

Eph. 1:3-14 - Blessings of Being Connected

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

The enthusiasm of Bob Dylan in that song about the salvation we have in the blood of Jesus is shared by the Apostle Paul in our passage this morning.

Last week we started a study in the book of Ephesians, and just as soon as Paul has said hello, he launches into a hymn of praise to God. He writes for 12 verses.

In the Greek it's all in one sentence. One big, long sentence. In English we break it up a little bit for readability, but I hope as I read it this morning you'll still hear Paul gushing with joy and excitement as I read Ephesians 1 verses 3 to 14.

Ephesians 1 at verse 3. This is God's holy word. 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, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.

[1 : 18] In love He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things, according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory.

In Him 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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory.

The grass withers, the flowers fade, but these words of our God will indeed stand forever. Join me now as we pray and ask Him to teach us. Indeed, Father, blessed be Your name.

[2 : 40] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us so richly in every way. What an amazing passage. What a great chance to remember together and rejoice in what You've done.

Father, You know that our hearts can't even contain it. That our minds are too weak to understand. That my words are too feeble to even describe what it is that You've done.

And so, Father, I pray that You would speak. Holy Spirit, would You open our eyes and our hearts to see wonderful things in this, Your Word.

Please, please teach us and change us. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. While I was in seminary, my wife worked at Washington University in St. Louis.

One of the things she did was plan events, and she helped organize one time a very large dinner to honor distinguished alumni of the university. It was a big night. A thousand people were going to be in attendance.

[3 : 49] Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York City, was the keynote speaker. And all these distinguished alumni were coming back to be honored by the university. Now, Christy had offered to work the event, which meant that she could be at the ticket table out front.

She might get a plate if they had some left over, or she might not get to eat at all. But for sure, what that meant with Christy at the event for the evening was that I was in a really bad spot.

I was home on the couch with probably frozen pizza as my best bet for the evening. This was a huge, huge deal, and we had no right to be at the dinner.

Then we got our big break. We found out that one of the distinguished alumni honorees was Jim Barker, the president of Clemson University. Christy and I had just come from Clemson and knew the Barkers a little bit while we were there, so I found that out, and I emailed Mrs. Barker and said, Christy will be there that evening.

She would love to be able to say hey to you. If y'all can look for her at the ticket table, you'll probably see her on your way in. And thought nothing else of it. And two days later, the lady in charge of the event came to Christy and said, I got a call from Mrs. Barker today.

[5 : 06] They'd like for you and Will to be their guests at the dinner. They'd like for you to sit with them. All of the sudden, we went from on the couch with frozen pizza and at the ticket table to table number two, right up front for the whole night.

My name tag that night read Will Spink, but it was only as guest of Jim Barker that I could be seated at that dinner. In fact, the people at my table figured that out quickly.

They were, why are you here? You know, let's see. You're Will Spink. Now, who is that? Oh, guest of Jim Barker. Oh, right, right. So all night, that's what I went through. Oh, you're just with him.

Yes, we're with him. President Barker had earned the honors that he was receiving that night, the chance to be at that dinner. And only as I was connected to him, could I enjoy the food, the company, the other wonderful parts of that evening.

That's exactly what the Apostle Paul is about to talk about as he details every spiritual blessing we have in Christ because of our connection to Jesus.

[6 : 19] And it's so important for us to see this this morning because it's easy to focus on ourselves and to feel like frozen pizza Christians, for lack of a better word.

You've felt this way before. Like, you know, you're a Christian, maybe, I hope, but only worthy of eating frozen pizza on the couch, not steak at table number two.

Compared to others around you, you feel on the outside, insecure, maybe not sure you really belong, a second-class Christian, if you even are one at all.

I mean, think about it. You haven't really done enough or been good enough. The people around you don't seem to be converted to Jesus all the time. There's that huge moral failure you've done again.

And then last night, you lost your temper with your family again. Certainly, of all people, you're not really, really in. Someone else knows more.

[7 : 18] Someone else has done better. And so we don't think we'll get God's love and attention. He's probably not interested in us, only the really spiritual people. They'll sit with Him.

We'll eat frozen pizza on the couch. You felt that before? The Ephesians may have felt that way. They may have had similar struggles. Here they are in the midst of this city that is rampant with immorality and the worship of other gods.

And here's this little fledgling church. The city of Ephesus is not repenting and turning to Jesus immediately. Maybe they really were a second-class church.

Lots of new young Christians, you know, many of them Gentiles. They really didn't, they weren't steeped in how to do church. Probably they didn't do things well. Maybe numerical growth wasn't what they'd hoped it would be.

Was God really caring for them? Could they really count on Him to continue to do that in the midst of a city like this? Would He really care about people in a place that disdained Him?

[8 : 21] Maybe some of them or all of them felt like frozen pizza Christians. And so Paul begins his letter by saying to them and to us that Christianity and your story in it is not about what you do for God.

It's about what God has done for you. He says that the blessings you have from God are not ribbons you've earned for your own performance. It is every spiritual blessing coming in Christ.

You're blessed over and over and over because you're connected to Him. Listen, our access to God is based on what God has done for us, not what we do for God.

Let me repeat that. Our access to God, our relationship with Him, the interaction and engagement we have, the blessings we receive from Him are based not on what we do for God, but on what He has done for us.

That's the good news of this passage. Life is not all about you. It's all about Him and His glory. So what has God done?

[9 : 29] What is it that He's done for you? How has He blessed us in Christ? This passage is so rich, we could sit here and marvel at it all day. Some of you think I'm about to.

But let's look at it in three parts for just a few minutes. The first part, the Father's plan. An anchor in eternity past.

Look at verses 3 through 6 of this passage. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who's blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, praising Him.

What is it that He's done? Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that word chose is the word in the Greek from which we get the word elect. He chose us.

He picked you. He wanted you. He moved towards you. He intentionally did something. In love, He predestined us. He's up to something.

[10 : 30] Before you were even a twinkle in your mother's eye, before the foundation of the world, God is setting His love upon you and He's got a plan for it. For what?

To what end? What's His plan? Why was He choosing you? Two things at least here. Look in verse 4. The perfect record. He chose us that we should be what?

Verse 4. Holy and blameless before Him. Not a passing grade. Not merely tolerable to God, but holy and blameless.

Perfect. A perfect righteousness that of course is not coming from us, but from Jesus. Perfect righteousness. What else did He plan for us?

Verse 5. He plans for a new family. He predestines us for adoption through Jesus Christ. He wants us to be a part of His family.

[11 : 35] Don't miss this. Do you hear what He's doing? He's decided He wants you in His family. You're welcome in. You belong. That was His plan all along. You're not just invited, you see, to come off the sofa and to bring your frozen pizza into the banquet hall and wander around the back and watch and peer.

And I wonder about all those people enjoying the wonderful meals up front. You're invited to come to the Father's table because you're connected to His Son and have actually become a son.

He's brought you into His family. What a great comfort and security that is. The God of the universe, before you even existed, intentionally purposes in His will, plans for you to have a perfect record and a new family.

His family. He plans for you. Listen, if that's His plan, you can count on it. He's God. He's in charge. He's loved you since before the foundation of the world.

That's an anchor that will hold that you can count on. And then verse 6 reminds us all this good stuff that He's doing is He's doing it for us.

[12 : 46] It's actually to the praise of His glorious grace. Not to our credit, right? Predestination, for example, is a source of glory to God and comfort for God's people.

Not a topic for debate and controversy. That's what it's become for some of us. Listen, God says, this is all about the praise of my glorious grace and how wonderful I've been to you.

How much I love you. How magnanimous I am and how comforted and secure you can be because of who I am. You can be confident in His love.

Secondly, we have the Son's sacrifice. The cross in human history. Before the foundation of the world, God makes a plan and the Father having made this plan for us, someone's going to have to execute it.

Someone's going to have to make this happen and the Son volunteers. I'll go. Listen, we're not talking about a distant deity who's fatalistically and whimsically just ordering all the events of human history.

[13 : 59] That's not the picture we have of God before the foundation of the world, is it? When God chooses to save, it costs Him His Son. It costs Jesus His very life.

That's why this redemption is costly. It's a costly redemption that we have. Verse 7, how is it described? In Him we have redemption through His blood.

The very blood of Jesus, the perfect Son of God, is the purchase price. Redemption refers to buying something back. Like purchasing someone's freedom out of slavery.

Buying it back. And when God plans for us to be in His family, He had to buy us back at the cost of the perfect Lamb. Not with perishable things like silver or gold that we were redeemed, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

That's what happens on the cross. The Father who loves you and wants you in His family says, I've got to purchase you and it costs my Son His life. As a result of that, we receive what?

[15 : 11] Full forgiveness. Another spiritual blessing. There's starting to be a laundry list here. Full forgiveness. Look at verse 7. We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.

And this means that our slate that's dirty and that's smudged is wiped clean. Our sin and guilt wiped away completely. Not just some of our sins, but notice full forgiveness.

Keep reading. On what basis are we forgiven? To what extent? According to the riches of His grace which He has lavished upon us.

Riches lavished upon you. Do you know what that feels like? I like to eat, so I pictured Christmas at Grandma's house. We were just there recently and here's what it went like for us.

My girls would go to get dessert. They'd find the cookies in the cookie jar and they'd eat a couple or three and they'd run out and they'd say, there's no more cookies left.

[16 : 10] And we'd say, perfect. You know, we're through. And Grandma says, oh no, oh there's plenty more in the back room. Let me go get you some more cookies. And we're like, oh, Grandma, two or three cookies was enough.

And they get some more and so, you know, an hour or so later you're sitting there watching the television and your kids come out with a bowl of ice cream. Grandma, ice cream?

I thought we'd run out of that. We emptied that carton last night. I had two more cartons in the freezer outside in the garage. We got some more out. They're having ice cream. It runs out but there's always more.

You never run out. Always more. Always given generously until you're completely full. That's lavish, right? That's what it looks like to have riches lavished upon you.

That's what Christmas should be like especially for kids who can still eat that much. Have you had the riches of God's grace lavished upon you? Poured on you to overflowing over all your sins?

[17 : 16] The worst things you've done? The biggest failures to perform where you left things undone? The things you've never told anyone else about? The thoughts in your heart you're embarrassed you've ever had?

Hasn't He lavished forgiveness on us? Hasn't He done that? What a great blessing that is. Full, full forgiveness. A great gift.

So the Son accomplishes the Father's ancient plan in real space and time of human history. But does it get to us? The cross still seems like a while ago.

Is it going to actually get to us? Is it going to be ours? There's all these blessings and the Holy Spirit makes sure of that. Finally, in this passage we read of the Spirit's seal. A stake in eternity future.

The last part of this passage. Notice especially verse 13. When we heard and believed, we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Now before we talk about what the Holy Spirit does for us, can we just notice for a second?

[18 : 24] All three parts of the Godhead working together. God working in concert. All three with unique roles. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father planning to love and save. The Son taking on flesh to sacrifice and redeem. And now we have the Spirit applying that purchased salvation to those whom the Father has chosen and for whom the Son has died.

Because the word Trinity is not actually in the Bible, people sometimes suggest that the Bible doesn't teach about a triune God. It's been suggested again recently. That maybe Jesus isn't really divine.

That these are things we're making up. This is a great example of the Bible teaching about the Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together. They've come together on this project.

What's the big project they're partnering on? All three of them working together. To what end? It's securing our adoption and our eternal salvation.

[19 : 27] That's what they're up to, isn't it? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together. And so the Holy Spirit comes and guarantees that we have a certain inheritance.

That's what it looks like for Him to be a seal. Look at verse 11. God hasn't just adopted you with the possibility of taking it back. In Him we've obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

You want to know what's going to happen? When this guy decides it happens, he works all things according to the counsel of His will. This plan is not tentative or tenuous.

He's written you in permanently with the riches of His kingdom belonging to you. He's engraved you on the palm of His hand. He's not changing His mind. The Holy Spirit is the one who seals, validates, authenticates that we are indeed His.

The heir of the cattle on a thousand hills. We have a stake in eternity future. Something that we can count on. And then there's eternal security.

[20 : 37] The Spirit is described again in verse 14 as a guarantee. The Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance. When you hear guarantee, think of the down payment, the deposit, the promise of eternity because we have the Holy Spirit in us now.

So this is not social security which may be there in 30 or 40 or 50 years but may not. This is eternal security. an inheritance that cannot perish or spoil or fade because the Holy Spirit lives in us and assures us that we'll obtain the inheritance until the day He claims us as His own and we receive the fullness of the coming kingdom.

Everything that God has for us. It's also interesting in these verses if you look in this last section Paul actually changes some pronouns.

What does he mean when in verse 11 he says, in him we. We, he's talking about us Jews. Paul was a Jew. In him we've obtained an inheritance.

Look at verse 13. In him you also, you Gentiles, you also when you heard and believed, received the Holy Spirit. So you get to verse 14 and whose inheritance is it?

[21 : 57] Ours. The Jews and the Gentiles. We and you. Our inheritance. Whatever your background. Regardless of your religious pedigree or your performance.

God has secured eternity. He's the one who's done it. So just take a look back at your story for a minute. What is it that establishes your access with God?

What's the currency of your relationship with God today? What is it that determines whether you're on the couch with frozen pizza or at table number two? What is it?

There's an anchor in eternity past all the way back before the world existed, before you existed, that the Father loves you and has a plan before you existed.

That there's a cross in human history, time and space, where Jesus comes and purchases you. This is actually the one place you might have showed up.

[23 : 02] That's the place we should have been, right? And Jesus alone on the cross in our place purchases our redemption. And then in eternity future, already, God's gone ahead of us.

The Holy Spirit there knocking a stake in, sealing us and saying, I'm preparing for you a seat at a feast that you've not arrived at yet, but I've got it in place for you.

Just notice two things about this. First of all, what we said earlier, the Godhead working together, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all three of them working for you. And secondly, the fact that you're not there.

You weren't there before the foundation of the world. You weren't there on the cross. You're not there in eternity future yet. If you feel second class, held at arm's length from God, then you're reading the wrong story.

You're reading the one about yourself and about how you're doing and what things look like around you. Hear the old, old story again. All three persons of the Godhead doing this for you.

[24 : 15] He's just that good. His grace really is that amazing. That's your story. Two points of application for us this morning based off of phrases that are repeated in this passage.

First, in light of all of this that's true, all these blessings God has for us, so what? Well, we have a new focus. When Paul talks about the process of our salvation, who's the focus on?

You've probably picked up on this as we've read several times. Who's it all about? It's about God and His glory and praise. It started in verse 3. Blessed be, not you and me, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's going to be about Him. Verse 6 says, to the praise of His glorious grace. Verse 12, we actually exist to the praise of His glory. Verse 14, the whole passage closes to the praise of His glory.

From beginning to end, it's about His glory. And that's our chief end, right? The glory of God. Our lives are about His glory, not our own.

[25 : 28] Not about winning the game of life. It's about God's glory, even before it's about these wonderful things like our security and comfort. How can that be?

That doesn't seem to make sense. When I first think about it, how can it all be about God, actually be a benefit to me? Here's how that works. When it's about His glory, when God is made great, we're not made irrelevant.

It leads to our comfort and security because our salvation starts and ends with Him and His work. So if it wasn't ours to earn, it's not ours to lose either. When He gets the glory, when His grace is magnified, when God becomes big and strong and powerful, we then revel securely in a God who loves us, who's purchased us and will never let us go.

When the one who's holding you is strong and loves you, you're safe, right? If the person holding you is strong and loves you, you're safe.

It's all about His glory and that's good for us because He loves us. The problem is we're so obsessed with ourselves. We can't stop focusing on ourselves, what we look like, how we perform, what our reputation is, how comfortable we are.

[26 : 51] We'll even ask God to serve those things, won't we? To make us more comfortable, to help us look better. And the irony is when we focus on ourselves, things actually turn out worse for us because we miss all these blessings of God because they're found in Christ, not in self.

we miss out when we do well and when we do bad. Just think about some of the places we look for these blessings. Where do we often look for security? In money?

Even when we do really well, what happens when we get a lot of money? Things could change. You don't know how long it'll last. I mean, the stock market could change. There's some security there but I better get a little bit more.

This is eternal security in Christ. It happens when we fail. What do we think when our relationship with God, when our adoption becomes based on our performance and we fail?

And we start thinking maybe He doesn't love me. Maybe He won't hear my prayers. I've been such a failure. In both of those cases, our focus is on ourselves rather than on the glory of God and the riches of His grace.

[27 : 59] What would be different for you if your focus was reoriented from your glory to His? What would change? How you invest your money? Where you spend your time?

What else would change? What would you start doing if that were true? What would you stop doing? Where could you trust and rest and relax where now you feel insecure and anxious?

If it was really true that it wasn't about how many national championships you won and how successful you were but that He has won and that He's chosen you to be on His team. If His reputation really mattered more than yours.

If His glory was really more important than your comfort. Wouldn't our lives look different? If we really believed that and took that seriously? It's about Him.

Secondly, we have a new name tag. At least ten times in this passage the phrase in Christ or something similar in Him through Jesus Christ appears over and over.

[29 : 06] In twelve verses for a phrase like that to be repeated ten plus times is really something stark that we ought to notice. Our connection to Jesus our union with Him is highlighted because it's the basis for all of these blessings, right?

None of the rest of this glorious passage happens without that. And so for us the vital question is do you know Him? Do you know Him?

What do I mean when I ask a question like that? Do you know Him? It's an issue of our defining identity of our connection of what's on our name tag.

Under your name does it read in Christ? Does it read guest of Jesus? The question is not asking do you know about Him? Have you heard about Him from a distance or studied about Him up close?

It's do you know Him? Are you in Him? Have you in desperation claimed His record as your own and trusted Him as your only hope? I'm not asking do you go to church more than your co-workers?

[30 : 16] Do you pray more than your family members? Do you know more theology than your friends? That's not the question. This passage is asking are you in Christ?

If so all the blessings of God are yours. One more picture of this from a guy who is even worse off than I was with frozen pizza on the couch.

His name is Mephibosheth. Try saying that even once. Mephibosheth. His story is in 2 Samuel 9. King Saul and his son Jonathan have died.

David has become king of Israel. Jonathan had been David's best friend. Had earned David's affection. And so David asks is there anyone left of Saul's house to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?

He loves Jonathan so much he wants to show kindness to someone for Jonathan's sake. and he's told there's one but he's crippled in both feet.

[31 : 22] He's not worthy to even come in the palace. Perhaps he's a threat to David's power as an heir of Saul still alive. Listen to what happens in 2 Samuel 9.

Mephibosheth does come to King David and David says to him do not fear for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father and you shall eat at my table always.

And Mephibosheth bows down to David and says what's your servant that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I? And the king called Ziba Saul's servant and said to him all that belong to Saul and to all his house I've given to your master's grandson.

son. And so Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem for he ate always at the king's table.

Now he was lame in both feet. Lame in both feet. A self-described dead dog. But Mephibosheth was connected to Jonathan wasn't he?

[32 : 34] And because of Jonathan's merit Mephibosheth always ate at the king's table. If they wore name tags back then I am certain that his would have read son of Jonathan.

Mephibosheth son of Jonathan. Southwood Jesus has done immeasurably more than President Barker for me or Jonathan for Mephibosheth.

President Barker earned me a seat at an honored table for one night. Jonathan earned for Mephibosheth a seat at the king of Israel's table for the rest of his life.

Jesus has earned for us for those who are united to him a seat at the king of kings table for the rest of your life and for all of eternity.

He's done that for you. Does your name tag read guest of Jesus? That's the only way to receive every spiritual blessing to have a perfect record a new family costly redemption full forgiveness a certain inheritance eternal security and and so much more that's just in this one chapter.

[33 : 53] If you're in Christ you've done nothing to earn your seat at the table. God chose the you that is in Christ before the foundation of the world before you did any better or tried any harder rejoice he loves you.

If you're not in Christ you can do nothing to earn your seat at the table. There's nothing you can do. Believe in him. Cling to him.

Ask for his record instead of yours. dead dogs second class believers repeated failures the good news of the gospel is that it's not about you it's all about him and he loves you and welcomes you to this table in Christ to this table that he set before you and he welcomes you in Christ.

I want you to hear the words of institution of this table from 1 Corinthians 11 Paul says I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me and in the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes y'all this is the Lord's table it's not a Southwood table or Presbyterian table if it was a Southwood table you might qualify I might have a chance but it's not it's the table of the holy glorious perfect king of kings and

Will Spink on his own has no chance to be at this table with the imperfections on my record and yours no chance but the guest of Jesus is guaranteed a seat here always always because of his perfect record if you've despaired of your own credentials and trusted in his come come and eat dead dog crippled in both feet your new name tag says in Christ you always eat at the king's table and if you're not in Christ if you don't know him I'd encourage you not to come to this table but I'd encourage you this morning imagine what if your record and the imperfections you're aware of and the things you regret and wish hadn't been a part of your story what if all of that could be wiped away your imperfect record gone and you'd be handed a perfect record that doesn't take months of rehab and trying to earn things better trying to clean it up and build your resume he does it all for you he can do it right now in this moment you can ask him he can scribble guest of

[37 : 09] Jesus on your name tag in this moment in permanent you can feast with him forever won't you trust in Jesus pray with me and we'll come to this table Jesus thank you thank you all the blessings that we have are because of you your body and blood have bought us what a great precious price that is for our redemption would the taste of your body and blood on our lips assure us of the father's full forgiveness and the eternal welcome that you have earned for us we ask in your name amen the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it as I ministering in his name break this bread and he gave it to them and said take and eat this is my body broken for you do this in remembrance of me in the same manner after supper he took the cup and after giving thanks as has been done in his name he gave it to his disciples and said take drink all of you this is the blood of the new covenant in my blood take and drink the body and blood of

Jesus given for you come all of you rejoice feast come trust him and eat and drink to his glory the host team members will usher you forward and back to the tables and we will feast together for more information visit us online at southwood.org our and you you you you