

**“Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ Jesus.”**

**Ephesians 1:1 – 8**

This morning we begin our next series, on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Paul is writing this from prison, chained up for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. And yet his imprisonment isn’t the big thing that occupies his thoughts. He doesn’t define himself as a prisoner of Rome, rather, he introduces himself as an apostle, by the will of God. He wants his readers to know that his missionary work and being in chains is actually a central part of God’s will. He wants his readers to know that they have these firm and secure spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, and that these blessings really matter. What do these spiritual blessings consist of? They include being chosen, forgiven, adopted, and being given knowledge and hope. That’s what the first lot of verses are about, and what is more important is that these blessings are all “in Christ”.

Paul says that those who believe in Christ are special, set apart and beloved by God. In that we have the wonderful privilege and opportunity to live as God’s holy people. This is not because we deserve it. It’s because God is holy and wonderful, and merciful, and gracious. This is what motivates Paul to write to the churches to motivate them to live pure and holy lives, and to grow in that holiness, making it more and more real in their lives as they live for Jesus each day. And so, I want us to look at the first eight verses of Chapter 1 to see all that God has blessed us with through the work that Christ has done for us through his life, death and resurrection and through the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us.

The first blessing is that God “chose us”. We’re used to thinking of ourselves as the people who choose. Yet here, we’re met by a God who chose us before we chose him! God chose us before the foundation of the world. God made decisions about us long before we had any hope of making any decisions about him. It’s true that our decisions are still real, and that we’re responsible for our decisions. Somehow, God works out his own prior plans even through those real decisions of ours. This is a gift of God’s grace and it means that our future and our lives are in God’s hands. It means that our relationship with God is not all up to us. And when you think about it, who would you rather have in control? The all-powerful, creator of the universe? The one who loves us? Or would you rather be in control yourself? Imagine if you were in control of it all. How do you think that would go?

Paul then speaks about the blessing of being adopted by God: It means we are someone whom God has loved and has taken in as his child. And this happens “through Jesus Christ”. We can call God Father by believing in his only Son, Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the reason we know he loves us is that he loves his Son Jesus Christ, and we are ‘in Christ’. It means that God made a choice about us before we made any choices about him. As much as we may have made a real decision to accept God as Father, God is the one who made the prior decision about adopting us. This truth of adoption is wonderfully comforting. To know that God has set his love on us, that he wants to be in a relationship with us as a loving heavenly Father, is a powerful thing. We can know him intimately; we can call him Father. We don’t just consider God from a distance as some detached creator but as one who hears us when we pray to him as “Father”.

The third blessing is our redemption. This redemption is really key, because it has to do with our relationship with God. Redemption is something that God has to do—and has done—for us. God has given us this grace in the one he dearly loves. In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace. God takes our sins very, very seriously. He takes them so seriously that he gave his Son Jesus, who willingly died for our sins to bring us forgiveness. This gift of redemption is central to the gospel message of Jesus Christ, and it is the foundation of our Christian lives. The redemption we have in Christ gives us the strength and the assurance we need. Our redemption is sure and certain, that we have in Christ, and that provides an anchor for our lives.

What do these truths or blessings do for us? They help us to see God's great plans that span from before creation to the end of time. They help us to remember that God doesn't exist to fit into our plans—rather, we exist to fit into his. And we discover the wonder and privilege of being known as God's children. God had a goal when he chose us: "to be holy and blameless in his presence". If it were up to us and we were left all by ourselves, we would be unholy and blameworthy, worthy only of judgment in God's presence. But God's choice of us changes that. We don't need to prove ourselves and earn it. We grow in holiness because God our loving Father has chosen us to be holy and blameless before him.

Lastly, these blessings give us a reason to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others. We can be confident that God is in control. We can be secure in the knowledge that God is achieving his purposes to bring to himself the people of the world that he so loved who believe in Jesus Christ. We just need to pray and humbly get on with sharing the gospel. Because it is not all up to us, we don't have to be anxious about our weaknesses and failures. We can simply rejoice that God uses our humble efforts to achieve his purposes and trust that he certainly will. Praise be to Him, the all-mighty God that chose us, adopted us and redeemed us. Amen

For reflection:

*What is it about these blessings that challenges or comforts you the most?*

God's grace and peace be with us all.

Bobby