

Ephesians 1:3-14 Absolutely blessed.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ 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, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Dear friends in Christ...

When you came here to this worship service today, I'm sure that you were hoping that it would be a good day for you. Whether you came here as a regular local member, or whether you came here as a visitor from near or far away – surely you were hoping for a good day. Surely you wanted this day to be a blessing, surely you wanted it to be of some benefit.

Today's Bible reading from Ephesians is all about blessings. This reading is a bit unique, because these verses from verse 3 to 14 are one extremely long sentence in the original Greek. And it is all about blessings shared between God & us.

There are 2 ways that blessings go in this reading. The Apostle Paul talks about blessings towards God as well as blessing towards us. To bless someone is to say or do good things to them. Someone always benefits from a blessing. Additionally, to bless someone also means to praise them up and speak well of them. This long ancient Greek sentence shows how we might bless & praise God. It also shows how God blesses & speaks well of us.

So why would God speak well of us? Why would God be saying good things about us? And can we even believe or trust that God wants to say good things about us? Because there are a few problems when it comes to God saying good things about us or to us. We could think of a whole list of reasons as to why God might not say good things about any of us.

A couple of weeks ago I spoke about the mistakes we make in life, and how we all wish for our mistakes to simply disappear – never to be seen again. Now biblically, ‘mistakes’ may sound a bit too light – because human sinfulness is much more than a few errors or blunders. But a couple of responses told me that, in that sermon, you understood that ‘mistakes’ meant ‘sins’ that really plague the heart & mind – sometimes for many years. Yes, bad choices can affect other people for a long time to come. Our sins, our harsh words, our wrong thoughts, our bad plans, our wrong actions, our bad choices, our unhelpful beliefs – all play their part in driving a ‘wedge between us & God’.

How can God say good things about us, when we are in the habit of ‘hitting the wedge’ further between us & God? How can God say good things about us when we find ourselves driven apart from other people through our differences?

The Apostle Paul never held back from admitting he was a sinner – through & through. Sin is the great separator from God - Paul knew that. A holy God and sinful people don’t fit together. So, how & why does God even bother to remove the wedge and bind us back together again?

The answer is given all the way through this continuous Greek sentence today. Paul used a number of churchy words & phrases, to tell us that God always had a plan to save sinful human beings from permanent separation from God. Therefore, God’s plan was always going to bind us together permanently as a family of God.

But for us to become God’s children, something had to be permanently done about our sin. And throughout this reading, the answer is repeatedly pointing to God’s Son, Jesus Christ. In this one continuous Greek sentence, Christ is mentioned seven times. The Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth, to pay the price for every sin of every human being who would ever live. I am not going to do a study here on all the words & phrases which are used throughout this reading. But the message is that God’s plan of sending Jesus means that we now have forgiveness of sins, we are God’s own children in the heavenly places, and we inherit every blessing for eternal life.

Paul gave full glory to God, as he proclaimed the saving plan of God. This divine plan was well & truly put in place before the very foundations of the world. Paul reminded his readers that their conversion to Christianity was not a last-minute decision by God, but it was part of a divine, eternal strategy. Our rescue from sin has been carefully crafted by God for a very long time.

We have certainly heard how God permanently made us to be his heavenly family. But why has God decided to do this? Why does God change us from being sinners to being holy & blameless children of God? Why did God bother?

And the answer is, that this is the loving character & nature of God. It is God's good pleasure; it is God's good will - that people be saved from separation from God. If you find it hard to believe that God would be concerned about you, then at least remember that God's character is different to the nature of people. When we say, "God is love", this is not a throw away line. It is the very nature of God's existence. God's purity, God's holiness, means that God is always out to save, to rescue, to help & to assist. Because of human behaviour, we might be tempted to see God as walking out on us - when in fact, God is in the business of showing favour.

When worshippers come to Holy Communion, God is continuing to show his favour to us. Jesus says that he is right there with us, giving us strength-of-faith & forgiveness. It is a holy meal for people who believe that he shares his body & blood with us in a way we cannot fully understand.

And just consider how much favour God shows, in placing the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit upon people in Holy Baptism – so that God calls us his own children. And this is for people of every age group – that whoever has not been baptised can soon be assured of this favour from God.

I'm not sure how well or how tough things are going for you right now. But spiritual blessings from God are for everyone. And in all of these blessings, God is speaking well of us; God is saying good things about us. God is guaranteeing that the past will be forgotten, and only the blessings will finally remain. For in Christ Jesus, you are absolutely blessed. Amen.