveness and grace.

[7 : 10] They're the blessings he's going to talk about tonight. We're going to hear about how we are forgiven of all our trespasses. That's another word for sins. All that keeps us away from God and from each other.

We are forgiven of that through the blood of Jesus that was shed on the cross for us. And so as Paul kind of pulls the camera back and looks at the big picture, he reveals to us what it is to be truly blessed.

If I asked you how you've been blessed in your life or your experience of blessing, you'd probably think back to the start of your life, your earliest memories, those kinds of things.

But Paul wants to go so much bigger than that. So we're going to look tonight at blessings in your past, present and future. But it's not about the beginning of your life to the end of your life. It's about eternity past and eternity future.

So that's where we're going to go now. If you turn over to verse 4. We're looking at blessings in the past. We'll go verse 4 to verse 6.

[8 : 17] He says, Just as God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love, he destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the beloved.

This is the doctrine of unconditional election. This is one of our big words that we learnt last year. If you're here for the Salvation Series, I know we've got a bunch of visitors here. You can get it online if you want to get the sermons from the Salvation Series of last year.

But we talked about this unconditional election. In other words, Paul is saying that you were saved. If you're a Christian here tonight, you were saved not because you're a good person or because God saw something particularly special in you, but actually you were saved before the foundation of the world, before you could do anything good or bad.

God chose for himself a people. That's called election. He chose who would be saved and he did it before anything existed. We saw in that series that there's another view called conditional election or foreknowledge and that says that God looked forward into history.

He saw that you were going to love him and so he loved you back. But we know that that's not what the Bible says. The Bible says that we love God because he loved us first. And this passage clearly says that before there was anything, God chose to love us.

[9 : 49] He chose to save us. You need to use your imagination in this, right? Because you need to be able to imagine a time when nothing existed. So before we were in Genesis, for that second Bible reading, before Genesis, before the creation of the world, before there was anything, right?

And you think about it, there wasn't even blackness because blackness didn't exist. So you're going to start having to do some serious mind work, more than I can do to imagine this. But before anything existed, God existed, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

He existed with himself. Perfect relationship. He didn't need us. He didn't need to do any creating. He was perfectly happy as he was. But he decided to create the world and everything in it.

But before then, he had you in mind. Before he created, he determined to save people for himself. That's called unconditional election.

It says it here, verse 4, Before the foundation of the world, we were destined to be saved. Now this is a troubling thought for a lot of people, right?

[10 : 59] Like I love this. If you've been around for more than about a week, you'll know that I love this doctrine of election. I just think it's the sweetest doctrine. But not everyone does. And when I first heard it, I hated it.

Do you think about, you know, the fact that I didn't determine my own salvation?

That hurts. Think about the fact that God, irrespective of whether someone's good or bad, chooses to save someone and not someone else. That makes him seem cold.

It makes him seem distant. Some people have accused God of being like a puppeteer because of this doctrine, right? But that's not what Paul expects us to think when we hear about this doctrine. Check it out. Two reasons why he wants us to hear about this and love God more and praise God more and feel warmed by this. Verse 5, He destined us, he predestined us, he chose us for adoption as his children.

[11 : 59] The better translation, by the way, doesn't put the verse split of verse 5 between love and he destined.

So I reckon the better way to read it is this. In love, he destined us for adoption as his children. In love. Not because he's cold, not because he's a dictator, but in love.

He destined us for what? For adoption as his children. Think about what adoption means. My sister, my younger sister, is adopted. My parents adopted her from South Korea.

She was five months old. She was in an orphanage in Seoul. And they went over there and they adopted her and they brought her back. And for the last 21 years, she's lived with us as a member of our family just as much as anyone else.

And she will tell you the greatest expression of love in her experience is the fact that my parents did that. That they adopted her into our family.

[13 : 03] It's a beautiful thing to do. It's a loving thing to do. To be adopted. To be saved out of a wretched situation into a situation of love and salvation. He adopted us as his children.

That's a beautiful thing to do. Another reason. Paul says we ought to respond with praise. You go down to verse 6. He says all these things happen.

This predestination. This election. Saving us before we could do anything good and anything to deserve it. To the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the beloved in Christ. So he did all these things. To the praise of his glorious grace. It's grace. We don't do anything to deserve it. He does it for us. Before the foundation of the world.

Before you were born. He does it because he loves you unconditionally. And it's not based on anything you could ever do. It's unconditional election. It's unconditional grace.

[14 : 02] Praise. And Paul says our response should be praise. Verse 3 he said blessed be God. It's another way of saying praise God that these things have happened.

To bless God is to speak well of him. And so Paul wants us to hear this doctrine. And maybe you respond like I did by reacting against it and hating it. But he wants the process to be as we understand what it means to be elected by God.

That it should cause us to praise him for his mercy and his grace. You might say yeah that's great. Excellent. Unconditional election happened before the foundation of the world. What's God doing now? What can I hang on to now?

Is God just like the God of deism who starts things off as a process. And then leaves. And leaves us up to our own devices. You see that cold sort of distant God.

[15:07] Well we know that that's not who God is. And we see in this next section that he has plans and gifts and graces for us in the present. So let's start with verse 7 and 8.

He says in him. In Jesus. We have redemption. Through his blood. The forgiveness of our trespasses or sins.

According to the riches of his grace. That he lavished on us. This is what we have in the present. That's why it says in him we have. That's present tense.

We have what? We have redemption. You know what redemption means? We don't really use the term anymore. But to be redeemed means that you are released. You are liberated from being a prisoner.

Or being in a bondage. Or being a slave. We learn in Ephesians that in our own self we are dead.

[16:07] In our trespasses and sins. That we are under bondage and slavery to sin. But this passage says we have redemption through his blood.

Jesus died on the cross. He shed his blood. He was killed, murdered, executed for our sins. God died on the cross.

To save us from our sin. So that we would be redeemed through his blood. What happens? The forgiveness of our trespasses happens.

And this is all of our sins. Past, present, future. When Jesus died. Because you were predestined for salvation. Because you were redeemed before the foundations of the world.

You were saved from all of your sins. Past, present and future. That's what the blood of Jesus does. It redeems us.

[17:03] It saves us. According to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. God isn't stingy with his grace. He doesn't give you a little bit of forgiveness.

And then ask you to say certain prayers. Or you know. Do certain acts in order to be saved. Or forgiven from then on. No, he lavishes his grace on us.

That's in verse 8. In the past, we were saved. We were redeemed. We were elected. In the present, we have redemption.

Forgiveness of our sins. But there's more to it. Keep going through the verses. We'll go to verse 8b. In addition to redemption.

Forgiveness of sins. Paul says, With all wisdom and insight. God has made known to us the mystery of his will. According to his good pleasure. That he set forth in Christ.

[18:02] As a plan for the fullness of time. To gather up all things in him. Things in heaven. And things on earth. In addition to receiving redemption.

We also get to know the mystery of the will of God. God reveals to us. Makes known to us the mystery of his will.

So, we've just had a series on Jonah. The series before that was on God's will. And the big idea was that I said, God has a will of decree.

Whereby he says that things will happen. And that cannot be changed. That's his big picture will. He works all things in accordance with his will. And he also has a will of desire.

That's what we read in God's word. So, that's the commandments that we find in God's word. That's the way we ought to live. And he wants us to be obedient to that. And then we got to the one that we were really hoping to get to.

[19:01] And that was God's will for your life. In your situation. What job you should have. Who you should marry. And I said, God's not going to tell you that. Most probably. He wants you to trust in his big picture will.

He wants you to obey his will in the Bible. And then he wants you to live by faith and not by sight. He's probably not going to tell you his specific will for your life. And here we're talking about the big picture will of God.

This is the mystery of his will that has been made known to us. What is it? What is God on about? For us to ask you that question. What is God's main aim in everything he does?

What's his main aim in creating the world? What's his main aim in electing people for salvation? What's his main aim in sending Jesus?

What's his main aim in giving us bacon and eggs? What's his main aim in everything he does? His glory.

[20 : 05] Thanks for us. That's exactly right. His glory. And more specifically, Jesus' glory.

That's what God is on about. If you've been to another church or read a book where they tried to tell you that God's main aim in life was to make you feel good. You got it wrong. You got it wrong. God does love you. God does care for you. God created you. He knits you together in your mother's womb. He cares about you more than anyone else could. But his main aim in everything is to glorify Jesus.

Pick it up in verse 10. What's the plan? A plan for the fullness of time to gather up all things in Jesus. Jesus. Things in heaven and things on earth.

That's the big picture. Ephesians. Big picture kind of book. And we get to the biggest picture of all God's will. In everything he does is to make Jesus look great.

[21 : 06] And to bring all things together in him. Things in heaven and things on earth. That's what he's on about. He wants to reconcile all the rubbish of this earth.

He wants to make everything right again. He wants to take away all sin. He wants to take pain and death and crying and sickness away.

And he wants to make all things new in Jesus. To gather up all things in him. Things in heaven and things on earth. You're going to see throughout Ephesians that Paul has this idea where the earth is one sphere and heaven is another sphere.

And while heaven is ruled by Jesus in perfection. Earth is often ruled by Satan and demons and wicked and evil men. And his, Christ, God's main aim is to bring all those things together into perfection under Jesus.

And it starts now and it finishes when God comes to make all things right again. I want to read you what that looks like.

[22 : 14] What does it look like for all things to be gathered up in Christ? Things on heaven, on earth and things in heaven. You don't have to go there but I'm going to read Revelation 21.

Just a few verses. This is looking for, this is a vision of the world that is to come when God makes all things right.

He said, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming out of heaven from God.

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming out of heaven from heaven from heaven from heaven.

So that we might spend eternity worshipping him with one another. Reconciled to one another. Heaven and earth will be no more as they were separated.

[23 : 35] But they will be new. All things will be redeemed. And that's God's big idea. That's why God's doing everything that he's doing.

So, in the past, God saved us unconditionally. He elected before the foundations of the world everyone who would be saved. In the present, we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins by the blood of Jesus.

We also get to know the mystery of God's will. That is his will to bring everything, all peoples, under Christ. And so we look to the future when that will happen.

And this passage has got something to say about the future as well. So let's wrap it up with that. We'll go to verse 11 right through to the end, verse 14. He says, In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things, according to his counsel and will, so that we who were first to set our hope in Christ might live for the praise of his glory.

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.

[24 : 57] This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people to the praise of his glory. We look forward to the future.

I wonder if you've ever thought about the inheritance that you will receive when your parents cark it.

It's a little bit awkward, isn't it? Think about the inheritance that you'll receive when your parents die, because they need to die before you can get it, right?

It's part of the reason why the prodigal son, you know, the father and the prodigal son, were so offended when his son asked for his inheritance. It's another way of saying, I wish you were dead. I wish we could just fast track to when you were dead and I could get the money.

So it's a little bit awkward. I mean, I've thought about it. But it is awkward. Here we're encouraged to think about our inheritance.

[26 : 00] You know why? You know why it's not awkward? Because your parents don't need to die for you to get it. You need to die. Either you need to die or Jesus needs to come back for you to get this inheritance.

It's the inheritance that you'll receive when you walk onto the shores of heaven and meet God in the flesh. You'll receive the reward that you're due for trusting in Jesus through thick and thin.

And part of that reward is simply the reward of being with him. No more crying. No more tears. No more pain. All things have been gathered up into Christ.

New heavens. New earth. That's our inheritance. And Paul says, think about your inheritance.

There's a couple of reasons why you should think about it and why you should be encouraged not to doubt your inheritance.

If you look at verse 13. It says, in him, in Christ, you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

[27 : 05] So when you heard the gospel, Jesus died for your sins. And he responded and said, yes, I trust in Jesus to forgive me for my sins. When that happened, when you believed in him, you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.

So when you become a Christian, you receive the Holy Spirit. He dwells within you. And he says, he is the seal of your inheritance. It's like a guarantee.

That if you've got the Holy Spirit, that's a guarantee that you will receive your inheritance. You will go to heaven. You will spend eternity with God in perfection.

That's the seal. And he goes on even further. You're marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. This is the pledge. It's the seal. It's the pledge of your inheritance toward redemption as Christ's own people to the praise of his glory.

Paul says, if you're a Christian, you shouldn't doubt that you will spend eternity with God in heaven. He will say that you need to do a daily, day by day, perseverance, you know, reading your Bible, praying, asking God to make you more like Jesus, turning away from sin.

[28 : 22] That's not just a passive thing. You need to work out your salvation with fear and trembling day by day. But he says, if you've got the Holy Spirit, that's your pledge. That's your seal.

That's your guarantee of this inheritance that's far more valuable than the five grand your parents are going to leave you after they've spent it all on trips going around the world. It's far more valuable than that.

It's your inheritance. It's your eternal life. So you work backwards. You receive eternal life. Why is that?

Because you accepted the grace of God and the redemption, forgiveness of your sins. It's not that you didn't make a decision. Don't hear me say that. Predestination isn't taking the decision away from you.

Everyone in this room, if you're a Christian, said, yes, I want to follow Jesus. You made that decision. And you received redemption, the forgiveness of your sins by the blood of Jesus.

[29 : 29] God made the mystery of his will known to you that everything is about Jesus. Now, why did that happen? You move back further. Before the foundations of the earth, God chose you.

He adopted you as his son or his daughter, as part of his family. That's the big picture of your life.

Let me just say a word to you tonight, if you're not a Christian.

We've got a lot of visitors here tonight. It's great to see you, by the way. I don't know if you're a Christian or you're not. But God's word in the Bible tells us that all of us, apart from Jesus, have one destiny.

And that is not one of being made new and redeemed and experiencing new life in new heavens and new earth. That is rather a destiny of being separated from God's love, separated from God's favour, under God's judgement, separated from all love.

And so, the continuum of your life looks very different. You don't accept Jesus, you don't have redemption. You don't have forgiveness of sins in this life.

[30 : 48] You don't accept Jesus, you will not experience love, joy, peace, redemption in the life to come. And so, here at the church, every week, we want to be telling you, imploring you, begging you to put your trust in Jesus.

He is the only way that you will experience this kind of redemption. Many of you are hurting. Many of you have experienced great sin in your life. Many of you feel dirty, rejected. Many of you have experienced that God promises redemption, forgiveness of sin, cleansing. And He promises one day to make all things new.

To wipe away every tear. To cure every disease. So, I want to invite you to come, just like I did. To come, just as many of you have, to Jesus. The redemption of your life away from sin. For the forgiveness of your sins by His blood.

[31 : 55] And for the promise of the inheritance that you will receive when He returns or when you die. Eternal life with Him. If you want to know more.

If you want to discuss it, debate, argue. Please join the Introducing God course Thursday nights. Speak to me. Speak to someone you've seen up here tonight. We'll plug you into that.

If you just want to talk tonight. If you want to pray. If you want to accept Jesus. If you want to live for Him. If you want to experience the redemption of your sins. Of your life and the forgiveness of your sins. Then please see one of us.

We'll pray with you. I want to pray for us all now. So, let's bow our heads. Father, thanks again for this great news. It is the best news.

That we have an inheritance. That is better than any earthly inheritance that we could ever have.

[32 : 52] That we have a blessing today that's far better than any blessing of food and rest and holidays. We have the forgiveness of our sins. That we have the assurance that you have been working for our redemption before the foundation of the world.

And you promise to see everything out to the end. Where all things will be made right. So, God, please do the miracle that you've been doing in so many hearts here.

To save us. To save us. To save us. To redeem us. I thank you for the promise. That you will never turn away anyone who comes to you.

Looking for forgiveness and redemption. That you will never reject anyone. So, we thank you for this book about grace.

We pray that you continue to bless us as we learn more over the next nine weeks. We pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. We are going to stand and sing a song when I survey the wondrous cross.

[34 : 13] And it's a great...