

Our Blessings in Christ
October 11, 2015

An elderly lady walked slowly into a life insurance office in Minneapolis during the worst part of the Great Depression. She wanted to know if she could stop paying the premiums on her husband's life insurance policy. She explained, "He's been dead sometime now and I don't believe I can afford making the payments any more."

No one had ever explained to her how life insurance works. The clerk behind the desk looked up her husband's policy and discovered it was worth over one hundred thousand dollars. The lady was well off financially, but she had no idea that she was well off.

That story is similar to the situation of many Christians. We have some wonderful riches as Christians, but you may not be aware of what you have. It is kind of like starting a new job and only after you start, you find out there are benefits, like life insurance, vacation, or sick leave.

Today, we're going to learn some of the benefits we have in Jesus. Paul, the missionary, wrote a letter to the Christians who were living in the city of Ephesus. In this letter he begins by telling them of some of the great riches that are theirs as followers of Jesus Christ. We will start at the very beginning of the letter.

Ephesians 1:1-2 (NIV) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the form of letters at that time. We start our letters with who the letter is to and put the writer's name at the end. In the Roman world at this time in history, the person writing gives his name at the beginning of the letter.

Paul is writing to the saints in Ephesus. The English word "saint" comes from the Latin word for holy. The word saint means holy ones or holy people. The holy people he is writing to are Christians. In the Bible, the word saint is not a special class of super Christians. It is simply all Christians. He is writing to all the Christians in Ephesus.

In verse 3 he praises God for the spiritual blessings he is about to describe to them.

Ephesians 1:3 (NIV) 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.

That is how YOU can respond to God this morning. **Once you learn what you have in Christ Jesus, praise God and thank God for these blessings.**

The blessings he writes about are benefits that go with being a Christian. You don't have to login and sign up for them. There are no special forms to fill out. You don't have to make a special request for them. You don't have to give your email address. They are yours automatically when you put your faith in Jesus.

Note first that all of these blessings are SPIRITUAL blessings. They do not involve material or physical things. Instead, they are spiritual blessings, spiritual benefits. They concern the inner

you, your spirit, your soul, your relationship with God. It is with our spirit that we put our faith in God. These blessings deal with our spirit connecting to God, who is also Spirit.

Notice also that we have EVERY spiritual blessing. Every spiritual blessing refers to every spiritual enrichment needed for relating to God. Some of you will remember the special sermon series of last year. The passage started off by saying that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness in Jesus. Anything we need for relating to God we have already received in Jesus Christ. You may not yet know all that you have, but you have these things none-the-less. As you learn of them, you can thank God for them.

He does not list all the spiritual blessings we have, but he does mention some of them near the beginning of this letter.

1. God planned for us to be His, verse 4.

"For he (God) chose us in him (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy..."

I said a few moments ago that the word saint meant holy person and that this meant one who is set apart. The root idea of the word **holy means "to set apart."** **Christians have been set apart by God, for God.** When you became a Christian, God set you apart from everyone else on this planet. God claimed you as His own. God pronounced you to be His. The word holy means set apart, and in this context, we are set apart unto God.

Learning of this, WE are to set ourselves apart unto God. God pronounces us holy and then we are to live up to that holy status. God pronounces us to be His, and then we are to live up to that pronouncement. Believe you are his and act accordingly.

Let me go back to the first story. Learning of her riches, the woman could then live up to those riches. She could go purchase things she needed because she had the money for them.

Christian, you are holy. God has said so. Now go and live it.

Oh, how wonderful God is to bless us like this!

2. God planned for us to be without fault, verse 4.

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be ... blameless in his sight." (Eph. 5:27; Phil. 2:15; Col. 1:22; Heb. 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19; 2 Peter 3:14; Rev. 14:5)

This word means "without blemish, or spotless." This word is found seven other times in the New Testament. It would do you well to look them up this week.

This means you are innocent in God's eyes. When God looks at a Christian He does not see the sin of that person, He sees the righteousness of Jesus on that person. When you put your faith in Jesus, God put all of your sins onto Jesus, and put Jesus' righteousness onto you. You are now blameless before God.

Isn't that great? Oh, how wonderful God is to bless us like this!

3. God planned for us to be heirs through adoption, verse 5.

"In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ"

I know, it doesn't directly speak of being an heir. I'll get to that in a moment. But look first at these first few blessings. Note that God was planning for these before He ever created the earth. This whole thing with Jesus is not some backup plan in case things did not turn out well with the nation of Israel. This is not God's Plan B. No, these blessings are part of God's A plan from the very beginning.

God planned from before human history to make us His own, to adopt us. When you adopt someone they become a joint-heir with your other children. That means we have become inheritors of the same things Jesus will inherit as the Son of God. Paul writes of this in one of his other letters.

Romans 8:16-17 (NIV) The (Holy) Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

We have been adopted into God's own family and are co-heirs with Jesus. When Jesus returns to the earth and receives the recognition and glory that is His, we will be recognized as His followers and will receive glory with Him.

God's plan has always been that we would have a special relationship with Him, a family relationship. When my sons were old enough to ride their bikes in the street, they rode the whole neighborhood. Often they would bring someone back home with a bicycle that needed fixing and I would gladly do so if I could. But the only kids I BOUGHT bicycles for were my own boys. Since they were my family I gave them more than I gave the other kids in the neighborhood. I treated my sons special because they were MY sons.

You do the same thing. So does God. God wanted us to be a part of His family. So He adopted us. And as His children, He gives us blessings that non-Christians do not have.

Oh, how wonderful God is to bless us like this!

4. God redeemed us from the consequences of our sin, verse 7.

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins"

Before we became Christians, our sin had already ruined us. Our sin had already condemned us to hell. Though we had not yet stood trial before God, we were as good as judged guilty and bound for hell. Our only hope was that someone would stand in for us and redeem us from the sentence that already hung over us.

That is what Jesus did. Jesus volunteered to stand in for us. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins with His blood. With the blood of Jesus God purchased us back to be His. **The word redeem means "to buy back." God bought us away from the consequences of our sin.** We put our faith in Jesus and were forgiven of our sins.

One time years ago, our neighborhood had the county bring out a trash dumpster, one of those big long ones. The dumpster was for people in our neighborhood to clean out and throw out their bulky junk, stuff that would not fit in a trashcan. By the end of two days it was full and overflowing.

The day after I saw it full, I saw something else. I saw two men with a pickup truck going through the dumpster, pulling stuff back out. They had pulled out a lawnmower, some bicycles and other stuff. Some of this they would fix up to use again. Other items they would take to sell for scrap metal. Christian, you and I were already on our way to hell when we accepted Jesus. And in accepting Jesus, God pulled us out of the hell-bound dumpster to be repaired and remade for His service. He bought our freedom from sin through the blood of Jesus. He applied a coat of Jesus' blood to our souls.

Oh, how wonderful God is to bless us like this!

5. God revealed His plans to us, verses 9-10.

"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."

If you owned a farm or business, you would not be expected to tell your employees your plans. But you might tell your friends of your plans. You might tell your family your plans. Look what Jesus said to His followers the night before He died.

John 15:15 (NIV) I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Because we are the friends of God, He told us the future.

When I worked in the mailroom of a large company many years ago, we would often be told something new to do. Rearrange the work tables, or change the procedures for handling materials. But they rarely told us why we were making the changes. That would start all kinds of rumors about what was happening and why. We would have been better motivated if they told us why they were making the changes. We would feel more a part of the team.

God wants us to be part of His team. He wants us to feel the joy of seeing His plans come to fruition. So He has told us the ultimate goal of His plan. Quite simply, His plan is that ultimately all things, all people, all institutions, all governments, all nations, all the world will come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When Jesus returns to earth every eye will see Him and every person will know that HE is the LORD of all the earth. He will be KING of Kings and LORD of Lords, the VIP of VIPs. One day ALL the world will be made to live under the Lordship of Jesus. He will receive the glory and recognition rightfully due Him.

Have you ever said, "I just don't know what the world is coming to,"? Well now you do. And you are a part of it.

Oh, how wonderful God is to bless us like this!

6. We received a down-payment on the completion of our salvation, verses 13-14.

Your salvation is not yet complete. You are still in your broken down bodies. You still have sin in your heart. You still see Jesus dimly, not face-to-face. You are not in heaven yet. How then do you know your salvation is real or will be completed? You know it by the Holy Spirit in you.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV) "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."

God gave us the Holy Spirit to live inside of us as a kind of down-payment or deposit, giving us His word that our salvation will be fully completed when Jesus returns. God will make good on all His promises.

The Holy Spirit's presence in your life is evidence that God will fulfill all His promises to you. Hold on to that evidence when doubts arise. Your experience of the Holy Spirit is God's down-payment on your completed salvation.

Oh, how wonderful God is to bless us like this!

Praise God for His kindness and generosity. Thank Him for His wonderful treatment of you.

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If you are not a Christian, all these benefits can be yours as well today. Right now, choose to believe that you are a sinner in need of a Savior and that Jesus is the Savior God sent you. Turn your life over to Him today, and be saved from the consequences of your sins.