

July 30, 2006
Pentecost 8

“Chosen and Blessed in Christ”

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

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. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. ¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

When we come together for worship as we are doing here this morning, we come to tell each other great things about our God and how blessed we are in Christ. Ordinary every day life on this earth can wear you down. If you spend your whole week watching the news on television and reading the paper, it won't be long before you find yourself in a prison, surrounded by walls on which are plastered with all sorts of images of how badly things are going in the world. Or if you have lots of problems facing you this week, you may become so burdened by the troubles, you cannot even see the blessings you have in Christ. That is why we sing hymns about our God, pray to him, and listen to him speak to us in his Word.

Paul must have been overwhelmed with joy as he thought of the blessings he had in Christ even though he was a prisoner in Rome. There is no sadness and sorrow in his words, only pure joy as he writes, "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."

These words are actually part of one long sentence in the original Greek language that pours out to us the blessings we have in Christ. Some of you had teachers who taught you how to diagram a simple sentence, break apart the noun, the verb, the object, the prepositional phrases. Imagine trying to diagram a sentence that is 216 words long in the Greek and 280 words long in English. It would take up the whole board in the classroom. Let's not fault Paul for running his words together. That happens when you are simply overwhelmed with blessings. I pray that through this sermon this morning you and I will be overwhelmed as we look at these words to see the blessings we have in Christ and how

these blessings came to us.

Look at the blessings you have in Christ

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with spiritual blessings in Christ." It is good to praise the Lord. Literally the word "praise" or "bless" means say good things about someone. There lots of good things we can say about our God this morning and the blessings that have been poured into our lives. This past week you experienced from the hand of God highly visible and tangible blessings. You ate good food, sometimes even too much good food. You drank water when the temperatures soared, good water. You slept in homes, in beds, with mattresses and blankets. You drove in cars. You enjoyed protection from a government that provides you with all sorts of special services. You enjoyed the hugs and kisses and the words "I love you." All of these blessings we can see with our eyes are small compared to the blessings we cannot physically see, blessings in the heavenly realms, the spiritual blessings we have in Christ.

Let's look closer at these blessings. First it says, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." You are so blessed because through Jesus you are holy and blameless in the eyes of your God. If we could sit down together and talk honestly and openly about our lives without hiding anything we would be shocked at how there are secret sins in all of us that are so shameful. But now your life is different. Through Jesus all the past thoughts have been cleansed, and the perfect, pure and holy life of Jesus is credited to you. That's why Paul was able to write in Romans 5, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus." You cannot really see this blessing, but it is there. If the end of the world comes this week, or your hour of death, you can say with all confidence, "I am ready! I am ready because of Jesus!"

You are so blessed. Paul just keeps bursting out with more blessings in Christ. "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." You are adopted as sons through Jesus Christ. I was not adopted. I was born into a family. On a very hot day in August, I came into this world, and my mother and father had to take me home. They did not have the option of saying, "We don't like this kid, we are going to take him back and get a different one." I was not born as child of God into this world. I was born without God and without hope the next chapter of Ephesians tells us, dead in trespasses. But then I was adopted and placed into the unique position of sonship, a special relationship with my heavenly Father. This position cost me nothing, but it cost Jesus everything.

Paul won't let us go. Once he has our attention about the blessings we have in Christ he pours it on. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." Redemption. Forgiveness of sin. Riches of God's grace. Lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. The word for "lavish" has the thought of something flowing up out of the ground, bursting forth and spreading all over the place. That's the way it is with the blood of Jesus, the price paid to redeem us. 1 Peter 1:18 says, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed, but with the blood of Christ a lamb without blemish or spot."

If I poke myself with a needle, or cut myself with a knife, the blood will flow from the poke or the cut. The blood that is in my body is precious to me. It keeps pumping through my heart, feeding my cells and keeping me alive. I can actually see the blood. I did not see the blood of Jesus pouring from his body as he was beaten or hung on the cross. That blood I cannot see is more precious to me and to you, because it gives us everlasting life.

Paul won't let us go, now that he has our attention. He wanted to tell us even more of the blessings we have in Christ. "He made known to us the mystery of his will which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment." You are sitting here this morning and you know the will of God, what is in his mind, what he wants for all people on the face of this. Scripture says, "God will not have any perish but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth." You know what God wants for the people on the streets of Baghdad, or the suffering people of Africa, or the well off people living here in our neighborhoods. Moses told the Old Testament people, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may follow all the words of this law." God has spoken to you in his Word and you know what is beating in his heart of love, and his desire to rescue all people from the judgment to come. In his wisdom he uses ordinary people like you and me, blessing us with his Holy Spirit, so we can share these blessings in Christ, or as it says in our text, "for the hope of his glory."

Paul is still not finished with us. He has more blessings to share in this very long sentence, this outburst of joy. "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, the praise of his glory." You are marked with a seal. At the time Paul wrote these words important documents had wax poured on them, and then a seal imprinted on the wax. The Roman government put a seal on the tomb of Jesus daring anyone to roll away the stone and break the seal. The Holy Spirit is your seal that you are God's dear children. You cannot see this seal, but it is there. You can check it out by asking yourself a simple question, "Do I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and God from all eternity?" If your answer to that question is "Yes" then you have the blessing of the Holy Spirit in your life because according to Romans 10, "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."

You are also blessed to have the Holy Spirit as deposit guaranteeing your future inheritance. Have you ever put down a deposit on a trip, or reservation, a home, or something else you wanted to buy? The Holy Spirit is your deposit, your guarantee of what is coming. You live each day with the Holy Spirit putting into your thoughts the blessings the place that Jesus has prepared for you that you cannot see. The Holy Spirit makes these blessings greater and more important than the blessings you see. The home of righteousness that Jesus is preparing for you is more real to you than the home you will return to after worship today. That is why Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4, "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

As you stand in awe of all these blessings in Christ, and eagerly help each other in worship to see these blessings, you are further amazed at how these blessings came to you.

Look at how these blessings came to you

You did not receive these blessings because you are better than other people, or you had more going for you, or even that God saw what you might turn out to be. God chose these blessings for you, purely by his grace, way back in eternity. Listen again to Paul. "He chose us in him before the creation of the world." "He predestined us to be adopted." "He made known the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure." "In him we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him." "You also were included in Christ." I dare say, "I accepted Christ into my heart" or "I came to believe" as if I did something to bring that gift to myself. Later in chapter 2 it says, "By grace you have been saved, through faith, it is gift of God..." Faith is a gift of God, decided and planned for you before the creation of the world.

Have you ever gone to a pet store or to person who is selling puppies to carefully pick out a new pet? How do you determine which puppy to pick? Will it be the strongest, the cutest, the toughest, the most friendly? You pick the one you want to take home with you on the basis of what that animal does. If it came down to a matter of selection to be God's child, I would have no chance of being accepted, nor would you. There is nothing in me that God could love because of the sin that taints everything I do. What does the Lord God, creator of the universe do? He chooses or elects us in Christ to have all these blessings that we have not deserved. Furthermore he tells us clearly in his word that he wants all to be saved and come to this truth. Paul could not contain his joy when he shared these blessings, nor can we contain our joy as we share them as we are doing this morning in our worship together. Amen.