

Ephesians 1:3-14 “Blessed in Christ”

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Preacher: Will Spink

[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.

! What difference does it make?

You can't talk about union with Christ for very long without going to Ephesians chapter 1. Here in Ephesians 1, with overflowing joy in one really long Greek sentence, the Apostle Paul unpacks wonders of good news that we can never exhaust.

We'll be exploring these for eternity. I want to read this beginning of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus that is also God's encouragement to all of us today in the church of Jesus.

Ephesians 1 at verse 3. 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.

[1:46] 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.

Thus far, God's holy word. Let's ask for His blessing. God, you have promised that the word that goes out from your mouth will not return void, that it will accomplish the purpose for which you send it.

[3:18] And so we ask that you would do that now, and that it would accomplish in our hearts the purpose you send it for. Would you encourage us? Would you enliven us?

Would you give us a passion and a zeal and a joy in Christ that we've only dreamed of? Transform us by your Spirit, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. While I was in seminary, Christy worked at Washington University in St. Louis.

And one of the things that she did was plan a big annual dinner to honor distinguished alumni. Over 1,000 people would attend.

Rudy Giuliani, who was the recent mayor of New York City, would be the speaker. And that was a big deal then because it was right in the wake of 9-11. And this event was a big deal.

[4:18] And we had no right to be there. Christy was working the check-in table, which meant that she may or may not even get any food. She may or may not even see inside the banquet room.

But that put me in an even worse situation. Because with Christy gone for the night, I would be alone on the couch, and we're thinking frozen pizza at best for dinner.

There I am. I'm not an alumnus of Washington University. I am in no way distinguished, so definitely not invited.

We were left out until we got our big break. We learned that the president of Clemson University was one of these distinguished alumni being invited to be honored at this event. And since we knew them from our time in Clemson, I emailed Mrs. Barker and said, hey, Christy will be at the check-in table working the event. She's looking forward to seeing y'all there.

[5:27] Except the next morning, Mrs. Barker called the woman organizing the event and said, we would like for Will and Christy to attend the event as our guests.

Just like that. In one phone call, we went from the couch and the check-in table all the way to table number two. Whoa. It was amazing, I tell you.

Incredible. Throw your microphone kind of incredible. For that night, my name tag read, Will Spink, guest of Jim Barker.

Right? I had nothing that I had done to be there. The only way that I could sit there that night and enjoy that wonderful steak dinner at table number two was that I was with President Barker who had earned it.

He'd earned the honors he was receiving, the right to sit at that table. And only as I was connected to him, could I then enjoy the food, the company, the speech, the wonderful blessings of that evening.

[6:34] I want to ask you to think this morning if you have ever felt like a frozen pizza on the couch Christian.

I mean, I'm a Christian, I guess. Not a Muslim. Buddhist. I mean, I'm a Christian, but I'm only worthy of eating frozen pizza on the couch.

Not steak at table number two. I think many of us walk around feeling many days like second class Christians. Maybe it's because we feel the weight of our sin.

I'm just feeling overwhelmed by guilt. I'm trapped in immoral behavior. I just keep living the same old ways as always.

Maybe it's because we feel everyone else knows more and does more and we're just missing out on the real action. We didn't hear about Jesus growing up and we still feel on the outside looking in most days.

[7:43] Maybe what we realize is we're just content with getting by spiritually. Other things besides God are frankly more important.

financially, physically, socially, it's just more natural to focus on those areas and we're too ashamed to ask ourselves why that is.

So we don't deserve God's love and attention. He's probably not interested in us. Only in the really spiritual people, right? They'll feast with God.

We'll settle for the frozen pizza on the couch. If you've ever felt that way, I want you to realize that what Paul does in Ephesians is he starts by pulling us up off the couch.

God himself has placed you in Christ, given you a new identity and relationship with his son so you have not merely a distant view of God but a direct seat at his table.

[8:54] He takes your name tag and writes guest of Jesus and now you get the full VIP treatment. Nothing held back.

The delicious food, the distinguished company, the desirable seat, the droning speech, all of it is yours.

That was a reference to sermons. Here, though, the focus is not a dinner that you'll eat. It's spiritual. Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. This doesn't mean you'll dine with the rich and famous but that all of the care of your sovereign heavenly father that he gives to his most beloved children is yours.

All of it. I mean, something good happens in our life and we post it to social media and put hashtag blessed, right? Most of you don't do that but anyway, sometimes we do that kind of thing and this is so much more than just a little hashtag on a small piece of your life.

[10:10] If we'll only realize the wonder of how richly blessed we are, that's what Paul wants you to hear this morning. The point he's making is that when you receive God's best gift, kids, you learned this week, who is God's best gift?

That's right. Jesus is. When you're united to Jesus, you receive all God's good gifts. There's no second class Christian left behind on the couch with frozen pizza.

God doesn't work that way. See, the gifts, the blessings that we're going to unpack this morning in Ephesians 1 are not individual gifts that you may have some of and not others.

It's not like that. They come together. It's a package deal, if you will. That's why 11 times in these verses alone we're told that a gift comes in Christ, in Him, in the Beloved.

Our union with Christ is not one among many gifts that God gives us, right? It's the package in which all the other gifts are found. Don't you love that kind of gift where you get one of those big bags and you keep opening it and there's one present after another?

[11:28] That package is union with Christ. union with Christ, in fact, is like a stocking. Anybody ever gotten a stocking before?

You see this? Ooh, there's lots of stuff in here. I wonder what it is. When it has your name on it, when you belong to Jesus, all the gifts in the stocking are yours too.

Isn't that how it works on Christmas, right? This is how it works with stockings, right? You don't go through a stocking and think, oh, I need to find a gift tag and see which one of these gifts is for me. That's not how a stocking works, is it? If your name is on it, every gift in here is for you, right? When they start coming out, let's see what's in here. Oh, boy, we've got, oh my goodness, lots of gifts, even some peppermints.

That's exciting. All of the gifts in the stocking, including the last one, are for you. God who loves to give good gifts unites you to Jesus.

[12:34] You receive that gift by faith and then all sorts of presents and blessings spill out of that union with Christ stocking. Okay? So, I have some volunteers for this morning.

If I talked with you earlier, if you would come up here and help me with some of these gifts, yes, thank you. Come on down, we'll find the one with your number on it. All right, let's see.

Beck, were you five? There's one. All right. Four. Were you two? Samuel, were you three?

Awesome. Y'all can go back to your seats.

We'll open these in just a minute. And Gracie is going to get number six, I think. There she comes. She was sitting further back. Oh, I meant to tell you you could have a peppermint. You can come back later and get a, you can come now if you want.

Oh, man. Here you go, Gracie. All right. You got a peppermint too. That's pretty exciting. All of these gifts, thank you.

[13:37] All of these gifts come out of the one stocking of union with Christ. So, y'all are going to have to pay extra special attention so you know when it's your turn.

Okay, when you're united to Jesus, the best gift, you receive all of God's good gifts. We're only going to hit a few that are mentioned here as Paul starts counting his blessings, so to speak. But would you, would you enter into that this morning? Say, what, what happens? What gifts do I have in Christ? Who has number one? Caroline, what, what does number one say?

Can you open the gift for us now? What's in there? Election. All right, thank you. Verse four, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, before creating the heavens and the earth, before creating you and me even, God picks you in his sovereign understanding and he says you are connected to Jesus.

He chose you in him, in Christ. You should have that feeling of worth, of value that you remember when you were the first kid picked for the team on the playground, welling up inside of you, except that it's, it's not worth that, that you've earned.

[15:11] this is chosen only in Christ. Not in your goodness, not in your wisdom, not in your hard work, but in Christ.

Which means, good news, that your badness, your foolishness, your laziness can't disconnect you from Christ.

Christ. Listen, God knows you. He sees you. He has a plan for you, including a way for you to be his and to be holy in his sight.

And all of that has to do with is centered on, hinges on Jesus. That's the gift of election. The spiritual blessing of knowing the God who made us is the God who is remaking us in the image of the son that he connected us to before we were born.

Which leads to gift number two. Can we open gift number two, Sadie? What you got? Adoption.

[16:23] A great one. Verse five. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.

Remember last week God gave us an unassailable identity in Christ. He defines us and he says we are sons and daughters.

We're not merely invited off the couch but amazingly seated at the father's table forever through Jesus Christ. Not on our own but because he is the beloved son and we are connected to him we receive the love the grace the family welcome that he himself the perfect son knows by right. These first two gifts remind us that we were not holy not blameless not his sons by birth we were unholy sinful orphaned because of our sinful nature because of our sinful choices we didn't look like sons of God we didn't live like sons of God we didn't reflect the spitting image of our father but he decided that we would he he was committed that we would that's how much he loved us that when he wasn't obligated to have us in his family when he didn't get stuck with us nonetheless he loved us not because we were so wonderful but in many ways because we weren't right the heart of God was attracted to make us vessels of his mercy trophies of his grace children beloved by the one who is love alright gift number three redemption thank you

Samuel because you've been united to Christ you have redemption verse 7 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 notice God's character here it is to lavish expensive grace on us over and over and over he wanted to unite heaven and earth his people and his creation in the person of Jesus so he had to buy us back that's what redeeming someone meant in Paul's day usually from the context of slavery or servitude perhaps because you had built up such a big debt that you actually had to sell yourself into service to someone else in order to pay off that debt until you were redeemed you were bought back how were we bought back with the precious blood of Jesus

[19:47] Christ right in him redemption through his blood now just stop and marvel at that for a second how do you get his blood to pay for your debts union with Christ your debt sin and death into his account his credit righteousness life into your account second Corinthians 5 21 whatever happens to Jesus happens to you you're connected there is no other way that you deserve death and that someone else dies and you get off the hook in fact you get given life eternal instead what an incredible mysterious marvelous plan that God has for your salvation do you see what he had to do he had to figure out how do I

I take this sinner and without punishing him eternally for his sin how do I give him life oh I need to connect him to someone who deserves life who can give him that gift and so he unites you to Christ you are personally mysteriously but really connected to Jesus your accounts are linked so you can transfer funds or more helpfully he can what good news because we're going to need a lot of gift number four who's got gift number four Lily what do you have forgiveness thank you the forgiveness of our trespasses verse seven isn't this one of our favorite gifts right without it I'm eternally hopeless right I can't forgive myself I've sinned against the holy God of the universe not as as some these days would like you to believe just against my own conscience no no sin is a debt that I can't pay because only the one sinned against can forgive the sin right it's related to redemption the price of paying the guilt of our sins our violations of God's law is quite high and perhaps some of you are wondering and feeling is my tab continuing to run higher and higher every day did you notice what this gift is and what it's like we're told elsewhere that forgiveness is in his name through this man it's in

Christ that forgiveness of sins is offered all through the New Testament in Christ forgiveness is not even according to the cost of your tab like you know just enough to cover it no no what is it it is according to the riches of his grace which by the way he lavished on us there's more coming and more coming right this is like going to grandma's house and when we would go to grandma's house there were always cookies out and if you ate them all there were more in the back and when grandma scooped ice cream for her great grandchildren the bowl could barely contain it it was like magic how it was hanging on there and if you ate it all and the carton ran out there was another carton in the garage freezer always more always given generously like the riches of God's grace

and forgiveness so the very worst things that you've done the very most important things that you've failed to do the thoughts and the desires that you're so embarrassed of that you've never told anyone all of those forgiven in

Christ as you trust him to cover what you can't you see how Paul's just dumping out the stocking right he's just showing look what you have in Jesus look what you have look what you have what else is in here connected to Jesus number five Beck what'd you get an inheritance!

Verse 11 in him we're back in the stocking we have obtained an inheritance that's a big word but it means that God never stops providing for us sorry I messed the microphone up earlier and now can't get it fixed that we will always have what we need especially spiritually right spiritually everything we need always see God hasn't just adopted you temporarily to see how you do and whether he'll keep you no no he will not change his mind he works all things according to his wise plan so you have not merely provision today but you have a stake in eternity future in the Old Testament the promised land and your family's part of it was your inheritance it was a big deal except if you were a

[25:25] Levite one of the priests in which case you didn't get any specific spot of land do you remember why that was the inheritance for that tribe was Yahweh himself by the way that wasn't a penalty for the priests don't feel bad for them that was a privilege talk about a spiritual inheritance in the heavenly places God is committing himself to be with you and for you forever because you are connected to Jesus co-heirs with Christ himself and nothing can separate you from his love remember inseparable an unbreakable union with Christ and that's going to help number six make even more sense what's Paul talking about here at the end the last gift out of the stocking this morning although we could name many more

Gracia what's in in your box back there holy spirit thank you listen to verse 13 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's the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory how do we know that this inheritance is specifically linked to God himself and it's not just pastor talk because God gives us the Holy Spirit in our hearts right now as the down payment the deposit do you see what he's doing when he says it's a guarantee what he's saying is this is assuring you that your sovereign heavenly father who chose us and adopted us that the sacrificial son who redeemed us who forgives us they will be with us along with the third person of the triune

Godhead working together to bring us home to heaven forever the whole trinity working together for you you have the Holy Spirit now now it changes things the Spirit gives new life so you're not just stuck going around living in sin right in sprocket in Christ you're not the same anymore you're a new person you have the Spirit to remind you of the power and the provision of the God of the universe the resurrection power that brought new life out of the dead is in you you can't get Holy Spirit any other way and you can't have Jesus and not have his Holy Spirit now living and active in your life both of those things are true there's no other way than through union with Christ to have Holy Spirit and you can't have

Jesus and not have the Holy Spirit in that stocking too See both of those realities are true for all of these good gifts that God gives you can't get any of them apart from Jesus apart from union with Christ but if you have Jesus you can't miss a one of them they are all yours the gifts are wrapped up if you will in the giver that's why this one big long sentence that Paul writes is a sentence of praise to God how does it start blessed be God this is what Paul is doing he's praising God he's leading the worship service of prayer and all of these gifts are just more and more reasons to praise God every good and perfect gift is from above it's from your father it's through his son it's secured I hope that even even right now as we consider these gifts and think about just some of them as we marvel at how richly blessed we are that that that that you'll realize I'm graced so abundantly in Christ that one of the things that wells up in my heart is thanksgiving for all these gifts is praise to God I've forgotten!

[30:04] Father how good you have been to me and how great you are we never could have found these gifts on our own we never could have done enough to earn them and yet they become ours in Christ God forgive me for

sitting on the couch spiritually for thinking that I'm stuck with frozen pizza when you have seated me in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus and God praise be to your grace that while I am seated there in the heavenly places but still living here on earth you have given me every spiritual blessing possible God you are so good to me I hope that's what you're thinking I also recognize it's quite possible that you're sitting here this morning and you're thinking yeah but

I don't actually believe in Jesus so I'm not sure any of those good gifts are for me I'm not sure they're mine if that's you this morning first of all I want to say thank you for listening this long and tracking with what God's word is saying this morning and there's good news here for you that I don't want you to miss out on today so you don't have to keep running around trying to figure out solutions for all of these different issues in your life how to get your shortcomings!

addressed addressed oh man we all have shortcomings none of us meets even our own standards what am I going to do about mine how do I know I'm loved and I belong we all long for that where will I find it how do I address the future to have hope to experience deep stability and security so that I won't be shaken see if you're longing for those things you might have to go to six different places and different relationships and work years and years to develop all of these in your life and still never have real forgiveness or adoption or an inheritance that you're confident about and the good news is you don't have to you could chase all of those or you could come to one place to one person to Jesus who offers you all of those and say to him

Jesus you have everything that I need that's what God is offering you this morning on the authority of his word simply to believe into Jesus and have a relationship with the God who gives every good gift you just cling to him and all the rest of that stuff comes with it so we're going to keep talking the rest of this summer about what this looks like in the different areas of our lives but when I say the gifts are wrapped up in the giver it means for example that when you are trapped in sin when you're beginning to feel overwhelmed by guilt when you want to hide instead you run to Jesus you don't have to manage your sin you don't have to figure out how to stop it on your own you run to him and find first forgiveness and then hope and then new life in him so there's actually a change you're not just making yourself feel a little better or look a little better there's real change cling to

Jesus and remember that if you have him you have everything you need similarly when you're lonely you don't know if anyone sees or values you when you're discouraged about an uncertain future when you're too weak to handle the situation that you're facing right now cling to Jesus the hope the family that you belong to the Holy Spirit power are yours not when you chase after all those gifts but when you cling to the giver when you find yourself in Christ and then you begin to unwrap all of the gifts that come with him don't go looking anywhere else don't go run under the tree don't go searching in a closet you walk into the presence of the God of the universe with guest of Jesus on your name tag so you regularly open up that stocking boldly open up union with

[34:56] Christ and just unwrap in relationship with him one gift after another you go and approach his throne of grace to find everything that you need and so much more in Christ let's pray Jesus thank you for this great gift the gift that we'll never stop giving for all of eternity we will be exploring the riches that you have poured into us because we know you because we have you because you have us and will never let us go might we live with those kind of riches with that kind of power with that type of confidence and hope and joy because you have so richly given us everything that we need we thank you for it and we pray that we would look for riches nowhere else and that we would delight in coming to you for them every day in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org who