

**“BLESSED BEYOND MEASURE”**  
**(Ephesians 1:1-3)**

Today we begin a study of a book of the Bible considered by many theologians and Bible students to be one of the greatest books ever written – the book of Ephesians. One theologian called Ephesians the Grand Canyon of scripture – it covers the depth and width and breadth of truth about God and His will for our lives. It truly is a remarkable and transformative book.

I want to start this morning by giving you a brief overview of the book, the setting in which it is written, and then take a close look at the theme verse that guides the entire flow of the book. As I was reading through Ephesians and trying to get the overall idea of the book, a story from the Old Testament came to mind, and the more I thought about this story the more I felt it perfectly captured the theme of Ephesians. The story is found in 2 Samuel 9 where King David wanted to honor the loss of his close friend Jonathan, who seven years earlier had died in battle.

David met Jonathan right after he had killed Goliath and they were bound together in their love for God and country. The twist in their relationship was that Jonathan was the son of King Saul and was next in line to become the next king of Israel. But Jonathan saw that God’s anointing was upon David and yielded his rights to the throne to David. When a new king came into power, they would usually seek to eliminate any family member belonging to the previous dynasty. But David tells Jonathan, “When I become king this will not happen – I promise to show grace and kindness to your family.”

Now seven years after the death of Jonathan, David wants to do something to honor the memory of his friend by showing kindness to his descendants. He finds out that Jonathan has a son named Mephibosheth. The first time I preached a sermon on Mephibosheth I could not pronounce his name for the life of me, and just referred to him as “Mike.” Mephibosheth was only five years old when his father was killed in battle, and fearing that the enemy would seek to take the life of the young boy, his caretaker fled with him from the palace, but in her haste, she dropped him and he became crippled in both feet. He is now living in exile in a place called Lo Debar – meaning a “barren land.”

David sends for him and Mephibosheth – now about twelve years old – steps before David’s throne and he’s terrified. “What’s the king going to do to me?” David says, “Don’t be afraid... I knew your dad – he was my best friend – and out of love for him I want to bless you.” Mephibosheth is stunned... “What do you want with a dead dog like me? I don’t have anything to offer you – I’m a cripple – I’m a nobody.”

David snaps his royal fingers and says to his servants, “Everything that belonged to Saul – his land, his possessions – anything that Saul had, I want you to give it to Mephibosheth.” But that’s not all. David says, “Come with me.” He ushers Mephibosheth into the royal banquet hall and there he sees a large table with several chairs around it. David points to one of the chairs and says, “This one is yours. From now you will sit at my table and be part of my family – everything that belongs to me belongs to you – I’m adopting you as my son.” Everyone then gathered to eat, and Mephibosheth ate to his heart’s delight. Because of David’s kindness he went from exile in a barren land to sitting at the king’s table.

The story of Mephibosheth is the story of Ephesians. Ephesians describes how we, like Mephibosheth, are crippled by sin and living as outcasts apart from God. But God, purely out of His grace and kindness, sought us out and redeemed us through the blood of Jesus. He accepts us just as we are – crippled and alienated from Him – He adopts us as His children and lavishes on us every blessing possible. Therefore, since all this is true, the whole direction of our life changes – we have a new identity, we have a new position, we have a new calling – we now live as children of the king.

This message is reflected in how the book of Ephesians is divided into two parts. Chapters 1-3 describes our *position* in Christ – who we are, and chapters 4-6 talk about our *practice* in Christ – and how we are to live in light of who we are. The first three chapters tell us *what we believe*; the last three chapters tell us *how we ought to behave*. The first three chapters deal with *doctrine*; the last three chapters deal with our *duty*. Since we have been lavished with every spiritual blessing in Christ, it should have a profound effect on how we live. That's the book of Ephesians in a nutshell.

With that, let's dig into the first three verses and look at the background and theme of the book... “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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.”

The author of Ephesians is none other than Paul. Twenty years earlier it was inconceivable that Paul would ever write a book like Ephesians. He was an ardent persecutor of the early church and did everything in his power to stamp out Christianity. On one of his trips to persecute and arrest Christians, the Lord appeared to Paul – he saw the light – and was dramatically saved. His life literally turned a 180. The Lord said, “I'm giving you a special assignment – I'm sending you as my apostle to the Gentiles.” Paul says in verse one that his appointment as an apostle was completely by the “will of God.” Paul said in Galatians that God set him apart in his mother's womb. God has a special plan and purpose for everyone who becomes a part of His family.

Paul took three major missionary journeys west evangelizing one Gentile city after another. On his second missionary journey Paul, along with Aquila and Priscilla, started a church in the city of Ephesus. **SLIDE**. Ephesus was easily one of the top five cities in the Roman Empire – it was a big, metropolitan seaport where all the major highways intersected. Ephesus was a largely pagan city that boasted one of the seven wonders of the ancient world **SLIDE** – a huge temple dedicated to the goddess Diana – a goddess believed to bring fertility and life to all who worshipped her. **SLIDE**. Ephesus was also known for its amphitheater, the largest in the world, designed to hold up to 25,000 spectators.

Paul eventually left Ephesus, but returned on his third missionary journey stayed for three years – which for Paul was a record for staying in one place. He worked as a tentmaker and in his off hours he would go to a lecture hall and present the claims of Christ, and new believers were added to the church. As the word of the Lord grew, many former pagans made a bonfire and burned their pagan idols and denounced the goddess Diana. The making of idols was a huge business in Ephesus and when the local businessmen saw what Paul was stirring up, they caused a riot and tried to turn the people against Paul.

After the riot Paul left Ephesus, but later sent Timothy to be the overseer of the church. Eventually the Apostle John came to be the overseer of the church. Tradition says that John brought Mary, the mother of Jesus, with him to Ephesus, and according to tradition Mary died there in Ephesus.

Some years later Paul was arrested and imprisoned in Rome for preaching the gospel, but it didn't stop him from evangelizing – he bent the ear of every Roman prison guard assigned to him and many of them came to faith. During this time Paul also took out his pen, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote four letters to churches – including the book of Ephesians. Many scholars believe that Ephesians was a letter intended for distribution among several of the churches in western Asia Minor, with Ephesus being the major city and church.

After greeting the church in Ephesus, Paul sets the theme for his book in verse 3. He writes... “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.” Paul wants believers to know that as God's children we are blessed beyond belief, and the rest of the book unpacks these blessings and how it changes the way we live and view ourselves.

He begins in verses 4-14 by describing the blessing of our salvation, and in the Greek language with which Paul wrote verses 4-14 is one long sentence without a period. Paul is so caught up in the wonder of all we've been blessed with that he doesn't even stop to take a breath – one blessing after another flow out like a flood that has burst forth from a dam.

In verse 3 we notice six key things about our blessings – themes that Paul expands on throughout the book. The first is the source of our blessings – where they come from. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us...” All of **our blessings come from God**, and verses 4-14 describes how each person of the trinity plays a part in our salvation.

In verses 4-6 we see the blessings of God the Father... “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”

In verses 7-8a we see the blessings of God the Son... “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.”

And in verses 13b-14a we see the blessings of the Holy Spirit... “When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.”

All our blessings come from God, and we receive blessings from each person of the trinity. In the story of Mephibosheth, David is the one who sought him out – it was completely the initiative of David to find Jonathan's long-lost crippled son, bring him into his palace, and adopt him as his own son. Mephibosheth was the recipient of grace. Likewise, the word “grace” is used five times in verses 4-14. Grace is a rich word that means God's favor on undeserving people. In His grace, God is willing to forgive us and bless us abundantly, in spite of the fact that we don't deserve to be treated so well or dealt with so generously.

Paul will talk about this in chapter 2 where he describes how before salvation, we were dead in our sins and deserving of God's wrath. In 2:4-5 he says, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” We're only here today by God's grace, which He has lavished on those He loves.

First, we see that the source of our blessings is God, and secondly, we see the kind of blessings we receive... “God has blessed us with every *spiritual* blessing in Christ.” Paul says, “**Our blessings are spiritual in kind.**” When someone says, “I am so blessed,” they’re often referring to some favorable condition they’re enjoying... “I’m blessed with a good job, I’m blessed with a roof over my head, I’m blessed with good health” – they’re referring to things that can be tangibly seen and felt. These blessings, however, are temporary and subject to change. I might not always have a job or a roof over my head or good health. What’s more, even those who are not saved enjoy the common grace blessings of God such as rain and sunshine and food.

But spiritual blessings are unseen – they’re not part of the physical, material world – and they are blessings that are eternal and not subject to change. As great as earthly, material blessings are, they are not nearly as important as spiritual blessings. This is illustrated in the story of the paralyzed man who was brought to Jesus – the house where Jesus was staying was so crowded that the man’s friends cut a hole in the roof and lowered him down to Jesus. If you asked anyone in that room what the man’s greatest need was, they would say, “His greatest need is to be healed and able to walk.”

But instead of saying, “Rise up and walk,” Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.” “Your greatest need,” Jesus said, “is not physical, but spiritual. You need forgiveness, you need eternal life, you need salvation.” Physical healing, as great as it is, is temporary – but spiritual healing from sin and death is eternal. Our greatest blessings from God are spiritual, and God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

Third, we see in verse 3 that **our blessings are comprehensive.**... “God has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in Christ.” Whatever you need to live the spiritual life, whatever you need to face life’s problems, you have it. In 2 Peter 1:3 Peter says, “**His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.**” Just as David told Mephibosheth, “All I have is yours,” so God says, “I’ve blessed you with every spiritual blessing that can be yours.”

Romans 8:32 says, “**He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**” God says, “If I’ve already given you my greatest gift – the gift of my own Son – any blessing after that is just icing on the cake. Anything else you need in life is yours in Christ.

The story is told of a man at the turn of the last century who spent every penny he had to board a steamship headed from Europe to the United States. Once aboard the ship he didn’t have any money for food, and ate what little bread and cheese he brought with him, which soon ran out and he went several days without food. The day before they were to dock in New York City, he approached one of the stewards of the ship and asked if there was any food anywhere, he could eat. The steward looked puzzled and said, “Do you have your ticket?” The man said “yes” and showed it to the steward. The steward said, “This ticket entitles you to three meals a day for the entire voyage. Go eat up!” The moment you are saved God says, “From now on – through the voyage of this life and beyond – everything you need to thrive and prosper spiritually is available to you – pull up a chair and start eating.”

The fourth truth we learn in verse 3 is that **our blessings are in the heavenly realms**. . . “God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the *heavenly realms*.” What are the “heavenly realms?” Paul uses this phrase five times in Ephesians and it refers not to a physical location, but to a *spiritual reality*. We naturally assume that the only things that are real are in the physical world around us that we can see and experience. But Paul says that reality is much larger – it includes the place of unseen spiritual activity.

In other words, the world we see is not the only reality – there is a larger, unseen spiritual reality where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, and where the spiritual forces of evil war against us. As believers we live in two worlds – we live physically on earth, while at the same time we live spiritually on a higher plane – as Paul says in Philippians. . . “Our citizenship is in heaven.” Even though we are not yet in heaven, our minds and hearts are focused on heaven’s values, and this perspective changes the way we view the present world.

This is why Paul says in 1:18-19a, **“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”** Paul prays that we will see more and more the spiritual realities that lie beyond this world.

In 2 Kings 6 the prophet Elisha is standing with his servant facing the mighty Syrian army – they are surrounded with no way of escape, and his servant shrinks in fear and says, “What shall we do?” Elisha says, “Don’t be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” The servant looks at Elisha and says, “That’s crazy talk – there are just two of us and there are thousands of Syrian soldiers.” Elisha stops and prays and says, **“Open his eyes, Lord, so that he might see.”** Elisha saw things from a spiritual perspective and prayed that his servant’s eyes would be enlightened to see what was happening in the “heavenly realms.” Suddenly, the Bible says, “The Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” With spiritual eyes he looked into the heavenly realms and saw that they were surrounded by a great angelic army.

Our spiritual blessings are not located in the world we see around us, but in the unseen heavenly realms, and as believers we are blessed to see these realities through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. We’ll talk more about this in the weeks to come. But we must move on.

The fifth truth we see in verse 3 is that **our blessings are in Christ**. . . “God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing *in Christ*.” This phrase – in Christ – is used 27 times in Ephesians, and it’s a phrase that is a little hard to grasp ahold of because there is no earthly analogy we can use to explain in. All of these spiritual blessings we enjoy, Paul says, come as a result of being “in Christ” – by having a personal relationship with Him through faith. Before salvation we were in the world, in darkness, in sin – but when we’re born again, we are now “in Christ.” We have a new position and status. Our faith in Christ brings us into the family of God where we enjoy all the blessings and privileges of being His children.

Paul goes on to say in verse 5 that we are adopted into God’s family *through* Jesus Christ – Jesus is the only way to God. Because we are “in Christ,” when God looks at us, He does not see us as cripples and outcasts like Mephibosheth, He sees us through the perfect righteousness of Christ.

The sixth a final truth we see in verse 3 is that **our blessings result in praise**. Verse 3 begins with the words... “Praise be to God...” When you and I ponder all of the spiritual blessings God has given us – that He’s chosen and adopted us into His family, that through the blood of Jesus He’s redeemed and forgiven us, and that by the Holy Spirit He has guaranteed our eternal salvation – the only response is to say, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow!”

When we realize all the blessings we have from God, the natural response is to – in turn – bless God. You can praise God anywhere – walking on the beach, driving in the car – anywhere – but there is a special time of praising God when we gather together with fellow saints and collectively raise our voices in praise and worship. When given a gift, we must never forget the giver, but render to Him the praise that is due Him.