

**Pentecost 8**  
**July 19, 2015**

*"Counting Our Blessings in Christ"*

---

**EPHESIANS 1:3-14**

---

**P**raise 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. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. <sup>9</sup> And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

There is good advice in an old Irving Berlin song sung by Bing Crosby with the title "Count Your Blessings." Here are some of the lyrics from that song. "When I'm worried and I can't sleep I count my blessings instead of sheep And I fall asleep counting my blessings. When my bankroll is getting small I think of when I had none at all And I fall asleep counting my blessings." Then it goes on, "If you're worried and you can't sleep Just count your blessings instead of sheep And you'll fall asleep counting your blessings." Perhaps you have even tried this when you cannot sleep. You count your blessings and thank the Lord for them, and then you fall asleep counting your blessings.

These words just read to were written by the Apostle Paul from a prison in Rome to the dear Christians in Ephesus. The letter encourages them to count their blessings in Christ whatever their circumstances in life may be. That's what we want to do this morning. We want to use these words to count our blessings in Christ and see how rich we truly are.

**"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."**

We go to our Heavenly Father in prayer and thank him for all the blessings he has given to us in Jesus' his Son. This past week you experienced very personal blessings from your heavenly Father. You had food to eat and clothes to wear, and a home in which to live and a bed in which to sleep. You enjoyed the smiles and encouragements from people who love and care for you. At the top of the list of all you reasons for thanking and praising is the fact you have been blessed in the heavenly realms with spiritual blessings in Christ.

You don't have to go very far in the life you lived this week to realize that you certainly don't deserve these blessings from your God. The Lord heard your grumbling and complaining. He saw some angry thoughts that flashed in your mind. He saw how you don't always put him first in your life. Yet, he poured out blessings to you even though you don't deserve them. He blessed you in the heavenly realms with spiritual blessings in Christ. God our heavenly Father has given us the gift of his Son Jesus. I cannot earn these blessings in Christ. They are given to me as a free gift of God's grace, his underserved love and kindness to this ungrateful sinner.

When did the Lord your God choose to give you these blessings in Christ that you do not deserve? **"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."** Your heavenly Father did not choose to give you these blessings shortly after you were born because he saw you were going to be such a great person in his sight. No, he chose you to be in Christ and have these blessings in Christ before the world began. Your God had a very specific plan for you. He wanted you from all eternity to be holy and blameless in his sight through Jesus his Son. He wanted you this way so he could accept and love you as his dear children in this life and for all eternity. It was God's plan from all eternity to have your sin washed clean by the blood of his Son shed on the cross for you. It was God's plan to bring you to believe in this blessing. In the next chapter of Ephesians we are told, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast."

Think of how blessed you are. **"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."** You were adopted into God's family. You were adopted when you were not fit to be adopted. A family wanted to adopt a cat from the animal shelter. In one cage is a friendly cat that begins purring as soon as it is touched. In another cage is a cat, an angry cat, that snarls and hisses and claws the finger when it is stuck into the cage. Which cat will be taken home with the family? Your loving heavenly Father adopted you into his family when you did not deserve to be adopted. You were worse than a hissing snarling cat and so was I. Romans 8 says that we were hostile to God. Our God blesses us by overcoming our hostility, leading us to see our sinful condition and then leading us to see everything Jesus has done to save us. He opens our eyes to see his glorious grace freely given to us in the one he loves.

How is it that our God is able to lavish such riches of his grace on us when we don't deserve them? It is because he redeems us by the very blood of his own Son. **"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, riches of grace, all lavished on us. The word for "lavish" has the thought of something flowing up out of the ground that spreads all over the place. The blood of Jesus flowed out of his body when he was beaten and hung on the cross to die. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. It redeems us from eternal death and punishment.

Gold and silver cannot redeem me from my sin. In 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." I can use money to buy things. As we were traveling back home from Colorado we passed through the mountains on I70 at Silverthorne. We stopped for lunch at a Chipotle restaurant. I can still taste the spicy chicken salad. It was so good and less than eight dollars. I can satisfy my hunger by using money to redeem or buy food. But I have nothing to offer God to pay for my sin, no money, no good deeds, no special sacrifices. Our only hope is the blood of God's Son. "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." The blood of the Lamb cleanses us from all sin. This is my greatest blessing in life that I can count again and again and again.

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 cannot see the blood of Jesus pouring from his body as he was beaten or hung on the cross with my physical eyes, but I do see this blood with eyes of faith. The blood I cannot see is more precious to me and to you, because it gives us everlasting life. In Romans 5 the Apostle Paul writes, "But where sin increased (because of Adam's fall) grace increased all the more." God lavished his grace on us with the forgiveness we have in Christ.

Let's not stop counting our blessings. There are even more blessings to count in Christ as we dig deeper into this text. **"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."** We can open the Bible and know what God wants for all people. We know what he wants for a world full of people that don't want him. His will is a mystery. It remains hidden and secret until people read the Bible and hear what God wants for them. God's will for people can be summed up in the simple but profoundly deep words Jesus spoke to us in John 3:16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." I know what God wants the neighbors who live next to me. I know what God wants for my children and grand children. In these last days he is calling people to come to him. I recently saw a picture of Chinese people gathered in a small room studying the Bible with a person who had come to teach them English.

Paul, please don't stop. Show us more of the blessings we have in Christ so we can continue to number them and count them. **"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, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."** You were chosen from all eternity to believe in Christ. You were also chosen according to God's plan and according to his will to be for the praise of his glory. This is a constant hope that we have in our lives that the Lord has plans for us to use us for his glory. In chapter two it says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Because you are in Christ every facet of your life has meaning and purpose and value to the Lord. We have this hope, this certainty that all things will work out for our good and for the glory of our God.

Oh, dear Apostle Paul, writing from a prison in Rome tell us even more of the blessings that we can count one by one. **"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, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory."** Our hope is not just in this life but in the life that is to come. You have the Holy Spirit who serves as a deposit or guarantee of the glory that is waiting for you when Jesus calls you home to heaven. When we were traveling to Colorado we made arrangements for a hotel room in Beaver, Utah. To make sure the hotel room would be there for us when we got there we put it on a credit card. We paid for it in advance. Jesus has paid for in advance the mansions he has prepared for you in heaven. He gives you the Holy Spirit to constantly remind you what you have waiting for you. He is the deposit guaranteeing what is to come.

If you are worried and you can't sleep, than count your blessing instead of sheep and you'll fall asleep counting your blessings. It has been said that Satan can put walls around you, but he cannot put a roof over your head. You have blessings in Christ that you can count over and over again and never get tired of them. Amen.