

All spiritual blessings

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[0 : 00] Ephesians, the first chapter at the third verse. In Ephesians chapter 1, verse 3, it is written, Let it be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

When we were considering some weeks ago at the prayer meeting of the adoption of scripture, you remember we asked the question, how do we know that the Bible is true?

And we came to the conclusion that the answer to that story, that question at the end of the day, is simply this, only the Holy Spirit himself can persuade and assure us with his inner testimony that the Bible is God's word.

But we also noticed that there are, within the Bible, certain supportive internal evidence, internal evidence that supports the fact of the Bible's divine nature.

And our confession of faith, speaking of this, includes among a number of supportive pieces of evidence that we find in the Bible itself, the majesty of the style.

[1 : 23] There's something majestic about the style that we find in the scriptures, particularly in passages such as the one which we read this evening from the early verses of Ephesians chapter 1.

There are a few passages even in the Bible, which are as majestic as verses 3 to 14, is it, whatever it is, 3 to, yes, 14 of this chapter.

Commentators have described the whole epistle to the Ephesians as sublime. And this section, this opening section, surely sets the note. There are, I understand, in the Greek, 202 words in these verses.

One sentence in the original, in these verses. They divide it up into shorter sentences in our English version. As though Paul is so caught up with the glory and wonder of the gospel that he pours his words forth without pausing for breath.

Like a mountain stream, a torrent, pouring its way down the Argarsha hillsides after a period of heavy rain.

[2 : 44] Paul is caught up in the wonder of the glory of God. And he pours out these words like a mountain torrent in the melting snow.

These opening words are what we call a doxology. They are to the glory and praise of God. And it's about this opening verse of the doxology that I want to think with you this evening.

Now first of all, we notice the context of Paul's words. It's generally believed by scholars that this letter to the Ephesians was a circular letter that Paul sent out to the Asian churches with individual names inserted for each church to which it was sent.

The author is of course Paul the Apostle. He told that in chapter, in verse 1. You remember Paul had preached in Ephesians.

You can read the rather dramatic story of Paul's visit to Ephesus in the book of Acts, chapter 19. And in his writings we are told, to the saints which are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

[4 : 09] Now the word saints, of course, in the New Testament has nothing to do with figures in stained glass windows. Nor has it anything to do with those who are specially canonized by the Roman Catholic Church.

In the New Testament, the word saints is the word used, one of the words used to describe Christians. It means those who are consecrated.

Those who are set apart for the service of God to be used by God. And all the Christians are in the New Testament the usage of the word saints.

And you, if you are a Christian tonight, you are a saint in this sense. They are described as the faithful. Those who are full of faith.

Those who believe. They are those who believe in Christ. Who have trusted in Him. Who have accepted His offer of salvation. That's who they were.

[5 : 13] And where were they? We are told, first of all, that they were at Ephesus. Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia.

Ephesus, the city which contained the temple of the goddess Diana. One of the wonders of the ancient world. You remember, the preaching of the gospel led to disastrous consequences for those who had vested interests in producing statues of the goddess Diana.

And there's an uproar in the city after Paul had preached. You'll find that in Acts 19. It was a commercial port. It was a very important city in ancient Asia.

And in this city, this city marked by idolatry and the worship of this goddess Diana whose worship was accompanied by unmentionable acts.

In this city, which was a port where there were comings and goings all the time, in this busy and evil city, there was a church and there were these Christians to whom Paul was writing.

[6 : 24] So they were in Ephesus. But Paul also tells us that they were somewhere else. He tells us in verse 3, sorry, in verse 1 that they were in Christ Jesus.

And this is a phrase that Paul uses, isn't it? Often in the New Testament, he speaks of us as being in Christ. That's a phrase he uses most often perhaps, more often than any other, to refer to the Christian.

He doesn't speak of us so often as being justified or redeemed or forgiven, although all these things are true and he does use these expressions sometimes. but the phrase he likes to use most frequently is this phrase in Christ.

We are in Christ. We are united to Christ. We are in fellowship with Christ. And that fellowship was what we were remembering and enjoying this morning at the Lord's Day.

So these folks whom Paul is writing are in two places. Physically, they are in Ephesus. Spiritually, they are in Christ. And that's true of you and me.

[7 : 35] We are in two places too. Physically, we are in Campbellton or Kintyre, whatever it is we stay. Spiritually, if we're believers, we are in Christ. And both these statements are true.

Both have to be kept in focus. Both of them impinge upon our daily lives and overlap. Here in our Ephesus, we are in the flesh.

We are living as Christians at home, in our work, in our relationships with our friends and neighbor. We are in the world, surrounded by all the temptations and the evil influences which are there in this world in which we live.

But we are also in Christ, living in union with Him by faith, part of His new creation. and we are in both these places.

And because we are in both these places, there is our constant tension, pulling at us, raising problems for us, so that we need constantly to remember that both these facts are true.

[8 : 46] And Paul is writing to these Christians in Ephesus to tell them what's involved in being Christians in Ephesus. And he's writing in this letter to tell us how to be Christians in Campbellton or in Tien Loan or wherever it is we are.

Now it's very significant that Paul begins this letter as he does. He's writing to Christians for whom consistent testimony is not easy because of the environment in which they're living.

And he doesn't begin by discussing the problems and the difficulties which they meet living in these two spheres. He doesn't say I know how difficult it is for you or a terrible life there must be for you living under these in this situation.

Nor does he begin by pointing out the sins and the temptations to which they're exposed in Ephesus. No, he doesn't speak about them at all or about their situation at all.

He begins his letter in verse 3 after the introductory greetings by focusing upon God. He turns their attention away from themselves away from their environment away from their problems and he points them to God.

[10 : 16] Now it's possible isn't it? You and I become so preoccupied by living in the world by just keeping going in the world God has second place and Paul will say right at the beginning.

It's possible isn't it for us that the trials and the problems which we meet every day in the course of our lives are such that we become self-absorbed rather than being God-centered.

It's possible isn't it that our difficulties and our problems prevent us come between us praising him and the priorities which Paul outlines in this letter at Mies remind us the word God first in our

thinking.

So that's the context in which this doxology is offered. Then we notice secondly the one to whom the doxology is offered.

Blessed says Paul be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be God. This doxology first of all then is addressed to God.

[11:41] Now the word blessed is used twice in fact it's used three times in this verse 3. Blessed be God who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings.

And the word blessed is a difficult one because it's a word which we use so easily. It just flows off our lips. When we're not sure what to say when we're praying for someone we say God bless so and so.

When we can't be bothered working out why we should be praying for the missionaries in South Africa we pray God bless the missionaries. It's a word which we use far too often so that we forget what the word means.

it is four senses in which we use it in the Bible. First of all we speak about blessing God blessed be God we bless God when we praise him for his goodness.

I will bless the Lord at all times his praise shall continually be in my mind. then it's used of God's blessing of us.

[12:55] He blesses us says Calvin when he crowns our undertakings for success and bestows upon us happiness and prosperity. God who hath blessed us.

Then we bless each other when we pray for one another. and then ministers bless priests bless in the scriptures ministers bless the church today and the blessing is not simply a prayer but a testimony and a pledge of a divine blessing.

They have been given a commission to bless in the name of the Lord. We can bless God in the way that he blesses us but we can bless him in the sense that we seek to have a proper and high esteem of his greatness when we sing his praise when we speak of him to others remember the word of the psalmist that we were singing in Psalm 34 I will bless the Lord at all times I quoted a minute ago and then he goes on to say in verse 3 of that psalm O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together when we speak of them to others we are blessing the Lord when we are seeking by the way we behave to bring glory and honor to his name we are blessing the Lord whether you eat or drink or whatever you do says Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 do it all for the glory of God we bless God and secondly the doxology is addressed not just to God as God but to God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ our Lord Jesus regarded God the father as his God and father remember how often he speaks especially in John's gospel of his relationship with his father remember how he was when he confronted Mary Magdalene in the garden on the day of his resurrection he said to her don't hold on to me for I have not yet returned to the father go instead to my brothers and tell them I am returning to my father and your father to my

God and your God Jesus in the days of his life looked upon God as his garden father he placed himself under the subjection to his father that was part of what was involved in his coming into the world he who was equal with God who was God of gods and Lord of lords himself placed himself in voluntary subjection to his father his address to the garden father of our Lord Jesus Christ and then we see thirdly the reasons for which the doxology is on why does Paul raise this great anthem of praise to God because he says God hath blessed us now that to be more accurately translated

[16:42] God blessed us because what Paul is saying here as the original Greek verb tells us he's not speaking of a continuous process of blessing although God does continually bless us he's speaking particularly here of one specific act of blessing he's saying way back in the councils of eternity God blessed us God made a plan of blessing for us blessing in other words it's our reference to what we find referred to in various places later on in the chapter to God's eternal purpose when the whole plan of salvation was worked out and the divine covenant of grace was devised God's purpose of blessing of salvation for men now how does he bless us first with all spiritual blessings blessings of spiritual blessings or every spiritual blessing now it may be that Paul is referring here to spiritual blessings in contrast to material blessings material blessings like the food which we eat our homes our clothes our family life our work and so on these are important but they're not top important the first important they have to take place second place to spiritual priorities as we noted this morning and Paul says we fix our eyes not at the end of 2 Corinthians 4 we fix our eyes not in what is seen but what is unseen for what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal and it may be that Paul is emphasizing here that God blesses us not just with the

material blessings which we enjoy but far more with spiritual blessings also it may be that there's a suggestion here remembering the petition of those to whom he's frightened that when material blessings are few in number when we are deprived of material blessings it's then that we enjoy in Christ the more spiritual blessings and that's a strange fact of history the church in eastern Europe which has come through such dark days and that church we are hearing more today than we've been able to hear for a long time during these years of deprivation and of suffering God's people in eastern Europe enjoyed great spiritual blessings which we would long for and covet for the church in our own land they were deprived of material blessings but they enjoyed great spiritual blessings and it's very often the case when the one is taken away the other is granted that's one of the part of a divine strategy and it may be that there's a reference here that Paul is saying to the Ephesians yes you'll be deprived of material blessings you're suffering you're persecuted but look what you'll receive at the same time from the hand of God father's spiritual blessings may refer to their ority they're spiritual because they are given through the Holy Spirit it is his function to make available to us what Christ has done for us we are Christians only if the Holy Spirit has brought his work of salvation in our hearts and we only grow as Christians as he fills and directs and controls our hearts what are these blessings well it would be a lovely bit of time to go through the chapter tonight and examine them all but time doesn't for me but if you read through these wonderful verses you'll discover the blessings which come to us in the gospel election adopt redemption forgiveness revelation find them all listed here and Paul says God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings not just with some of them not just one or two our God is not a niggardly God our God doesn't give us grudgingly of his grace he says to the Ephesians you've received all these blessings there's not one missing his divine power has given us everything we need for life and goodness to our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness all God has given all these blessings blessings are yours and mine to be received by people you may not think much of your spiritual condition you may feel that your grace is a small measure God has blessed you with all these spiritual blessings before the world began stop stop in the midst of your trials and problems and rejoice in them praise God and your soul will be lifted up all spiritual blessings and these spiritual blessings are in heavenly places in heavenly places in Christ or in the heavenly realms we receive them a fortieth of them we receive them fully hereafter remember

Abraham Abraham was given the promise and we are told in Hebrews chapter 11 verse 13 the writer of the Hebrews speaking of Abraham says and the other patriarch says all these people were still living by faith when they died they didn't receive the things from us they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance and they admitted that they were aliens and strangers and all and the blessings the fullness of the blessings we will not receive until we are in glory they are ours by anticipation but that doesn't mean to say we can sit back and wait for them we can enjoy them in anticipation now they are ours by promise as we were reminding ourselves at the communion table this morning they are ours by promise they are in the heavenly places the him writer says more happy but not more secure the glorified spirits in heaven so there's another sense in which this phrase in heavenly places may refer maybe there's another meaning that this may carry we are given these blessings in heavenly places because it's in heavenly places that our warfare is to be accomplished look at

[25 : 13] Ephesians chapter 6 verse 12 verse 10 finally to follow in this last chapter the same letter be strong in the Lord and his mighty power put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's scheme for our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms in the heavenly places that's where our enemy is that's where the greatest part of our battle is and so that's where our spiritual blessings are he blessed us with all spiritual blessings and then godly we are blessed in Christ these blessings come to us only in Christ and this phrase in Christ recurs down through the letter to the

Ephesians it's a reminder that these blessings are ours not because we deserve them not because we even want them but because Christ has purchased them for us Christ has purchased them for himself first of all by his obedience he purchased them not for himself only but for all he came to represent and they're ours when we come to Christ and came and we united to him when we are in Christ remember the promise to Abraham we read in Genesis chapter 22 after Abraham was commanded you remember to sacrifice Isaac and then right at the last minute God intervened and

Isaac's life was spared and God gave to Abraham the promise through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed because he obeyed me

Genesis 22 verse 8 through your offspring and who is Abraham's offspring to which the promise is referred here the offspring of Abraham is of course our Lord Jesus himself through Christ all nations of the earth will be blessed the same world we don't deserve these blessings Christ has won them for us he has purchased them he has undergone the test he has performed the work that he was given to do he has taken the sins of his people upon himself he has loved his own he loved them right to the end he drank the cup right to the bitter drinks he left nothing undone and he purchased by his own he his blessings for us

Christ we do not deserve them but Christ deserves them they are given to him and because they are given to him they are ours too blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ you see all the three persons of the Trinity are involved here in our salvation all the blessings we receive come to us through the whole united harmonious act of our God and on this communion Sunday evening look back over this day as we look forward to we whatever difficulties it may bring for each and all us whatever fears and forebodings we may have whatever worries and anxieties let us remember that in Christ God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places and if you and I are going to fight this week with the powers of evil if we are going to know temptation then the blessings which are ours are given to us in Christ in heavenly places whatever our battleground may be we are like love just earth it's what have We thank thee for thy Son and for all that he has done for us.

[30 : 16] We marvel at the love that we prepare to go through so much suffering and pain and affliction and rejection. In order that we might know untold and undeserved blessings.

We pray that we may be given a richer and fuller sense of our inheritance in Christ. That we may enter into the enjoyment of it. And that we may not be satisfied until we understand and receive fully and enjoy by faith all that is available to us in the Gospel.

For Christ's sake we ask it. Amen.