

**“In the fullness of time, God will gather up all things in Christ Jesus.”
Ephesians 1:8 – 16**

In these next lot of verses, Paul is continuing to lay out the amazing spiritual blessings that God has given us. In Christ, we have been chosen, forgiven, and adopted by God. Now in verses 8 -10, We have also been given the blessing of knowing God’s plan for the universe, which is “to gather up all things in Christ Jesus”. Paul says that God has graciously made this plan known to us, in Jesus Christ. It means we know where the world is heading, and how we can play our part. God has graciously communicated his plan, as a gift, “made known to us the mystery of his will.” This is truly an act of grace from God. It means that, as his adopted children, we are let in to the intimate secret of his will.

Paul tells us, the goal of this plan involves bringing everything to a point where it is in proper order and harmony, under Jesus Christ. That is where things are heading, and that is what God is doing right now. And we will find out more about this plan as we go further into our study of Ephesians. At the time that Paul was writing, the plan is well on its way. God has decided on his plan and put much of it into operation already, but it hasn’t been completed yet. Paul says that this is a huge plan and it is put into effect through the preaching of the gospel. Then, in verses 11–12, Paul continues to talk about God’s blessings that we have in Christ. He says, “we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will”.

Paul’s words here make us as readers take a step back from ourselves and lifts our eyes to the broad horizons of God’s plans for the world. Paul’s words help us to see the incredible nature of God’s plans. Then, when we more clearly see how big this plan is, and where we fit into that plan, it helps us to rejoice in God’s blessings even more. When Paul talks about “having obtained an inheritance”, he is first of all, referring to the particular promises made to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, where mention is made of God who singles out Israel from all the other nations as his special people. Israel is God’s ‘heritage’ or ‘inheritance’. It predicts that the people of Israel will rebel against God, and that God will be rightly angry and judge them. Yet even then, it says, God will still love Israel. He will have mercy on them and forgive them and save them as his special people. When that happens, that special blessing won’t be just something that is relevant to Israel but also to all the nations and indeed the whole of creation will see it and worship God. This is the extent of the blessings that we have in Christ.

The purpose was to bring his blessings to all the nations through Christ. The book of Acts describes how the message about Jesus Christ spread from Israel to the nations, near and far. The message was preached and believed by many. And as the gentiles believed in Jesus, they too came to share in this hope and these blessings and to be saved from God’s righteous wrath. God’s great purpose and plan for the universe has a far greater dimension. Firstly, God’s blessings were for Israel. Through Jesus Christ, God claimed his heritage and blessed that early Jewish community. Through blessing these people first, God brought blessing and forgiveness and hope and salvation to all the nations round about. Then having heard and believed the gospel, Paul tells his readers they were “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”. The Spirit is God’s ‘seal’— or God’s ‘brand’, demonstrating

that these gentile believers belonged to God as much as their fellow Jewish believers.

Paul reminds his gentile readers that they too, have been caught up in God's great plans for his universe through Christ. He reminds them that this is how God is achieving his purposes. It is through the gospel being preached, heard, and believed. That is how they, too, have come to be sealed with God's Holy Spirit. Therefore, we look forward to the time when God will gather up all things in Christ. This is the core of the gospel message. Our salvation is about lost sinners, under God's judgment, being rescued and restored and brought to life. The goal of the gospel message is that people believe in Jesus Christ and so receive forgiveness of sins through his name. As the gospel has come to us today, and we hear and respond by believing it, God gives his Spirit to us—which means we belong to him, we are secure in him, and our future relationship with God is guaranteed.

Paul then continues on to describe the Holy Spirit as the pledge of our inheritance or the first instalment or deposit. Our inheritance is the everlasting life that God gives to his children. In the Old Testament, we read about God's people being given an inheritance—the land of Israel, a shadow of a much greater gift—a new heavens and a new earth for God's people, full of joy and fulfilment and peace and life, secure in God's loving care. This is Israel's ultimate inheritance. And, Paul says, all those who believe in Jesus Christ have come to share in this inheritance of eternal life. The Holy Spirit is the pledge or the seal or the guarantee that we are God's property or possession! And if we are God's own, we can be sure that God will redeem us at the end. Those who believe in Christ can be sure that we will live with God forever, because the Holy Spirit has sealed us, branded us, and marked us out as God's own. And because God is God, he won't let his possession go in the end because they are secured in him.

This sealing by the Holy Spirit, also helps us to live for God when things are hard. We need the Holy Spirit to remind us, strengthen us, and help us to see that we are God's possession, that we are deeply loved, that we can call on God our Father for help, and that we can look forward to that time when God will indeed redeem us and bring us into everlasting life and joy. This is why—as Paul says—we praise God for his glory, now and forever.

Paul then tells his readers that he prays for them. But before we look at what Paul prays for, we will close by thinking about why praying is important. When we remember who God is, and when we remember who we are, prayer is essentially knowing who God is. God is our Father, and he loves us. The most basic way we relate to God is through faith, that is through believing in him and relying on him as Father. Therefore, when we pray, we come with an attitude of praising God for his greatness, we come humbly, remembering that we need forgiveness and we come with an attitude of thankfulness for all the great things God has done for us. So, if we come with an attitude of praise and humility and thanksgiving, we will realise that we need God to work in our lives. And for God to work in our lives we must continue to pray. Paul, in acknowledging the great things that God has for us, the very fitting response he can offer, is to pray for the believers in Ephesus. So, when we pray, in faith, we must ask God for things according to his will and for the glory of his name.

For reflection

How can these blessings or truths lead you to praise God's glory more deeply and richly OR what can you ask God to help you with, by his Holy Spirit?

God's grace and peace be with you,

Bobby