

"Unending Spiritual Blessings" Ephesians 1:3-14

Introduction

- The poet **Langston Hughes** offered this advice, "*Folks, I'm telling you, birthing is hard and dying is mean--so get yourself a little loving in between.*"¹ In a week where we as a congregation experienced both of these extremes with the death of Earl Ackman and the birth of Miranda Meinen, Hughes' advice seems all the more appropriate. What's left to pursue-what adds meaning to life in between the extremes of birth and death? Love. It's no wonder the **Beatles** proclaimed "*all you need is love.*" It's no surprise that our world is **obsessed** with the **pursuit** of love, with finding love, with maintaining love.
- **Because** of our need for love, we go to **great lengths** to catch the attention and **earn** the **affections** of others. We are **conditioned** to **crave** love, care, and **intimacy**. I bet some of you here this morning **haven't** had your **need** for love **satisfied**.

Transition

Today I want to **tell you** about **the only thing** that can **satisfy** humanity's deepest emotional need for love. God's sovereign, perfect plan, his choice to love you and me through Jesus Christ.

Proposition

- **Praise God, Jesus Christ is the greatest gift of love this world has ever seen**

Transition

Today we are going to look at a passage that will **warm your heart** and **remind you** of God's great love for his children. It is God's great purpose for his church that the message of his love through Christ be imprinted, etched, chiseled into our identities. In fact, Paul's goal in **reminding** the Ephesians of these blessings is to "**inform, strengthen, and encourage** [the Ephesians]. Paul wants to '**ground, shape and challenge**' his readers in their faith. He wants to **form** their **identity**."² He does so by describing

Organizational Sentence

- **5 blessings that demonstrate God's great love for you and me**

Transition

Let's take a look now at **verse 3** where Paul lays the **groundwork** for God's blessings **which come** in the following verses.

Background and Setting (1:3)

¹ Peter Washington, ed., Love Songs and Sonnets, p. 235.

² O'Brien, The Letter to the Ephesians, p. 57.

- As Paul's **introduction** to Ephesians, this section is a **eulogy**, a **section of praise** to God, in which Paul **extols** "every spiritual blessing in Christ." These blessings found in Christ and demonstrate God's love for us. Now a **couple of things** about these spiritual blessings.
- **They come through Christ and Christ alone.** The **priority** of Christ in this passage is seen by the fact that the **phrase "in Christ" or "in Him"** is found **11 times** in verses 3-14. Paul could not have been more repetitive in making his case that **Jesus Christ is the greatest gift of love this world has ever seen.**

Transition

Okay, with that in mind, let's look at **God's first blessing** found in **verse 4**. Listen to verse 4.

Main Points

I. He chose us through Christ (1:4)

A) Validation

- i) Before the **world** was **created**, **God chose us** to be his people in Christ. He didn't choose us because of **something good** within us or because of anything we have done or even **might do**. God chose us because it **pleased him** to do so. **Salvation** is a **work of God alone**. **He chose us in Christ.**

B) Explanation

- i) Verse 4 explains to us the **remarkable truth** that before this world was created God chose us. Before the founding of **America**. Before the rise of **western civilization**. Before civilization arose in the **Fertile Crescent**. Before **people** were created. Before **hills**, and **mountains**, and **clouds**, and **rivers**, before the foundations of the world were laid, before Genesis 1:2 which says, "*The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep.*" Before the **sun** and **moon** and **stars**. Before all of this, God made a **decision to set apart** a people, a **holy nation** to love, serve, and praise him. He did this of his **own free will**, without compulsion.
- ii) Let me make **something else** clear. Verse 4 also says that we are **chosen with a purpose**. God chose us in order that we might **be holy** and **blameless** in his presence. God's word is full of examples that support this claim. Listen to just one.
 - (a) 2 Timothy 1:9 says "[God] *has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.*"
- iii) This also means that **before** he chose us we **must have been unholy** and **blameworthy**, and therefore **deserving of judgment**.³ God's choice is a **testament** to his **grace**. He **chooses** us, **in spite** of our sinfulness. Are you beginning to understand what this verse is teaching? **Salvation** is **totally based** upon the **action** of God **himself**.⁴ There is absolutely **nothing we can do** to make God choose us.

C) Illustration

- i) How many of you, when you were/are dating, had/have **a list** of what you were/are **looking for** in a **spouse**? If the person you are interested in does not **fulfill** the **qualities** or meet the standard, they **don't make the cut**. They aren't chosen.

³ O'Brien, The Letter to the Ephesians, p. 100.

⁴ NIDNT, vol. 2, p. 538.

- ii) Do you realize that **God keeps a list** of what he is looking for in those who will serve him? He does. Do you realize that **not one** of us **here** in this room can make the cut on our own. We don't fulfill God's **requirements** of **holiness, perfection, or blamelessness**. *"For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard."*
- iii) And yet, as Ephesians 1:4 teaches us God **chooses** us **anyway, his choice is not an accident**. He asks us to be His. That's the **grace** of **God**. And incredibly enough, **through faith** in **Christ**, who lived a perfect, blameless life on our behalf, we can **meet** God's standard of holiness.

D) Application

- i) **Some** of you here today **have made a choice** or decision, or have a habit in your life that keeps **you** from loving God because **you're sure** he **can't love** you. I want to encourage you today, let the **doctrine of election**, God's choice of you **comfort** and **reassure** you of your **status** before God. God chose you **in spite** of your faults. **Confess your sin** to him and **bask** in the **glory** of his **sovereign gracious love**. I want to also encourage you to praise God for his choice of us in Christ? When was the last time you **praised him** for choosing you?

Transition

The **spiritual blessings** of being in Christ **begin** with God's choice of us. But they don't end there. Listen to **verses 5-6** to see if you can pick out the **second blessing**... The second blessing is that ...

II. He adopted us through Christ (1:5-6)

A) Validation

- i) **Before the ages**, God **preordained** that those who would believe in Jesus Christ would be **adopted** as sons of God-to have a relationship with him. By God's great love, he **delivered** us from a life of bondage to sin, he and gave us the **status of sons and daughters**, and made us part of his **royal family** and **heirs** to every **spiritual blessing** in Christ. He did all of this out of his **sheer pleasure** and love. **God adopted us through Christ**.

B) Explanation

- i) "Ephesians 1:5 makes the case *"that before time began God chose to adopt men and women into a personal and intimate relationship with himself."*⁵ Before the **creation** of the **world**, **God decreed** that he would **adopt some** to be his children. He preordained it. *"Left to ourselves, we would never be certain that we had done what was necessary for our salvation. But we are not left to ourselves: God has predestined and called his own. This is a way of saying that our entire salvation, from first to last, is of God."*⁶
- ii) **How** does God do this? It is **through faith in the person** and work of **Jesus Christ** that God adopts us. That is why Galatians 3:16 can say *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."*
- iii) **Why** does he do this? He does it **because** he **loves** us; *"in love he predestined us."* But he **also** adopted us because of his **good pleasure** and his will. It **pleased God** and it was his preordained will that **Christ** should **suffer** and die and **pay** the **penalty** of our sins so that we might be made sons of God. That's why Galatians 1:4 says Christ *"gave himself for our sins*

⁵ O'Brien, The Letter to the Ephesians, p. 103.

⁶ Morris, Theology of the NT, p. 27.

- to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*" In other words, **God sent** Christ to the **cross willingly, joyfully** because he knew it would result in **great good**.⁷ God **intended** the cross to happen, it wasn't an **accident** or "**Plan B**". God **planned** to redeem fallen **mankind** through the **death** and **resurrection** of Jesus Christ.
- iv) **And** he did this *"to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."* Salvation through Christ and our adoption is a work of his free grace bestowed to us by God so that his **glorious grace** might be praised. God **didn't have to** save us. We weren't worthy of it. We **deserved judgment** and **wrath** and **death** for our sin. Yet out of his **rich mercy** from us, his withholding punishment, God gave us **grace instead**, that which we don't deserve. He gave us the **blessing of adoption** by means of his beloved, Christ.

C) Illustration

- i) *"The love we thought would never stop
now cools like a congealing chop.
The kisses that were hot as curry
are bird-pecks taken in a hurry.
The hands that held electric charges
now lie inert as four moored barges.
The feet that ran to meet a date
are running slow and running late.
The eyes that shone and seldom shut
are victims of a power cut.
The parts that then transmitted joy
are now reserved and cold and coy.
Romance, expected once to stay,
has left a note saying GONE AWAY."⁸*

D) Application

- i) Poets write of unrequited love because the **love** of **man** is **fleeting**. It **ebbs** and **flows** like the **waves** of the **sea**. But **God's love** for us **through Christ never ends**. The **fact** that God has **predestined** us for sonship should be a **great encouragement** and comfort to us. God's predestination means that, *"God never goes back upon his gifts and call."⁹* His **love endures forever** as the psalmist says. God's love for you will never run cold.

Transition

The **spiritual blessings** keep on coming in **verses 7-8**. The **third blessing** is that... Follow along as I read verses 7-8.

III. He bought us with Christ (1:7-8)

A) Validation

- i) The **spilling** of **Christ's blood** is the **means** by which mankind is **delivered** from bondage to sin. This too is a **testimony** to **God's** continual **outpouring** of **grace**. God delivered us through Christ and Christ alone. **He bought us with Christ.**

⁷ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, p. 103.

⁸ Peter Washington, ed., *Love Songs and Sonnets*, p. 210.

⁹ Morris, *Theology of the NT*, p. 27.

B) Explanation

- i) Our **deliverance** is **because** of the person of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us that we *"were bought at a price."* The **price** for our **deliverance** is the **shed blood** of Christ. It is **through Christ's** shed **blood** that we are **delivered** from sin and are **cleansed** from a guilty conscience. To understand the **magnitude** of this truth we must realize what life without Christ's deliverance is like. Before Christ we are **imprisoned** by our sin. We were in **bondage** to that sin. **Jesus** says in John 8:34, *"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."* But **God**, through Christ, **changes that**. Listen to Colossians 1:13-14 *"For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* We have **forgiveness** of sins through **Jesus Christ alone**.
- ii) What's amazing is that **Christ's death** on the cross is the **means** by which **God lavishes** upon us the **riches** of his **grace**. God **loves** us, **favors** us, **chooses** us, **adopts** us, and **delivers** through the **gracious unwarranted, undeserved, sacrifice** of Jesus **Christ**.

C) Illustration

- i) In **2001**, the **Los Angeles Times reported** the true story of **Lou Johnson**. *"Lou Johnson, a 1965 World Series hero for the Los Angeles Dodgers, tried for 30 years to recover the championship ring he lost to drug dealers in 1971. Drug and alcohol abuse cost him everything from that magical season, including his uniform, glove, and the bat he used to hit the winning home run in the deciding game. When Dodger president, Bob Graziano, learned that Johnson's World Series ring was about to be auctioned on the Internet, he immediately wrote a check for \$3,457 and bought the ring before any bids were posted. He did for Johnson what the former Dodger outfielder had been unable to do for himself. Johnson, 66, who has been drug free for years and a Dodger community relations employee, wept when given the gold ring. He said, "It felt like a piece of me had been reborn."¹⁰*

D) Application

- i) **Before Christ**, you and I were **on** the **auction** block just like the **ring** in the illustration. We were going to be **sold** to the **highest bidder, death**. But **God did something** for us that we could not do ourselves. God, through the **payment** of **Christ's blood, redeemed** us from that **auction**. He **sacrificed** his son so that **our sins** might be **forgiven** and we might have relationship with him.
- ii) Lou Johnson wept for joy at the return of his lost ring. When was the last time you wept for joy because of what God has done for you through Christ? What a blessing, what great love God has shown you and me.

Transition

Look at verses 9-10. The **fourth blessing** is that...

IV. God reveals himself through Christ (1:9-10)

A) Validation

- i) It is through Christ that God reveals to us his preordained, predetermined plan, his will for the universe. His plan is this. At the appointed time, all of creation will be brought under the authority of Jesus Christ himself. Our salvation is simply a foretaste of what is to come. And without God revealing the mystery of his will in Christ, we would not be able to

¹⁰ Citation: Bill Plaschke, *Los Angeles Times* (2-10-01); submitted by Rick Kauffman

comprehend our salvation and the blessings we have talked about: our election, our adoption, our redemption. If you have understood tiniest part of what I have spoken about today it is because God revealed it to you. **God reveals himself through Christ.**

B) Explanation

- i) What does it mean for God to reveal to us the mystery of his will? It means that God, as a personal God, reveals the aspects of his character to those who are in Christ. *"God's revelation mediates knowledge of God, his decrees and secrets, a knowledge which, in the last analysis, is inexhaustible."*¹¹ This means that we would not be able to respond to God in faith unless God didn't first open our eyes, ears and minds, to see, hear, and understand the mystery of his will. That's why the person of Jesus Christ is so important. Because Jesus reveals the Father. Listen to Jesus in Luke 10:22. *"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."* Praise be to God that the whole world can know God because he has revealed himself through the person of Jesus Christ! *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."*
- ii) And our salvation through Christ is the tip of the iceberg of what God is going to do through Jesus. Our salvation is not the entirety of God's plan for this world. Ultimately, God's purpose is to unite all things under Christ's authority—to *bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

C) Illustration

- i) I don't know if kids are into stuff like this these days, but when I was a kid, I used to love to decode those secret messages on the back of cereal boxes. Of course to read them, you needed a special decoder ring. The only interpretive key you need to understand the bible is not found in the Davinci Code it's found in Jesus. Christ is our special decoder ring. You want to understand the deep secrets of God? You want special insight into what God is doing in this world, then look to Christ. He's the one that reveals the father.

D) Application

- i) This means that as we interact with non-Christians we must point them to the only thing that reveals God, Jesus Christ. Our discussions must be about Jesus. And when the conversation changes to something else, we must gently say, well what about Jesus. I had the opportunity to do this with a young man named Vladya in the Czech Republic last week. Vladya believes that there are many paths to God...

Transition

Look at verses 11-14. The **final blessing** is that...

V. He guarantees the Holy Spirit because of Christ (1:11-14)

A) Validation

- i) How do you know there's such a thing as eternal life? If someone were to ask you to prove it, could you? How do you know that what God says about eternal life is true? The answer is the Holy Spirit. Because we have believed the message of salvation through Christ, God guarantees the Holy Spirit to us. The Holy Spirit is our inheritance, the deposit made in our

¹¹ NIDNT, vol. 3, p. 311.

lives proving to us that God's promise of eternal life with certainly come about. **He guarantees the Holy Spirit because of Christ.**

B) Explanation

i) Verses 11-14 echo the refrain of God's choice of us. Paul begins in verses 11 and 12 by speaking of God's choice of the Jews. Then in verse 13 he explains that the gentiles, you and me, were included in Christ and all the blessings that accompany him when we believed the gospel, the good news of Jesus' life and death, the gospel that saves us. It is because of Christ that we are guaranteed something. *Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.* A seal is a sign of ownership. "Cattle and even slaves were branded with a seal by their masters to indicate to whom they belonged."¹² God has branded us as his own. He's deposited in our life, the Holy Spirit, the down payment guaranteeing our inheritance, salvation or eternal life. "The word guarantee is a commercial word denoting a pledge-some object handed over by a buyer to a seller until the purchase price was paid in full."¹³ The gift of the spirit then is the guarantee of immortality and eternal life. And God does all of this for the praise of his glory.

C) Illustration

i) God's guarantee of salvation and eternal life is not like a shaky Joe Namath's guarantee in Super Bowl 1.

D) Application

i) There is nothing in this world more certain than salvation through Jesus Christ. Christ is an investment with a guaranteed rate of return. At some point God is going to pay out the dividend of eternal life. Until he does, until God redeems those who are his possession, he gives the Holy Spirit proving that he promises will come true. Praise God for Jesus Christ the greatest gift of love this world has ever seen. The blessings that come to us through Christ are unending and amazing.

Conclusion

- It doesn't look like the Reds are going to make the playoffs this year. But in 1990, the **Cincinnati Reds** did. That year, my dad came up with playoff and World Series tickets and he asked me which series I wanted to go to before the playoffs started. Whatever I chose, my dad would take my sister to the other series. He only had **four tickets**: two for one playoff game and two for one world series game, should the Reds make it. I chose to go to the playoff game because I **didn't think** the Reds would make it to the World Series. **Little did I know** that they would beat the Pirates in the NLCS and go on to sweep the Oakland A's in the World Series. Although I saw a great playoff game, my little kid sister got to go to the World Series. I **still regret** that choice today.
- As we close today, I want to remind you that God cannot and will not regret his choice of you and me. No matter how many times you tell yourself, God can't possibly love me. He can love you and he does, and he does not regret his choice to love you because of one thing. His choice of you comes through Jesus Christ. And God is perfectly pleased with Jesus. It's because God is pleased with Jesus that he is pleased with those who come to him through Jesus. Praise God?! Paul certainly felt that praise was an appropriate response. The **refrain** "to the praise of God's glory" is **repeated** 3 times in v.6, 12, and 14. As we leave here this morning, let your heart overflow with praise all this week because of God's great love for you. Let's pray.

¹² O'Brien, p. 120.

¹³ Bruce, p. 266.