

Ephesians 1 v 1 - 23

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[0 : 00] As we come to God's Word, let's just commit this to the Lord in prayer. Let's pray. Dear Lord, as we come now to your Word, we pray that that Word won't simply be words on a page or even simply words that we hear, but Lord, that we'll hear them as the very words that you have sent, words that will be effective in leading us on in the Christian pathway.

So Lord, help us. Help us to concentrate. Help us to take in any teaching that you have for us. For we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, if you've got that passage in Ephesians opened, that would be useful. You'll notice that in that last hymn that we sang, based on this passage, it says, Come thou fount of every blessing.

And this passage, certainly from verse 3, talks about spiritual blessings. And that's what we're going to be thinking about this evening. I wonder if people asked you, today, now, this minute, do you feel blessed?

I wonder what your response would be. Some might say, yes, it's been a really good day. I feel blessed today. Others might answer rather more circumspectly and think that they weren't having a particularly blessed time at the moment.

[1 : 42] And we have these pictures of what that would mean. But what I want to focus on this evening is particularly verse 3 in the passage that we read, which says this, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who's blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

And I want to look at that verse and unpack the various bits of it. But in order to start, we need to understand a couple of things. First and foremost, that unlike some other passages that you might read, which are clearly aimed at certain groups of people, this one is most definitely aimed at Christians.

We know this because at the start when Paul introduces the letter, he says, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus. Not the ones who just come along and just sit there listening, but it has no effect on them.

Or the ones who come along because of duty, or because of some form of wanting to keep up with whatever the latest thing that's happening. But these are to the saints, the faithful in Christ Jesus. These are true believers that Paul is writing to. There's no doubt though, that when this letter was written, and when the church used this letter, there was much teaching in here for those who weren't Christians.

[3 : 12] That's clearly true. And people have preached on this book many times, drawing out the gospel elements of it. But it's very firmly aimed initially at Christians, and therefore it's directed to us if we're Christians this evening.

And when we look at that particular verse, it has some things in it which we need to take note of.

The first thing is this, it begins, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So in examining these verses, and as we meet together tonight, one of the things that we should be able to say when we leave here is, that tonight we really have praised God.

Because that's what this passage is all about. Paul is saying that we need to praise God for all of these things that are going to follow. And since I'm going to go through some of those, it should lead to praise on our behalf.

So let's just take that verse, and begin to, as it were, put it into smaller portions that make it easier to understand. It begins with God, and all of these things which follow are directly from Him.

[4 : 39] But there's also this next and further bit, which says, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because as we'll see, that's also fundamental to this passage.

But there's an amazing statement in it, which I want to pick out right now. It says here that we've been blessed by God in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Every spiritual blessing. It doesn't say a blessing. It doesn't say some blessings. It says every blessing. In other words, if we read this passage, if we learn from what it says, if we take it into our hearts, everything that we read about these blessings, has already been given.

This tense that's used here for blessed, it's what they call the heiress tense. It means it's already been done. God's already blessed us with these things.

We might not be aware of them from second to second in our lives, but nevertheless, they're all there. We've been blessed with all these things. If I asked you to define, I'm not going to, so don't look worried.

[5 : 55] I've stopped being a teacher now. But if I asked you to define what the word bless means, what the verb bless means, what would you say it was?

Because as I started to think about this when I first started to look at it, I began to wonder myself how I would define it. It's a bit intangible, isn't it? But when you look it up, in the dictionary, the bit that is about this sort of blessing says this.

It's invoking God's favour. God's favour. So this whole passage is talking about God's favour to his people.

God's favour to you and to me. These are good things from God. And it's already been done.

The moment you become a Christian, these things apply. And what Paul is really doing is telling these Ephesians, look, you're Christians. These things you need to know.

[6 : 58] Why? Well, we'll come into that eventually. So, every blessing. But notice, it's not from the worldly sense.

I mean, they bless the penny hedge and they bless the boats and they bless all sorts of things. But that, if you like, is a worldly blessing. This, it says, is a spiritual blessing.

And look, this has been blessed in the heavenly realms. This isn't an earthly thing. This is a supernatural thing. This is an amazing thing.

This morning, when Peter was preaching, I'm glad he did because he brought out this idea of, it's a complete mystery, isn't it? Why would God love us? Why would he send his son to die for us when we don't deserve it?

More than that, we've sinned against him. Why would he? It's a complete mystery. But we'll see that this is all part of God's plan as we look at these verses.

[8 : 04] And, all of these things that are going to be talking about, these blessings, the ones which come from God, which have been planned in the heavenly realms, and their spiritual blessings, every one of them that we would need, notice that they're all in Christ.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us, talking about God, in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. This is for Christians.

The implication is, if you're not a Christian, none of these apply to you. None of them. Which, when we go through them, they're so amazing, you'd think, well, why would anybody ever want not to make access of these blessings?

And the other thing is, that you cannot gain these things on your own. All of these blessings that I mentioned, you and I can't possibly make them happen to us.

We can't bring them about. You'll soon see what I mean. Because I'm going to go through these now. Some of them at least. So let's take it on from verse 3.

[9 : 30] Think about these blessings in Christ. It says, For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Christ Jesus.

He chose us. Now, I don't know about you, but when I was that high, perhaps Jono's height, and they were picking teams at school, right?

Put us all in a line, two captains, pick your teams. When that happens to you, what are you always praying for? Somebody's going to pick you. Hopefully first, but if not, certainly bad.

You don't want to be the last, do you, to be picked. But you don't have any choice. You can't make a plea to the captain to pick. Well, you can, but they'll ignore you. And you just stand there waiting.

And if, sometimes like me, occasionally, you get picked last, you know you're going to be goalkeeper. Or, perhaps even, they didn't want to pick you at all, really, but they just wanted you to cope for the post.

[10 : 35] So it's that sort of situation. But here it says that God chose us. And you remember me saying, this has already been done.

Look what it says. He chose us in Him before the creation of the world. Before the creation of the world. There's a misplaced optimism in the lives of people who think for themselves, well, I'm leading a good life.

Perhaps they're even going to church. Perhaps they do a lot for charity. And they think, well, when it's the right time for me, I'm going to say to God, yeah, you can have me now.

You know, I'm going to believe in you. It doesn't work like that. They've already been chosen. And what they've actually chosen to do is to reject God.

But it doesn't stop there, does it? It's not even good enough that He just chose us. It goes on to say, but He predestined us to be adopted as His sons.

[11 : 41] Again, if you're a child who's got no mum and dad or you're in a home, then you've got no choice whatsoever about who adopts you.

It could be a criminal. It could be all sorts of people. You don't really have any choice. It's whoever is willing to take you. I want you to imagine for a moment that you're in that home and you're the most ugly boy, in my case, that there's ever been.

Don't say, I already qualify. Right? And you're scruffy. You've not got much of an education. You're not any good at sport. You know, there's no reason why they should pick you.

What would you think if somebody did? You'd be absolutely amazed. And God did that with us.

Didn't He? There was nothing about us that might be attractive to God.

Rather, the opposite. It says that our sin was so great that He can scarcely look at us. And yet, because of Christ and His atoning sacrifice, it's as if we were covered by a white robe that covered all our unrighteousness.

[12 : 58] but He goes on to some more blessings. He says, in accordance with the pleasure of His will to the praise of His glorious grace which He's freely given us in the one He loves.

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, etc. Redemption. We've been given redemption. redemption. That's something else we can't do. We were due to suffer the penalty of death. There had to be a payment for that.

There's no way we could pay it. We have nothing to pay it with. We've got no righteousness. We've got no things that the Lord wants to pay for that.

He had to do it. He had to send the Lord Jesus Christ to die in our place to pay what we couldn't pay. And He redeemed us.

[14 : 02] If you like, we've been sold over to the devil and the devil was demanding a tremendous price for us. And the Lord, through His death, paid that price to bring us back to God.

Isn't that a blessing? When you think of what the alternative is in terms of spending an eternity in hell, what a blessing it is.

But it's not just that we've been given this opportunity that we've been given redemption, but notice what it also said. It said that He also forgave us our sins.

Do you remember when Jesus did speak to that man who'd been dropped through the ceiling at His feet by His four friends because He couldn't walk and He said, Son, your sins are forgiven.

And what did the crowd say that Jesus heard or He knew that was in their hearts? They were saying, how can He forgive sins? And then He said, so that you will understand that I have the authority, He told him to get up His bed and walk which He did.

[15 : 17] How can we make anybody forgive what we've done against them? We can't. It's only the person who's been sinned against who can forgive.

And here we're told that this forgiveness is given to us. Amazing what God has done.

amazing, the blessing that God has given to us. He carries on. 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.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. So there we have another gift.

We have this book, this Bible which contains God's inspired word. What if the Lord hadn't decided to tell all the people who wrote this book, all those prophets, the apostles, people like Paul and

others who wrote this down, what if we didn't have this?

[16:42] Well, this is a tremendous gift because this tells us the whole story and what it's about because it says it's the truth and it's the gospel of your salvation.

This whole Bible, not just the gospels, but the whole Bible is the gospel of Christ's salvation from beginning to end as we all know.

You can go to virtually any book in the Bible with the possible exception of one and find it is a direct relation to the Lord Jesus Christ and his coming again.

And so the whole of this book has been given to us. It's a blessing to Christians. How many times have you heard Christians say, I don't know what I'd do without this book?

It's the reason I'm a Gideon because we put these books into the hands of people and God does the rest because it's not just words, it's the inspired word of God.

[17:44] It says, 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.

To put the seal on it so that people would see and understand that someone was the Lord's, particularly in those days immediately after Jesus died when you read the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit was the sign, it was the seal that someone was truly born again.

And though we don't see it necessarily manifest in those ways, the Bible says that when we become Christians it's as if our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and he comes to dwell within us. Again, we can't force the Holy Spirit to come and dwell within us. It's God's sovereign choice. But this is what happens.

So in summary, of those blessings in Christ, you know, we can tick them off and think where would we be as Christians without these?

[19:03] Where would we be if we didn't have God's sovereign choice? If we hadn't been adopted into his family?

If we hadn't been redeemed by Christ's blood? If we hadn't been given insight into the mystery of the gospel? If we hadn't had our sins forgiven?

If we hadn't been given the Holy Spirit? I think you can see why in that first sentence it's so important and Paul felt it's so important to say look at these things that God has given every believer without exception and what does it say?

every spiritual blessing in Christ everyone every single one is in that list you can look in the New Testament other places and they will say similar things perhaps in different words but with the same sort of emphasis and as if to make it absolutely clear why this has happened because we see or we saw at the start that this was all of God this was a gift of God nothing that man could earn but simply gift after gift from God giving more abundantly than we could ever hope or imagine for but there's a refrain that runs through all of these let's look at it praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in all the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ that's where we started for he chose us in him in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Christ Jesus in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace which is freely given us in the one he loves that's Christ again in him in Christ we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us in all wisdom and understanding and he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ 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 in him we were also chosen having been predestined and so on and then well you don't need me I'm weighing the record thin now but it's in Christ all the way through can you see there's a correlation here because of the fact that you could look at this in one of two ways depending which way you're looking you could say if I'm in Christ as we just explained all of these spiritual blessings belong to us and they are sufficient for everything we ever need but the reverse is true if we don't have these blessings and we know we don't we've got a question whether we really are in

[22:23] Christ and if you feel that's the case then clearly since everything here is in Christ we need to think seriously about the claims that Christ is making concerning himself and our need of this salvation that is given here that's fantastic isn't it all of those blessings everything that we would ever need not just for here but for eternity all of those blessings are spiritual blessings they don't

stop when this world ends they go forward into heaven we'll still be God's sons joint heirs with Christ we'll still be going through all of those different things that we looked at and everyone will apply to us that's great but what about in our life now well I didn't read it but the second part of this chapter gives us the answer because it begins like this verse 15 for this reason in other words

Paul's now saying I've told you these things and now I'm going to tell you the reason and I'm just going to pick out three things which I believe in terms of application to the Christian are important for us to understand he says for this reason he's going to pray for the Christians in Ephesus and what are the things that he prays for well here's the first that God may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation why so that you may know him better so that you may know him better just imagine that from an earthly sense you had a parent or a brother or sister just saying about this some of you might watch that program on television it's around about bedtime so we sometimes catch it where they're looking for a long lost relative it's sometimes a mother who's had their little baby adopted and they've not seen them for 40 years and then they try and find out where they are it's always a tearful reunion at the end and imagine that and imagine that this was your father or mother that you were separated from what do these people normally in the program spend all their lives doing finding out about their mother and father knowing them better because that is the important thing and we don't have our father in this world but one day we'll be with him and won't we want to know him as best we can

Paul is praying that these people will know him better look at the second thing he says I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he's called you the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints he wants our eyes and our heart to be opened so that we will know this inheritance that we have this living hope that one day will be with him the difference between a living hope of course and the hope that most people in the world have is that ours is a certain hope because God has promised and so he prays that we'll be enlightened to know the hope if you can live a life that's full of hope you can achieve anything if you have a life that's got no hope then it can be debilitating and can spoil even the plans that men and women make as

Christians we need to live in this glorious hope the knowledge of this inheritance that will come and the third thing is incomparably great power working in us showing us his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms well you know there was a 17 18 year old boy who produced a nuclear reaction in his classroom and that's fantastic and I've seen a bomb explode at least on television a hydrogen bomb and seen the power and it's awesome and recently the people who are proposing the big bang theory said it all happens in you know 13 millionths of a second that the big bang happened well even if it did

God did it and imagine the awesome power that God used to create not just you and I but a whole universe with all its variety with all of the things that are in it imagine the power and if that's not enough it says that this was the same power which raised Christ from the dead that in a worldly sense is impossible and yet by his almighty power he was raised from the dead life was breathed into him he rose to take his place in heaven alongside the father imagine that power and he says here that we need to realise that power because as Christians we have access to that power and we can understand it can't we it doesn't mean worldly power it doesn't mean that you know we're going to be able to take over the country next week or that we'll become millionaires or anything else but what it means is that when we pray the only person who counts listens that's [29 : 04] God and then he responds to our prayers sometimes not always in the way that we expect but he's a God of all power the same I find it amazing that that power that essentially comes to a man or woman and makes them suddenly in there in there realise that they don't know Christ but they need to and changes their hearts the implication is that's the same power that rose Jesus from the dead isn't that amazing the same power so you can see that it's no small thing when Paul is talking about these spiritual blessings in Christ he's speaking to these Ephesians to protect them from what he knows will be the persecution to come and say remember all of these things that you need your spiritual armour if you like he talks about armour later on but I'm not going to go there but all of these things are like that these are protections but you need to know that they're there you need to know that they're there and you need to use them and to use them it's all about knowing God better it's all about knowing his power his authority that we have access to that and also that one day even though we don't see it in this world we'll have a glorious inheritance with him in

heaven and all of this not because of what we've done but because of what he's already done once and for all it's done it's finished it's there and we simply take note of it and in our lives we seek as we started off with the passage praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who's blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ Amen Amen