

True Spirituality

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[0 : 00] We're looking at the third part of a run-on sentence in Ephesians, and it's Ephesians 1, 11 through 14. And I'd like it if you could look at the reading that was put into your bulletin, and that's a bit more of a helpful translation for this passage that we're looking at.

This is a wonderful passage. It ends this run-on sentence that is really a continuous outburst of exuberant praise. Paul starts by saying, you know, 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. That's a mouthful right there, but he just keeps right on going. And he sustains it. He says, to the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glorious grace, three times over. And there's a reason why Paul's excited here. He, and it doesn't make much sense, humanly speaking, he's in prison facing a very uncertain future. He may be executed. He knows that. He's writing to a church that's a very small minority in a huge metropolis where there are many temptations, first of all, where there are beautiful and powerful religions that surround them.

[1 : 22] And there is extraordinary wealth. Those who have nothing to do with Christ are prospering. And they look like they have it all.

And Paul knows that the church in Ephesus will wonder, what are things like on the other side of the fence, in a way?

What is good for us here? And Paul is reminding them of the spiritual grace, of the goodness that God has given to them in Jesus Christ.

He is opening that treasure chest again for them, of the gospel that brought them to faith in the first place. And it is very exciting to look at.

And that is why Paul is full of joy. What he is telling them in this passage, and in fact the whole run-on sentence, is that God has a plan.

[2 : 19] And this is what's unique about those who follow Jesus, is that they are in relationship to the living God who has a plan for the whole world.

And that plan very simply is to bring people to belong to God. And it is a plan that has been worked out before the elements of the universe came into being.

It's a plan that encompasses the Garden of Eden. It encompasses Ephesus, which no longer exists. It encompasses Vancouver as well. And that plan is to save humanity from spiritual death by adopting people.

By causing them to belong. He destined us, in verse 5, to be his daughters and sons through Jesus Christ. And that's why John Calvin said that adoption, that understanding of adoption, is the true and native source of our salvation.

And that's a wonderful way to put it, because when you really know the truth, that God designed a way, from the beginning of creation, to be your heavenly Father and save you, you can stand in any city.

[3 : 32] You can withstand any temptation or any attack on your relationship with God, because you will have a joy that shows up in even the most stressful times, as Paul shows, and you will know the love of God if you understand what that plan is for us in Jesus Christ.

And it's wonderful that Paul, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gives to us this language of adoption, because that's a clear way of revealing to us God's loving plan for the world.

It communicates the good news that through Jesus, God causes people to belong to him forever. And that's why Paul writes that nothing in heaven or earth can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

That is the fundamental blessing of belonging to God that's being described there. And so in this sermon, as we go through this short passage, what unfolds here is that it tells us that we belong, it tells us how we belong, and it also tells us what it looks like in our life to belong.

What is our experience of belonging? And so I want to look at that. Look at verses 11 through 14. 11 and 12 tells us that we belong. It says, In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we who first hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory.

[5 : 14] Now notice the repeated emphasis that God has a plan. It says that we're predestined. It's according to plan. He works out everything.

It is his purpose. It is his will. It's unmistakable that there is this blueprint. And the content of that blueprint, of those plans, is that Paul says, we are chosen.

Now it's very important for us to understand what that word chosen means. You have to unpack it a little bit. Because in the original, it literally means we are made an inheritance.

that God makes us to be his inheritance, his possession. And what Paul is saying is that God's great plan through Jesus is to make us that possession.

And that's why if you jump down to verse 14, God's people are called his possession. Now, as many of you probably know, we went through a sermon series in the book of Exodus in the fall and in the winter this year.

[6 : 23] And many of you were studying the book of Exodus in Bible studies through the week as well. So, your minds were filled with God's word in Exodus. And one of the things that was great about that, and I think it was very good for the congregation, one of the things that was great for me in this is that when I look at the rest of the Bible, I often see Exodus in those passages.

Whether it's the New Testament or Old Testament. And that is happening here in verse 11 as well.

We see what is revealed in Exodus. Because if you remember a few months ago in Exodus 19, God has brought his people to the base of Mount Sinai and he is going to give to them his law.

He's going to reveal himself and his will. And the first thing he tells the people is number one that they have been rescued. God has brought them out and that there was a purpose for it.

And here's what it was. He said, Therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples for all the earth is mine.

It's an amazing thing to say because God is saying that everything belongs to me and I have chosen you to be my treasured possession. that they would be his people and he would be their God.

[7 : 52] And he shows this by coming to dwell with them in the tabernacle. Well, Paul is saying exactly that here in Ephesians. He is saying that we who are the first to hope in Christ and he's talking about Jewish believers here, we who are first have had this incredible blessing that God promised in Exodus that through Jesus they are treasured by God.

They belong to him and actually God comes to live in them. Jesus dwells in them by the Holy Spirit and so in this way the Old Testament promises are fulfilled in him.

That's why the Holy Spirit is called the promised Holy Spirit later on in this passage. And wonderfully what happens is that in verse 13 there is a shift from me from we to you.

So you notice how 11 and 12 is talking about we and in 13 and 14 it's addressing you. And it says you also were included in Christ.

That is actually a shocking statement to make to that church. He is saying that you all in Ephesus who are Gentile Christians which was the majority that promise in Exodus is actually fulfilled in you today.

[9 : 17] You who were not related to God who are naturally far away from God's people and cut off from God are included in the great blessing of the covenant with God through Jesus Christ.

You are now God's treasured possession. You are now people in whom God dwells. And it's hard for us to imagine the seismic shift that would have been for Jewish Christians to hear that and Gentile Christians as well because of course there was a huge gulf between them spiritually and culturally in every way.

But Paul teaches them that they both belong to God when they hope in Christ. Together they are God's treasured possession. And so the readers would have known that the only way that this could have happened is through an immensely powerful work of God that he would bring two people two people so far apart as one who belonged to God that somehow God in his mercy and his grace and

his power fulfilled the promise of Exodus even in the Gentiles.

Now one of my great privileges in ministry is to prepare people for baptism. And baptism it's a great thing to do because you get to talk about the blessings we have in Christ.

And we talk about how baptism signifies what Jesus has done for us. How he has done this work of bringing us to belong to God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[10:53] And I also tell them that baptism strengthens the faith of those who are watching.

Because as a congregation when we see the people who are baptized and hear of the sign we think of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

And right after the baptism we make a cross a sign of the cross with water on the forehead of the child or the adult and we say I mark you with the sign of the cross as Christ's own forever.

And what that does is it reminds us of God's plan in Jesus Christ. That it's not only for the person being baptized but God's plan for you as well that you are precious to him.

That you belong to him as his treasured possession. And that is the gift that was given to Gentiles and Jews and it is the gift that is for you as well.

And this is something that I think is strengthening for us as individuals and as a church because all of us will be buffeted or are buffeted now by the work of the evil one.

[12:07] There is a spiritual struggle that is happening that all of us are part of. And Paul is going to talk about that struggle at the end of Ephesians. He talks about the schemes of Satan and the flaming arrows of the evil one.

And that struggle affects us in two ways. And I think maybe the Jews and the Gentiles in Ephesus illustrate the two ways that the struggle affects us.

One is that we can be tempted to worry that perhaps we do not really belong to God. The Gentiles must have found that hard to believe at first. That somehow they are made God's treasured possession.

How could that happen? We don't deserve it. It's true. And maybe there are Jewish Christians that said you don't have the pedigree, you don't have the ceremonies, you don't deserve it.

We're not sure about your salvation. And then the second group of temptation were Jews who thought well I'm actually in a pretty good place.

[13:08] God kind of owes me this grace that has given to me. And I'm going to rest on my own merits and not rely on the grace of God and on His work in my life.

And this is something that we can fall into too. We can become complacent and there may be little evidence that our lives belong to God. We're resting on our innate goodness in a sense.

So that can be a temptation to us as well as the temptation to doubt whether God has actually saved us. To wonder whether it is sure and secure our salvation.

temptation. Well for both of those situations those temptations that come out of our spiritual struggle it is met by the reality of how we come to belong.

So God has told us that we belong in this passage now He's telling us how we come to belong as well. And it's a challenge to us if we are complacent it is a comfort to us if we are not assured of our salvation.

[14:12] So in verse 13 it says you 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.

Now Paul is just giving a statement of fact. He's not saying you might have been included in Christ when you heard that word we're not sure. He said no if you heard the word of truth and believed you belong and were included in Christ.

You see the powerful thing that made you belong to God was not your own ability to believe but it was based on the gospel of Jesus Christ the power of that gospel.

It's the word of truth so powerful that it brings permanent change in your life. Permanent change of status with God you belong to Him and it brings about belief that's an ongoing transformation in your life.

life. It's the way that God makes people His own and that's a miracle because it brings spiritual life it brings people from being dead spiritually to being alive to God a new creation the Bible talks about it and so you can be assured that your faith and trust in God comes because of a massive work of the Holy Spirit in your life who is forming Christ in you.

[15 : 39] Now in this congregation if we were to have an interview station set up at each door and not let you leave until you told about how you came to faith in Jesus Christ it would be a long postlude afterwards but the other thing that would happen is that we would hear hundreds of different stories of how you came to trust in Jesus but in all those stories what you would have in common is what Paul has just said that the Holy Spirit caused you to hear the gospel of salvation and the Holy Spirit caused you to believe and continues to work in your heart and in your mind in other words it's his work from start to finish and that's why verse 13 should be a huge encouragement to you you know because as you live your Christian life as you are desiring to live for God you can know that is the Holy Spirit working within you and you're keeping in step with the Holy Spirit it should also be a huge encouragement to you to actually get that gospel out into the world if it's that powerful to bring about change that powerful to make people belong what a gift that is to those around you and somehow we must get our colleagues or friends and families to hear the gospel of our salvation and of course the mission that we've been hearing about with Rico Tice is just this great opportunity to do just that because Rico will be bringing this gospel that we hear about here to Vancouver he's a very good communicator with those of very different walks of life and the gospel will be brought to those to the people who are brought to him and the Holy Spirit will work as the gospel is presented and so Paul tells us finally how the Holy Spirit works now when the Holy Spirit works he says look at verse 13 because this is helpful to us it says you were marked in him with a seal in Jesus with a seal the promised

Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession now it's helpful for us to see how the Holy Spirit is doing this incredible work making us belong because it says this it says first of all that the Holy Spirit is a seal and in the ancient times a seal was put onto a letter or a document sometimes put onto possessions like animals or slaves that belong to a household but with a letter or document it said two things that it belonged to the owner of the seal who is put on that letter and also and it couldn't be violated and secondly that the letter or document was authentic so this letter really is from the owner truly is so the same way Paul is saying that when the Holy Spirit comes to us when we believe he makes us belong to God that's what the seal means it's affirming our belonging to God the Holy Spirit in our lives tells us that God's we are God's treasured possession otherwise why would God why would Jesus live in us by his Holy Spirit and the seal also tells us that God's promises are true and authentic so the Holy Spirit in our life tells us that those promises from the Old Testament are in fact ours we are brought into them we are brought into that relationship that God has set up from the foundation of the world it is authentic it has happened to you whether you feel like it at times or not the Holy Spirit is the objective assurance that that has happened now Paul goes on from talking about the seal of the Holy Spirit to say the Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession and this is a wonderful thing because the Holy Spirit is working as a first fruits as a foretaste of what will come when we see God in heaven and that word deposit is a part it is actually a substance of what is going to happen we bought a house recently and so the concept of down payment is very fresh in our minds right now and a down payment is the same substance it is the same dollars of what will come to the bank and so for the bank our down payment is a foretaste it is a very small foretaste of what is to come and in the same way the Holy Spirit is a living in our life is a first installment of what is to come but it is significant he is the same God who we will see one day in heaven and we experience a small foretaste of that now now we have discovered that banks love down payments because they guarantee what will come and we love the Holy Spirit in our lives because it means that

Jesus is present in our lives and that is a guarantee of the life of belonging to God in heaven because the one who lives in us has risen from the dead and he never to die again and therefore he will always be present with us it is the guarantee of life of belonging to God in heaven now I want to close by the third point which is a point that has to do with experience because when we talk about the Holy Spirit often people ask the question how can I know that the Holy Spirit is in my life how can I be sure that Jesus is living within me and so the question is how do I know I belong well before I answer that question and it's not an easy one I want to tell you about my five year old son Alexander and he he came to me yesterday as I was working my sermon he said what are you doing dad and I said

I'm working on my sermon and he said well what is your sermon about now the best way to have your sermon focused and try to get clear is to explain it to a five year old in one sentence or less so

I thought for a minute and I said well my sermon is about the fact that we belong to God and God lives inside of us so that we can praise him and he thought that for a second he said well how does God live inside of us and I said by his Holy Spirit and he said to me the Holy Spirit is God I said that's right and he said well does God build a house inside of us and I had to think about it and I said yes he does and of course what he's getting at is how can God dwell in us live he must have to build a house now

I can't tell you exactly I had to think a while and thankfully he left to try to explain how God builds a house inside of us but I want to explain it to you right now because he is building his house it is a house that lives for the praise of God's glory and the Holy Spirit is doing this work and it is how you know that he is present in your life and I just want to give you a couple things Jesus teaches us about the Holy Spirit he says the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin and so if you experience repentance and desiring for the forgiveness of your sin there is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life very powerfully if you believe God's word about Jesus is true Jesus says that's the Holy Spirit who leads you into truth powerful work for God to do that by the Holy Spirit Jesus also said you know if you want to love Jesus and therefore obey him

[24 : 31] Jesus says if you love me you will obey my commandments that is the work of the Holy Spirit that would make you want to obey Jesus that would give that love to you and that's very related to what Paul said because Paul said that the Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts you know so that we know that he loves us and we desire to love him back if you experience that in your life the Holy Spirit is at work in a powerful way if you pray to God if you pray to God as fathers the one who hears you knowing that you are his child that is the Holy Spirit in a dramatic way working because it says in Romans that the Spirit causes us to cry Abba Father and he bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and you know that praising God and knowing him as father is an incredible foretaste of what will come in our inheritance in heaven and finally the Bible tells us that it is by the Holy Spirit that you are able to say

Jesus is Lord now to say Jesus is Lord is an amazing powerful work of God because it means that you live your life with reference to him with he being your ruler with he being the one that you desire to serve and so when the Holy Spirit does that work in your life where your whole orientation of life is changed in that way and you desire to serve him there is the work of the Holy Spirit and what he does in that is he conforms us into the image of his son and you can see some concrete examples of that in the gifts of the Holy Spirit fruits of the Spirit being love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self-control you know when these are happening as a result of your faith in Jesus Christ there is a work of the Holy Spirit in your life there is the life of heaven coming into your life and so I close by saying that that all of this is really summed up by that last little line in verse 14 where it says that all of it is to the praise of God's glory and that is what the Holy Spirit is doing in our life it is moving us to know that we belong to God with the result that we will praise his glory and my prayer is that you will be strengthened by hearing the truth of the gospel which says we were adopted we belong to God and that the Holy Spirit is at work in you making you belong making you into the imprint the image of Jesus Christ and it would be very good if we ended with a prayer

I think that the prayer from the call it to the day does this and I'll just ask you to close your eyes and to pray silently as I pray about what the Holy Spirit is doing in our life so as I pray hence I pray and I hope I finally see you as a guard as there I ■ L cal is and I I can and I feel like even like I can be