

God Speaks to Encourage Us
Ephesians 1:3-14

Please turn to Ephesians 1. At a Saturday men's breakfast we had this last spring, Marlin told us there that he had read Ephesians 1 earlier that morning, and he had been much encouraged by that. That's about all he said.

Later that same day I read Ephesians 1, and I also was comforted and encouraged. God used it to cheer me up. Most days I can use that. I told myself that if I got a chance to speak you this summer, it would be on the opening thanksgiving of Ephesians. Today is the day! I'm glad for the chance.

Paul writes this so we will praise and thank God. This Scripture has not done what it's supposed to do if it only encourages and comforts us. This Scripture succeeds when we praise and thank God. Let's keep that in mind.

In Eph 1:3-14, God speaks to us. He tells us what he's done for us, and what he's going to do for us. This is not going to change your circumstances at all. Not at all. But it's a good story, it's *your* story, and it's far bigger than anything in your circumstances or mine.

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 seven give us details of how we came to be blessed.

God blessed us, that's the first God tells us. 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 already 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 buildings are. But "spiritual blessings in the heavenlies"? What is that? 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.

Who exactly gets these blessing? The answer is in verse 13 – "you were included when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and you believed it." Somewhere along the line, every one of us heard the simple gospel. Christ died for our sins, and he rose again. If we trust in him, we have eternal life, we're included.

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 before him.

Say this to yourself: “God chose me before the foundation of the world.” Put your own name in there. “God chose me, Ed Neufeld, before the creation of the world.” Use your name.

Let’s talk about God’s choosing, about God’s sovereignty and human freedom. Scripture has quite a bit of clear teaching on both sides of this, so let’s not try to wriggle out of either one. The Bible wants it both ways. God is sovereign, and humans make their own choices.

When God wants to warn us, or call us to himself, he talks about human freedom to choose. When God wants to encourage and comfort us, he talks about his sovereignty. This is an encouragement Scripture, so God’s sovereignty is pretty strong, and we will let that stand.

For what did God choose us? To be holy and blameless before him. “Before him” can mean in his sight, right now. “Before him” can be when we’re actually with God, like we read in Jude: “God is able to bring you into his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.”

Both of these are true, regardless of how we take this line. We are holy and blameless before him now. The Jude sense is better here, because our Scripture today has a strong emphasis on our future with God.

Think about the time line. God chose us back then, before creation, for something we still don’t have. People, we weren’t saved for this, we were saved for that, to be brought into his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

What we did was hear the gospel and believe it. That was our choice. And once we do that, God says to us, “I chose you (and say your name here, folks), I chose you before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless and joyful in my glorious presence.” For this we thank him.

3 (v5) God Predestined Us to be Adopted

In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, which was 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. 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? It was his pleasure and will. Back then already he loved us, and this is what he wanted to do.

You have to imagine God being pleased and delighted with the thought of adopting you. Use your full name. We have a terrible time believing this. We can think of others God would be this happy to adopt, but not me. Listen, brothers and sisters, if you’ve heard the gospel and believed it, this includes you.

We weren’t adopted back there, but when he chose us he planned our adoption. He made that our destination.

To the praise of his glorious grace. Remember the basic arrangement with God that we have talked about before? God takes care of us and provides for us, and we praise and thank him. That's how relationship with God works.

God has been and will be so gracious to us, so generous and loving, that when we actually get in front of him and understand it all, we won't be able to stop thanking and praising him. We'll get tired and stop thanking him, and start to walk away, and then gratitude and love will overwhelm us again, and we'll go back and praise him some more. This Scripture says we should start now.

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

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

When the Bible speaks about human, it uses darker language than we would use. The whole human race rebelled against God, and our guilt made us slaves to a terrible and powerful dark authority. 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. God has opened the floodgates of his grace onto each one of us.

Say this to yourself: "I have heard the gospel and believed it. God says that means that he 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 in his presence. 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 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. I live under a waterfall of his grace."

God wants us to say these things to ourselves and to each other.

5 (v9) God Told us His Hidden Plan to Make Christ Ruler of Heaven and Earth

*With all wisdom and understanding, he **made known to us** the mystery of his will to fulfill his own good pleasure, which he planned in Christ, to be put into effect when the times are fulfilled—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together 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, not complicated. It's secret because these things were not known before Christ, but now that Christ has come, God makes it clear.

The mystery here is that all things in heaven and on earth will be brought together in Christ. We're talking about the new heaven and earth still to come. No more tears or pain or separation or fear or death. Christ has all authority now, but he's not using it the way he will then.

God showed us this plan of his. God honoured us by showing us, and God 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 by the plan of him who works out everything to conform to the intention of his will, in order that we, who were the first to 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 exactly it means in this sentence. The NIV says "we were chosen," and but other say "we have an inheritance." The thing is, they are both 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 inheritance from God?

We have an inheritance, because we have been predestined by the plan of God, who works out everything to conform to the intention of his will. God has planned it, people. Paul says that in as many ways in one sentence as he 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 will receive that inheritance.

"We who were the first to hope in Christ." Did you catch that? Verses 11-12 are about Jewish believers, and vv13-14 are to the Gentile believers. The first believers were all Jews.

The thing is, he doesn't call them "the first believers" does he. He calls them "the first to hope in Christ." Listen, people, we weren't saved for *this*. We were saved for *that*. This is just a stage on the way. We are on a pilgrimage. We are on the last exodus. We've been freed from Egypt, in baptism we crossed the Red Sea (1 Cor 10).

But we weren't saved for the exodus, we were saved for the promised land. We were saved for our inheritance, for the new heaven and earth, we saved so God could bring us into his loving presence blameless and full of joy. Peter says that salvation means being born again into a living hope (1Pet 1:3). Believers are those who hope in Christ.

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. "You also" means "you Gentile believers." That's us. How did we get included in all this? We heard the message and believed it.

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.

Marilyn had Fields Market bake a saskatoon pie to her specifications. They wrote “for Marilyn” on big letters on the pie box, so that no one else would walk out of the store with that pie. That’s us. We’re each a pie in a pie box, and God has put his seal on each us, so that no one else walks away with his property, so he can come and get us when he’s ready.

And what is the actual mark? It’s the Holy Spirit, nothing less than the Spirit himself. When we heard and believed, God marked us with his seal, the Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings the Lord into our lives in many ways. But the Spirit also seals us for what’s still to come. The Lord will tell his holy angels, “Go now, bring me everyone that’s sealed with the Spirit.” That happy day is still to come.

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.

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 freed from slavery, but not in the promised land. That’s why we have a seal. He 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.

Let God be speaking to you in this whole Scripture. 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. He’s given all he has, we live in a flood of his love and grace.

Praise to God in the New Testament is almost always for the kinds of things in our Scripture today, things the world did not give, and the world cannot take away. Let's thank God for what we have in Christ and can never lose.

PRAYER: O Father, 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. Strengthen our minds with your Spirit, Father, so that we can take a firm grip on these things. 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.