

Ephesians 1:14 — I Am Blessed

January 19, 2014

Good morning. It is great to have everyone for worship. Faith Church is a multi-campus church with campuses in Spirit Lake and Spencer. Each weekend, we teach on the same passage of the Bible across all campuses. Pastor Jordan, from the Spencer campus, and I study together during the week so we can deliver a similar message. We are just launching our Spencer campus and this morning is its first Sunday in the Spencer auditorium. If you have a chance to visit the congregation this winter on a Sunday morning at 11 a.m. in the auditorium, know you will not miss a beat in our series.

We are in a new series on the book of Ephesians called “Who Am I?” When we look in the mirror, it is easy to get depressed. We remember the sinful choices of our pasts and the failures in our lives. Truth be told, most of us struggle with self-esteem. In this series, we will learn what God sees when he looks at us in the mirror. Instead of seeing a failure, he sees someone who is incredibly blessed, all because of Jesus. Jesus changes the way we answer the question, “Who am I?”

Let’s begin with a quick review for those who missed the introduction to the book of Ephesians last week. The book of Ephesians was written by the apostle Paul to the city of Ephesus. It was a port city where most of the business traveling to and from Rome from the region of Turkey passed through. As a result, it was a rich city. It wasn’t just known for riches, it was also a city with a reputation for the occult. Demonic worship, seances and demon possession

were common. The city even had a thriving book business telling people how to cast spells on their friends and neighbors. It was a city filled with paranormal activity. Poltergeists, ouija boards, demon possession, hauntings — you name it and they had it. The Ephesians had no problem believing in the existence of an unseen spiritual world because they regularly experienced it on a daily basis.

When Paul came to the city as a missionary, God worked in amazing ways to authenticate the gospel and prove that Jesus' death and resurrection were real events that had supernatural ramifications. As Paul told people about Jesus, lives were transformed. Even Paul's used tissues were taken to people and they drove out demons and healed the sick.

Last week, we learned how the church began in the city of Ephesus from Acts 19. Today, we begin Paul's letter to the church. I have to warn you. The six chapters of this short letter are deep.

I have a book in my library from a guy named William Gurnall. He was a Puritan. He taught from the book of Ephesians for most of his pastoral career. I have his book just on Ephesians 6:10-20. We are talking only 10 verses. The book is 826 pages long. That is a lot of writing for only 10 verses! If you think I am long-winded, this guy takes the cake.

That being said, this morning we will start slow in the book of Ephesians and only study the first sentence of the book. Thankfully that sentence covers 14 verses! Ephesians 1:1-14, in Greek, is just one long sentence. It is 202 words. I didn't verify it but some scholars claim this is the longest sentence in the Bible.

So while we are only preaching on one sentence, we are covering 14 verses.

We are taking it slow but not that slow.

The opening sentence of Ephesians is one long praise to God thanking him for what he has done for us through Jesus Christ. Paul was so excited about what God has done for us through Jesus that he didn't stop for a breath or even a mark of punctuation for more than 200 words.

Here is the way we will structure our morning. Verse 3 is a summary statement of how God has blessed us. The rest of the verses go into the details of how God blessed us in eternity past, the present and how he will bless us in eternity future. When we are done going through the text, we will have a little Q&A time on these verses because they are some tough ones to think through.

Ready to go? Let's begin.

I am blessed.

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... Ephesians 1:3 (ESV)

Paul was thrilled. God is so good. If you are a Christian this morning, you need to know that God has blessed you in Christ. How has he blessed us? He blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

The physical world that we see is not all that exists. There is a vast unseen spiritual world with powerful angels and demons. God himself is a spiritual being that doesn't have a body. God created the physical world and the unseen spiritual world.

When we think of our planet, we think of the incredible complexity, intricacy and beauty of all that is around us and we are amazed. We think of the

beauty of the grass, the corn, the lakes, the fish, the birds, the animals and all that is in the ocean. Watching a National Geographic program on the living things visible to the naked eye on our planet is enough to leave us spellbound.

If that doesn't amaze you, there is another uncharted world called the micro-world. Grab your microscope and you find animals are made of cells which have mitochondria, DNA and a variety of functions. There are bacteria and viruses fighting against the cells. This is another amazing world beyond our eyesight. If you get your electron microscope out you find another world inside of your micro-world. You find electrons, protons, neutrons and smaller yet is a world with quarks. The complexity of the micro-world further stretches our minds to comprehend God's power and creativity to make all of this smaller than the eye can see. If the complexity of the micro-world doesn't blow you away, an even more fascinating world is the incredibly complexity of the macro-world beyond our planet and solar system. If you do any astronomy, you know our Earth is puny. Our Sun is 109 times larger than the Earth. Our Sun is small. Antares is a star that is 1,400 times wider than our Sun. The size of our solar system and the universe doesn't just defy exploration, it defies numbers. We have this amazingly complex and beautifully seen world, an even greater micro-world and an even greater than that macro-world in the universe, all of created matter. Here is where it gets exciting.

In the book of Daniel and the Gospel of John we learned the unseen spiritual world is more complex and vast than our the tangible physical universe. The Bible tells us that in this vast unseen spiritual world there are differing types

and ranks and powers of angelic and demonic beings. If you are impressed by the physical world, try and imagine what the unseen spiritual reality behind all of this must be like.

Paul said that because of Christ, we have been given by God every possible blessing that could be given us in the unseen spiritual world. God could not bless us any more than we already are in this vast unseen spiritual world through Jesus. God *could not improve* on the blessings he already given us through Jesus in the unseen spiritual universe.

Jesus didn't just conquer sin in the physical world but he conquered all the unseen rebellious spiritual powers in the vast unseen spiritual world. Jesus is head over all of it. Jesus Christ who is head over it all calls us his brothers and sisters. This is amazing. It is mind blowing. If you know God through Jesus, you can't be more blessed than you already are in the unseen spiritual world through Jesus! That changes what you see in the mirror.

Let's unpack this and see where it comes from.

God blessed me in eternity past.

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace... Ephesians 1:4–6 (ESV)

In eternity past, before time began, before the world was created, God purposed in his heart that he would create us. In God's mind he planned to put us and his son together before the world began.

What is even more amazing is that he planned that we should be holy and blameless before him. That means God knew that we would start off unholy,

sinful and worthy of blame but that to put us with his son, he would transform us to be holy and blameless. To do this, before the world began, God planned for his own son to save us.

How would he accomplish this? By adoption. This means that God chose to adopt some people into his family to make them brothers and sisters of his son, Jesus. To make this possible, God sent his son into time and space to permanently take on a human body so we could be his brothers and sisters; he planned for Jesus to die for our sins by taking it upon himself and to give us all of his perfection to make us blameless and holy and then adopt us as his brothers and sisters forever.

This really blows you away. Before time began, before the Earth was created and I had done anything wrong or right, God had us in his mind. He knew we would be idiots and fools but he chose to love us anyway and to send his own son to die to save us because we can't save ourselves. God chose to do all this so he could adopt me into his family. This rocks!

Why did he do this? Why did he choose to take us, who deserve wrath and punishment for our rebellion, and make us his sons and daughters? It tells us why in our text. He did this all to the praise of his glorious grace. As Christians, God's purpose for our lives is that all the different ranking angelic beings and powers in this vast unseen universe would gather around expecting to see a grand demonstration of God's fully deserved wrath for rebellion against him. We are talking a huge bonfire of punishment. Instead there is this group of people, not everyone, these certain people that God saves, through his son

becoming one of them, and his son taking all their sins from them. Instead of being given all of God's wrath that they deserve, they are given every blessing God could conceivably give to anyone or anything in the universe. They are adopted into God's family because the son of God became one of them and they died for them and then adopted them. We go from being below the angelic beings and being part of the temporary created order to being above all the unseen powerful spiritual beings in the universe and being brothers and sisters of God's own son. All the beings in the unseen spiritual universe are going, "Wow! That is undeserved mercy and grace. This is mind boggling. This is the greatest act of undeserved mercy that has ever taken place in the universe for all of time and space. It can't get any better."

There is only one reaction out of us when we understand this. That is praising God for his glorious grace. That is why we gather on Sunday. We don't gather to beg God to bless us, we gather to worship and thank God for already blessing us as much as he possibly could through Jesus.

When you look in the mirror what do you see? If you know Jesus, you should see someone who is so blessed by God for all of eternity that if God wanted to improve upon his blessings to you, he couldn't. If that doesn't put a spring in your step, I don't know what would.

God blessed me in the present

...with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight. Ephesians 1:6–8 (ESV)

Then Paul moved from describing how our blessing through Jesus began in eternity past to how it works itself out in our everyday life in the present.

The first thing we learn is we have *redemption through his blood*.

Redemption means release from slavery. It is a term used to describe how Israel in the Old Testament was taken out of slavery in Egypt. Instead of living as slaves, the Israelites were free. The Bible says that each of us is living in slavery. Our slavery is not in Egypt, rather we are slaves to sin. We want to do what is right but are drawn to do what is wrong. It is so easy to bend the truth. It is so easy to lust. It is so easy to plot and scheme, like Governor Chris Christie's aides did to create a traffic jam. We know it is wrong. Why do we do it? By nature we are slaves to sin. The Bible tells us that because of what Jesus Christ has done for us, we don't have to lie, yell, lust and cheat. Before, we had to sin. There was no option. The only way to conquer sin in our lives was to substitute one sin for another. To beat the sin of lies, we substituted it with the sin of pride for how good we were at not lying.

Now with Christ, we no longer have to sin. We are free to not sin. Before, sin was part of our nature. When Christ came into our hearts, he gave us a new nature. Is it still a struggle to not sin? Of course! Are we still tempted? Yes! Now we have a new option. We no longer have to sin.

Not only do we have redemption from the power of sin in our lives but we have forgiveness of the sin we committed in our lives. We have complete and full forgiveness through Jesus. Each of us has things in our lives we want to keep hidden. If somebody brought them up at a cocktail party we would turn so red we

could substitute for a stop light. While we hope to forget our sins and hope our friends forget our sins, the problem is God doesn't forget our sins and he knows all of them in intricate flawless detail. When we die, every one of us will stand before God and be judged for our sins. The good news is Jesus died for sin. If we have asked Jesus to forgive our sins and be in charge of our lives, our sins are forgiven and God won't bring them up again.

Redemption from the power of sin and freedom from the guilt of sin are only part of the story. God says he is lavishing his grace upon us. This means God is getting excessive in his kindness toward us. God is overdoing himself and getting out of control.

How many of you have been to an all-you-can-eat buffet? Even though you can go up for a second plate, you always find people who load up their plate like they will never return. They pack their plates with steak, chicken and barbecue ribs as high as they can stack it. They slap on the lasagna, the mashed potatoes, and they have their plates stacked with food like a tower. They finish by pouring gravy over the whole thing, which then begins to drip off their plate onto the carpet. As they walk back to their table, more falls off their plates than is on your plate. You can't help but think, "What slobs! They are so overdoing it."

That is exactly the way God is treating us through Jesus. He is slapping grace upon grace on us so it is running off the plates of our lives.

I know what some of you are thinking. "If God is overdoing his grace in my life, I would like to see it. My bank account is in the red; my kids have the flu;

my wife is irritable, and I have a bad case of bunions. God, where is your excessive grace?”

God could come up to us and dump all of his grace into our lives at once like burying us in loads of dirt from the back end of a dump truck, but he doesn't. The text says he lavishes his grace upon us in all wisdom and insight. He has tons of grace he will display toward us but he gives us the right amount, in the right way at the right time.

Think of it this way. Many of you are like me and have saved money for your kids. I have a son who is about to turn 18. For argument's sake, let's say I saved \$50,000 to graciously help him. The absolute worst thing I could do is give him all \$50,000 on his 18th birthday. We know he would spend \$40,000 of it on stereo equipment in a week.

The right way to give him my grace is with wisdom and insight. When it comes time for college tuition, the purchase of a car or the purchase of a house, I give out my grace then. That is the way to love him.

God is the same way toward us. He allows us to go through tough times, but he comes to our rescue at those crucial moments in life as he extends more and more grace to us beyond our salvation through Jesus Christ.

God will bless me in eternity future.

...making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the

promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:9–14 (ESV)

Then Paul turned to how God will bless us in the future. There are many mysteries about God and life we do not understand. For example, how can God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit all be distinct persons but yet we have one God? Another great mystery in the universe is how can a woman talk on the phone, make dinner, watch her kids and do her hair all at the same time? This is one of the mysteries of the universe guys have been trying to understand since Adam and Eve.

There is another mystery in the universe that is answered in these verses. Where is history headed? Will this planet continue to roll on just like it has for the last several thousand years or is there a finish to all of this? Here we learn that in the fullness of time, God will wrap up history and all things in the vast unseen heavenly realms, and all things in the recreated physical realm will be united together under Jesus. God's plan is that Jesus will reign and rule over everything. All rebellion against God will be squashed. The Lake of Fire will burn as a great demonstration of God's fully deserved wrath for all eternity. Jesus will be in charge of it. Heaven and earth will be combined and Jesus will reign and rule over all of us, and here is the kicker: We will reign and rule with him and under him over all other beings in the re-created universe. Forever, we will be the grand display of God's greatest undeserved blessing that has been or will ever be done. We deserve none of this.

Paul said that when life is tough, look forward to your inheritance. God is working all things out to the counsel of his will. Life is not out of order. Life is not

random. No matter what we face, it isn't out of God's control. We may not understand God's plan, but he has one. It is a good plan and it involves incredible blessings for us in the future that we don't deserve.

Our response to God for all of this is to simply praise him. What else can we do besides praise God because we are so blessed forever through Jesus?

Questions and answers

Can God work sin for his glory?

God is bigger than sin. He chose not to destroy sin instantly but to use sin as a platform to display his wrath against rebellion and his undeserved mercy toward the rebellious. When we sin, or we are sinned against, we can know God's will is not thwarted and he will use sin for his purposes. As Christians, we know that because we are blessed beyond our wildest dreams that when God allows us to be sinned against he will use that sin in our lives for his ultimate glory and our ultimate good. If you're in the middle of despair, disaster, or distress, you need to understand that God is not done. God is in the process of bending things back for his good. He promises to use the sin and pain in your life for his glory and fame. This is why we do not lose hope, no matter how dark the future. This is why Romans 8:28 is such a great verse.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 (ESV)

No matter what happens, for those who are loved by God, he will work all things for our good and his glory. Even sin cannot thwart God's plan to make us the most blessed beings in the universe for all of eternity.

These verses talk about election and predestination. I thought I had a free will?

Yes, this section is probably one of the strongest in the Bible on the topic of God choosing us. Election simply means God chose us to adopt us into his family by his son before the Earth was created and before we existed. It means God chose us long before we existed in space and time to choose him.

Before you freak out about this, you need to realize election is biblical. It isn't something made up by a theological geek. It is in the Bible. Before you fight predestination, you need to understand that predestination is good news for us, not bad news. The Bible says we are so deep in our rebellion against God that if it was left up to us, we are so screwed up we would never seek God. We would always think of ourselves as masters of the universe. Unless God chose to love us first and soften our hearts toward him, we wouldn't and couldn't respond to him.

My favorite example of this is Acts 9. Paul was originally Saul, the great persecutor of Christians. The Osama Bin Laden of his day. He was on the Damascus road on his way to bag a few more Christians when Jesus encountered him and knocked him on his back side. As a result, Paul became a Christian. Who started the whole thing? Was Paul seeking Jesus or was Jesus hunting down Paul? It is the same thing in the Old Testament. When it comes to Abraham leaving the land of Ur for the Promised Land, how did it start? Abraham seeking God or God, out of his grace and goodness, hunting down Abraham?

How does this work out in time and space in our world? The Bible tells us that when we tell people about Jesus Christ, it is like a great magnet from a junkyard, that is used to lift cars, is drawn through a room. Those God has chosen in eternity past hear the message of Jesus Christ and God works supernaturally in their lives to soften their hearts and the good news of Jesus makes sense. They are drawn to Jesus like a piece of metal to that magnet. Those that God has not chosen in eternity past hear the message of Jesus and it doesn't influence them. They are like plastic. The message of Jesus doesn't draw them. They think it is foolishness.

What I love about this passage is it combines God's electing us in eternity past with our response in eternity present.

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world... Ephesians 1:4 (ESV)

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit... Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)

Election is why we can tell others about Jesus and be guaranteed of success. If it wasn't for God choosing people in eternity past and God's Spirit working in people to call them to himself in the present, when we tell people about Jesus there would be no hope of them responding. It would all be foolishness about living your life for a dead guy.

Why did God choose some and not others?

That is a good question. I don't have the answer and Paul didn't have the answer. We leave it to the mystery of God.

...he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will... Ephesians 1:5 (ESV)

He elected us for the purpose of his will. He has his reasons. I don't understand them. Paul doesn't understand them.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will... Ephesians 1:11 (ESV)

How do I respond to this? There are two possible responses. One is we can get bent out of shape that God didn't choose all people or more people. That doesn't do us any good. There is nothing that we can do about it. Those are God's choices he makes for his reasons. Don't lose your hair over it.

The other option is much more productive. Rather than losing sleep over why God isn't more merciful to others, we can spend our time being thankful to God for being merciful to anyone, especially us, because we don't deserve it. Remember this is not a little bit of mercy. This is God lavishing mercy. This is God maxing out mercy and grace in the universe to us when all we deserve is to be the eternal kindling for the fires of hell.

This is where Paul went "I suggest we do the same. God, we want to thank you for saving us when we were dead and gone and hopeless."

Conclusion — worship!

All the other religions of the world have one thing in common. They tell you that you must manipulate God to love you. You manipulate him through prayers, chanting and sacrifices. You twist God's arm through being a good person or moral choices or trips to Mecca or through tithing 10 percent or

cleaning up your life. If you do all these things maybe you can manipulate God into being gracious and kind towards you.

The God of the Bible is different. He doesn't need to be manipulated. God chose to love us before time began. He chose to love us not because we are lovely. God chose to make us lovely. God chose to hunt us down, soften our hearts and draw us to himself. He chose to give us every spiritual blessing that could ever be given through Jesus. He adopted us to be his sons and daughters and lavished grace upon on us so that it is just dripping off the plate.

Folks, we don't have to read our Bible every day to get God to love us. We don't have to give 10 percent to get God to love us. We don't have to pray the same prayer over and over to get God to love us. *God already loves us more than we can conceive through Jesus. This is why we love him.*

This is why we worship God. The Christian faith is not trying to get God to be good to us but praising God because he has already been good to us through Jesus.

I know what some of you are thinking. "I am in despair. I am in poverty. I am sick. I don't like what I see when I look in the mirror." Paul said, "Guys, as I write this letter I am in prison. What I see on the outside is depressing as my hands and feet are in chains. What God has done for me through Jesus changes the way I feel about myself and my life. I can't stop talking about this. I can't even get a period in my sentence, so it is more than 200 words long when I am talking about how blessed we are by God through Jesus!"

This week, when you look in the mirror, what should you see? See someone blessed by God through Jesus with more blessing than you can comprehend.

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)

As Christians, when we look in the mirror, there is only one thing we can say. I AM BLESSED!



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