

Saved to Serve

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[0 : 00] the one who came not to be served, but to serve. And so over the next six weeks, we're going to be dipping into Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus.

And this letter is about the church and it's about who the church is. And it's time for us to pick it up again. We've done it before, time for us to pick it up again and get an idea of what God says the church is as we look ahead to the next year and closing of Vision 2020 and to seek what he has in store for us as we plan to move forward in our life together in this city.

Paul shows us here in this letter the incredible scope of God's plan for the universe, his agenda for the universe through time and eternity through the Lord Jesus and therefore his agenda for the church, his agenda for this church.

So if you're lucky to follow me today, you hopefully receive one of these on the way in, a bit of an outline, which you'll have the passage in front of you and also my three extensive points.

And from there, also if you haven't got this, you can also use the St. Paul's app. It's in front of you as well. But let me just launch into it. First of all, I want to pick up verse three because verse three in chapter one is an astonishing claim, but it's also the summary verse of the entire chapter of chapter one.

[1 : 42] What does it mean to be blessed?

Every spiritual blessing in Christ. What a statement that is. The rest of chapter one just simply unpacks what it means to be blessed.

And this statement says there's nothing lacking. There's nothing overlooked. There's nothing held back. Now, when we use the word blessing today, it doesn't carry the same force that's meant here in this verse.

You know, I mostly sign off my emails and text messages with the word blessing from Steve, you know, blessing Steve. And it means that I wish you well, even if the text doesn't necessarily indicate that of what I've just sent you, I'm wishing you well.

In verse three, it means something far more profound. Its meaning is very similar to the Old Testament word shalom.

[2 : 57] Every blessing carries the meaning to have every joy and every benefit that your heart and your soul needs and longs for.

That's what it means to have every blessing. That's what the word blessing means. To have every joy and every benefit that your heart and your soul needs and longs for.

And the declaration here in verse three is that if you are a Christian, if you're a disciple of the Lord Jesus, you're a member of God's family, then you've got it already.

You have every spiritual blessing now. It's a past tense in the original language. The blessings that are ours are listed in verses three to 14, which in the original text is one long, complex sentence.

It's a sentence which is meant to overwhelm us with every blessing. And each one of them has many, many applications.

[4 : 18] Each one could fill a library with its applications. And I think that Paul deliberately wants us to be overwhelmed with this massive cosmic list of what God has done for us in Jesus.

Now, I just want to unpack just briefly two of them, adoption and redemption. Have a look at the end of, and when I say briefly unpack, I mean really briefly unpack.

Verse four, in love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. Now, adoption has multiple aspects to it.

Adoption means that through Jesus Christ, that God is not just our King and our Savior, but he is our Father.

Jesus brings us into the ultimate family, the eternal family. One implication is that we have access to him as his much-loved children.

[5 : 24] One very famous photo of John F. Kennedy when he was President of the United States is his young son, John Jr., playing under his desk in the Oval Office while he is having a meeting with other officials and getting on with being the most powerful person in the world.

Anyone else try to get that kind of access to the President would be stopped. You know, I just can't walk into the Oval Office and play at Donald Trump's feet.

Doesn't work. Not that I want to, but doesn't work. Or if you decide to rush the President, you'd be shot. As a child of God, we can access him without appointments, without fear.

We can boldly run into his arms. Adoption also means inheritance. This is why the emphasis here is on us being adopted, whether you're male or female, as sons of God.

In the first century Palestine, only sons could be heirs and inherit the property of the Father when this was first written.

[6 : 43] And as adopted sons, we are co-heirs with Jesus of the future. We inherit the future. We don't know completely what that means, but Jesus says, the meek will inherit the earth.

Adoption also means security. If you're an employee, how long does your employer put up with your bad behavior and your failures?

It varies, I suppose. But everyone has their limits. But how long does a parent put up with the waywardness of a child? It's kind of forever.

God is our Father and we are secure in his love. But the prior to place here in chapter one is redemption.

Verse seven. We are told, in him we have redemption. Now redemption, again, is a loaded word with multiple implications.

[7 : 54] It's actually the word for ransom, which is a bit more than simply paying a debt. Ransom carries the meaning which is a bit more than just paying a debt.

It is, in fact, in the first century, the word that's used to set a prisoner free. For instance, in New York, when, if you ever get your car towed away by authorities because you're parked in the wrong spot, they put it in a car prison, a sort of a holding yard.

And those holding yards are called redemption centers. When you pay the fine, they release your car to you.

When you pay the fine and they do not stamp on the fine paid, they stamp on the fine redeemed.

And when you pay the fine, you get stamped redeem on your fine and you release your car from captivity.

[9 : 10] Redemption means paying a debt that we owe, but it also means being liberated from slavery. Indian lawyer and activist Mahatma Gandhi said that both Eastern and Western religions all agree that human beings are not free.

We are all slaves, in his words, to selfishness and the ego. And I reckon he was pretty right.

We are always, every single human being, always grasping at things because our egos are constantly needing to be fed. And of course, we are constantly grasping at power of money, of beauty, of status, of popularity, of recognition.

It puts us at the center. We push everyone else away so that my ego can be fed. And Gandhi went on to say that Christianity helps.

And he was a student of Christianity even though he was a Hindu. He got most of his theological formation about Christianity from Tolstoy, which I would never recommend. but, so that's where you can see his failure here.

[10 : 22] He went on to say that Christianity helps because in Jesus, we have a way to be really free from the selfishness and the egocentricity that enslaves us through his example.

He said Jesus was the ultimate example of nonviolence, the ultimate example of giving up power and wealth and influence, the ultimate example of sacrificial service.

So he says, look to Jesus forgiving, loving and serving, dying for others and when you see him, you will be moved and it will liberate you from selfishness and ego to go and do likewise following his footsteps.

Now with all due respect to Gandhi's massive achievements, he missed a crucial point of Christianity.

If we look to the amazing life and service of Jesus for others and try to live like he lived, to follow in his footsteps in order to be fully free, it will crush you, it will kill you.

[11 : 46] There is no egocentricity in his life whatsoever. Even a secularist would declare that. It is a perfect life.

He is not driven by the need for security and approval and power. To try to be like him would end up crushing us under the weight of expectations that cannot be met. We would be cursed, not blessed, if we followed in Gandhi's way.

We don't need someone to live up to. We need someone to liberate us, to set us free from slavery. If I see Jesus Christ loving, forgiving, serving, and dying, not for others, but for me, for me, doing all that for me in my place, oh, that's different.

That is very different. And this is how we can be truly blessed. I'm up to my second point if you're following me on.

The big and the repeated statements in chapter one is every blessing comes to us in Christ.

[13 : 21] Not being like Christ, but in Christ. Verse three again, praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

It's also verse four, verse five, verse seven, verse nine, verse 11. When you become a Christian, you are not just given an example to follow in Jesus. He is that.

You are not just given a king to obey. He is that. Nor simply given a savior to appreciate. He is that.

When you become a Christian, you are put in him. everything that is his, he departs to us.

Everything he has, all of his accomplishments are yours. Every blessing comes from being connected to Jesus. We have no spiritual blessing unless we are connected to Jesus.

[14 : 26] These blessings are not something that we earn by our religious or our moral effort. In fact, the very first few verses of chapter two help us to see that to get every blessing cannot be achieved by trying harder.

Have a look at it. Ephesians two, verses one to three, we get the diagnosis of the human condition and why our efforts cannot achieve anything.

As for you, you are dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the rule of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Paul is not saying here, like Gandhi, that we are in danger of death, but that we are in a state of real and present death.

[15 : 42] And it would appear that God's got it wrong because there are people all around us living day by day in the city whose bodies are active, whose minds are sharp and personalities brimming.

Has he got it wrong that we are dead even though we are present? The philosopher Jerry Bentham died on the 6th of June. I've told you about this guy in the past.

Died on the 6th of June, 1832 and in his will he requested that he had his body preserved and put in a wooden cabinet. He left his entire estate, which was quite an estate, to the University College Hospital in London on the condition that his body be placed in attendance at all hospital board meetings.

And this duty is carried out to this day. That's not his original head. They had to come up with another one because it was pretty creepy. It's carried out every day.

The cabinet is wheeled into the room to the board table and the chairman says, Jeremy Bentham present but not voting. It's astounding but it's amazing when you want someone's estate you'll do whatever it takes.

[17 : 09] He will never raise a hand in response to a motion. He will never submit a motion although he's been there in body for 175 years, he's been dead the entire time.

Dead people are dead. They cannot do anything for themselves and what Ephesians 2 says is that every human being is in that position spiritually left to their own devices.

In the area that matters the most the soul there is no life left to our own devices we are all blind to the reality the demands and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 2 and 3 says that that's our natural state all of us are dominated by the world from without the devil from beyond and our own sinful desires from within.

We are helpless hopeless and in great peril unless something is done to save us to bring us back to life we are dead in our transgressions and sins and the good news is that from the deep depths of helplessness death and despair we now move to the astounding contrast of verse 4 but because of his great love for us God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace that you have been saved.

[18 : 50] In our state of spiritual death God through the Lord Jesus Christ has come along and breathed life into us and not until we get that life do we realise that we were even dead in the first place.

We are dead in our transgressions but God intervened we're in bondage to sin but God intervened we're objects of wrath but God intervened God intervened by redeeming us releasing us from captivity to sin and death through the blood of Jesus you see that in chapter 1 verse 7 in him that's Jesus we have redemption through his blood Jesus has objectively taken away from me everything that's wrong with me and everything that's wrong with you he has stood in our place he has taken our sin he has paid our debt he has given us life and he has set us free from selfishness and the ego God himself enters our world and upholds his justice by becoming cursed for us so that we might receive every spiritual blessing all our guilt and our shame is taken away so if you're a

Christian then you are in the valley of death but through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus you have been redeemed you have been resurrected and been raised to the highest of heights and it's all for free free did you get that in verses 8 and 9 for it is by grace that you've been saved through faith this is not from yourself it is a gift of God not by works so that no human being can ever go look at me salvation is by God's grace grace it's why for the Christian humility must be the first thing that grows in your life it is the unmerited favor coming to us the utterly deserved it's a free gift Paul is so keen that we understand that we don't work for it that any service that we do in the name of Christ is not paying him back he says it's not by work so that no one can boast we can try all we like but all of our good works are no more beneficial than rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic there is no room for boasting in human effort we deserve nothing we were owed nothing it is not as if

God could see our potential we were dead and yet we have every spiritual blessing through Jesus the spiritually bankrupt have had their debt wiped clean been set free from bondage to selfishness and sin and ego and death and verse 10 is a wonderful description of who you are in Jesus if you're a Christian you've been taken from being a corpse to now we are God's workmanship literally we are God's masterpiece we are his work of art on display full of life for eternity the ultimate workmanship of God is a person who's been dating transgressions and sin and been made alive in Christ and the awesome news is that this is available to everyone as it says in verse 8 through faith act 16 says believe and have faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ and you will be saved and that's a decision that some of you need to make today do not waste this opportunity come to life in Jesus today and believe in him stop trusting in your own effort stop trusting in your own intellect and submit yourself to the will of Christ God's eternal plan as has just been unfolded to you in Ephesians 1 and 2 there is no faith in Jesus there is no grace there is no salvation no one has sins forgiven no one goes to heaven no one has peace until there is faith in the Lord Jesus receiving every spiritual blessing by God's grace has a profound impact on your life you spend the rest of your life realizing this blessing by working it into your heart until it shapes every air of your being there are at least two evidences in these chapters that reveal that we have in fact received every spiritual blessing in

[24 : 17] Jesus we see the first is in chapter 1 verse 6 to the praise of his glorious grace and again at the end of verse 12 for the praise of his glory and once more in verse 14 to the praise of his glory when you have every spiritual blessing through Jesus you don't just believe in your mind it becomes glorious to you it is beautiful to you it captures you it captures your imagination it captures your heart you praise God's grace you lift your voice and you sing it you declare it this is not just evidence of having received every spiritual blessing but the way these blessings work their way into your life there is no more powerful story for change no more moving moral narrative than someone giving their life for others for instance on the 13th of

January 1982 Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the icy waters of a river in Washington D.C. just like after takeoff because of faulty de-icing on the wings of the plane dozens of people were killed most people were killed in fact on the flight except there were six that were initially survived the crash and they clung to the only part of the plane that was hanging out of the icy waters and that was the tail of the plane and the waters were so icy they hampered the rescue effort they tried launching boats boats couldn't get to the plane people couldn't survive swimming in the water a very well strong human being could last a maximum of 30 minutes in that kind of temperature before succumbing to hypothermia and so a helicopter was called in they couldn't bring a rescuer it's like anyone got a helicopter they brought in a helicopter the first passenger they rescue was already floating in the water and starting to nod off to sleep and they managed to get this person attached to a cable and drag them out of the water to the river bank helicopter came back and threw a and by that time he had submerged below the icy waters there are scholarships all over the United

States in his honour bridges and roads are named after this guy he gave his life to save five people there is no more powerful narrative structure or moral beauty than sacrificial love Jesus Christ did that for you and you were his enemy dead in sin it changes the driving centre of your life it will move you so that the things that you used to find captivating selfishness and ego no longer drive you his glorious grace will capture you and lift your heart in praise his glorious grace will change you and we see that in the apostle

Paul from verses 15 onwards in chapter one Paul just cannot control himself he overflows in praise and prayer he's essentially praying here in these verses that this Ephesian church would come to fully understand the magnitude of receiving every spiritual blessing in Christ it will motivate us to live lives that praise him but also lives that don't put me at the center verse 10 for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do a life of good works a life of service of others is indispensable to salvation it's the life of service we have been saved to praise and serve as

Martin Luther famously said justification is by faith alone but not by faith that is alone for where there is faith there are always works each one of us has an eternally designed job description which includes the tasks the abilities and the place to serve whatever the job description he has called you into he will equip you fully for it and in fulfilling the service that he's called you to do by his grace you will be both more and more his workmanship and more and more your true self and more and more you'll discover joy in the service of others rather than the pursuit of selfishness and the ego there is nothing more beautiful than his workmanship praising and serving for his glory and our vision for this series over the next coming weeks and for this year ahead for us as a church is to call as many as possible into that beauty into that joy we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing to serve blessed that we might be a blessing called

[31 : 13] Hashem.