

Ephesians 1:3-14 — I Am Blessed.

December 2, 2018

It is great to have you on the first Sunday of advent as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. One of the problems with the Christmas season is that it has become familiar. It is routine. The wonder of Jesus' birth is stifled with routine. We put up the same Christmas decorations. It is the same fake tree and lights.

The greatest danger of the Christmas season is not the familiarity of our Christmas decorations but the familiarity of the Christmas story. Year after year we set up the nativity scene with the shepherds, wise men, Mary, Joseph and baby in the manger. The familiarity and ordinariness of that Christmas scene can obscure the significance of Jesus' birth when the Son of God also became the Son of Man.

To help us see the significance of Christmas in a new way, this morning we begin a small advent series that will look at a few select passages from the book of Ephesians. The title of this series is, "The Gift of the Son." My hope is that these weeks in Ephesians will help us see why the birth of Jesus is the greatest gift that has been or will ever be given.

This morning, we are studying the opening verses of the book of Ephesians. We are in Ephesians 1:3-14. Turn in your Bible and follow along as I read them.

Read Ephesians 1:3-14.

These verses break into four sections. First, Paul told us we are blessed through Jesus. Second, he told us God the Father planned in eternity past to

bless us through Jesus. Third, he told us we are blessed in the present by Jesus. Fourth, he told us we will be blessed in the future because of Jesus. Paul told us we are blessed in the past, present and the future all because of Jesus.

Through Christ, I am the most blessed being in the universe.

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... Ephesians 1:3 (ESV)

If you are a Christian, you need to know that you are blessed because of Jesus. How blessed are we because of Jesus? Paul told us that God blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places through Jesus.

Let me unpack what Paul said. The physical world is amazing and incredibly complex. Imagine the snowflakes that fell on your driveway this morning. Scientists tell us every one is unique. Each one was fashioned by God. Creation screams of God's complexity and beauty. Another way we see God's beauty and complexity is by studying our bodies, especially the parts that are extremely complex, like our eyes and brains. Imagine the complexity behind your eyes and your brain to see the snow in living color. Everyone with half-a-wit of intelligence knows the eyeball is not a chance occurrence. Even Charles Darwin who created invented the theory of evolution went on record saying that evolution cannot explain the chance occurrence of something as sophisticated as the eye.

God made everything we see around us, and he even made the complex eyes we use to observe that world. What we see around us is only the beginning. We could spend the rest of our lives walking the earth and never place our feet on the same place twice. The earth which is filled with all these complexities is so

large that exploring our earth is an endless task. God formed every fish, every mammal, every bird, every mountain, every valley, and every sky.

In a lifetime we could never finish exploring the earth with its complexities and beauty. Even more amazing than the earth is outer space. Our Earth is just a small planet in our solar system. Our sun is 109 times larger than the Earth. There are other solar systems with their planets and suns which are much bigger than ours. Antares is another sun, and it is 1,400 times wider than our sun. In short, the size of God's physical universe defies understanding. It defies mapping.

If you think the physical universe that we can see is impressive because of its complexity and size, the book of Daniel and the Gospel of John tell us there is an even more complex and expansive spiritual universe out there that is beyond our physical world. The spiritual world is filled with different types of angelic beings, both God's righteous angels and fallen angels. These angelic beings have differing abilities and powers. God tells us the vast physical universe that we see and the vast spiritual universe that we can't see exist together in parallel. The Bible also tells us that Christians exist in both of these universes. While in the physical world, Christians may not sense any significance, in the vast unseen spiritual universe, we are blessed with every possible spiritual blessing. God cannot bless you and me more than he already has through Jesus. Right now, the Bible tells us we are a little lower than the angels but one day, because of Christ, it will flip. We will be over all the angels and even judge all the angels in the vast spiritual universe.

Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! 1 Corinthians 6:3 (ESV)

The reason we will move from being below angelic beings to above them is because we have become the most blessed beings in the universe through Jesus. This is not because of who are in and of ourselves. This is all because Jesus loved us. Jesus died for us. Jesus chose us. This is because we are adopted into God's family and are brothers and sisters of Jesus for all of eternity. We will reign and rule with Jesus over everything in the universe. We are so blessed.

On the cross, Jesus not only conquered sin and death in the physical world, but Colossians tells us that Jesus also conquered every fallen spiritual being in the vast unseen spiritual world.

...by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Colossians 2:14–15 (ESV)

The terms rulers and authorities are Hebrew terms for different high-ranking, fallen angelic powers.

Let's see why Paul described us as the most blessed beings in the universe through Jesus.

God the Father chose to bless me in eternity past.

...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself 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. Ephesians 1:4–6 (ESV)

...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...

In eternity past, before time began, and before the world was created, God purposed in his heart that he would create us. He knew us. He planned our future existence before he created the world. Before time, matter, or anything was created, God purposed in his heart to create us and to put us together with Jesus, his son. God's plan was that our identity would be found in Jesus. We didn't deserve this. We hadn't done anything good. We hadn't even come into existence. The universe was yet to be fashioned. All we had was future existence, but in the master plan for the universe, God had us in his mind and he had already decided to put us with Jesus and to bless us through him.

God the Father chose to make us holy and blameless.

...that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Why did God do this? God wanted to make us holy and blameless before him. This means that God knew we would be unholy and blame-worthy even before we came into existence. God knew we would sin. God knew we would be lost and spiritually dead. God knew we would be fully deserving of just eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire but in eternity past, God the Father had a plan. His plan was to transform us through Jesus from being blameworthy to being pure, spotless and without sin. In eternity past God the Father planned to save us and bless us through his son.

God chose us because of his love, not because we deserve it.

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

Some people think the reason God did this was because he looked ahead down the corridors of time and saw that some were better than others so he chose the best and left the rest. That is not true. God didn't choose to call some

people to himself because we were deserving of anything. He chose to call some to himself and save us through Jesus because of his love, not because of our goodness. God gets all the credit. Saving us was based on his undeserved love. It was his choice. We don't deserve any of God's grace. We are so blessed.

How did God accomplish this transformation and take us from sinful and worthy of eternal punishment to being holy, living free from sin, and receiving the most undeserved blessing in the world? He did it all by his son, Jesus. In eternity past, God the Father chose to adopt some people into his family. He chose to make us literal brothers and sisters of Jesus. The background of this is the idea of adoption in Roman society. Adoption in Rome meant the adopted son or daughter was given the full legal rights from his or her new adoptive family. Adopted children were also completely released from all obligations of their former families.

That is what God did for us. He adopted us into his family by means of the death of Jesus, and he also made us brothers and sisters of Jesus. This is one of the reasons Jesus took on flesh and was born in Bethlehem. Jesus took on a human body forever so he could identify with us forever. He also took on humanity so we could be adopted as brothers and sisters of Jesus, who is God but is one of us.

This is mind-blowing. All I can say is "We are blessed."

We are a grand demonstration of God's undeserved grace.

To the praise of his glorious grace...

What benefit did God gain? The text tells us. This was all for the praise of God's glorious grace. God did this so the extent of his kindness and undeserved love would have a way to be displayed in the universe. The contrast between the eternal punishment we deserve because of our sin and the forgiveness, blessing and privilege of reigning with Christ for eternity over everything in the universe is the greatest contrast that will ever be displayed in God's creation. We are so blessed. The result of what God has done for us is he will constantly receive praise from us and all of creation for the grace we don't deserve.

I ask you, what do you see in the mirror each morning? Do you see just another face in the sea of humanity? Do you see someone filled with guilt and shame? Do you see someone without hope for his future? Look again. See yourself the way you really are not in and of yourself but the way God sees you through his son, Jesus, and his gracious plans for you. We can't be more blessed than we are through Jesus.

God the Son is the source of my present blessing.

...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... Ephesians 1:6–8 (ESV)

Then Paul moved from how our blessings were planned by God the Father in the past to how they are carried out by God the Son in the present.

Jesus frees me from the power of sin.

...with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood...

We have redemption through Jesus' blood. Redemption means release from slavery. It means you are delivered from a life in slavery by someone paying

the necessary price to release us from slavery. The price of freedom from our slavery to sin was steep. It was the blood of Jesus. Jesus needed to die for our sin to free us from the power and the control of sin.

Our redemption from sin obtained by the blood of Jesus frees us from sin's power in our lives. Before Jesus, we had no choice but to sin. Sin was the default of our hearts. Now Jesus has freed us from sin's power. We can say, "No" to sin. We can walk away from sin. Jesus freed us from sin's power so we can live to please Jesus. We don't need to live to please our sinful nature.

Jesus frees us from the consequences of our sin.

...the forgiveness of our trespasses...

Jesus forgives all of our sin. No matter what we have done, Jesus forgives it all. No matter how many times we stumble back into sin, Jesus forgives it all. The death of Jesus is sufficient to pay for all sin. No matter what you have done, no matter how far you have fallen, turn to Jesus. Jesus' death is more than enough to forgive you for whatever you have done and whatever you will do.

Jesus gives us superabundant grace no matter what our sin.

...according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us...

Have you been to an all-you-can-eat buffet? I try to avoid them because I always eat more than I should. I want to try a little of everything in the buffet line. I pile my plate high with lasagna, potatoes, chicken, shrimp, vegetables, and everything else that makes my mouth water. The problem is I run out of room on my plate. The food on my plate starts falling on the carpet because I take too much.

That is a good picture of the way God gives his grace to us. He gives us grace, grace and more grace. We fall into sin, but he gives us more grace. We fall into the same sin again and again. When we repent of that sin, he gives us more grace. We may be heartbroken when we look at ourselves and struggle to forgive ourselves for our sin, but God always gives us more grace. I love the way Paul said this in Romans.

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more... Romans 5:20 (ESV)

When our sin increases, God's grace increases even more. How much better could God be to us? Not only does God continually give us grace for our sin, but God enables us to extend that same kind of superabundant grace to others.

When I spend time with couples in premarital counseling, even though they are starry-eyed and think their future spouses are perfect, I remind them that they are sinners. Both of them will be capable of deeply wounding one another. Just as your closest friendship and deepest love will come from your spouse, your spouse is also capable of inflicting the deepest wounds and may feel like your greatest enemy. When your marriage gets tough, God calls you to forgive your spouse. As Christians, we are to forgive our spouses with the same kind of superabundant grace that God has shown to us through Christ. We forgive like we have been forgiven.

God the Father extends the grace of Jesus at the right time and the right way.

...in all wisdom and insight.

If we are so blessed by God, why don't we feel more blessed by God now? Why does God leave us in stressful situations where our bank accounts are low and our expenses are high? Where is all this excessive grace?

God could dump all of his grace on us at once, but he doesn't. Paul said God lavishes his grace upon us with wisdom and insight. This means God is very wise and insightful when it comes to extending his lavish grace in our lives. He extends his grace the right way and at the right time.

Think of it this way. Pretend you saved for your child's college education. Your son turns 18 and you have \$50,000 in the bank to help with school. That is a lot of grace. That is lavish grace. You could give all of it to him at once and write him a \$50,000 check on his 18th birthday. How well would that work? Wise parents give out their lavish grace in bits and pieces at the right time and in the right way. Dumping lavish grace on someone doesn't usually help him or her. It can ruin him or her. This is the same way it works with God's grace on our lives.

At times, God will allow us to face difficult struggles and tough seasons in life. God uses those seasons to mature us. He uses those seasons to build our faith, to teach us to pray, to teach us to trust, to teach us to read God's Word with new intensity. Then, with wisdom and insight, the God who knows the big picture of his plan in this world and who is more interested in forming our character to be like Jesus than just giving us comfort dispenses his grace in our lives at the right time and in the right way. Even when we face death, we face death knowing that our death is not the end of God's goodness in our lives but it is just the moment we receive even more grace when we go home to be with Jesus.

God promises to continue blessing me in the future.

...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. Ephesians 1:9–14 (ESV)

Then Paul turned to how God will bless us in the future.

There are many mysteries about God we do not understand. For example, how there can be one God that exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I don't know how this works, but that is what the Bible teaches. Another mystery is how can Jesus be fully man and fully God at the same time? I don't know, but that is what the Bible teaches. Another mystery of the universe is, Where is history headed? Does this world exist forever or will it wrap up and have an end? These verses answer that mystery.

History will culminate with all things under the reign and rule of Jesus.

...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.

God tells us history will have an end. All things will wrap up, and everything in the vast unseen spiritual world and everything in the physical world will be ultimately united together with Jesus ruling all of it. Colossians tells us Jesus created all things.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. Colossians 1:16 (ESV)

History will wrap up with all things coming back under Jesus as the rightful head and ruler over all created things. History will wrap up when heaven and earth are combined. Jesus will be at the center as Jesus reigns in the new heavens and the new earth that is free of sin.

The amazing part is we will reign and rule under Christ and with Christ over all things. All rebellion and sin will be taken away in that day.

The fallen angels, known as demons, and those who die in their sin will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire as a just response to their sin. Who will be in charge of the Lake of Fire? Will it be the devil? Absolutely not. The devil will be tormented in the Lake of Fire. Jesus, who is large and in charge of all things, will be in charge of even the Lake of Fire, not just the new heavens and earth.

We are God's chosen inheritance for eternity.

We have obtained an inheritance...

The verb "obtain an inheritance" can mean to give or to receive an inheritance. Many Bible scholars believe the better way to translate this is to say "we are God's inheritance." This makes good sense. In the Old Testament, Israel was called God's inheritance. Now we are also God's chosen inheritance. As God's inheritance, we are the portion of this creation he has set aside for himself for eternity. God has his chosen nation in Israel and his chosen people through Jesus that are beyond Israel and make up the church.

But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day. Deuteronomy 4:20 (ESV)

God is in charge of world history and our history. He will work everything in life for his praise and glory.

...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.

Paul said the reason we are God's inheritance is because we were predestined in eternity past. God did not just set us aside as his own people in eternity past for eternity future but God is working all things according to the counsel of his will. That means God is large and in charge of everything in our lives. He has a good purpose for everything in our lives. We may not understand what God is doing in our lives but we can trust that God is doing something good. From the vantage point of eternity we will understand God's plan and will affirm God's goodness.

A good example of this is Joseph in the book of Genesis. When he was a teenager, his brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt. It looked like his life was out of control. Later, he realized that was all part of God's plan to bring him to Egypt where he could save many lives, including the lives of the brothers who betrayed him. While in Egypt, Joseph was falsely accused of a crime he didn't commit. He spent years in jail suffering for what he hadn't done. It looked like God lost control of Joseph's life. He didn't. Joseph's time in jail was part of God's good plan to put Joseph in the right place at the right time to meet the right people so at the right moment God would move him from the dungeon to the throne room in one day. Looking back on his life, Joseph could see the wisdom and goodness of God's plan, but in the early stages, it looked like his life was spinning out of control.

We see that just as God predestined us in eternity past to be with his son and it will play out in eternity future, in a similar way, God has predestined every moment of our lives today for the praise of his glorious grace.

God has a plan for your life and mine. It is not necessarily an easy plan or a pain-free plan, but when we look back on God's plan for our lives from the vantage point of eternity we will praise God saying it was a good and wise plan that we couldn't have improved upon.

God the Father put the Holy Spirit in our hearts when we trusted in Jesus. The Holy Spirit begins to change us now and is the guarantee that God will bless us in the future.

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.

Paul told us how blessed we are for eternity past, present, and future but how do we know that is real today? How do we know we are the most blessed beings in the universe? Paul said we know all of these amazing blessings are true because the moment we believed in Jesus, we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

In the ancient world when people owned something, they always put their seal on it to identify it as theirs. Think of it like cattle branding in Texas. In a similar way, God branded us as his chosen sons and daughters through Jesus. The seal he placed upon us was the seal of the Holy Spirit. What this means is the moment we trusted in Christ as our savior and asked Jesus to forgive our sin, a supernatural transaction took place where the guilt of our sin was forgiven in heaven by Jesus. God also sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts to begin changing

us from the inside out. This is what the Bible calls the born-again experience. Before Christ, you thought one way. When the Holy Spirit came into your heart, you began thinking differently. You started acting differently. You realized the friends you had and the things you were doing were not pleasing to God. Things you used to love, you now hate. When you read the Bible, what was once a boring book is a fascinating book. It seems like God is speaking to you through his Word. You are highlighting verses. You can't get enough of the Bible.

What happened? The Holy Spirit came into your life. He is remaking you from the inside out to be more and more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit breaks addictions. He restores marriages. He gives us self-control where we had no control. He gives us a patience and kindness when we were unkind and demanding.

This life is only the beginning of the changes the Holy Spirit will make in our lives. Today, we only have a downpayment of the Holy Spirit. Imagine the much greater ways the Holy Spirit will change us in eternity. The power of the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead and gave him a body that will never die. The Holy Spirit will one day also raise our bodies and give us a body that will never die. The Bible hints that since eternity is infinite, for all of eternity we will receive continually new and improved blessings from the Holy Spirit that will never come to an end.

Conclusion

The gift of God's Son makes us the most blessed beings in the universe.

All I can say is, "We are blessed!" We are blessed beyond our wildest dreams through Jesus. That blessing began by God the Father in eternity past when he put us together with his own son before creation began. Jesus carried out that blessing when he took on a body. He was born in Bethlehem so he could become one of us so he could die for us. When he became one of us, we could be adopted to become his brothers and sisters. We look forward to reigning and ruling with Jesus for all of eternity. We are blessed.

This Christmas season, God calls us to respond with heartfelt worship and praise of his glorious grace.

This is what we celebrate at Christmas. This is why we set aside time each year to remember the gift of the son. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to put the plan God the Father had in eternity past into motion and make us the most blessed beings in the universe through Jesus. Paul said the only proper response to all of the blessings we receive through Jesus is to praise God for his glorious grace. As we close, we are taking communion together.

When the cup and bread are passed, I want you to take the bread and the cup and while you are holding them to worship and thank God from the bottom of your heart for sending his son and making you so blessed. That is the best way to make sure the Christmas season doesn't become empty and routine. It is to remember that Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was the beginning of God's plan in eternity past to bless us beyond our wildest dreams through Jesus. That makes

the holidays worth celebrating and fixes our eyes on Jesus for the season, the place they should be.



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