

When God Gives Our Testimony  
Ephesians 1:3-14

Please turn to Ephesians 1. This is Thanksgiving Sunday, and our Scripture tells us why we praise God, why we're thankful to him. This Scripture explains our salvation, it tells us how we became followers of Christ.

Two weeks ago we also had a thanksgiving sermon. In that one we thanked God for the things he gives all people, his goodness to all Creation. Today we're giving thanks for what we have in Christ, what we received when we came to Christ.

Do you know what it means when a believer gives their testimony? When people give their testimonies, they tell the story of how they came to Christ, and what happened that caused them to believe and be baptized.

I've been reading our text over for a couple of weeks, and I realized that when I tell people how I became a Christian, and the way God would tell people how I became a Christian, are different stories. Both stories are about me and about the same salvation, but God tells my story differently than I tell it.

In Eph 1:3-14, God tells us how our story looks to him, and what really happened. It is a long thanksgiving to God. It tells us why we should praise God, and it is built around eight parts our salvation.

1 (v3) God Blessed us with Every Spiritual Blessing.

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed us** in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.* This first one is a summary of them all, the other six give us details of how we came to be blessed.

The first word is "blessed." God blessed us, that's the first thing we say. In the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing. In different words, God gave you and me everything he has to give, and it is in another place. In that place, God has not held back any kindness, any favour.

In Christ, we have everything God could imagine giving to us. That's the kind of blessing we enjoy. It is already ours. "Heavenly realms" means something like "where God is." We have every spiritual blessing where God is.

We're in a bind here because we don't know the currency. We know what money is, we know what land is, we know what houses and building are. But "spiritual blessing in the heavenlies" ... what on earth is that? The trouble is, it is not on earth, so we don't know. We know this: the blessing is all that God has to give, and that's very good.

If you're giving your testimony, you say "God blessed me with every spiritual blessing he could think of, and he gave this to me through Christ, I have it because I trust in Christ."

## 2 (v4) God Chose us Before the Foundation of the World

*For **he chose us** in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*

Say this to yourself: "God chose me before the creation of the world." How about that!

Let's talk about God's choosing. Many Scriptures are clear that our saving faith is our choice. Quite a few other Scriptures, like this one, are clear that our saving faith was God's choice. As a young seminary teacher I wrestled with this, went back and forth as I kept reading the NT. Was our salvation our choice or was it God's choice?

Eventually I concluded that the writers of Scripture don't see any tension. Our choice and God's choice are both entirely true. That doesn't work well for us, but it worked for scripture writers. The same writer will come down clearly on both sides of this. Jesus himself came down clearly on both sides of this in the same paragraph (Mt 11:25-30).

So I decided to get over it, and let both be true. The best illustration of this is how the Bible describes the death of Christ. Is Christ's death God's ancient sovereign plan to save people? Or is Christ's death evil humans acting out their rebellion against God? Biblically it is surely both.

So I teach whatever that page of the Bible teaches, and Eph 1 says our salvation is God's choice. So, amen to that. God chose me before the foundation of the world, and he also chose you before the foundation of the world.

## 3 (v5) God Predestined Us to be Adopted

*In love **he predestined us** for adoption through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

A destination is where the trip ends. High school students walk past our place a little after 8 in the morning, and their destination is the bus stop. Then they get on the bus, and the destination is the school in Steinbach. God marked our your destination and mine ahead of time, and the destination was "adoption through Jesus Christ."

Way back there, before the foundation of the world, he *chose* you and me, and then he planned to adopt us, bring us into his family, make us his children. Why do this? Because back then already he loved us, and this is what he wanted to do. It gave him much pleasure to plan this for us.

*To the praise of his glorious grace.* Remember the basic arrangement with God that we talked about in the thanksgiving message two weeks ago? God takes care of us and provides, and we praise and thank him. That's how relationship with God works. If we don't, we get foolish.

Do you enjoy planning something special for someone you love? I do. I'm terrible at coming up with a plan, but if I land on a good plan, it pleases me no end to make it happen. I'm sure most of you are the same. So also God, it was his pleasure to do this, and he makes excellent plans.

#### 4 (v7) He Redeemed us Through Christ's Death.

*In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.*

When the Bible speaks of people generally, it uses darker language than we would use. The human race is bent and doomed. People are under the authority of darkness. When people don't believe, the god of this age has blinded their eyes so they cannot see the light. Every human lives under that authority, we are all slaves because of our own sin.

To "redeem" means to buy out of some captivity or slavery. There's a price involved, a price to be paid. *The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many*, says Jesus. His death was the price of our redemption.

God chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless, and he predestined us to adoption. But he cannot actually adopt us until he buys us out of the mess we were in. We have redemption through his blood, and the forgiveness of sins. That's how rich God's grace is toward us.

How does my testimony read so far? "God blessed me with every spiritual blessing he has. They are already mine in his heavenly realm. Here's how it happened. Before the foundation of the world, God chose me to be holy and blameless. Back there, he already planned to adopt me, to bring me into his family, so I could enjoy him and receive a full inheritance. I was part of the sinful human race, a captive of darkness, a slave to sin. God had to buy me out of that slavery, and forgive my sins. He did this with the death of Jesus; he did not spare his own Son."

That's a good story, and it is every Christian's story, and we're not done.

#### 5 (v9) God Told us His Hidden Plans

*With all wisdom and understanding, he **made known to us** the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

In the Bible, a mystery is not something that's hard to understand. A mystery is something we'd never have known at all if God had not told us, and once he tells us, it is actually straightforward. What God made known to us is the gospel, that we are redeemed by the blood of Christ, that we have forgiveness of sins in Christ, and that Christ will rule heaven and earth.

In a real sense, the mystery that God made known to us is what's in the rest of these actions of God: he blessed us, chose us, predestined us, redeemed us, and so on. It's secret because these things were not known before Christ, but now that Christ has come, God makes it clear.

God showed us his secret plans. This is an honour for us, and God graciously did this because it gave him pleasure to do so. God said, "I'm not just going to redeem them and forgive their sins. I'm going to tell them my whole plan, starting before the world was even created, right up to the new heaven and new earth." We get it all, past, present, and future, in this thanksgiving.

6 (v11) In Christ we have **an inheritance**

*In him we have an inheritance, because we have been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the intention of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.*

There's a Greek word here that is not used anywhere else in the NT, and the experts are not sure what it means exactly in this sentence. The NIV says "we were chosen," and but other's say "we receive an inheritance from God" and in a footnote they say "we become God's inheritance" (NRSV, NLT). The thing is, they are all true in the Bible, so in that sense it isn't important. I stayed with the traditional understanding, that we have an inheritance.

Folks, we have every spiritual blessing God can think of to give. That's our inheritance. That's our hope. It is kept in a different place, it's with the Lord, and for a different time, when he returns. Why do WE have this from God? We are not special. Is this just raw luck? No.

*We have an inheritance, because we have been predestined according to the plan of God, who works out everything in conformity with the intention of his will.* God has planned it, people, said in as many ways as Paul can think of to say it.

God has a plan, and he works out everything to fit with the intention of what he wants. It's going to happen. As sure as we're here, we will be there, we'll receive that inheritance.

7 (v13) We were **Sealed** with the Holy Spirit.

*And you also, when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed it, you were **sealed** with the promised Holy Spirit*

In Greek, "sealed" is the main word in vv 13-14, though that is not so clear in English. When we heard the gospel and believed it, God put his seal on us. He marked us as his property. He's coming back to get us. When we believed, he marked us, he labeled us, as his possession.

And what is the actual mark? It's the Holy Spirit, nothing less than the Spirit himself. And here's how we can tell who has the Spirit. No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. "Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life."

If you can say that genuinely, you have the Spirit, and the most important thing the Spirit can do he has done. And that means you have God's special seal on you. You received this seal when you heard the gospel and believed it.

8, (v14) God Gave a **Deposit** to Guarantee our Inheritance.

*The Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

God gave us a deposit to guarantee our inheritance. The deposit is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is how God sealed us for himself, and the Spirit is also a deposit of our inheritance. Some translations say "down payment" instead of "deposit," but that means the same thing.

God said to himself, “I want my adopted children to be certain about their inheritance. So I will give them a bit of their inheritance ahead of time, so they can know that I mean this. Let’s see, what part of their inheritance shall I give them ahead of time? I know, I’ll give them the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is a part of my children’s final inheritance, but I will give it to them ahead of time, to guarantee the rest. The Spirit will be my deposit, my down payment to them.”

We are already redeemed, in the sense that we are bought and paid for, God bought and paid for us with the death of Christ, and he freed us from our slavery, he set us free.

But he hasn’t come to pick us up yet. We’re free, but we’re still in the old place. That’s why we have a seal. He marked us because he’s coming back to get us. We now are God’s possession, and the guarantee lasts until he comes back to get us, and then we get the full inheritance.

That’s our story, that’s the real story of how I came to Christ, and that’s how each of you came to Christ. But these words are not here so we’d know how to tell our story. They are here so we would know how to praise and thank God. So let’s make this a prayer of thanks to God.

Here’s how God tells your story: He blessed you with every spiritual blessing, he chose you before the world began, he predestined you to adoption, he redeemed you by the death of Christ, he made his whole plan known to you, he gave you an inheritance, he sealed you with the Spirit, and he gave you the Spirit as an inheritance deposit, so you would know the rest was coming.

One comment before we close with that prayer: When we thank God for things, it is usually for circumstances that have turned out well. It is right and good that we thank God when life goes well for us. We won’t stop that. But in the NT, that is almost never why people thank God.

Praise to God in the NT is almost always for the kinds of things in our Scripture today, what God gave us in Christ, present and future, things the world did not give, and the world cannot take away. That is how God’s word encourages us to thank God. We need to move in this direction. Let’s always thank God for our riches in Christ, which circumstances never threaten.

**PRAYER:** Our God and Father, we praise you and thank you. You blessed us with every spiritual blessing you could give us. Whatever you could imagine you have done. This began back before the world was created, you chose me and these brothers and sisters to be with you, holy and blameless. Back then you planned to adopt us into your family. And you sent your Son, you paid with your Son, to buy us out of our doomed captivity and to forgive our sins.

Then, Father, you told us your inner plans, your hidden plans, what we call the gospel. You made the whole story clear to us, beginning to end, of what you would do through Christ. You made sure we understood it. And now, when we put our hope in Christ, you give us an inheritance. When we heard the gospel and believed it, you sealed us with your mark, which is the Holy Spirit himself. And by giving us the Spirit, you also gave us a deposit of our inheritance.

You gave us some of our inheritance ahead of time, so we would know for sure that your promise was solid. God, we give you glory and praise and thanks.

What more could you say than to us you have said? What more could you do than for us you have done? Your grace and your love are past our measuring. We're so glad to be yours. O Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:** May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.