

Ephesians 1:11-14

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[0:00] I am Matt Coburn. That is Nick Lauer up there in the plaid shirt. We were amalgamated tonight.

Matt Lauer will not be joining us. Oh, it's just good for a laugh, Michelle. It's great. We love it.

So, we are going to be continuing in our series in Ephesians. If you want to turn with me in a few Bibles to page 976, we're going to be looking at Ephesians chapter 1, verses 11 through 14.

As you're turning there, I did a little bit of research this week. I want to ask a question, Josh, you might know the answer, but how many people have run the Boston Marathon in this room?

Anyone? No? Okay. Good. I might get away with this illustration then. All right. So, if you know anything about the Boston Marathon, which is one of the better marathons in the world.

[1:10] So, there is this place about mile 20 that is called Heartbreak Hill. It is only a hill with an elevation of about 90 feet. So, it's not actually as high as some of the other worst hills in marathons. But it does happen at a fairly high grade, which makes it harder if you've ever run a marathon. The other thing, and this is where I'm way out of my depth, but my understanding is that right around the 20th mile is when your body begins to completely have used up all of its normal reserves. And it starts drawing energy from places in your body that it never pulls from before. And so, your body is just, rumor has it from the accounts that I read that when you're running the marathon, that's right about the point when you just are like, I'm about to give up. You're literally stumbling down the road. And when you hit Heartbreak Hill in that condition, it is so hard to get to the top. Rumor has it that the professionals, they keep running like they're doing fine. But pretty early on, you start to see the people who are just struggling and just fighting to put one foot in front of the other to get up Heartbreak Hill.

One of the neat things that I saw in that is that there are people who camp out on Heartbreak Hill every April because their job, as they see it, is to help these poor runners get to the top of the hill. To keep going and not give up when they hit this really hard point in life.

They cheer them on and say, you can do it. It's not that far. This is mile 20. You're nearing the end.

You can do this. And I think that it's not unfair to see that the book of Ephesians is actually written in some ways for a similar purpose. We've talked about it before. The book of Ephesians in some ways is a general book about what does it mean to be a Christian and how do we live. But it was striking to me as I was thinking about this message tonight that in chapter 6, it talks about the battle.

It talks about the struggle that it is to keep going as a Christian. And in one place, it actually talks about that there is this great spiritual battle to keep going and that the goal isn't even to victory and to victory and break through the finish line and to that. But all Paul exhorts them to in chapter 6 is to stand. And what he actually says is, so therefore stand firm and having withstood everything, stand. To keep going when life gets hard. In the face of disappointments, where it feels like your future has been ripped away from you. In the face of disability or disease, where your very health and functioning seems to suddenly have flown away from you. In the face of a disaster, a personal disaster or a natural disaster, when it seems like everything that you thought was certain and sure has been shaken to the core. In the face of a discouragement that won't lift, when you think every day you wake up and you think, today's going to be better. And yet it's not.

[4:54] The darkness descends and the heaviness chokes your soul. In the face of these things and many others, words, part of what the book of Ephesians has to say to us tonight particularly is that the promise of our future, that is being able to see the finish line and know what is awaiting us, is a part of what we have as ammunition to cheer one another on. Part of what God has called the church to is to be those people lined up on Heartbreak Hill, speaking the words of encouragement, reminding them of the God that they know and what he has done for them, reminding them of the future that awaits at the end so that they can press on.

This is a basic of Christianity. How do we keep going? So we're going to look at our passage. I'm going to read verses 3 through 14. We're going to look especially at verses 11 through 14 tonight. So if you want to read along with me and then we'll pray and then we'll dive in.

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 foundations of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons 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 on 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. Lord, I ask as we look at this word that you would illuminate our minds and, Lord, enliven our hearts, Lord, that we would see the truth of it, and in seeing that truth, Lord, we would love it and respond in worship, and even as this passage says, that we might be to the praise of your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. As Paul finishes this incredible section about what God has done for us in Christ, what God has done, the every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms that he talks about in verse 3, he now finishes in verses 11 through 14 by primarily looking ahead and saying that there is something yet to come that you have now already taken hold of. And in fact, he emphasizes here the role of the Holy Spirit, that God has given us the Holy Spirit so that we might know that what is to come is ours in Christ, that we have this future that is of such incredible and surpassing worth that we can keep going. So let's look at this. Let's look at this future and the way that he lays it out, the way that he unpacks it. Look with me in verse 11.

[9:33] In him, and in him, the him here is talking about Christ. It's always about Christ in this section, I believe. And so in Christ, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things out according to the counsel of his will. So this is the first thing that Paul wants us to see, is that what we have waiting for us, because of the salvation, all the things that you see in verses 6 through 9, we have redemption. That is, we've been bought back out of slavery to sin. That we have the forgiveness of our trespasses, that we no longer stand guilty before God. That he has lavished on us this mercy and grace and this salvation from sin. That he has made us his own by doing all these things. He now says, in him, we have obtained an inheritance.

For all who are in Christ now, there is now a future waiting for us. That means that we are a part of God's family. This is what you see back in chapter, or in verse 4 and 5, right? He says, you've been predestined to be adopted as his sons. That is, that he has brought you into his family, which means that you now are the beneficiaries of the riches of being a part of his household.

You are the one who will receive the blessings of being in God's household forever. And that's an incredible thing for us. Because what it means is that it means we never have to be worried again or uncertain about who we are. Because if we have this inheritance as a part of God's house, we know whose we are. We are sons and daughters of God.

And the inheritance that we have is like the inheritance of the firstborn. That is, we get all the fullness of it. We don't get the scraps of God's kingdom.

We get the fullness of it because we become, in Christ, who is the firstborn in the house of God, we become co-heirs, as it says in Galatians. Ones who receive all the fullness of being in God's house.

[12:04] So we know who we, we know that we, where we belong. We know who we are. We know that God is going to provide for us. If God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And this is now to be ours. This inheritance of being in his household is now ours. We know that there is no good thing that God will withhold from us. Now we know in our present circumstances that it feels like that, doesn't it, sometimes? God, are you really going to be good? God, are you going to abandon me? Or are you really going to carry me through? Can you really provide for me in the particulars of my circumstances?

The fact that we have this inheritance that in Peter is described as imperishable, unfading, and kept in heaven for us. This inheritance is a glorious thing. And it means that as we are part of his household, we are recipients of, above all things, his love. The Father bestows his love on us through the Son. What a glorious thing it is that we have this inheritance. And I want you to see, too, how Paul unpacks it. Because he says, we have obtained this inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things out according to the counsel of his will.

If you are a believer here tonight, you need to know that salvation did not come to you by a happy circumstance or by a lucky accident. I'll bet for those of us who would claim to be a follower of Christ in this room, if we sat down, we could talk about all the crazy stories, all the remarkable circumstances, all the amazing individuals and ways that God, the diverse ways that God has drawn us to himself, drawn us to himself, drawn us to the place where recognizing our sin and our need for a savior, we believed in him. But friends, look at what this says. None of that was an accident.

God has worked all of this out according to his will for you. From the beginning, God chose you. If you want to marinate on that, go to our website. Go back two weeks ago to the beginning, chapter three, or verse three through five. I preached a whole sermon on what it meant for us to be chosen. I don't want to rehash that. But what I do want to say is it's not a mistake that you are here. And if you're here tonight and you're exploring Christianity, you're wondering about it, if you're thinking, what is this? What is this Jesus thing all about? You're not here by accident either. God has drawn you here tonight so that you might hear more of what God has done for you and Jesus. I pray that God will give you ears to hear and that you will be able to see what he has done.

So the inheritance that we have is rooted in God's plan for us. Secondly, I want you to look at verses 12 and 13. And this is a very cool thing because it's not only that, but it is for all people.

[15:38] I don't know if you've ever been in a circumstance when you walked into a room and you thought, do I belong here? Is this, am I really, like, am I, am I up to snuff? And it could be for all sorts of reasons. I might walk in as a woman to a room full of men and think, wow, do I belong here?

I might walk in as a Caucasian into a room full of people of color and think, do I belong here? I might walk in to a room of people who go to that big university over there and think, am I smart enough to be here? Is it okay? Because I don't have that. You know, when I was in ninth grade, I tried to join a traveling soccer team and I did it, but I remember living that whole fall with the sense of, like, do I belong here? Am I good enough to actually make this team and to stay on it?

I'm sure you've felt that in some way. You know, one of the remarkable things about God's grace is that it is a welcome invitation to all. Let me show you why I'm talking about this because in verse 12, Paul makes a very interesting statement. He says, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. Now, when I first read that, I thought, oh, that's nice. That's all believers, right? Because we've all put our hope in Christ.

But then, interestingly, do a little, if you're an English major, look at the pronouns for a section, second, right? In verses 11 and 12, he's talking about we. And then verse 13, he makes this interesting shift. And you also, when you heard and believed this message. And it's a fascinating shift. And I think, because we'll see it at the end of chapter 2 and chapter 3, that Paul's going to make this a very big deal. In the progress of history and how God has worked in history, in the Old Testament times before Christ, God primarily worked through a particular nation, the Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham. And they were his special nation that he called out to be his own.

And he leaves bountiful hints that his goal is never limited to just those people. That his goal is always to include people from outside of that little nation and that little tribe. But then when we get to the New Testament, there's this remarkable thing that happens. Because Jesus blows the doors open. And what you see is the fullness of God's plan. That his salvation isn't just for this people.

[18:25] He's not just a tribal God. He is a God for all people. And so, the first to believe in Christ were the Jews who heard and listened to Christ during his earthly ministry in the very beginning of the church. And you see this pattern throughout the New Testament that there's a sense of first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. And yet, this was not a priority of value. It was a priority of chronology.

What God is saying is, no, my grace is for everyone. There is no one. There is no race, no color, no gender, no intellectual ability or background, no financial need. There is no human calculus that can preclude us from the invitation of the gospel and from the welcome of God the Father to those who believe in him. And we see this because in Revelation at the end, when we see a picture in the book of Revelation of what God's people gathered around the throne will be, he says it will be people from every tongue and tribe and nation. And so, friends, if you've ever wondered, do I belong in God's family?

Friends, friends, know that there is nothing, there's no human characteristic that keeps you apart from that.

The common qualifier is that we who have believed in or we who have hoped in Christ, the one requisite, the one prerequisite for those to come into God's kingdom is to recognize that they are sinners in need of a Savior, that they are lost without God, that in themselves and in this fallen world that we live in, we need a salvation that comes from beyond ourselves. We can never do it on our own. We can never be good enough. We can never perform well enough. We could never do enough church activities. Nothing we can do can overcome the power of sin and death in this world. But God has sent one who can, Jesus.

And by his perfect life, living a life without sin, and by his death, therefore offered, not because of his own sin, but his death offered on our behalf, and because of his resurrection from the dead, showing that sin and death had no power over him, and that he's now a risen Savior and a living God who is able to offer all who come to him in repentance and faith, he's able to give them forgiveness of sins and life now and eternal with him. Friends, this is all that God wants. From every tongue and tribe and nation, from every place, from every corner of New Haven, from every part of Connecticut, to the ends of the earth, this is what God has given us. What a mercy it is that God would include us in his people. What a great God he is.

[22 : 04] Thirdly, look at me in verses 13 and 14. The inheritance is rooted in God's plan. It is inclusive of all people. Thirdly, it is marked by the Spirit of God. When Nick preached on verse 3 a couple weeks ago, he pointed out the fact that this section from 3 to 14 has almost a Trinitarian shape.

That the first part, verses 3 through 5, is kind of about the work of the Father, and then 6 through 9, or 6 through 10, is about the work of the Son, Jesus, and then here we see the work of the Spirit that God has given, the Holy Spirit.

Look with me again. Let's read it. In him also you, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

There are two images here of what the Holy Spirit does. There's a much broader theology of the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity, the very person of God, who comes and dwells within those who have believed in Christ.

But here are two images to give us hope as we press on in this race. First of all, he is a seal. Now, I used to think that the best image for this was like a wax seal.

[23 : 33] I don't know if you've ever seen, like, in the old fashion, you have these scrolls, and they drip a glob of wax on it, and then you push a seal in it, and that would keep the scroll closed, and it would describe who it's from.

And I thought, oh, that's what God has done with us. But interestingly, as I studied this week for this, I realized that actually, a lot of the commentators say it's actually more like a brand. Think of the cattle out west, right?

And when you've got free-range cattle, you've got lots of cattle, and sometimes they even mix together. Well, how do you tell them apart? Well, because the cattle man has taken his brand, and apart from the painful and potentially damaging aspect of this, it's a mark that says, this one is mine.

It's a sense of ownership. And that's what God has done with us. By giving us the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, He is saying to us, this one is mine.

And He's given it indelibly. That's why you would brand a cattle, because you can't erase it. You can't rub it out. You can't change it.

[24 : 45] And God has given similarly an indelible mark on His people. And He's done that by the Holy Spirit coming and dwelling within Him.

The second thing, as we see further on in verse 13, or at the beginning of 14, I'm sorry, is that He's also the guarantee. Your footnote says, this is like a down payment.

If you've ever bought a house, right, part of what you have to do is you have to give enough money as a down payment to say, I can buy this. I can actually do this.

And this is a guarantee that the person who is selling it will be able to weather this financially. Maybe some of you, I see a few of you who may be college parents, have you ever co-signed on a college loan to be the guarantor of that college loan?

That means that someone else is getting the money, but you're signing off to say, if He doesn't pay it back, I guarantee that I will pay you back. What does this mean?

[25 : 58] It means for us, the Holy Spirit is the one that God has given to us to guarantee that what He has done in us will be brought to a completion.

That as He is calling us to Himself and saying, you are my people, you are my children, you are now a part of my household, He is saying, I'm giving you the Holy Spirit so that you know that your inheritance is secure and is certain and can never be taken from you.

And this is what the Holy Spirit is given to us for. God takes responsibility for His own to make it to the end.

God takes responsibility to say, I will give you, my Holy Spirit, so that you will know that I have made, that I have guaranteeing that you will make it to the end.

And of course, this is part of what the Holy Spirit does, isn't it? Not only is the Holy Spirit one who comes and gives us a new spiritual life, He is the one who gives us gifts of service in the church.

[27 : 16] He is the one who enlivens our souls so that we can understand the word of God so that we may be able to run the race with perseverance. He gives strength. There are so many ways in which the Holy Spirit living in us ministers to us and enables us to do this.

But fundamentally, what Paul is saying here is that all of that is an outworking of this guarantee that God has given to us. a remarkable thing.

And then finally, we've seen it twice in this passage. We've seen it three times in the larger section. We see it at the end of 12 and at the end of 14.

What God has done for us is He's done all of this so that we might be to the praise of His glory. Friends, I'd love for you to spend your fall meditating on this.

That this is what God has called you to in Christ. That you might be to the praise of His glory. Because what God is doing when He does this is He is unseating the very center of what our sin nature does.

[28 : 38] If you go back to the Garden of Eden, when the temptation came to Adam and Eve, it was, you can be independent from God.

You can be your own God like Him. You can be God of your own world. You can be the one who's at the pinnacle of all that is.

You can be the center of your universe around which everything else orbits around the gravity of your center. And when Adam and Eve sinned, and what we do every day, and we know this because we're darn it all, we're just plain selfish.

We just think it's about us. And what God is doing in our salvation is He is unseating that. And He's freeing us up from that.

And He's putting Himself back in the center where He belongs. And He's putting us back where we belong. Orbiting around the gravity of His glory and His greatness and His goodness.

[29 : 52] And all of our lives, all of our relationships, all of our career decisions, all of our daily interactions with people, all of our thoughts and our private world, all of these things are meant to be reoriented around this new center of gravity.

That we might be to the praise of His glory in all that we do. That God has saved us from, in fact, the unbearable burden of being the center of our own universe.

And put us back where we belong so that we find in great joy and freedom that we weren't made for our own glory, but we were made for His.

And as we find ourselves focused on Him and His glory and His greatness, let me just stop for a minute and make sure we define our words. The praise of His glory, His glory is the display of His nature, His character, and His works.

It is, the glory of something is when you see its characteristics and you see the value of them. What God wants to do with us is for us to see the unparalleled, unmatched glory of God in the work that He has done in saving us from sin.

[31 : 23] And when we put Him in that center, and when we find ourselves orbiting around Him and making Him the point of our lives, do you know what we find? There's glory for us.

There's glory that we are able to reflect Him and be for Him. And that's what Paul will talk about in the second half of Ephesians. The first half is going to be this is what God has done for you and this is all that.

And then the second half is so live like it. Live in such a way that you are to the praise of His glory and as you do that you will reflect Him and in your character and in your actions and in your priorities and in your relationships.

You will be to the praise of His glory. Both the praise that wells up in your own heart and the praise of others who see your life and they will not see how great Jonathan Lee is or Greg Hendrickson, but they will see how great God is.

And what a great thing that is because that's what actually we were created for. This is what the Westminster Confession says when it says what is the primary purpose of mankind?

[32 : 48] The chief end is the old language. What is the chief end of man, of all mankind, is that all of us, men and women, would enjoy God and glorify Him forever.

That we would not only see His greatness, but that it would bring us great joy to see Him as He truly is. And then in doing so, He would glorify Himself through us.

So friends, this is the inheritance. This is what waits for us. All these things that God has done for us, the fullness of them is still there. And whether you're cruising at mile 25.9 or whether you are wrestling at mile 20.4 and you're in the middle of heartbreak hell, remember these things and press on.

Let's pray. Lord, we praise You. We praise You for what You have done for us in Christ. Lord, we pray You to help us.

Help us to take hold of these things, to hold fast to them and cling to them. Lord, help us to run the race set before us with perseverance.

[34 : 16] Help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the One who started our faith, the One who will bring it to completion.

God, help us to take hold of this inheritance and to carry it with us. Lord, we thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit who is a seal and a guarantee. Lord, that the work You have begun in us, Lord, You will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.