

## Ephesians 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,  
To God's holy people in Ephesus,<sup>[a]</sup> the faithful in Christ  
Jesus:<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and  
the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him  
before the creation of the world to be holy and  
blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he<sup>[b]</sup> predestined us for  
adoption to sonship<sup>[c]</sup> through Jesus Christ, in accordance  
with his pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious  
grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the  
forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's  
grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and  
understanding, <sup>9</sup> he<sup>[d]</sup> made known to us the mystery of his  
will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in  
Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their  
fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on  
earth under Christ.

<sup>11</sup> In him we were also chosen,<sup>[e]</sup> having been  
predestined according to the plan of him who works out  
everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in  
order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ,  
might be for the praise of his glory.

<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the  
message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you  
believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the  
promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our  
inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's  
possession—to the praise of his glory.

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 Preacher: Stephen Taylor

Slide 1

A few years ago Athina Onassis, turned 18 and immediately she inherited over 1 billion US dollars. How about that? Up until that point she had lived a pretty normal childhood even catching the bus to school, but once she got to 18 years of age everything changed, radically.

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She got the money, the gold, the art masterpieces, four property in France, England, Switzerland and Argentina, even a whole Greek island just because she was the granddaughter of Aristotle Onassis, the Greek shipping tycoon who when he died in 1975 was one of the richest men in the world. And because Athina was related to him, she now has been blessed by him with untold riches.

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But Athina has nothing, absolutely nothing compared to the members of the Church in Ephesus, Turkey. For the apostle Paul writing to them in the late 50's most likely from a Roman prison cell tells them in chapter 1:3 *"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"*.

Slide 4

You hear that? The Ephesians were blessed in the heavenly realms. In a way they were already having a foretaste of heaven, for they had at their disposal every spiritual blessing in Christ. Athina Onassis and many of the world's current billionaires might have almost every physical blessings that money can buy. But like Aristotle Onnasis, they too will one day die and lose it all. Every single thing. But what the Ephesians have is theirs forever. Wow.

Makes you a bit jealous, doesn't it? Boy wouldn't you like to have been in their shoes? Wouldn't you like to have what they have? Wouldn't you like to be so blessed by God that you too would have every spiritual blessing in Christ?

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And yet when we look at the Church at Ephesus, there's nothing special about them. Sure they are called saints in verse 1, but all Christians are called saints in the New Testament. Sure it is pointed out that they are faithful, but no more so than any other Church. Sure they have a relationship with Jesus, but don't we as well? And so as we start this letter, we realise that Paul isn't just talking to the Church at Ephesus, in fact most Bible scholars think it was a circular letter to many Churches in the area of Ephesus any way. He was talking to all Christians. He was even talking to you and me.

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And he is saying that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Every single one. Not one spiritual blessing has been withheld by God. Now that doesn't mean that you and I will have every spiritual gift. Nor is he telling us that we have every physical blessing, you and I know that isn't true either. But no spiritual blessing has been withheld from those who are in Christ.

Slide 7

In Christ. You see those blessings don't reside with us here in Newcastle/Swansea. They are actually attached to the person of Jesus Christ. And so when we trust in Him, when we follow Him, then we live with him then as part of the package of having this relationship with God is that He sends along with Jesus every spiritual blessing in Christ. We might live in

Charlestown or Swansea or Ephesus but we are also in Christ. And just as Jesus now is in heaven and has within his grasp every spiritual blessing, through our relationship with Him so does each Christian believer.

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You know when I got married I married someone who came and lived with me. But it wasn't just Kaylene who came along but all of Kaylene's belongings. I was a cheap skate and so most of the things in my flat had been borrowed from others or purchased cheaply or even second hand. But Kaylene brought new things, quality things, things that would last and so when we married I was able to enjoy not only a relationship with Kaylene but also what she brought along with her. And likewise when we are in Christ, Jesus brings along and makes available to all of us who are Christians the blessings of heaven that God has given to Jesus.

Slide 9

Now before we stop and have a good look at what some of those blessings are can I ask you to think about for a moment what would your top three blessings be about being a Christian? If someone was to say to you what are the top three things you have received from being a follower of Christ what would you say? Forgiveness of sins perhaps? Assurance of heaven maybe? The wisdom of the Bible? Being part of the Church family? Or maybe the actual family that God has given me? They are all great blessings aren't they?

Slide 10

Well Paul will go on to tell us his top three blessings in Christ and they will be that God the Father has chosen me. God the Son has redeemed me. And God the Holy Spirit has sealed me. Now were any of those on your list? Let's see why they are on Paul's list shall we?

Slide 11

### **1. God the Father has chosen me for adoption.**

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

Paul's letter now explodes with praise, praising God with one long sentence that goes from verse 3 to 14 and uses over 202 words. They just gush out of him. And the first blessing he is thankful for is that God chose us in him before the creation of the world. Paul says that God thought about us Christians even before he said those immortal words, *"Let there be light!"* God starting writing names in his book of life, before you were a twinkle in your father's eye, even before the world was a twinkle in God's eye.

Slide 12

Why did he do that? For in verse 5 we read *"in love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ"*. He didn't just choose us, he had a purpose, he predestined a plan that enabled me to become a Christian. God wasn't going to leave anything to chance. God wasn't going to just wait and hope that I would choose him. He chose me and in love he predestined me to be one of his sons. To be adopted into his heavenly family.

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For when you think about it, we are all natural born children to one mother and father. But we are not God's natural born children. We were adopted. God chose to include us in his family. God did something in order to bring us into a relationship with Him. We are not a child by birth or by merit, or by race, we are a child of grace. God decided to bring us into his family, before the creation of the world.

You see the emphasis of this passage is not me choosing God or making a decision, or praying a prayer, or walking down the aisle, I may at one time done one of those things and

so may you have. But Paul is not placing the emphasis here on me or you but on God. He chose us. He predestined us. He adopted us. Why would he do that?

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Two reasons. He *“chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight”*. He chose us to change us. So that those who were dead in sins might become alive. So that those who were unholy might become holy. God knows that the life without him, the life that we used to live, is futile and hopeless so he chose us for something worthwhile. He chose us to be holy and blameless. He chose us so that we might truly share his nature and character as men and women made in the image of God.

But he also predestined us to be *“adopt(ed) to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace”*. He chose us to please Himself. Slide 15 And he adds even more in verses 11 and 12. *“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory”*.

God chose us so that the praise of His glory would fill the earth. He chose us to declare to the whole world His glorious plan. He chose us because that was his will to save a people unto Himself. God knew that dead people can't chose Him. So He chose us & in this way he could make known to the whole cosmos his wonderful, his glorious, his amazing grace.

Slide 16

Wow, what a blessing. In the words of British preacher Richard Coekin *“when we arrive in heaven, God will welcome us and we can imagine him saying ‘I am so glad to welcome you into my home at last – for I chose to save you for my son before I made the world; I sent my son to die for you on the cross; I arranged history to ensure your birth and steer your life; I bought someone to explain the gospel to you and opened your eyes to recognize Jesus as your Saviour and Lord; I carried you when you were weak and held on to you when you tried to run away and now finally I can welcome you into my home. It is **so good** to see you – I’ve loved you for such a very long time!’”*

Slide 17

Here at the top of the list of spiritual blessings is the mind blowing blessing of being chosen by God. But not everyone believes in this. There are some who want to emphasize free will and a person's choice so much that they downplay the blessing of election. God only foreknew who would come to Jesus. Now that is a shame, a real shame, if you believe that. You will miss out on the assurance that if God has chosen you there is nothing you can do to lose that salvation. Nothing. No sin. No false statement. No dementia at the end of your life can take you away from the very presence of God. Of being in Christ. Nothing.

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You can still get to heaven even if you don't believe in election. But I think you are like the plane traveler whose employer has bought you a first class ticket and you instead insist on going on economy or cattle class. You will get there but you miss out on the comfort and enjoyment of much of the ride. Let's move on because Paul moves on to the next blessing

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## 2. God the Son has redeemed us for unification

<sup>7</sup>*“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us”*. The second great blessing is that ...

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We have been redeemed, bought back by God. The idea of redemption is one that we don't use very much today but a few days ago I heard on the radio an ad for Cash Converters encouraging us to Flip it. Flip it? It said I could take some of my expensive jewelry and hand it over to them and they would give me the money it was worth as a loan. So I take my wedding ring for example which is worth millions to me for what it represents but might be worth say \$250 to cash converters. They give me \$250 for me to use however I want. But to get my ring back to redeem it I have to pay back the \$250 before I get back my ring.

The idea that Paul is highlighting is that we were once owned by God. He made us after all in his own image we have the mark of ownership there within each one of us. But when we sinned we sold ourselves to Satan. We walked away from God. We lived in rebellion to Him. So if God wanted us back, even though he owned us by creating us, he had to buy us back.

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And you are worth more than a \$250 piece of jewelry. You and I are immensely valuable in God's eyes, so precious that the cost of flipping you, redeeming you was the death of his only Son Jesus Christ. The price of sin, the price of rebellion, the price of doing my own thing was so high that I was in over my head and yet God purchased my life, by the cost of his son's Jesus blood, on the cross. What a blessing. That means I am no longer enslaved to sin or Satan. I am free to resist Satan's temptations. I am free from my guilt and sinful nature. I am free to be the person God made me to be.

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I am redeemed & forgiven. The mark of sin, the destruction that they have wrecked on my body can be taken away. I don't have to be dirty, I can be clean. I don't have to have evil attached to my body, they can be all washed away. They have been put in the garbage bin & taken completely away from me, never to be seen again. Slide 23 In the words of John Calvin preaching on this very text in Geneva in 1558. He said, "*God puts our sins out of his remembrance and drowns them in the depths of the sea.*" Your sins are now at the garbage tip, or down the bottom of the ocean, as far as east is from west. They are not coming back.

Slide 24

But the price of this redemption, the price of this forgiveness is huge. Huge. It cost the life of Jesus Christ. The mystery is finally solved. In the OT sins were taken away by the death of a perfect lamb, or a scapegoat but how could an animal like that really forgive my sins? It couldn't but it pointed everyone to the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

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And the reason why God redeemed us? "*With all wisdom & understanding<sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,<sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ*".

To bring unity to all things in heaven and earth under Christ. To bring unity under Jesus. The whole of creation and the whole Church are being brought together under the one head. Jesus Christ. Friends that is where this world his heading. That is why God made us like he did. To bring all things together under Jesus. Have you ever thought about that?

Where is this world heading? Ecological disaster? Nuclear war? One world government?

Well it may or may not go down that path but it is actually heading for a time when Jesus is Lord over all. And will be seen as Lord over all. So friends don't be too despondent about our world. Don't look at the news and get gloomy. God is in control. God has redeemed his people and forgiven them and one day this world which is groaning as if in the pains of childbirth will be renewed, restored, reinvigorated and at the middle of it all well be a renewed, restored, reinvigorated family of God.

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It's amazing but Paul writes this in a prison cell of a Roman jail and yet he is thankful, praising God because God has given him this vision of where the world is heading. And it is not about us, about you and me. It is not about our tiny plans and visions to survive the week, to raise good kids, to become comfortable at home, to do some travelling of God's world. God's vision is bigger, grander, more spectacular than that. He wants to bring everything, everything under Jesus. He wants to bring in a new heaven and a new earth under Jesus. He wants to bring together men and women, black and white, young and old, rich and poor, Calvinist and Arminian, Baptist and Presbyterian altogether as one. In the Church now yes but one day perfectly together in heaven.

Doesn't that just blow our mind? And we are a part of it. Chosen by God the Father in the past, redeemed by God the Son in the present and lastly

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### **3. Sealed by God the Holy Spirit for God's possession in the future.**

<sup>13</sup> "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation". Isn't that interesting? We might be chosen by God the Father before the creation of the world but the message of truth still needs to go out. The gospel of our salvation still needs to be preached. It is not like God's sovereignty then makes evangelism irrelevant. Because the gospel is the good news of God. And in the proclaiming of the gospel we tell everyone about God's grace and proclaim his wonderful name.

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As Paul says in Romans 10 another passage about God's election. "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" The preaching of God's gospel, the calling of God's people, the opening the heart by God's Spirit and the drawing of us the faithful to Jesus all works in perfect tandem.

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But once we have been chosen and redeemed it is the job of the Holy Spirit to seal that salvation within the believer. "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory".

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You might remember that a few years ago both Heron & Panadol, were extorted. Someone opened up packs of head ache tablets and placed a harmful substance within them, to make the pain relief drugs dangerous rather than helpful. So the owners put a tamper proof seal on their packaging so no-one could get in. In the same way God has so sealed his sons & his daughters that we cannot be tampered with. Our salvation cannot be destroyed. God's physical presence within us means that nothing can overpower any of his chosen ones.

So God starts off the process of salvation by choosing us, he fulfils the conditions of our salvation by sending Jesus to die for us and he will keep us safe until the end by protecting us with an anti tampering seal by sending us His Holy Spirit. God is making sure nothing will ever keep us apart!

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But the work of the Holy Spirit doesn't end there for He is also a guarantee, a deposit, a down payment that once you have receive Him, you know that the rest is coming. It's like the deposit you pay on the purchase of a house. It's the first payment that secures your legal claim on the property and it's also the first instalment on the final purchase price. So it is with the Holy Spirit. In giving Him to us, God isn't just promising us our final inheritance, he's also giving us a foretaste of it; that is, he's giving us our first experience of being part of his family, connected to him in a personal way.

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The Holy Spirit gives us the entree which promises the full meal. And if the entree involves being in Christ, being adopted and forgiven and redeemed.... what on earth is the whole meal going to be like? It is going to absolutely marvellous! And friends that is kept safe in heaven for us who are God's possession. To the praise of His glory.

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Friends that is why Paul has gone to such lengths this morning to raise our praise. To let our hearts skip a beat; to give us a song to sing, a message of praise for the whole world to hear. That is why God has done all of these things for us, that is why he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ not so that we can go to heaven but so that our praises can tell the world of heaven. Not so that Christ might join us in our lives but so that we might live our lives in Christ. Not so we can live as we like as if our actions don't really matter but so that we can live for the Father, Son & Holy Spirit because his actions mean the world to us.

The world says it is all about me. God's word says it's all about God. The world says find a way that makes you feel happy and God says if you understand what I have done for you, you will live a life of joy and praise. The world says the one with the most toys wins and God's says the one who is part of my family is the real winner for he or she has been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

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And it is this God who has bought you this first class ticket this morning on the praise express. So are you going to enjoy the ride or do you want to still travel in cattle class? Are you going to live a life to the praise of His glory or are you going to complain about what God has not given you in this life? Are you going to marvel at what God has given you or are you going to desire the money, the riches, the houses, the holidays that others in the world seem to be enjoying right now? Those things don't satisfy! So don't hunger after them.

God has chosen his people. Redeemed his people. Sealed his people. Father, Son and Holy Spirit has been intimately involved in in our salvation. We have been adopted as his sons and daughters. And all that we have now is just a taste, a foretaste of the things to come.

Friends let's sing about it. Let's thank God for it. Let's live our lives in the light of it! To the praise of His glory! And in the holiness and blamelessness that is the only possible response to our great, great God.