

Blessed be God

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[0 : 00] We shall turn now to Ephesians chapter 1, and words we'll find in verse 3.

Ephesians 1 and verse 3. But God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we saw in that part of Acts which we read, the Lord promised Saul of Tarsus that he would suffer many things for the sake of his name.

He was a chosen vessel, and one mightily honoured by God. And yet one whose life was, at many points, riven with suffering of one kind or another.

And I say that because this epistle was itself a product of one such episode in Paul's experience, because it is a prison epistle.

And I'm sure that Paul and others must have wondered what God's providence meant, because here was this mighty apostle, so indispensable to God's church and to God's plan for his own kingdom, and yet those lips silenced by those long months of this imprisonment.

[1 : 38] There's no sign that Paul himself ever chafed against the bit in this particular situation, but from that imprisonment came some of the most outstanding epistles of the entire Word of God, which was to Philippi and Ephesians and Colossians and Philemon, all came from this moment in Paul's experience.

And it may be saying to us at one level that when we think ourselves most useless, most diverted from the work of the kingdom, precisely then does God use us in his own unexpected ways.

And these mighty words penned in a prison cell have achieved far more, I suppose, than the apostle living voice could have done, despite all his wanderings and all his journeys for the sake of the gospel.

And it's remarkable, too, that from this prison cell, where there was no comfort, there were no resources, there was no privacy, there came something so sublime as this particular composition, because sublime it is.

It really soars and soars and soars into those great spiritual stratifiers. And here in verse 3, Paul is simply, in his own way, formally opening the epistle and speaking to us of the doxology.

[3 : 20] He has identified himself and his readers, and now he simply says, Blessed be the God and Father for all Jesus Christ. And in many ways, he could have stopped that there. But the spirit takes over his mind, just at this point.

And from this point, Paul soars ever, ever upwards. And I want tonight to pause over these words for a moment, to get something of their inspiration, perhaps, into their own spiritual lives.

I want, first of all, to pause over the name that God has in this particular verse, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is God's own prerogative to give himself a name, and God gave himself many names throughout all his scripture. The simple name God itself, emphasizing for us God's power and God's grandeur.

The name Jehovah, reminding us of God's inexhaustible being, God as the being one who simply is and is and is unchangeable.

[4 : 41] Not unchangeable in some static and unproductive way, but unchangeable in his commitment to his people, and the steadfastness of his love.

The bush of God's own love. The God who is love. That bush, it keeps on burning.

And as we'll see too, you know, that love never began. It is self-existent and self-sustaining. It simply was.

It simply is. God goes on loving. So God is God. And God is Jehovah. And God is also the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

That great name of the triune God. Reminding us that God lives in an eternal fellowship.

[5 : 42] Not in solitude or in isolation, but towards each other, beside each other, in each other, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

This great fact that at the very heart of God from eternity, there is witness. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.

So in the beginning, there was this witness, this fellowship, this face-to-faceness in the very depths of the Godhead. And it is God's will for his church that we should be one, as he himself is one.

And if we feel, as we do sometimes, the temptation to live as monads, to live in isolation from God's church, then we have to come back to this great, I'll almost say, biblical model, where it is God's will for us, that for us too, that be this witness of believing togetherness, of face-to-face love.

So God's name is God. And God's name is Jehovah. And God's name is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[7 : 12] And all of these names have their own words to speak to us here tonight. But then, this particular designation, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a reminder to us that in his, I will say first of all, in his earthly human life, Christ stood to God as a creature in relation to God.

God was his God. And it's a reminder to us that in that earthly life of Jesus, he was worshipping God.

God was his God, the God that he worshipped. And in an age when perhaps we are tempted towards a lessening of a solemnity of our worship, it is so worthwhile to go back and reflect on Jesus' attitude towards God.

And the total solemnity and the utter reverence of all his responses and all his approaches to his own God.

And he calls Holy Father and Unrighteous Father. So here is the God that Jesus worshipped. And the God that Jesus revealed to whom Jesus pointed.

[8 : 52] But to whom he pointed in a unique way that he was himself the very image of God so that to see him was indeed to see the Father.

So that in the face of the man Christ Jesus in the humanity of the Son of God there we see the glory and the very essence of God himself.

God is defined for us here as the God whose face we see in Jesus so that in the love that is embodied in Christ we see no other than the love of God.

And when we see that love in that great progress of self-denial for example in Philippians 2 where he makes himself of no reputation and where he humbles himself and becomes obedient to the cross.

The wonder of it is that there too is the form of God as if that self-denial and that self-emptying and that self-amoration that going to the cross were not a contradiction of God or existed in some tension with God but that there was God's very fall God's very love to lay down his life for us.

[10 : 46] And so here is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus worshipped by Jesus and revealed by Jesus and defined by Jesus when he washes the disciples feet there is a great divine act when he goes voluntarily towards the cross of Calvary there is a great divine act so here is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and what then is to be our response where he says blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus and he wants at the very outset of the epistle he wants our hearts to rise up in doxology to

God and how enormously important that is that we move away for a moment from all our self examinations and all our interest in our own experience and all our analyses of what we might call our own saving act or a saving work in us and for a moment just say blessed be God that's where Paul wants to start and that's where we want to start tonight with this outburst this outpouring of doxology blessed be God and in different ways Paul uses that word three times in this one verse blessed be the God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing blessed be God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing and let's for a moment just reflect upon what is said of God here what God has done for us he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing notice for example the sheer sovereignty of it as Paul defines it here because at fearful different points

Paul Paul brings us back to the sovereign foreordination of God and to the sovereign love of God see verse 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world and predestined us that's where Paul is coming from from this fact that we speak here not of some human achievement but of some great divine initiative and one which goes back way beyond the beginnings of time and for Paul himself way back beyond that Damascus road because that is not where it began it began in that immense eternity in which

God formed his own purpose and where in eternity God put his love at the very heart of that purpose and not love in some general sense but love so specific and love so personal he chose us and he in love predestined us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ by himself predestined in love and of course part of what it's saying to us is the intimacy the finality of that love so that no matter how far back you go the love was there and it's one of the most amazing things because this divine love is a sovereign love and a contingent love and it's a free love it's a love that God need not ever have exercised or permitted to himself or shown so that sense it was not necessary

God could have been God without it and yet God never existed without it it is sovereign and free and in that sense not necessary and yet it is eternal and it becomes in a way the way that God defines himself he defines himself as the God who chose us chose you he defines himself as the God who loves and who loves you and as we reflect tonight on that there is not a believer in this audience but her face her name her cares her sorrows the road she will take where and how that journey will end this all known to him and all part of the purpose of his love

[17 : 40] I'm saying God has loved you and God chose you from the beginning that's God's word to his own people blessed be God and all those blessings coming from his own sovereign and eternal love he has never never been never drawn breath without loving you and that love has formed its own purpose this great preordination this prearrangement of God before God said let there be light God had formed a purpose and that purpose was this that you should be holy and without blame before him that is

God's arrangement and that is God's plan and sometimes you seem to make so little progress in the life of faith and sometimes there is so much that seems more setback than progress and so much that defies analysis and comprehension and yet God's invincible plan it moves on God's mind made up God's invincible determination that one day you you will be faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy and so there it stands the sheer sovereignty of those blessings with which God has blessed us the result of his eternal sovereign choice his inexplicable love his invincible undivertable plan to make you spotless and utterly and perfectly holy but then see this too see how how specific those blessings are he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing and maybe tonight we are very conscious of adversity and difficulty in our own providence maybe there's pain maybe there is dejection maybe as we read this morning we are weary and fainting in our minds and maybe deep is calling unto deep and maybe we are all bewildered because

God said God would bless us and yet God's promise there so specific blessed us with every spiritual blessing not every temporal blessing come back again to Saul of Tarsus and those great words he is a chosen vessel and I will show him what he must suffer for my name James Packer wrote a book once called laid back religion it's American title was jacuzzi religion maybe some of you have jacuzzis you just lie back relax and soak it all up and sometimes our religion is like that all that's what we want just to go from blessing to blessing to blessing and then when the adversity comes it's so hard to handle because we forgotten that there is a cross to bear and a race to run and a fight to fight and a discipline to undergo how tremendous it is to know and to see that in this island there are so many young believers with all their enormous potential for the church of

Christ worldwide in a great highland diaspora and yet how important that from the because there is no species of suffering from which God has promised us immunity that God has saved I will give them every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus Paul was a great Christian God blessed him did he have wealth did he have security did he have leisure did he have popularity did he have power this little man with no great physical presence whom some called the offscouring of all things and yet he is the blessed man and that's what

God is promising us not lives of temporal prosperity but God is promising us every spiritual blessing and see to how comprehensive it is it is sovereign it is specific and it is comprehensive every spiritual blessing there is a kind of holistic quality to what God gives us so that he doesn't give us a bit of salvation or a part of salvation but God gives us the whole God gives us every spiritual blessing and it forms an organic whole an organic unity you have the whole salvation because you have the whole

[25 : 18] Christ God in man prophet priest and king preexistent humiliated and exalted that whole Christ is yours the whole triune God the father the son and the holy spirit all committed to your salvation what a magnificent picture the two natures of Christ the three offices of Christ the three persons of the God and they're all at it and they're all about it and they're all yours and they're all for you and so you have every spiritual blessing and time and again we find this unity in the new testament with regard to those blessings in Galatians 5 Paul speaks of the fruit of the spirit not the fruits torian but the fruit this one single organism this fruit of the spirit of God that's what God has given to us

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing we have justification adoption sanctification they go together assurance of God's love peace of conscience and joy in the holy spirit and growth and grace well you can't pick and choose and God doesn't give you one but not the other but God gives you the whole salvation every spiritual blessing and Paul goes on to itemize them although his language becomes almost incoherent in the ecstasy of his vision and it's hard to analyze the various bits that have been before us but three things stand out here in every blessing there is the fact of adoption and the fact of redemption and the fact of all being sealed with the spirit and

God has done these three things given you these three great blessings adoption redemption and the sealing of his own spirit he has chosen us to be adopted he has foreordained us to his adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself and that such a remarkable change in our status in our legal standing because we were aliens and enemies and outsiders and we stood in God's court charged as sinners and God in his grace justified us and forgave us and God might have said to us you are free to go and that will be it justified and that's it but God's not content with forgiving you not content with justifying you but God says come home with me and I want you to be a member of my family

I'll give you my name I'll make you my heir I'll have you sit at my table and all I have will be yours and I'll always be there for you and do we tonight know the glory about the right of access to God our rights as God's children predestined to the adoption those who are enemies now God's children now able to say Abba Father in whom too Paul says we have redemption even the forgiveness of sins there it is away down there round verse 7 in him we have redemption we have redemption the forgiveness of sins every one of us who has come to know the

Lord has come to know himself or himself and for all us perhaps there are moments and faces and episodes in that past that still haunt us that still torment our consciences Robert Bruce the great scholarship former in the 16th century said that when God gave him conviction of sin he seemed to cause every wrong he had ever done to rise with terrible clarity before him with all the detail of circumstance time and place and he seemed to see them each one in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins those sins which in forgiveness are no longer mine they were mine the most mine my thing

[31 : 50] I ever had but they been dismissed they been sent about their business I been loosed from them that is the deliverance the emancipation the burden of guilt running off running away their sin dismissed and where do we have it how do we have it through his blood and how difficult that is for us because our human pride wants to say there is this I have done in order to my redemption and because whatever we look at we find it so inadequate we can't take this redemption to heart you know we're always on about our own saving experience as if that saving experience were what

Paul were talking about here in whom we have redemption through our own saving experience or through the work of grace or through the new birth or through my conversion and yet when you look at your own saving experience you know that because it's yours and your experience it is tainted and if that's the rock I am standing on I shall never know the peace of God because the peace comes through the blood you know the saving experience does not rely or rest upon the saving experience the saving experience rests on the blood redemption through his blood and that's the only place that's the price of our salvation that's a ransom that's a redemption that's what delivered us what

Christ did on the cross of calvary how can I possibly look at anything I've done anything I have felt and have experienced and imagine that somehow there there is the basis of my forgiveness of my redemption and if tonight we are tied knots over our own saving experience over how we began or how we didn't begin or how we progressed can we in God's name move away from it into this glorious liberty where we know that it was all done for us that I will not quite say the experience but I will say this the one experience that matters is the experience of the

Lamb of God on the cross of Calvary brought us a lamb to the slaughter as a sheep before her shearers is done and the chastisement of my peace was upon him that is the warm saving experience that blood that was poured out by God's own son on Golgotha in whom we have redemption and can we tonight through our saving experience rest simply upon that great fact you know it was done not only before my conversion before I was born Christ redeemed us on the cross of

Calvary that redemption doesn't come after I believe I believe in it it's first objective external right out there redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins and then in verse 13 there is other great fact we are sealed with the Holy Spirit we are adopted we are redeemed and we are sealed I am not going into that detail either but you know what a seal is a seal attests something it says it is the real thing that it is authentic we have in the free church college a college seal and it goes on all diplomas and so on to mark them as authentic this is an authentic free church college document and

[37 : 53] God attests each one of his own children we are not sealed by the spirit we are sealed by God with the Holy Spirit the seal the mark of authentication the proof is our possession of the spirit of God he lives in us he indwells us we bear his fruit we are led by him we are empowered by him we are strengthened by him through him we are able to do all things through the one who strengthens us that is the attestation and I tell you it is not the prerogative of any group of Christians it is the authentication and the attestation of every single believer that is what you are you are spiritual people you are spirit sealed spirit filled spirit led people

I want your faith to know your faith to know that you are redeemed by the blood God and I want your faith to know that you are sealed with God's own spirit that is the attestation that you bear his fruit that you are led by him and that you are empowered by him so what do we see we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing those blessings so sovereign dispensed by the God who loved us from eternity those blessings so specific spiritual blessing and those blessings so comprehensive including those three great moments of adoption redemption and spirit sealing and where does it happen we have been blessed he says with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in

Christ Jesus in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus and at first I perhaps thought well there are two locations here in Christ and in the heavenlies in reality there is only the one we are blessed in Christ that's where we are as you remember your catechism effectual calling unites us to Christ and that's how those blessings are all applied to us in union with the saviour and I want you to grasp the gospel in that evangelical fact there that in Christ is all that you need in Christ you are adopted in

Christ you are redeemed in Christ you are sealed right through this great section that is the key phrase in Christ in Christ in Christ and I plead with you let that be enough we don't need further charismatic or Pentecostal experiences or second blessings on higher lives it's all there in Christ one of the perennial problems facing the church of Christ has been the false prophets who preach plus Christ plus Christ plus Christ plus and I want to do away with all the pluses and to have us simply there in

Christ what I am justified what more must I do now to be adopted what more must I do to be a child of God and I say nothing you are in Christ you are God's child what must I do to be redeemed I am in Christ that's all I need what must I do to have the full comprehensive incomparable energizing work of God's spirit in my heart and soul what more must I do know that I am Christ and I am saying again nothing you are in Christ the glory of it that's what we have to grasp the glory of being there and where is Christ he is in the heavenlies he is at the right hand of

[43 : 37] God and Paul is here I spoke of him soaring taking us up where I at least cannot quite follow because he is saying to you tonight that not only are you in Christ but you are in the heavenlies you are at God's right hand I put it otherwise your citizenship is in heaven that's where you are you are ready in the age to come you have tested the powers of the world to come in Christ ah but where is Christ in the heavenlies where are the heavenlies the heavenlies are at God's right hand that's where you are your lives are hidden with

Christ and God in a most fundamental sense you don't belong to this world you are here as aliens and pilgrims and travelers and sojourners you don't belong and that's why we are to sit loose to its joys and sorrows to its prizes its inducements and its enticements what do matter and that's a great challenge to us in an age when the world gives us as believers so little space when our jobs and our lives demand so much of us in the secular sphere to say we don't belong here we don't pursue its prizes we don't really depend on its joys we're not we don't belong here we're in the heavenlies look at the glory you see we are in Christ we are in the heavenlies we are sealed with the spirit we are redeemed we're

God's children Paul said to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 6 why are you going to law with each other you don't belong to this world with its property obsessions and its financial concerns what's that to you you'll judge angels that's where you belong at Christ's right hand on the day of judgment you are not ordinary I may be ordinary ministering to you but you are not ordinary you are in Christ you're in the heavenlies you're at God's right hand you're in the world to come its power coursing even tonight through your spiritual veins so that's where we have these blessings we have them in Christ we have them in the heavenlies

I want to say two brief words in closing first of all this church for all its remarkable experiences is the one to whom the Lord himself would write some years later and say in Revelation chapter 2 you have lost your first love love this very church that had every spiritual blessing in the heaven is in Christ Jesus it lost its first love love no I'm not going to say to you that you have or that you run the risk but I want to say one thing and that is this that we are far too inclined to regard the loss of that first love as inevitable as if everybody lost it and every church lost it and so we shall lose it my colleague in

Perlick Highland Mr Morrison was converted in revival in Nessoway back around 1920 and he told me once about how in the euphoria of that experience he went to visit an old Christian lady and he poured out his heart full of all its joys and all its assurance and all its aspirations and she listened and listened and listened and she said simply one thing just wait till the winter because it wasn't going to last it was inevitable it wasn't going to last well in his case he never lost it and why should we lose it why should we expect that joy that assurance that love that zeal that living in the heavenlies what has happened to us why should it happen to us why should the flame of that love burn not burn as brightly as ever to the very banks of the

[49 : 33] Jordan and the threshold of eternity let's resolve that we blessed with all those blessings shall never like the church of Ephesus lose our first love day of small things somewhere it may be but this night is not a night of small things it's a night when those gather in significant numbers across the generations and God is blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus and at last this blessed be God let's get that note of doxology back into our lives glory to God glory to God oh Lord my God how great thou art let's make sure that in our hearts in our public worship at the

Lord's table on the coming Lord's day that doxology is there let's present our bodies living sacrifices and reasonable service let's make sure by the grace of God with hearts filled by spirit that there is melody melody in your heart always that you are thankful always and in all things the Lord's supper is about this precisely blessed be God and