

God's Rescue Plan

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Date: 28 July 2013

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to start our series in Ephesians today, so keep your Bibles open to Paul's letter. It's really encouraging, actually, because I didn't plan this, but as we've started Ephesians, so have the youth group been looking at that passage, that letter, and I hear that Adam's group has also started looking at that first chapter.

So it's great. That's probably some of you who are hearing this passage for the second or third time this week. And so hopefully that gives us a chance for God's spirit to let it sink in. But let me pray for the rest of us.

Let me pray for all of us, including those who have heard it two or three times. Father, we thank you for your word, and we know that there are great riches in the letter to the Ephesians, and we just pray that we might be able to take away something of that tonight by the power of your spirit and for the glory of your Son.

Amen. Amen. As well, there's a little handout to help you follow along. So let me ask you, who do you think are the most blessed people in the world?

Who comes to mind? So perhaps you might think of Ashton Agar, Australia's newest cricketing sensation, only 19 years old, but the world's greatest number 11 batsman.

[1 : 24] Maybe it's Jennifer Hawkins, former Miss Universe, blessed with natural beauty.

Or George, George Alexander Louis, to be precise, the new prince of Cambridge, born to a life of luxury and comfort.

Well, as we look at tonight's passage, I think we'll come to see that these are not the most blessed people in the world. The rich, the powerful in this world aren't the most blessed.

Instead, those who believe in Jesus are. Now, I know some of you already know that. But then the question is, how much do you live by that?

Well, right at the start of his letter, immediately after Paul tells the Ephesians who he is, that is, that he has the authority as Christ's apostle to speak on God's behalf, Paul makes this very claim in verse 3.

[2 : 25] He says, Praise, or blessed be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

So, three times in one verse, Paul tells us that we, those whose Lord is Jesus Christ, are blessed. And then he spends the next 11 verses up to verse 14 telling us why.

It's one long sentence, 202 words in all, and he doesn't stop until he gets to verse 14. In fact, he keeps going because he then unpacks this prayer of praise in the rest of the first three chapters of Ephesians.

And so we'll see that over the next three weeks. But for now, let's return to chapter 1. And let's concentrate mainly on the first 14 verses tonight. Where having made his extraordinary claim in verse 3, Paul then proceeds to pile on one reason after another for this great claim.

And trying to overwhelm us with the glory of this truth. Last year, my family went to the Gold Coast for holidays. And if you've been there, you would have seen one of these huge water buckets dangling over the play equipment.

[3 : 42] The water pulls in slowly. And then when it reaches sort of a tipping point, what happens is that it goes whoosh. And the bucket tips.

And the water rushes out. A bit like that. And drenching the kids from head to toe. Now, Emma, my daughter, loves it. Lauren, not so much so.

She loves getting swept off her feet. Well, friends, this is what it's like tonight to stand under these verses. Paul wants us to be drenched in God's blessing.

To be whooshed by its greatness. And swept away by God's love. And so I want to follow Paul under three headings tonight. Three groups of blessings, if you will. And the first blessing Paul mentions is that God chose us before time. Chose us and adopted us to sonship. So when Paul says we are blessed in the heavenly realms, he doesn't mean that our blessing is in heaven only and not on earth.

[4 : 44] By heavenly, Paul means cosmic, beyond time and space, way bigger than us, much greater or much longer than our short life on this earth.

Our blessings stretch from eternity to eternity. So in verse 4, at one end of human history, God chose us in him before the creation of the world.

And in love, verse 5, predestined us for adoption to sonship. Chose, predestined, both those words mean God deciding beforehand to bless us, before time.

So long before the world began, before that very first day in history, we were already in God's mind. More than that, we were in God's love. God's love predestined for adoption as sons.

Now, a son just means an heir. So whether you're male or female, God chose us in Christ to share in his inheritance. To be, if you like, royalty in heaven.

[5 : 46] So look to the heavenly realms. Because our blessings aren't found in the stuff we have. Not the size of our bank balances, not our job titles, or our achievements, or the luxury of our lifestyles.

None of those things that the world looks to. God has bigger blessings for us. Not in the stuff we have, but in our status before God.

We're his heirs. And as heirs to his kingdom, we're also called to be holy and blameless in his sight. To be like him, pure and perfect in character and conduct.

So that we might live to the praise of his glorious grace. So three times in verse 6, 12, and 14, that's what Paul says. Paul repeats what God's ultimate aim for us is.

To praise his glory, both in word and deed. But that's a problem, isn't it? Because none of us are blameless or holy.

[6 : 48] Far from it. And in fact, the harder we try, we don't even come close to that mark. Which is why, having chosen us before time, next, God also redeemed us in time.

He redeemed and forgave us, buying us back from our rebellion. So we should have deserved death for our sin, but it was Christ's blood that was shed instead.

2,000 years ago on the cross. And so, if you look in verse 7, Paul says, In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

Now, every time I hear the word lavish, I think of chocolate sauce over ice cream. So much chocolate, you can't see the ice cream. Well, that's how God lavishes his grace on us.

More than we dream or deserve. But at great cost to himself. My former pastor in Campbell used to define grace like this. So we have the five letters, G-R-A-C-E.

[7 : 58] He says, Grace is God's riches at Christ's expense. And so Paul says that in verse 6, that God's grace is freely given to us in the one he loves.

Freely, willingly, not grudgingly. And he gives us his best, the one he loves, his only son.

Death and suffering for him, the one he loves, so that we might have forgiveness. Our debt paid, not because we deserve it, but as a gift when we put our trust in him.

Which is why over and over, Paul qualifies all our blessings with the phrase, in him or in Christ. We are blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Verse 4, we are chosen in him. Verse 5, we have adoption to sonship, not in but through Jesus Christ. Then in verse 7, in him we have redemption. Verse 9, God's purpose is achieved in Christ.

[9 : 01] Verse 11, in him we were also chosen. And verse 13, when you believe, you were marked in him with a seal. For it's only in Christ that we are blessed.

It says, blessed be the Father and God of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father blesses those whose Lord is Jesus. So that's the second blessing.

And having redeemed and forgiven us, thirdly, God now makes us his possession. This is the third group of blessings. And it's set out in verses 11 to 14.

Now the two verbs Paul uses here are allotted and sealed. But you're not going to find the word allotted in our reading tonight because the NIV in verse 11 translates it as chosen.

But this is not a repeat of verse 4 and 5, I don't think. The choosing here in verse 11 is actually different. Here the idea is more of a choice made by lot.

[10:01] So the idea in these verses is this. Those who are chosen in verse 4 and those who are forgiven in verse 7 become God's possession in verse 11.

But how that occurs is different for the Jew and for the Gentile. Each become part of God's people in a different way. So in verses 11 and 12, the we refers to the Jewish believers.

Paul himself, the apostles, and others like them. So out of all the nations in the world, the Jewish people were chosen by lot before Christ.

They were God's special possession or portion, even though they were still separated from God by sin. And it's from the Jews that the Messiah would come. And God has already made known of this to them in the Old Testament, even though its full meaning remained hidden from them.

This is the mystery of his will that Paul talks about in verse 9 and the purpose of his will in verse 11. They had the clues, but not the solution. But when Christ came, the solution was revealed to them.

[11:10] So that verse 12, those Jews became the first to hope in Christ. On the other hand, the you in verses 13 and 14 are the Ephesians who were mainly Gentile believers.

They had neither the clue nor the solution, but both had to be revealed to them together when they heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation. After which, when they believe, they were marked in him with a seal.

That is the promised Holy Spirit. That identifies them as God's possession also. So some people compare this seal as to branding, not the brands that you have at the back of your pants, but like cattle farmers putting their mark of ownership on their cattle.

So God's Spirit, as it were, brands us as God's possessions. But Paul also talks about the Spirit as a deposit because the Spirit assures us of much more in the future.

He is an installment, a down payment. And as verse 14 says, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory.

[12:23] So we experience God and his blessings now, but it's only a small measure of the never-ending experience of God we will enjoy in eternity. So imagine living in God's presence at that time without any sin, nothing to be ashamed of, no doubt as to who we are, no fear, no sadness.

That's what it's going to be like. Now, don't misunderstand Paul. He's not saying that only the Gentiles have the Spirit, but the Jews don't.

If you look at the verse, the Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance, meaning both Jews and Gentiles have the same Spirit. Both were alienated from God, separated by sin, but in Christ, both Jew and Gentile are now God's special possession.

The Jews first by allotment, then the Gentiles by the seal of the Spirit. About 11 years ago, Alyssa and I were actually living in London during the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

For those of you who are not royal tragics, that's 50 years on the throne. And so London put on a grand party, and Alyssa and I went down to the mall early, that's Paul Mall, or Pall Mall, whatever, early to secure a good position.

[13:45] We had to wait about five hours, but we didn't mind. And during that time, well, things happened, but some minor roles came for a walkabout. They turned right instead of left, and so missed the privilege of shaking our hands.

Anyway, there was great excitement and buzz, you know, marching bands, flotillas, and Her Majesty in her royal golden carriage. And then finally, the fly passed over Buckingham Palace. It was a great time, and everyone was proud to be British, British, even me. And I still look just as young. Hundreds and thousands of people had a great time that day, and, but if you stop to think about it, and all that money and effort that was being put into the celebrations, I wouldn't put in for people like me, plebs like me.

It was really only to honor one person, and that's the Queen. Friends, we might be tempted to think that with all these blessings, that the focus of God's attention is us.

Well, in one sense, yes, but not quite. We may be blessed with every spiritual blessing from eternity to eternity, but the center of God's purpose actually does not lie with us.

[15:08] Paul spells this out in verse 9 and 10, which we skipped over briefly just then, and then again at the end of his prayer in verses 22 and 23. And so Paul says in verse 9 that with all wisdom and understanding, God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure,

which he purposed in Christ.

And what is that purpose? Verse 10, to put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth, under Christ.

And so God's aim is to bring all things to sum everything up in creation under Christ. When the times reach their fulfillment, all things will come under Christ.

That is God's main purpose. Christ is, not us. And so the psalm we read tonight points to this very purpose. It says in verse 7, when the Father promises his son, you are my son, today I have become your father.

Ask me and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of your earth your possession. So all throughout history, even in the Old Testament, God had already been preparing that all things will be brought under Christ.

[16:28] We are not the center of God's purpose in this world. Christ is. But our blessings in Christ are a key part of this purpose. And that brings us to our second part of God's master plan.

And that is, Christ is the head, but the church is his body. That is, Christ rules over all creation, but his riches are found only in his church.

God's blessings come to us only when we are part of his body. You see, there are only two ways to come under Christ's rule, either in blessing as part of his church or else in judgment.

And so we may see people living today without Christ, enjoying themselves, having a good life, but this is only a brief period of grace to allow people to repent and believe in Christ.

And so when we jump to the end of the chapter in verses 22 and 23, that is the thrust of Paul's words. God placed all things under Christ's feet and appoints him head over everything, but it is for the church, his body.

[17:40] When God's love for his son overflows into this world, it fills the church, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Now by church, Paul is not talking about the buildings. He's not even talking about the people that attend church. The church that God is talking about is the spiritual gathering of all who are in Christ, those who have heard the word and believed, those who have put their hope in Christ.

And so these are the people Paul keeps thanking God for in verse 15. For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

here are the most blessed people in the world, God's church, living under Christ's rule. So friends, if you have not put your hope in Christ tonight, then please do.

There is no other way to find blessing. Now is your window of opportunity. And if you have any questions after the service, please come and talk to me or one of the leaders who will be down the front after the service.

[18:55] on the overhead, I have a picture of a jigsaw I made. It's a thousand pieces. It's a castle in France. I think it's Chambord, I think. And in my hands, I have one single piece from that jigsaw.

Now the picture is actually, the actual picture and what it is is actually irrelevant. But the question I have is this. If you believe that you are blessed in Jesus, how are you living your life?

Do you live your life like this single piece of jigsaw, part of God's master plan, the entire jigsaw? Or is your life the entire jigsaw and you are somehow trying to fit this single piece, God, into your life? Is your life so full of your own ambitions and priorities and desires, so chock-a-block with what you want and somehow you want God to fit into all that?

Well, let me just say, as we've read tonight, it doesn't work. Do you see what Paul prays in verse 17? After he thanks God for their faith, he then goes on to ask that their lives be shaped more and more by God's plan.

[20:14] So verse 17, I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation. For what purpose? Two things.

First, to know God better. And then second, in verse 18, to know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people and the incomparably great power for us who believe.

Paul wants them to be plugged into God's master plan to align their life with what God is doing in this world. And not just to know the blessings in theory, but to live it out.

To know that same power which raised Jesus from the dead and that is at work in us who are in Christ. So as we go through Ephesians, we'll see a bit more about what that means in practice.

But tonight, we need to resolve this. Are we going to stop, if we haven't already, stuffing around with our own master plans and get on board with God's master plan?

[21 : 24] Friends, God has only one goal in history and that is to put all things in heaven and on earth under Christ's rule. That is his master plan.

But we get to choose. Either we come under Christ's rule in his church and live out every spiritual blessing in Christ. Or else, be brought under his rule one day without Christ, without hope, without grace or blessing.

If you ask me, it's a no-brainer. But what will each of us choose? Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you have glorified your son and that you have appointed him over all things both in heaven and on earth, not only in this age but in the ages to come.

And we thank you that you, by your grace, have given us the chance to be his body and to enjoy that overflow of your love in blessing and in riches to our lives.

So, Lord, we ask you that, as Paul has prayed, that we might know you better. That we might know of the great hope that you have called us to, the glorious inheritance that awaits us.

[22 : 58] And that we might know each day the power that comes, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, that incredibly great power for us to believe.

Amen.