

BLESSED

Ephesians 1:1–3 (No. 1)
Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson
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INTRODUCTION

We begin a new series today on our first day of full services. This book couldn't be more fitting, nor the passage more fitting as we celebrate the beginning of worship services. This church was started in order to increase the praise of God in Athens—and from here, around the world. So that believers would live lives in worship to God. And that unbelievers would come to know the true God and worship him. There are thousands in Athens, who were made to worship God and do not worship him because they don't know him.

We were made to give God praise. Our passage today is a praise to God. The theme of verse 3 (our focus) is obviously blessing. 3 times in this verse. In a word play, Paul blesses God, who has blessed us, with blessings. Paul begins his letter with praise. He blesses God—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Blessed”: to speak well of; praise; extoll someone.

In fact, vv. 3-14 is one long sentence in Gk. (202 words) in Greek—one long praise prayer. In these verses, he praises the Trinity.

3-6: Chosen by Father before eternity past. v. 6: “to the praise of his glorious grace.”

7-12: Redeemed by the Son at salvation. v. 12: “to the praise of his glory.”

13-14: Sealed by the Spirit for the glorious future. v. 14: “to the praise of his glory”

After Paul’s customary greeting in his letters (vv. 1-2), he begins with praise to God. Here is Paul who—by the will of God—was made an apostle.

- Who formerly persecuted the church,
- who formerly would have approved of your stoning had he met you,
- who rejected Christ

Yet now, his mouth is filled with praise to the church of Christ. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . .” Then Paul says the reason he is to be praised is that he has blessed us. So the rest of verse 3 gives us reasons why God is to be praised. Yes, he is to be praised just because who he is. But unless you know something about him, how will you praise him? It is right to praise God because he is God. But it's hard to praise someone you don't know anything about. So God gave us in his Scriptures reasons to praise him. He teaches us about himself, so that we would know how to praise him.

The reasons for giving praise to God are found in three phrases that make up the second half of v. 3, which describe how God has blessed us.

I. THE RICHNESS OF OUR BLESSING

“[He] has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. . .” Now, this letter is written to believers—

v. 2: “to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus”—

so the blessing Paul describes is directed toward believers. And to those, God is rich in blessing. Paul demonstrates that throughout this letter:

- 1:7: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace”
- 1:18: “. . . the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,”
- 2:4: “God, being rich in mercy,”
- 2:7: so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”
- 3:8: To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,”
- 3:16: “that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,”

And, here, he has given us “every” or “all” spiritual blessings. How much is “all”? It’s full. If he has given “every” blessing—how much did God hold back, tell me?

2 Peter 1:3: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence. . .”

All things that pertain to life and godliness. So God is lavish in his blessing and stingy with no believer. And the blessing from God that we need most is “spiritual blessing.” In the OT, the benefits of God’s blessing were primarily *material*—blessings of more land, more cattle, more offspring. But the blessings in the NT for believers are better than material—they are primarily spiritual blessings.

One of the reasons I abominate the prosperity gospel is because in one sense how little it promises. “Come to Jesus,” they say, “he’ll prosper you materially. He’ll give you better health, more wealth. If you have faith, his favor on you will be shown by giving you a bigger home, better vacations, fancier jewelry, faster cars, no cancer.”

That’s it? Those material blessings all wear out. And when I die, all my possessions stay here—if they haven’t rotted or rusted already. Whether cancer eats away at my body or maggots do—one way or another my body rots too. I want an inheritance that never fades—never wears out—that I can enjoy forever with increasing—yes increasing!—joy! Why would I want a fleet of cars? I want the better portion—the better spiritual blessings.

Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” [Matt 6:19-21]

So that's not the only reason I hate the prosperity gospel—but that's one reason.

What are these spiritual blessings that are better than material wealth? The rest of the paragraph tells us—the blessings of:

- God choosing us (v. 4, “he chose us”)
- Adoption into God’s family (v. 5, “adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.”)
- Redemption (v. 7, “in him we have redemption through his blood”)
- Forgiveness (same, “the forgiveness of our trespasses”)
- Revelation of God’s purposes (v. 9, “making known to us the mystery of his will”)
- Inheritance (v. 11, “in him we have obtained an inheritance”)
- Sealed by the Holy Spirit (v. 13, “[you] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”)

Christians receive a bounty of blessings through God’s saving work in Christ. He has blessed us—past tense: Done. Over. Settled. Complete. Nothing more for you to add to fill it up. And nothing, thank God, you can do to relinquish it. So that’s a reason to give praise to God. There’s a second reason to praise God in this verse. . .

II. THE ASSURANCE OF OUR BLESSING

“who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”

Heaven is the abode of God. But when Paul says “heavenly places” he means more than that here. Throughout this letter, Paul refers to the heavenly places (lit., “heavenlies”).

1:20: “[God worked his great might] in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.”

1 Peter 3:22: “[Jesus through the resurrection] has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.”

So in 1:20, certainly Paul means Jesus is in heaven, but more broadly, the collective realm where God reigns.

2:6: “[God] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,”

Done. Past tense. Since you aren’t physically in heaven right now—surely Paul means in a spiritual sense you are already there as a believer and share in the Christ’s exaltation and glory. That is, you’ve been placed into the spiritual realm.

6:12: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

These rules, authorities, cosmic powers, spiritual forces—that’s all bad. Demonic. In this sense, the heavenly places include the spiritual realm where Satan rules. Not ultimately. God’s reign is ultimate. But in that realm there is a realm where Satan rules. So in 1:3, I take it to mean that he

has blessed us in the spiritual realm. Our blessings originate there. They are sourced from there—because God is there.

Three implications of that:

1. All the spiritual blessings that God gives you are tastes of heaven.

They are tastes of the glory that is to come for you. Adoption now is to give you a spiritual taste of what it will be like to be one of God's kids in heaven. Forgiveness now is meant to give you a spiritual taste of what it will be like in heaven where there is no sin and no separation between you and God. The revelation of God's purposes now are meant to give you a taste of what it will be like, with unveiled face, to "see the face of God" (Rev. 22:4)—For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face (1 Cor. 13:12) These blessings are meant to make you savor, long for heaven more. Which makes sense since believers are citizens of . . . heaven.

2. Your blessings are secure.

The safest place in all the realms is with God in heaven. The strongest bank in the universe is heaven—where your inheritance is stored. This is good news when we feel afflicted. Jesus said on the night of his betrayal:

John 14:1-3: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

So Jesus has a place for you—with him!—not on the back 9 of God's golf course—but in your Father's house. From the heavenly places comes the blessings of God to the people of God who will one day ascend into heaven to be with God.

3. You are well-equipped for God's call on your life.

As we saw in Eph 6:12, the battle between God and Satan plays out not only in the heavenly places but spills out principally on earth. Later in Eph 6, Paul tells us about the battle armor every believer is to put on. These blessings we receive in Christ have come in the midst of spiritual attack and interference. Paul says, "put on the helmet of salvation" (6:17)—in other words these blessings (doctrines, truths about salvation) are meant to protect you. Satan will try to discourage you or cause you to doubt—but knowledge of these doctrines serve as assurance of salvation when the darts are flying.

So reasons for praise to God include the richness of our blessing, the assurance of our blessing, and finally . . .

III. THE REASON FOR OUR BLESSING

"[he] has blessed us in Christ"

This phrase—or one like it—occurs 11x in this paragraph (36x in the whole book).

Whole books have been written about these two words. “In Christ” means our identification with Christ, our union with Christ. Believers are united with Christ and are found in him..

1 Cor 6:17: “he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

There’s a union. So, in one way, this phrase serves to limit the ones who receive these blessings—only those in Christ. The opposite of being in Christ is being apart from him.

Eph 2:12-13: “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says: ‘If you leave out the ‘in Christ,’ you will never have any blessings at all. ... Every blessing we enjoy as Christian people comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. His death on the cross bought for you all the blessings you receive. He paid the penalty for your sin—if you are in him. How do you become “in him?” Acknowledge your sinfulness. Turning from your sin and embrace Christ (trust him, receive him)—as the one who paid your sin.

CONCLUSION

We are in for special months ahead in the months ahead as we study Ephesians, aren’t we?

Pray

Father, all there is to do now is praise you. . .

- Blessings we have received are certain, complete, lavish, undeserved, and received with glad hearts
- The whole city of Athens doesn’t praise you.
 - Not all are glad about you.
 - Not all know you.
- But we who know you are blessed.
- Grant that our lives be marked by praise.
- Let TCC be known as the praising God church.