

God's extraordinary guarantee

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Preacher: Rev Dr Paul Gardner

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Long-time friends in the ministry. What a joy it is to minister and to speak of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you can't hear me, raise your hand at the back.

You can hear me all right? That's always good. Sometimes people are too afraid to say, you know what, I didn't hear a word you were saying. And you need to speak up if that happens.

Let's begin with a word of prayer, shall we? Lord, we thank you so much that we are your children. As we saw last night, that we are in Christ with all these amazing privileges.

That we are adopted as sons and daughters in Christ. Your sons and daughters. Father, we thank you that we are loved in Christ by our Heavenly Father.

[1 : 24] And Father, we pray that you will open our eyes to see still more wondrous things today as we continue to look at your word. For we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Well, last night we were talking about the amazing kindness of God. And one of the things, which I won't repeat this morning, but one of the things I did was just to read through those first 13 verses very, very quickly.

Skipping some of the words just to show that repeatedly Paul keeps coming back and he says, in Christ, in Christ, in Christ, in Christ, in whom?

In the one who is loved, in Christ. And we talked about what it is to be in Christ. That Christ represents us. That we are as God's people sort of summed up in our King.

In King Jesus. What is true, this staggering truth, that what is true of him, because we are in him, is therefore true of us. So he is the Son of God.

[2 : 31] We are God's adopted sons and daughters. He is loved by God. So we are loved by God. He has died.

So Paul, the Apostle, says, we have died with Christ. He has been raised from the dead. So we have been raised. And then staggeringly, because we don't feel it at the moment.

But in chapter 2, he says, we are seated in the heavenly places. And we said last night, we don't feel that, do we? And yet, he says, we are. He doesn't say we will be.

He says, we are. Why? Because we are in Christ. We are represented by Christ. Christ. Right there in the Father's throne room. And we have been talking about these glorious blessings that just bubble off Paul's, well, I was going to say tongue, but off his pen or his scribe's pen or whatever.

I think almost certainly most of the time it seems that Paul used a scribe. And I can't imagine keeping up with Paul as he wrote this long sentence that in Greek is just a sentence that runs through from verse 3 to verse 13 nonstop.

[3 : 49] Because he's excited about these great truths of what it is to be God's people, to be in Christ. So we looked at some of that.

But what I want to do today is to talk briefly about another extraordinary privilege that is ours in Christ. And I hope at the end of this session there will be a bit of spare time for some questions.

As Christians, Paul says, we have the Holy Spirit. We have the Holy Spirit. So turn to verses 13 and 14.

Because Paul is still thinking about the blessings we have in Christ. Not just for now, but for the future as well. So look at those verses.

So what is the Spirit's work here that captures Paul's attention?

[5 : 07] Another of these great blessings that we have in Christ. Well, let's start at the end of verse 14 there.

The Spirit guarantees future redemption. You'll see my points laid out in the sheets in the booklet if you look for that. When each of us became a Christian, Paul has been saying that we experienced redemption in Christ.

So we could be a holy people and a light to the world. We saw that last night. This happened as Christ died on the cross for us.

But it's a present reality in our lives. And that's what Paul is talking about as he goes through these verses. We are freed from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of Christ.

The kingdom of light. But more than that, Paul says, the Holy Spirit guarantees that at the future day, when Christ returns, when the world will be judged by the perfectly just judge, the Holy Spirit guarantees that we will be seen to be redeemed.

[6 : 27] We can talk about we are redeemed. But in a way that is reading forward into our experience now, what in fact is made clear to the whole world on that last day.

And Paul says it is the Holy Spirit who comes to us now, who enables us to say we are redeemed, because he guarantees that future redemption.

That when Christ comes, we will have no fear, no concern. Because in Christ, we are represented by him.

You know this as gospel teaching, don't you? But there's that wonderful picture that when God looks on us on that final day, he sees Christ.

Because we're in Christ. In Christ. So we don't fear judgment. Christ has paid for that judgment when he died on the cross.

[7 : 41] We don't fear it. Christ has been raised. We are raised with Christ. Eventually on that last day, the Holy Spirit guarantees that we will be raised forever.

To be like Jesus. And to walk and talk on an earth. Seeing Christ face to face, the Bible says, in a new earth. Where there'll be no more pain or crying or mourning.

This is what the Holy Spirit guarantees for us, Paul says. No wonder he's excited about it. It's incredible. We're redeemed.

When you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

As you think about your spiritual life, I wonder whether you sometimes have doubts. Most Christians do at some stage.

[8 : 47] In fact, any Christian who is arrogant enough to say, well, I never have any doubts. I think you can gently challenge them about that. Because most of us at some stage have had some doubts.

Am I really saved? Am I really redeemed? And often these doubts crowd in when we see sin in our lives and we say, can the Lord really forgive me?

Again? Again? Again? And so Satan comes in and he says, well, can the Lord really?

You know, can he? Maybe not. And we begin to doubt. It happens to us all. Maybe for you the question is a little different. Maybe it's, how can I know I'm a Christian?

And here's the answer. You can know you are redeemed and forgiven. You can be sure you're a Christian if you've placed your faith in Christ.

[9 : 47] Because in Christ you are sealed and marked by his Holy Spirit. In other words, we can know because we trust God's promises.

We trust God's word. Does that mean that I always feel confident in this? No. Does it mean I do sometimes have doubts?

Yes. But where do I turn when I have doubts? I have to turn back to God's word which tells me, Paul, you are marked by the Holy Spirit.

If you have placed your faith in Christ, you are marked with him. You may not feel it at this moment. But you are. So our confidence comes not from, do I always feel that I'm a wonderful Christian?

Or something like that. It comes back to what we were talking about last night. About God's grace, doesn't it? It is by grace these things are true.

[10 : 50] My issue is, do I trust it? Do I really believe it? I am marked, sealed, Paul says, by the Holy Spirit if I have believed in Christ.

It's a wonderful, wonderful truth. But it's really practical for our Christian lives. Really practical. Do I begin to lose confidence in my Christian faith?

Turn to the promises of God. Do I feel that my sin has overpowered me and maybe taken me far away from God? Turn to the promises of God.

He forgives. He has sealed you. He will not let you go. You remember what Jesus said to his disciples. No one will pluck you out of my hand or out of my Father's hand.

And Paul is saying the Holy Spirit is the one who guarantees that. He guarantees our redemption. But secondly, these verses remind us when we receive the Holy Spirit as Christians.

[11 : 55] And often there's a bit of confusion about this. Look again at verse 13. In Christ 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.

The Spirit comes at conversion. Have you heard the gospel of our Lord Jesus? Have you accepted Christ as your Savior?

Trusted in him? Placed your faith in him? However inadequate, however poor you feel your faith is sometimes. Have you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Then you are marked by the Holy Spirit. Paul is saying that absolutely definitively. It is who it is to be a Christian.

To have the Holy Spirit. If you are not a Christian, you don't have the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian, you do. You are marked. You are sealed by the Holy Spirit. Now, is it possible for us and is it our experience as Christians in our lives that sometimes the Holy Spirit seems to work in us in more powerful ways than usual?

[13 : 11] Or we're more excited by this truth and we grasp it more deeply? Of course. Yes. But the great truth is that every one of us, one of you sitting here today who knows and loves the Lord, who has committed your life to him, is sealed by the Holy Spirit.

And we need to trust that. Thirdly, the Spirit seals those who are in Christ. Now, of course, in the old days, slaves were marked either with a mark that was burned into their flesh or even a piece of their ear cut out.

And in a way, this is the picture here. It comes from the world of slavery. The seal of the Spirit is a sign of slavery to a new Lord.

Slaves who are redeemed and freed by Christ now find themselves under his lordship. And the Lord King Jesus marks them by giving them his Holy Spirit.

So they know they belong to him. You see, in the biblical faith, there are two lords that are revealed to us.

[14 : 33] And only two. There is the one who Paul refers to in chapter 2, verse 2, as the Spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

In other words, the one who is over those who reject Christ and rebel against him. Satan, at the end of the day. Or there is the Lord Jesus.

It's a difficult concept, perhaps, for us sometimes, but there's no neutrality. No neutrality in the Scripture. I'm old enough to remember Bob Dylan.

Looking at some of you, some of you are old enough as well to remember Bob Dylan. In his Christian phase, and by the way, I think recently I've read that clearly his faith still matters to him.

But in his Christian faith in music, he had an incredible song. Which is about just two lords. You've got to serve someone, he says.

[15 : 36] And then he offers in his song the fact that there are only two people you can serve. There's God in Christ. And there is Satan.

It's really true. That's the position of the Bible. The spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. Or we belong to God the Father and to his Son Jesus Christ.

God's Holy Spirit seals us if we belong to him in faith. It marks us out as servants or slaves of the Lord. Do you remember Paul starts his letters?

The Apostle Paul, of all people, starts his letters. And it's sort of nicely translated in some of our Bibles. You know, Paul, a servant of the Lord.

It doesn't say that. It says, Paul, a slave of the Lord. Doulos. Paul, a slave of the Lord. Because Paul knows that he now serves a different Lord.

[16 : 40] And he is slave to him. He's marked by him. He belongs to him. God can ask anything he wants of Paul. And as the Lord's servant or slave, so Paul sees the Holy Spirit as the one who helps him be what he is.

God's servant. Secondly, the seal indicates a sign of the Lord's protection. You know, slave masters in ancient Rome were not all bad.

In fact, slavery wasn't entirely a bad thing. It is to our modern mind. Our view of slavery is more conditioned by the horrendous type of slavery that we saw in the Caribbean and in the United States.

And it's sort of conditioned by that. But actually, in Roman law, there were very strict rules about how slaves were to be treated and so on. It wasn't pleasant. Don't get me wrong. I mean, they were sold in the marketplace and so on.

But it was the duty of a slave master to look after the welfare of his slave and of the family of the slave.

[17 : 57] And it was the duty to protect the slaves. So if they were attacked or if people in the marketplace tried to cheat them or something like that, the slave master, owner, would have to defend them in law.

Roman law required that. And what we have in the Bible is something similar to this, you see, is that the Holy Spirit is the way God protects us and keeps us as his slaves, as his servants, as the ones who are called to serve him in Christ.

The Holy Spirit protects us. It's an incredible privilege to know that he is the one who draws us back to Jesus when we're tempted and when we go astray.

He brings us back. He won't let us go. There's a lot of talk these days about the need to belong.

We know how painful it is for many people who feel they don't belong anywhere. Many young people we know struggle with identity these days.

[19 : 14] Where do I belong? What's my life all about? Who am I? And so many people these days seem to be struggling to find out who they really are and what their life purpose is.

Well, the Bible says that all people do belong somewhere. It talks, as we've seen, in terms of lordships and offers only two. So for a Christian, the whole modern discussion about identity seems to me to be as important as it was for Paul.

We may discard it, some of us, but actually it is a really, really serious discussion that Christians need to get involved in. We need to remind ourselves that our identity, as Paul is showing here, is in Christ, that the Holy Spirit guarantees that, that our identity is in Christ.

It's not in our success in the world. It's not in the job we have or the money we earn. It's not even in our family.

It's not in our sexuality. Our identity is in Christ. We are his. We are loved by him.

[20 : 36] That's where we belong. God has, as we saw last night, adopted us as his children. He's marked us out by his Holy Spirit. He's sealed us for himself. This is who we are.

Our identity is in Christ. And this gospel, this good news, is a huge statement into modern society where people are struggling with alienation, with feeling they don't belong, with wondering who they are, where they fit in, what they look like, what job they have, what, and on and on and on, all the worries of this world.

And this passage sings of the joy of knowing. My identity is in Christ. I am who God wants me to be.

And the world may look on and not like me sometimes. I may feel that I have no significance at all. And God says, but I've sealed you.

You're mine. Your identity lies in the Lord Jesus Christ. The biblical view of life.

[21 : 59] You know, the other thing these days, we're always hearing people talk of needing to be free. Free to be themselves and so on. But the biblical view of life turns that whole question around as well.

True freedom is to be found only in Christ. That's so ironic, isn't it? I'm a slave to Christ. Where is true freedom to be found?

In Christ. And there, amazingly, we find we are loved and protected and kept and cared for by God himself.

There's a lovely collect in the Anglican liturgy, which we say in morning prayer. I'll use the old version. Many of you will have grown up with that, as I did.

O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom.

[23 : 02] Defend us, thy humble servants, from all assaults of our enemies, in whose service is perfect freedom.

I looked that up online, and it looks like it goes all the way back to the great Christian Augustine from about 380 AD. Amazing statement, amazing understanding.

He grew up in a world of slavery. He talks about slavery in his writings many times. And he says, in whose service is perfect freedom. And all of this is guaranteed for us as we receive God's spirit when we believe in Jesus.

Thirdly, the spirit gives us wisdom and understanding. We saw back in chapter 1, verse 8, if you just look at it, that Paul praised God because in Christ, he has lavished upon us all wisdom and understanding.

And here's another great privilege that we have in Christ. We've heard the gospel, and we have believed. We've heard the word of truth, as Paul puts it here.

[24 : 11] And that is biblical wisdom. That is understanding the gospel. It doesn't mean that we're more intelligent than other people. It's not that sort of wisdom.

Look again then at verses 17 to 20. And Paul now talks of his prayers for the Ephesians. So he says, I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may 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.

There's a lovely song that has the words, open the eyes of my heart, Lord. The spirit opens our eyes to understand the things of God.

He opens our eyes to understand the gospel, to see salvation, to see the inexpressible kindness of the Lord that the apostle has been talking about here.

[25 : 31] And Paul wants us to get a grip on all these wonderful truths. The spirit then is the one who works in us to help us understand.

Have a look at what the spirit does for us, why we need the spirit's wisdom and understanding. Verse 17, the first reason is given there, so that we may know God better.

So, we come to know God as Christians, but I think all of us who are Christians would say, as we grow, this should be true of us, as we grow, as we continue our Christian lives, so we begin to know God better.

We know God in Christ as we come to faith, we trust him, we believe him, but gradually we come to see new things. Maybe last night I drew attention to something you hadn't thought of as a Christian.

Maybe you've been a Christian for years and you just think, do you know what, I never saw that before. Wow, God is amazing, isn't he? Does he really love us that much?

[26 : 44] Are we really in Christ in that sense that he represents us so we can say, I have died with Christ, I live with Christ? I'm seated in the heavenlies?

Are these, perhaps, truths that we grow into? We don't know them on the first day that we're converted. The Holy Spirit that we have as Christians leads us into this deeper truth.

How? Well, by opening up God's word to us. My prayer when I preach, and I'm sure David's is the same and other ministers here is the same, my prayer is that the Holy Spirit will use the words talked, mentioned, spoken, that the Holy Spirit will use those and plant them in people's lives if what has been said is true.

And if it is, if it isn't true, that the Holy Spirit won't let those words sink in at all, right? As a minister, I have, once or twice, had to get up in the pulpit the following week and say, you know what, I think I was wrong on that.

It's good to remember the minister is not infallible, but God's word is. And the Holy Spirit helps us understand. It's one of the reasons why in many of our churches where we take this seriously, we ask people to open the Bible in front of them.

[28 : 13] Because God has given you the Holy Spirit. So when I'm talking, you should be saying, so, is this true? It's not wrong to question the minister.

You should be saying, is this true? Well, come up to me afterwards, you know, and say, Paul, I'm going to need that glass of water, Judy, but it's right in front of you. That's all right.

Thank you very much. And to say, you know, Paul, you said this, but when I read that passage, I don't see that.

So are you right? If you are, please show me. If you're wrong, what does this passage mean? And that should be the sort of interaction as the gospel is proclaimed.

We're asking the Holy Spirit. We have the Holy Spirit. As Christians, you have the Holy Spirit. And it's fair and right and proper that we should let the Holy Spirit lead us into questioning, asking the questions, looking for the answers, and we find these in Scripture.

[29 : 26] Sometimes it's difficult to find what we're looking for in Scripture, but that's the Spirit's work as He works in us. And this is one of the things Paul is just rejoicing in.

We have the Spirit. We have the Spirit in Christ. Then secondly, we see the Spirit gives us this wisdom, verse 18, so that we may know God's glorious inheritance.

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. When I was a child, I used to sing a chorus.

Some of you may have grown up with it. And it went like this. Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done. Very simple, very childlike, and a wonderful truth that I have to keep reminding myself of when, you know, I'm feeling like not many blessings around today, Lord.

And I need to say, count your blessings, name them one by one. And that's really what Paul has been doing in this passage, isn't it? He's been counting all the blessings he can think of in one long sentence.

[30 : 46] There are many he hasn't mentioned, but he's mentioned enough to bring us joy and gratitude. The Spirit works in us to confirm that we are God's children and we will inherit all the great blessings of the new earth when Christ returns.

He will, we pray, that he will open the eyes of our hearts to see that great hope to which we have been called. The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

What is that? All God's people to be with him as the king in the new earth where we see him as the book of Revelation tells us, well as the apostle Paul also tells us, where we will see him face to face.

And then finally we need God's Spirit, verse 19, so that we may know his power at work in us, his incomparably great power for us who believe.

All growth in life requires some energy, some power of some sort. God's Spirit gives us that power, that ability to grow in Christ.

[32 : 04] Why do we find it so hard to think of being a better Christian? By that, I don't mean that there are sort of grades of Christians, not at all, that's very unbiblical, there aren't, you're either a Christian or you're not.

But we all know in our own lives we can be better servants of the Lord or do a less good job of it. And what Paul is thanking God for here and what he's praying for is that we will know that the Holy Spirit who lives in us and indwells us and is the mark that we belong to Christ, that that Holy Spirit will enable us to grow in Christ, to become more Christ-like day by day.

That's our ambition, isn't it? To be more Christ-like. That is to grow in grace, to grow in the love of the Lord. As we're told elsewhere in the New Testament in a prayer, that we may grow in the love and grace of the Lord.

And the Holy Spirit is the one who helps us grow. And so Paul reminds us that the real and strength and power for changed and growing Christians is to be found in the Holy Spirit working in us.

And Paul prays that we may know that. And we need to pray for each other that we may know that. And we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will indeed work in us, that we may grow in our love for the Lord.

[33 : 44] And the more we grow in the love for the Lord, the more we'll fulfil what we talked about yesterday, the more we will become a holy and blameless people, the more we will gradually become a light to the world.

And people will look and say, what have you got? And they will begin to come to church. And because you ask them, you'll say, well, it's not me, you know, it's Christ in me.

I know Christ. I serve Christ. Would you like to know more about him? There's a song we sometimes sing and it goes like this.

A lovely prayer. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

[34 : 52] We had the grandchildren of the man who wrote that in our congregation in the United States. And he'd been a missionary in Japan in a very, very tough time, very tough country.

And in the depths of the difficulties that he was suffering, he and his wife, he wrote that. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, that is our prayer. We thank you for your glorious blessings in Christ, perhaps even the greatest of which is that we have the Holy Spirit.

Lord, seal us for yourself. Help us to understand what that means. and may we grow in our knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus and in our service of him.

For we ask it in his name. Amen. What I'd like to do is just to give a few moments for some questions. I think we have I think I have I think I have I think I have I think I have I think I have