

**Sermon Preached by Pastor Robert Barnett at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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PRAISE FOR THE BLESSING OF GOD (PART III)

Ephesians 1:11-14

Entertainer Garrison Keillor, producer of the radio show *Prairie Home Companion*, tells a story about the embarrassment of being the last kid chosen for the baseball team:

The captains are down to their last grudging choices: a slow kid for catcher, someone to stick way out in right field where nobody hits the ball. They choose the last ones two at a time – “you and you” – because it makes no difference who gets picked when you’re a scrub, one of the excess kids.

Sometimes I’m chosen as high as the sixth one, but usually lower. I’m one of the last. But just once, I’d like Darrel to pick me first and say, “Him! I want him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes. You, c’mon!” But I’m never first. I’ve never been chosen with all that much enthusiasm.

Can you relate? Did you ever think about the fact that as a child of God, He chose you early – with enthusiasm? He did! The passage we just read tells us that. It begins with praise for the fact that God “chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world.”

Today, we will continue our study of Ephesians 1:3-14, thinking about the benefits we have because God chose us. A few weeks ago, we saw that this passage is about praise to God – the apostle Paul gave us a model prayer to thank God for the spiritual blessings we have from the Lord, for His gracious work in redeeming us through Jesus Christ. God the Father chose those who will believe. In what we call the doctrine of election, He “*predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ*” (v.5). When you and I respond to the gospel and believe in Christ, it was God who began the process.

We also see that God the Son accomplished the work of redemption. In Jesus Christ “*we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins*” (v.7). Every day, you and I fall short in our obedience to God. The Bible calls that being slaves to sin. We need redemption! And God has redeemed us from that slavery with the highest price that can be paid, the life of His Son.

We saw this in verses 11-12: *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.*

In Him – that is, in Christ – believers are chosen. We are selected – predestined before the creation of the world – as an inheritance for God. In the Old Testament, Israel was given an inheritance from God, the Promised Land. But also, God’s people are described as His inheritance: the heritage, the legacy that He has chosen for Himself. For example, Psalm 33:12

declares “*Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people He chose for His inheritance.*”

God has chosen believers for His possession, His inheritance. You and I are what God has chosen for Himself. Ligon Duncan described it this way:

Imagine a conversation between the Father and the Son before the foundation of the world. They talk about this grand plan of redemption. The Son says, “Father, as I give Myself freely to redeem sinners from certain destruction, what do You really want?” The Father says “My Son, there is a thief on a cross that I want; and there is a prostitute who will one day anoint Your feet that I want; and there are beggars and lepers and outcasts, and there are even some Presbyterians in Virginia that I want. I choose them as My inheritance, as my legacy.”

That’s our spiritual blessing. God has chosen us to be His inheritance and accomplishes His purpose through the redeeming death of Jesus Christ. We are forgiven because of Christ and linked to salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit. God the Spirit applies the benefits of salvation. We will briefly look at three aspects of that work – the Holy Spirit as a promise, the Spirit as a seal, and finally, the Spirit as a deposit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS A PROMISE

Our first point is that the Holy Spirit is a promise. The Spirit is God’s guarantee that we belong to Him, that we have been made His inheritance.

To understand this, we need to see that verses 11-12 closely parallel verse 13-14. Paul starts out by addressing Jewish Christians – *the first to hope in Christ* – and then speaks to Gentile Christians. He uses several different pronouns moving from “we” in v. 11-12 (which refers to himself and other Jewish believers), to “you also” in v. 13, referring to Gentiles, Christians like you and me who are not Jews. His point is to demonstrate the continuity between the promises made in the Old Testament to those made in the New.

The Holy Spirit was both present and promised in the Old Testament. In the pillar and cloud, the Spirit of God led Israel in the wilderness. Through the Spirit, God brought them to the Promised Land, enabled their conquest and divided the land as their inheritance. The Spirit was present throughout the Old Testament, saving the people of God. Salvation for Israel was the same as it is for us today. God’s people are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in the Messiah alone.

The Holy Spirit was also promised in the Old Testament. Joel 2:28 talks about this: “*And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.*” The Old Testament was looking forward to the coming Messianic age, which was the age of the Holy Spirit.

In the same way, Ezekiel 36:27 promises: “*And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*”

God kept His promise. The apostle Peter tells us that it was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out on all the believers in Jerusalem and thousands were saved – Jews and Gentiles! That’s what Paul has in mind when he says in Ephesians 1:13, “*And you also were included in Christ.*” In the New Testament era, the age we live in today, all believers receive the promised Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS A SEAL

That brings us to our second point. The Holy Spirit is a seal. We continue in verse 13: *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.*”

A seal is a mark of ownership, authenticity, and security. If a government official wrote an important letter, he would seal it by pouring a little wax and making an imprint with his ring. This was his official insignia to say the document was real and is not counterfeit. These were external seals.

God’s seal, however, is internal. Paul talks of God’s authenticating work in redemption. The Father gives us His Spirit to mark us as His own. God has sealed us with the Spirit and we are now His adopted children. Without the Spirit, we are without hope and dead in sin. When we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, however, we are authenticated as true children of God.

Note that God has not given us a “thing” or a “right” as the mark of His ownership. He has given a Person, the third Person of the Trinity. His indwelling of us, His possession of us, is a mark of ownership. Salvation is by faith alone, and all those who trust in Christ alone are marked out as God’s, as belonging to God, and are indwelt by a person, the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit testifies to us through the word of God to our hearts that we belong to God. Paul says the same thing later in Ephesians 4:30, where we read that we were sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. This is an incredible spiritual blessing for us! We have the security of forgiveness through Christ’s blood and the gift of the Spirit. Not only that, but we have great assurance as well, for God has set His seal on us for all eternity.

How are we sealed? Look at what Paul says in verse 13. We are marked with a seal when we hear and believe the word of truth, the gospel of salvation. The gospel is the good news of what Christ has done to save us from our sins. As we have seen, this is a Trinitarian redemption: God the Father has chosen us in Christ. We are to put our trust in Jesus because of what He did on the Cross. We can only do this if the Holy Spirit applies the gospel to our hearts.

How do we hear and believe? The preaching of the Scripture and the administration of the sacraments are the ordinary means of grace God has given to His church. The primary way God saves His people is through the teaching and preaching of the Word – in fact, that’s what evangelism is, sharing with non-believers the truths of the Bible. Romans 10:14-15 says:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Those who hear the word preached and believe have the seal of the Spirit. Through the Spirit God works out His election in individual lives. Hearing and believing is accomplished as God the Spirit opens our eyes to understand what Christ has done for us, gives us the faith to believe, and moves our wills to embrace Him as our personal savior. Apart from the Holy Spirit, none of us would turn to Christ.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS A DEPOSIT

Our third point is the Holy Spirit is a deposit. Look at Ephesians 1:14: The Holy Spirit “*is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of His glory.*”

In ancient business transactions a deposit or pledge was a guarantee that the deal would be completed. Our society works in much the same way. When a deposit is put down on a house, this is the first installment of the payment and the pledge of something more – much more – to come later.

So also the Holy Spirit is given to us as a deposit by God, indicating that He will give us the fullness of His blessing. The Holy Spirit applies the redemption accomplished in Christ to us, and is a down payment assuring us that God will give us the fullness of His inheritance.

Through the indwelling Spirit, God gives us a foretaste of that inheritance. The Holy Spirit is the first installment of what is promised to us in the future, God’s unquestioning promise that His children will receive the full inheritance of heaven. We don’t really know what this means, but we anticipate something really great.

We need that reminder every day. Daily life can sometimes be difficult. Relationships past and present, decaying bodies and medical problems, challenges on the job or in school – these things often bother us and seem overwhelming. Thank God that life is not summed up by our troubles. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:4-5:

For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

The Holy Spirit is a pledge, a deposit, a guarantee of what is to come. I don’t know about you, but I am greatly encouraged by the knowledge that what we have now is merely a down payment. When I think about the money we put down on our home two years ago, it doesn’t seem much compared to the remaining mortgage! In the same way, our experience today in Christ, at least how we perceive it, has no comparison to what’s in store for us. Consider Romans 8:

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The 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. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

The inheritance before us is grand. Our hardest and most difficult days will not come close to the glorious future spiritual blessings that we have in Christ. What assurance!

CONCLUSION

When God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world, He was enthusiastic. He gave us the promised Holy Spirit who is present with us, both as a seal of our salvation and a pledge of a future inheritance that is greater than anything we can imagine. We have security and assurance as God's people. Because the Holy Spirit works in us, we have every spiritual blessing.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is a prayer designed to re-orient our lives and put our circumstances, our dreams and ambitions in godly perspective. When we meditate on this passage, the way we think about ourselves and how we think about God begins to change for the good. I hope that you will go back to these words again and again and be reminded of what God has done for you.

If you have trusted Christ, God the Father has chosen you before the creation of the world. God the Son has redeemed you from your sin. God the Holy Spirit has sealed you for all eternity. When you and I discover anew what God has done for us, we will serve Him all the more. When we remember the blessings of God, our hearts will be filled with praise.