

The Rich Blessings of the Gospel

Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-3

Code: 49-1

This morning we're going to begin something that *could* end before the Lord comes. But then again, maybe not, since He could come any moment. And that is, we're going to begin to study the book of Ephesians. It has been a long year of various and sundry messages, trying to help you understand what's going on around us from the biblical perspective. I think now that we have settled a little bit into life in the church, certainly in our church, with such grateful hearts, it's time for us to do what is normal, and that is to go through a book in Scripture, and particularly in the New Testament. And we have chosen collectively the book of Ephesians.

I just want to read the first three verses for you, and then we'll try our best this morning to lay out an introduction for what is to come. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ."

If I were to title this message this morning, we'd just title it "The Blessed," "The Blessed." The idea of blessing has certainly been co-opted in the common speech of our society. People say, "I'm blessed," which is sort of a vernacular way of saying, "Everything is going well. I'm experiencing comfort," or, "I'm experiencing success," or, "I'm seeing an increase in my salary," or, "I'm happy with my kids." Whatever it is, we associate being blessed with positive events or positive circumstances. It's used in a very temporal and very short-sighted way, usually abstracted or divorced from any thought of God. People say they're blessed in the same way they might as well say, "I'm lucky," or, "Circumstances have been kind to me by chance."

We want to talk about a different kind of blessing—a blessing that is intentional, that comes from heaven, and that lasts forever. This is not the secular idea of being blessed. It's not the notion of those who talk about the lie of prosperity.

Blessed is a useful term for people who want also to brag on their achievements and accomplishments but at the same time seem humble; so they say, "I'm blessed." For many, to say you're blessed is the go-to term to declare your success while maintaining an obscure, undefined reference to some divine power somewhere, who for some reason favors you. And I would admit that there is much divine favor on people in general. On the world of nonbelievers it's called common grace, and it *is* a measure of divine favor. But all of the divine favor of common grace is short term, temporal, limited to time, and expires totally at death. Now this is not at all what the apostle Paul is talking about when he says that we have been blessed "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies," or the heavenly places, "in Christ."

If you look at verse 3 for just a moment, you will see "blessed, blessed, blessing." Three times in one verse, Paul refers to this notion of being blessed. From the root *eulogeō*—that's the verb form from which we get *eulogy*. First he says, "You are to bless God because He has blessed us"—and

how?—"with every spiritual blessing." To bless God means to speak well of Him or to praise Him. And why? Because He has blessed us. That is to say, He speaks well of us and does well by us, showing us favor with many blessings.

So the apostle Paul opens this letter with a call to praise: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." That's a doxology, if you will. It's giving God glory. It's an invitation for us to join Him and to bless Him who has blessed us with all blessings. And the blessings with which He has blessed us are heavenly blessings; they are spiritual blessings, so they are eternal blessings.

Now before we look closely at that opening few verses, I want to broaden the picture a little bit. We need to pull back. What are we going to be looking at in this wonderful book of Ephesians? Well there's a keyword that appears here in this book, and it appears six times. Paul uses it in his epistles twenty-one times; and it's a very unusual word, so that's why I note that he uses it twenty-one times, and six times in this letter. It is the word *mystery*. He uses it in chapter 1, again in chapter 3, again in chapter 5, again in chapter 6; and what we learn from that is that Ephesians is a book that reveals mysteries.

In this book the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, discloses truth that previously was not known but is now revealed. These are truths that have been unknown from the foundation of the world until the revelation of the New Testament. And this is so important for us to understand, so let me kind of help you with that a little bit. The pattern of God's revelation with regard to truth has to be understood this way: God has not from the beginning revealed everything; there is a progress of revelation even through the Old Testament. And there were some things completely hidden from those who lived during the Old Testament era and the 400 years between the Old and the New Testament and were never revealed until the New Testament. So let's think about that in a little outline that I'll give you.

Point one: God has always kept secrets. God has secrets. In perfect wisdom He has not chosen to reveal everything to us. Some things are hidden. Some things are permanently hidden. Some things are still hidden. Some things will always be hidden until we arrive in heaven. How do we know that? Because Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children forever." So there are things that God has revealed—that's what Scripture does—but there are things that God has not revealed. God has always kept secrets.

The second thing to think about in this little outline is that God reveals some secrets to special people throughout history. And those special people would be His own people: believers. Psalm 25:14 says, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." So God has secrets, but He reveals those secrets through all of redemptive history and all of revelatory history to certain people, namely those who hear Him and those who are part of His covenant. Proverbs 3:32 says it another way: "The secret," God's secret, "is with the righteous." Amos chapter 3, verse 7, "He reveals His secret unto His servants the prophets." In Matthew chapter 11—that's a familiar portion of Scripture—there is a very important text that speaks to this issue. Verse 25 of Matthew 11: "At that time Jesus said, 'I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was pleasing, well-pleasing in Your sight.'" It pleased God to reveal some special revelation to His own people.

Verse 27 then concludes this little emphasis: "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father;

and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” So God decides who will know certain things, including the knowledge of the Son. And the Son is part of that. The only one who can know the Son, understand the revelation of the Son, is the one to whom the Father and the Son give that revelation. In 1 Corinthians, the familiar chapter 2 and verse 14, “The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” So God has some secrets that He never reveals, and we won’t know them until we get to heaven. But God has other secrets that He reveals to special people throughout all of redemptive history, secrets that relate to salvation and His will, and the particularly emphasized reality of the knowledge of Him and His Son.

And there’s one other thing to consider, and that is this: God keeps some truths hidden from everyone for ages, and then at the strategic moment reveals them only to the righteous. So God has some things He never reveals, God has other truths related to salvation that He has revealed to His children through all of redemptive history, and then God has some things that He reveals only at a certain time. These are the secrets that are described in the New Testament as *mustērion*, mysteries. They are not in themselves mysterious, it’s simply a way of saying that God had not revealed these truths to anyone, nonbelieving or believing; they are sacred secrets kept until the New Testament.

In Matthew chapter 13, the words of our Lord: “Jesus answered them,” verse 11, “‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.’” There Jesus says the kingdom of heaven has held back secrets. “They have been revealed now to you,” Jesus says to His disciples. He did not reveal them to the people in general, and that is why He spoke to them in parables: not to make truth clear, but to hide truth. The mysteries that, then, are revealed in the New Testament are mysteries related to the kingdom of heaven as it is defined by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let me help you to understand something. The term *kingdom of heaven* refers to the current form of the kingdom of heaven, the period, in a sense, of the King’s absence. The King is here, the kingdom is in our midst spiritually, but in the actual way He’s yet to come and set up His earthly millennial kingdom, that’s in the future. So now we have a kingdom, but as far as the world knows, this is an invisible kingdom and the King is not here visibly present.

Christ came, you remember, offering His kingdom. They rejected His kingdom, they crucified Him, so the ultimate kingdom is postponed until the future, and we find the description of that in Revelation chapter 20. But what we have today is still a kingdom because it’s an invisible kingdom—we’ve been talking about that a lot, the kingdom of light. So we’re living in a form of the kingdom in which the King reigns over His people spiritually, while the devil reigns over the world temporally in the sense of the complex of sin that functions in human existence. The kingdom is here with all of its realities. The King is here. Salvation is here, blessing is here, rest is here, peace is here, all the fruit of the Spirit, eternal life; but these are not external, these are internal. But the kingdom is nonetheless in our midst.

At the end of Romans in chapter 16, verse 25, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading

to obedience of faith.” So what is the mystery? It’s essentially the mystery of the gospel—it’s the mystery that leads to obedience of faith. That mystery is a secret prior to the coming of Christ. Only since He has come and the New Testament has been revealed do we have the full understanding of the gospel mystery.

Let me break that out a little bit for you. There are a number of mysteries mentioned in the New Testament, particularly in the writing of Paul. And let me just give you ten of them, and we’ll land on the tenth one for the purpose of looking at Ephesians more directly.

There is the mystery of the incarnate God. And when I say mystery, I’m not just using the word; that is the word that is the word that is used in Scripture. There is the mystery of the incarnate God, which is to say that in the past that was not revealed, that God would come and be incarnate. Colossians 2:2 talks about the “true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” And then verse 9, “In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” That’s the mystery of the incarnate God. The Old Testament did not make that clear. There were allusions to that, but there was not clarity such as in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.”

So there’s the mystery of the incarnate God, that which is essential part of the gospel. And then secondly, there’s the mystery of the indwelling Christ. If you back up a little in Colossians 1 to verses 26 and 27, “The mystery which had been hidden from the past ages and generations”—which is what defines a mystery—“has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. The Old Testament didn’t see God becoming a man clearly, and the Old Testament didn’t see God taking up residence in the life of believers, the Messiah living in His people.

There is the mystery of lawlessness also, which is to say that there will be a level of lawlessness that will come in this part of redemptive history that was unknown in the Old Testament. There’s the mystery of Babylon in Revelation chapter 17; the mystery of lawlessness, 2 Thessalonians 2. The mystery of Babylon is the picture of the final form of the world economic system when the Lord returns. There’s the mystery of the rapture, 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 52, “We show you a mystery; we will not all sleep, we will be raptured, caught up to meet the Lord.” But with regard to the gospel there’s also, I should mention, the mystery of the unbelief of Israel, Romans 11:25; that’s a mystery. Nobody in the Old Testament believed, saw any indication that the Messiah would come and Israel would not believe.

So there are a number of mysteries. But regarding the gospel—and that’s what I want to focus on—there is the mystery of the incarnate God (God becomes man), the mystery of the indwelling Christ (that God-man takes up residence in the life of His people). If you look at Ephesians chapter 1 verse 9, “He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.” We could call this the mystery of His will, as verse 9 says, and that is the mystery that God is going to wrap up everything, in the end, in Christ and for His glory.

In Ephesians chapter 5 verse 31—and I’m just giving you these specific things; I’ll pull them together in a minute—Ephesians 5:31, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”—talking about marriage, and that’s taken from

Genesis. Verse 32, “This mystery is great; but I’m speaking with reference to Christ and the church.” This is the mystery of the church as the bride.

So there is the mystery of God becoming man, of the God-man taking up residence in the life of believers, of the fact that the God-man is the objective of all of God’s redemptive plan and everything will be resolved in Him. There is the mystery of the bride of Christ: that is, the church is His bride. All of this comes together, if you look at chapter 6 and verse 19, as the mystery of the gospel—the mystery of the gospel mentioned at the end of verse 19, the mystery of the gospel. And we read Romans 16, which also says the same thing.

And then one other thing to mention which is pertinent: We have the mystery of the church as the body of Christ, the mystery of the church as the body of Christ. Look at chapter 3 in Ephesians—and this is at the heart of this letter. Paul says in verse 3 “that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.” Again, defining a mystery as something hidden until the New Testament time.

The mystery of Christ, verse 6, specifically is this: “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” This is the mystery of the church as a body made up of Jew and Gentile. All of this New Testament revelation not given in the Old Testament regarding the church defines the church. The incarnate God becomes the indwelling Christ through belief in the gospel. The indwelling Christ takes up residence in the believer. The believers collectively are drawn together in a common eternal life, in which they are the body of Christ. God becomes one with man in order that man might become one with each other, all through the one gospel.

This is the mystery of the gospel and the mystery of the New Testament. Unity, then, is the goal. God becomes man so that the God-man can take up residence in His people, so that they are one with Him; and because all His people are joined to the Lord, they are therefore joined to one another. They are one with Him, and therefore one with each other—Jew and Gentile, no one excluded, and all of this through the one glorious gospel.

Now if you can grasp that, you’re going to understand what Paul is going to tell us in the book of Ephesians. It’s an amazing book. It tells us about this plan. It tells us how to participate in this plan. What is it that brings us into this plan? Well, verse 13 of chapter 2, being “in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” It says at that point, verse 14, “He is our peace, who made both groups”—Jew and Gentile—“into one and broke down the barrier, the dividing wall, abolishing in the flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, that establishes peace. He reconciles them both in one body to God through the cross”—and that is the unity of the body of Christ.

So that’s how you understand the broad essence of what Paul is telling us in the book of Ephesians. The mystery is revealed. It begins with chapter 1, where God lays out this plan according to His purpose. It then goes to chapter 2, which tells us how that plan is activated through the life-giving and unifying gospel of Jesus Christ. It comes into chapter 3 and says that this gospel brings together Jew and Gentile into one body. In fact, chapter 3 ends—and it’d probably be good to look at it. Here’s

the prayer at the end of the first three chapters, which basically are doctrinal: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may”—literally—“settle down in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend. . .” So we’re talking here in these opening chapters about comprehension of these mysteries, comprehension of these doctrinal realities, that you “may comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.” So Paul is praying that we would be able to apprehend, comprehend these great truths.

Then chapters 4 through 6, this is about application. Apprehension, and then application. Chapter 4 verse 1 begins this way: “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” And the final three chapters are practical ways in which we live our lives in line with our theology.

Now that’s kind of a way to look at this epistle thematically. But I want to give you another look at it, maybe looking at a diamond from a different angle. Letter is a treasure house. You’re going to find that all the riches of heaven are going to be basically provided for you in this incredible epistle. This treasure house of Ephesians has, more than any book, in the original days of Grace Church shaped this church. Here we are half a century later, and it’s time to go back and regasp some of these incredible truths that have defined Grace Church down to this very day. If you’re trying to figure out why we are what we are, why we do what we do, you’re going to find it all in the teaching of Ephesians—and other epistles, of course, that are related to it. But you’re going to find how spiritually rich this marvelous epistle is, and how it deposits those riches by God’s grace in the account of every believer. Chapter 1 verse 7 speaks of “the riches of grace.” Chapter 3 verse 16 speaks of “the riches of glory.” Chapter 3 verse 8 of the “riches of Christ.” Grace makes us rich, glory makes us rich, and Christ makes us rich.

“Grace” is mentioned twelve times in this book. “Glory” is mentioned eight times. “Inheritance,” four times. “Rich” is five times. “Fullness,” three times. “Filled,” four times. And this is what sums it all up: “In Christ” is mentioned twenty-seven times. Our riches are in Christ, by grace, with glory—in Christ.

This marvelous epistle talks about the fullness of God, chapter 3, verse 19—just read it. It talks about the fullness of Christ, chapter 4, verse 13. It talks about the fullness of the Spirit, chapter 5, verse 18. It is Trinitarian in its comprehensiveness.

So this is the treasure house of blessing. When Paul begins by saying we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, he’s introducing us to the mysteries that have come to be revealed and unfolded to us, and the treasures that grace and glory and Christ have granted to us. Everything is in Christ: In Christ we fulfill God’s will. In Christ we receive God’s grace. In Christ we are granted glory. In Christ is power. In Christ is love. In Christ is the fulfillment of God’s good pleasure. In Christ, God’s purpose comes to fruition. In Christ is our calling, our inheritance. And in Christ we produce the works of God. So we’re going to have the mysteries unfolded and the treasure house of heaven open for us to understand.

And I want to just remind you that verse 3 of chapter 1 is a statement of fact: “who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.” It’s a statement of fact that belongs as a

promise to every true Christian. So you're going to know the mysteries that have been sacred secrets in the Old Testament and only revealed in the New. You're going to know the mysteries that are revealed now, but only to those who are the people of God who have been given the Spirit and the new nature that allows them to understand.

So let's go back to the introduction, and let's just take a look at familiar words and help you to sort of set the foundation. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." Now we all know the story of Paul; I'm not going to go over all of that. If you want to hear the treatment of Paul, you can listen to the first sermon in the series on Romans, because the first sermon I preached was just a biographical look at Paul.

Paul was Saul, according to the seventh chapter of Acts. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, according to Philippians. He was a fastidious Pharisee. He was a leader of the Jewish anti-Christian movement, according to Acts 9 and also Galatians 1. He was converted to Christ on the Damascus Road, Acts 9. He was called in that same chapter, verse 15, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. And he became one of the pastors in a church in Antioch from which he was called to begin his missionary journeys in the thirteenth chapter of Acts. He went on three missionary tours, and while he was touring—and you can follow that in the book of Acts—he was writing his thirteen letters that are in the New Testament.

Now going through the Roman Empire in what was the greatest evangelistic and church-planting mission in church history, Paul proclaimed the gospel—the gospel that he writes of in Romans, Galatians, and even wonderfully in the book of Ephesians. Paul speaks in this letter, but the Holy Spirit also speaks; we understand that, because all the apostolic writings of Scripture were inspired by the Spirit of God.

Now he defines himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus." He's not just another man with an opinion. Specially called, commissioned emissary of Christ, he speaks with the authority of Christ; he is Christ's mouthpiece. By the way, this is the single credential that he lays out: "an apostle of Christ Jesus." Even though he stood outside the twelve—he was maybe overshadowed by them in some sense—he wants us to understand that he is a legitimate apostle. He does this with no vanity, no self-glory. In fact, he says, "I am what I am by the grace of God." He says, "We have received grace and apostleship," Romans 1:5.

But what do we know about his apostolic calling? When he called himself an apostle, four things were in view; let's look at them just briefly. First, his apostolic call. That is to say, it had to be directly from the Lord. An apostle was one called directly by the Lord Himself—as he was, on the Damascus Road. Only fourteen men were ever given this call: the twelve; Judas is out, Mathias is in, that makes the thirteenth; and Paul is the fourteenth. He had a divine calling. His life was interrupted on the Damascus Road; certainly the most dramatic calling of any apostle by Christ Himself—even the risen, exalted, ascended Christ.

The second thing that characterizes an apostle is that the notion of his identity is wrapped up in the One he represents. He belonged to Christ. He frequently refers to himself as a slave of Christ. This life was not his own; he was the possession of Christ, bought and paid for on the cross, so that he would say, "For me, to live is Christ."

Now apostle means “sent one.” So here is one who has received a unique call personally from Christ, who belongs to Christ as a slave, for the sole purpose of fulfilling, thirdly, a commission. *Apostolos* means a sent one. His commission, in particular, was to the Gentiles.

The fourth element of it simply is to understand that he had power. An apostle is given delegated authority; he can speak for the one he represents. Even in the Jewish setting, the Sanhedrin was a supreme court of the Jews; and in matters of religion, they had authority over every Jew in the world. And when the Sanhedrin came to a decision about anything, and that decision as given then to the public, it was carried out by a messenger called an *apostolos* and taken to those who needed to hear it. When such an apostle of the Sanhedrin went out, he didn’t go with his own message or his own authority—behind him was the authority of the supreme court of Israel.

So it was with Paul. He had authority granted to him by Christ. That authority was validated by signs and wonders and miraculous things, as God validated him as a true apostle by supernatural signs. Not only is he an apostle, but he is “an apostle of Jesus Christ *by the will of God*.” This is double authority, from the Father and the Son. God sovereignly directed the work, specially equipped the apostle called the apostle, as did Christ Himself.

So what is the function of an apostle, if you break it down? I won’t take a lot of time with it. But the apostle—basically you could sum up five things than an apostle did. One, preach the gospel. Paul says, “Woe is me if I don’t preach the gospel.” Secondly, teach and pray—if you borrow the language from Acts 6:4, where the apostles said, “We’ll give ourselves to the ministry of prayer and the word, and you’ll have to put somebody else over the business.” Do miracles, 2 Corinthians 12:12, the signs of an apostle. Acts 14:23, build leaders. And then, write Scripture, write Scripture. Preach the gospel, teach the truth, pray, do miracles, multiply leaders, and write down Scripture. Paul was one of those. In fact, he was the last, and maybe we would say the most influential of all the apostles.

So that’s just an introduction from the start of verse 1. Now let’s talked about the blessed, OK? Let’s talk about the blessed for the few minutes that we have left. I think that clock’s on Daylight Saving Time; maybe not.

“To the saints”—here are the blessed—“to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This identifies the blessed.

“At Ephesus”—though this letter is directed to the Ephesians, and I think that’s legitimately to whom Paul wrote it, there are no personal aspects in this letter. There are no references to local people or local events or local issues in this church. And in some ancient manuscripts there’s a blank where it says, “who are at Ephesus”—“who are at *blank*.” Where did such manuscripts come from, and why did that occur? We can’t be certain, but many scholars believe that this was such a general letter that it was circulated to all the churches, not only in Ephesus and close by, but all through Asia Minor—the seven churches that are listed in the book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3. In Colossians, in fact, Paul refers to a letter from Laodicea. Some feel this might be that letter; we can’t know that. But nonetheless, in some ancient manuscripts there’s a blank there so that any church could fill its own name in, and it would be appropriate to them. I could just as well say in that blank, “To the saints who are at Grace Community Church.” In other words, God probably designed it to go to Ephesus, but it was made available to all who would benefit from it—and that would be the whole church.

It's written from Rome. Paul is a prisoner during his third missionary tour. It's carried by Tychicus and Onesimus, along with Colossians and Philemon, to the churches and to Philemon.

So then comes the designation of who are the blessed, OK? Who are faithful saints? "Saints who are . . . faithful," holy ones, *hagios*. Not plaster saints, not stained glass saints, not canonized Roman Catholics, but those who are saints by justification, those who have been declared righteous. And by the way, nine times in this brief letter Paul refers to the believers as *saints*; and what this emphasizes is that they are, before God, righteous. But more than that, having been justified, they are therefore in the process of being sanctified.

I was asked while I was gone this week, two or three times, "Can someone be saved and not at all manifest any righteousness?" and the answer is of course not. You might as well as the question, "Can someone be unsaved and not manifest sin?" because whatever your nature is is going to be obvious in your behavior.

When he calls us saints, he is talking about our justification, but he also sums it up in our sanctification as well; and to show you that, 1 Corinthians chapter 1. And you might say of all the people who didn't act saintly, the Corinthians probably headed the list. But listen to how he begins 1 Corinthians: "Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth"—that's the whole church at Corinth—"to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling." If you're a saint, you're not only justified, you're in the process of being sanctified. And the Corinthians seem like some of the least sanctified saints—and yet that is how Paul describes them.

Listen to Hebrews 2:11, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Any believers who are justified are sanctified; they are brothers of Christ and brothers in Christ. Listen to Hebrews 10:14, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified"—or are being sanctified.

There are plenty of scriptures that indicate there's no such thing as justification without sanctification. One more comes to mind. Acts 26:18, Paul says his commission is to the Gentiles, to whom the Lord is sending him—verse 18, "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God"—that's conversion, and—"that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." When you put your faith in Christ, you're not only justified, you're sanctified; not perfectly sanctified, but you're on the path of sanctification.

So that, if you are a saint, you also can be designated faithful. That's why those go together: "to the saints who are faithful." What does that mean? *Pistos*, who are believers, who believe in Christ Jesus.

There has been a movement years ago that I basically took on in *The Gospel According to Jesus* that said you could be a Christian and completely lose your faith, be an unbelieving believer. Not possible. True believers are justified and sanctified. They are saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus.

So Paul is writing this letter to those saints and faithful believers. He says to them in verse 2—and

now we go from the blessed to the blessings—“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

The blessings. First, grace—*charis*, the kindness of God toward undeserving sinners. Peace, *eirēnē*. Peace means peace with God, the peace of God, peace with each other. Those are the first blessings: grace and peace. Grace is the fountain; peace is the stream that flows from that fountain.

But beyond that, look at verse 3: We have been blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” You say, “You’re not going to cover all of those because it’s almost noon.” No. That’s what the rest of the letter is about.

In verses 3 through 14, Paul gives one long sentence listing all the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ: election, sanctification, foreordination, adoption, acceptance, redemption, forgiveness, enrichment, enlightenment, inheritance, sealing, promise, on and on and on. Everything that is ours is laid out in that opening chapter. And, of course, from there you go through the whole treasure house of God’s provision for His people: the treasures of grace, the treasures of glory, the treasures of Christ. In this chapter, running down through verse 14, you will see the work of the Father, you will see the work of the Son, and you’ll see the work of the Spirit. And all of it has one purpose: verse 6, “to the praise of the glory of His grace”; verse 12, “to the praise of His glory”; verse 14, “to the praise of His glory.”

Everything that happens in the life of the church is to the praise of His glory. It is all for His glory—and particularly, the praise of the glory of His grace, praise of the glory of His grace, as we saw in verse 6.

So Paul’s praise, as he opens this, is to the One who should be blessed because He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings. So as we go through this, I think Paul is laying down for us the foundation of praise. If there’s any book that should elicit praise, it should be this one because the mysteries are going to be revealed to you, and the treasure house is going to be open to you. You’re going to know all that God wants you to know for your sanctification and joy, and the treasure house is going to be opened wide for you to partake in.

This will be a life-transforming book, I’m sure. These are spiritual blessings, not temporal ones. You can begin by recognizing that you are the blessed because you’re in Christ. You’re blessed in the heavenlies, not in an earthly sense; your blessings don’t terminate on death, they don’t expire when you die. Your blessings are anchored in heaven. And, “My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Again, the key over and over and over again, even in chapter 1, verses 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 22, 23; chapter 1: “In Christ,” “in Christ,” “in Him,” “in Him,” “in Him,” “in Him.” Everything is in Christ. If you’re not in Christ, you claim none of these riches. If you’re in Christ, they’re all yours.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. And even though we have barely scratched the surface of it, we pray that You will give us grateful hearts. Many of the things we’re going to learn in the weeks to come we already know; but refresh them to us, and may they elicit worship. May we do what Paul did in verse 3: Bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for all the blessings He has granted to

us. That is what worship is: to offer blessing to the One who blessed us out of His grace and glory and through His Son.

We thank You for what You have done for us even this morning: the refreshing reality of fellowship; the joy of worship; the sweet communion of prayer, collective prayer together; hearing again the magnificent truths of Your Word. Seal all these things to our hearts. May we dwell in the heavenlies, where our blessings lie; touch lightly in this earth. And may we live as Your children—manifestly so, so that others can see Christ in us. We are in Him, He is in us; may that be manifest to those around us. Make us a people of praise, thanksgiving, who ever and always bless Your name. We ask these things in Your Son's name. Amen.

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