

Ephesians 1:3-6
(Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 28:16-20)
“What the Father Has Done”

Introduction

Last Sunday, we began to study this tremendous sentence of over two hundred words that encompasses verses three through fourteen. These twelve verses, divided neatly in our translations into sentences and paragraphs, is actually one great explosion of praise and worship in which the apostle Paul scarcely stops for breath as he praises the Lord for all of his grace poured out upon his children. In spite of its ecstatic expression, there is a deep, theologically significant, structure underlying Paul’s praise.

Last week we looked at the entire sentence and noted how it is clearly divided between praise to the Father, praise to the Son and praise to the Spirit. Verses three through six speak of the unique blessings poured out by the Father, and the first section ends with the words, “to the praise of his glorious grace.” Verses seven through twelve speak of the unique blessings poured out by the Son, and the second section ends with the words, “that we might be to the praise of his glory.” The final two verses, verses thirteen and fourteen, speak of the unique blessings poured out by the Holy Spirit, and end with the words, “to the praise of his glory.”

This morning, we will focus on the first section, verses three through six, and examine more deeply the blessings given to us by our heavenly Father. As we will see, his grace toward us should call forth the same kind of affection and worship that Paul demonstrates in the passage before us.

Body

1. He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (1:3).

Every blessing is assured to us through the Holy Spirit:

When Paul writes of “every spiritual blessing,” we may hear it in our cultural context of vague “spirituality” as simply denoting an impulse toward the transcendent, toward what is greater and different than the mere physical reality around us that we see and taste and touch. But in Paul’s context, and in the context of this passage, it is clear that Paul is referring to God’s blessings as being secured for us by God’s Holy Spirit, whom he refers to in verse fourteen as the “guarantee” or “down payment” of our inheritance.

A Christian is someone who has been united to Christ by an act of God’s Spirit, an act so significant that the Bible refers to it as being “born again,”

“born from above,” and “born of the Spirit” (e.g., John 3:3-6; 1 Peter 1:3). It is a new beginning, the gift of a new life from which one is now to begin growing to maturity in Christ. And the promise here is that God has provided all that we need to become all that he has created and redeemed us to be. Through the means of grace – that is, through such things as prayer, meditation on Scripture, fellowship with God’s people and loving service to people around us – God’s Spirit matures us into the likeness of Christ.

Every blessing flows from our union with Christ in the heavenlies:

An emphasis of this entire section is our union with Christ. Everything the Father gives to us and does for us is due to our union with Christ – that is, due to his Spirit being in us and joining our lives to his. This is what is meant by the blessings God has given us being “in the heavenly places.” The cosmology of ancient people was of the first heaven being the atmosphere around us, the second heaven being the place of the planets, and the third heaven being the place of “rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (3:10). The Lord inhabits all the heavenly places and is “near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” (Psalm 145:18).

So Paul speaks of Christ being enthroned in the heavenlies (1:20) and then of us, whom God has graciously joined to him, as being “seated with Christ in heavenly places” (2:6). The emphasis is on our being safe and secure if we are in Christ, and of all that God has promised us being kept secure from the vagaries of earthly existence where, as Jesus said, “moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19). What God has given us in Christ through the Spirit – “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23) now, and the promise of ruling and reigning with him at last when he consummates all things (e.g., Revelation 3:21) – cannot be taken away or circumvented by any circumstance of life. We are secure in our union with Christ in the heavenlies.

2. He has chosen us in Christ to be holy and blameless (1:4).

We are chosen in Christ to be holy:

Holy and blameless does not refer to justification, to our having credited to our account the righteousness of Christ. While some commentators claim that this must be about justification since, as they claim, we cannot be holy and blameless, this seems to me to miss the whole point Paul is making. Virtually all commentators from the early church agree that this is about sanctification – that is, it is about practical holiness, the way we live our lives. And Paul describes two aspects of the Christian’s life: the internal and the external. Holiness describes what we are inside. Remember that holy means “set apart for the Lord.” A Christian should realize that he or she has been set apart by the Lord, chosen in Christ from before time, in order to live for the

Lord's purposes of renewing the cosmos and uniting all things in Christ. This great mission, as we shall see in our final point, is God's great reason for choosing people for himself and establishing a covenant relationship with them.

To the degree that we grasp this, it begins to change everything. Salvation is not merely about me or how I find forgiveness and relief from guilt, or how I face death unafraid and with the hope of eternal life. Salvation is, rather, about my being holy to the Lord – not a false, legalistic, unattractive “holiness,” but the holiness of one who is learning to live and love for the Lord and for others – especially those whom the world does not value – rather than simply living for one's self, consumed with self-love.

We are chosen in Christ to be blameless:

Blameless refers to the way that one's inner growth in holiness manifests itself outwardly. A clue to what Paul has in mind here is found in David's words in Psalm 19: “Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression” (Psalm 19:12-13). “Blameless” refers to living in a way that does not cause people to say, “So that's what a Christian is like? Then I want nothing to do with it!” It does not mean that one is perfect or does not sometimes fail to think, speak and act as a child of God. But it means that, when God's Spirit comes to live in us, everything begins to change, and that change is observable to those who know us.

There is a destructive teaching among some Christians today, the idea that people will be drawn to the gospel if it treats sin casually and claims that we are all just wrecks and will remain wrecks throughout our life, only to be made new when we are with the Lord. While it is true that we are all sinners and that God graciously saves sinners, the essence of our salvation is that we are made new, born again, and our lives are now on a trajectory of growth in Christ, made ever more like him. Anyone who refutes that statement has read the Bible extraordinarily selectively. The clear call of Scripture, from beginning to end, is to be holy, as our heavenly Father is holy. And inner holiness is manifested in an increasingly blameless life.

3. In love, he has predestined us for adoption as his children (1:5).

We are predestined in the same love the Father has for his Son:

It is easy to miss this little phrase, “in love.” But it is an important reminder of how deeply the Father loves us in Christ. In fact, he loves us just as he loves his Son, who gave himself for us in order to reconcile us to the Father. Some of you, I suspect, spend much of your time hoping that, in the day of the Lord,

you will be declared forgiven and will know the joy of hearing the Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. ... Enter into the joy of your Master” (Matthew 25:23). But you don’t have any sense, on a regular basis, of how deeply and dearly the Lord loves you. You don’t love yourself very much and you frequently disappoint yourself, and then project your self-doubt and disappointment onto your heavenly Father.

If you are a parent, imagine how sad you would be if a child of yours thought that your love was contingent on the child’s behavior, on its success or strength or beauty. We love our children with all our hearts quite simply because they are our children. Of course, we don’t want them to presume upon that love in dysfunctional ways that keep them from doing their best or from living and loving well. Our love makes us want the best of life for them. In this, we reflect but dimly the love of God for his children. He loves you. Live in that love. Let it give you the confidence to risk great things and not fear failure, because you are loved by One who will never leave you nor forsake you.

We are predestined in Christ for adoption as God’s children:

So, he has made us, not his slaves, but his children, dearly loved in Christ. Paul uses here, as he does in other places (e.g., Romans 8:14-17) the language of adoption. Jesus is called God’s “only begotten Son” with him from the beginning (e.g., John 1). An adopted child has all the rights and privileges of a begotten child, except that it does not share the genes of the begotten children, the unique family characteristics. However, God gives his Spirit to his adopted children, so that we have, as it were, his spiritual genes, and are to begin to display the family characteristics.

The apostle John put it this way:

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. ... Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2-3).

Realize, again, how loved you are, how cared and provided for, what is yours even now in Christ, and what glory awaits you in the age to come.

4. All of this is for a two-fold purpose (1:5-6):

We are chosen and blessed for the mission of God:

Once again, it is easy to read right past two important points to be taken from Paul’s final words in our text. Sadly, in the global west, we are used to talking

about salvation merely in personal terms, as though Christ died simply so that individuals like you and me might be freed from sin and death. But the Bible depicts salvation as a matter, not only of the individual, but also of community, and of the cosmos itself. We are saved into a family, God's new covenant community, and in our salvation is promised the renovation of the cosmos, "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1).

If we have been made God's children, then we have been entrusted with the family business, which is God's revealed plan "to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10). Jesus commissioned his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). We cannot simply live for ourselves, once we have become part of God's family. We have, as Paul said elsewhere, "been bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20), so we no longer belong merely to ourselves. Ironically, we only find our freedom, our joy and meaning, to the degree that we engage with our calling and join Christ on mission, wherever he has placed us, whatever our unique sphere of influence. Our call is to live in such a way that people will have reason to believe that the gospel is true.

We are chosen and blessed for the worship of God:

We are most fully human when we "worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). The Father seeks such worship because he has made us for this and knows that only when we are learning to worship with delight and affection are we able to know the reality of his presence and the truth of his love for us.

This entire two-hundred-plus word sentence, of which our text is merely a part, is a spontaneous outpouring of worship by the apostle. We hear him delighting in the Lord and wanting his readers to know something of the reason for his praise so that they – so that *we* – can join in that worship.

Conclusion

What of you? Do you delight to worship the Lord, to bless him for all of the blessings he has poured out on you? Do you yet realize that what he has done for you is life transforming, cosmic in scope and intent, and ultimately "to the praise of his glory"? Have you begun to contemplate, have you ever taken time to meditate upon, how profoundly and at what great cost the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth, has made you his dearly loved, richly blessed, child?

I invite you to refuse to live for nothing, to refuse to worship things that are passing away. Join the apostle, and God's children through the ages, in praying, saying, even singing from the heart, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (1:3).

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