

Ephesians 1:1-14 Sunday 7th August 2022

Good morning Saints! I do hope that you don't recoil from that title. A saint in New Testament language is not a dead person with a lifetime of good deeds and a couple of miracles behind them.

When you put your trust in Jesus Christ as your saviour you are a saint, as far as the apostle Paul is concerned. Saint means "set apart", you are still living in the world but, spiritually, not of the world. You have been reborn as Jesus described it to Nicodemus.

So, "Good morning Saints." It's a privilege to be looking at this letter of Paul to the Ephesians together. It would seem that this letter, along with the letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, was written by Paul whilst imprisoned in Rome, around AD 62. Once again, we are humbled that Paul, on trial for his life, should show such concern for the spiritual well-being of these early Christians and the churches to which they belong. This letter is addressed to those in Ephesus but in other manuscripts it does not specify one place alone, leading us to believe that it was a round robin letter for the whole surrounding area. We don't see specific names in this letter, yet we do know quite a lot about Ephesus. Some of us have been able to visit the ruins of a once great city in western Turkey. This place was wealthy, a seaport, a centre of learning and trade, as well as a stronghold of magical and occult practises and a centre of worship to Artemis (Diana). Paul spent over two years there during his third missionary journey and is reiterating his teaching so that there should be no doubt in these areas of doctrine (the first three chapters) and practical matters (the second three chapters).

So, we plunge into this great letter, expecting to hear truths that encourage, challenge and feed us here in March. We live in a very different world from these 1st century believers, but we need to hear these words every bit as much. By the time we reached the last chapter we shall have a new minister in our midst, and the heat of recent weeks will be a distant memory in the depths of autumn. Are you excited to read on? By the way, I must credit a couple of commentaries by Warren Wiersbe and Richard Coekin, that I have used in preparation of this talk and recent teaching at the Keswick convention from Jeremy Mcquoid.

The majority of the Bible passage we heard today, in the Greek, is just one sentence. It is Paul linking together over 200 words describing blessings, spiritual blessings, that all Christians are able to receive, when they come to faith. Now, we might all, at some time in our lives have been told to count our blessings. I've suggested it myself, on occasion, and being told that it's not always helpful, especially when someone is acutely unwell in mind or body. So, I'm treading cautiously here but, for a moment, just think about those people and things you consider a blessing in your life. Take a moment to make a mental list. I would imagine you'd include your family, your friends, your home, your health, work, or school, leisure, and money. All these things we can see, touch and appreciate. All these things can be removed from us, in a moment or gradually over a period of time will stop, because we live in a broken world. Even the most solid investment can quite literally go up in flames; the most enduring relationship will one day end. So is Paul talking about these blessings? (and I'm not minimising the joy, love and satisfaction we can gain from all of the above). No, Paul is talking about spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. These are where earth and heaven overlap, where God dwells along with other spiritual powers across the dimension of time, in the past present and future.

Paul can praise and thank God for spiritual blessings, despite being locked up in prison. We too can reach up from our current circumstances, whatever they may be, and in praising God, bring glory to His name. So let's see what these blessings are shall we? Notice as we go, that the whole of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are involved.

Firstly, verses 4 and 5: We have been chosen by God the Father. We are adopted children in his family. In the culture of the day it was possible for a master to adopt a slave, to give them their freedom and with it the privileges of being members of the family.

God knew, from the beginning of time that you would accept Jesus as your saviour. God is sovereign and he predestines who will or will not accept salvation. This is a hard concept to get our heads around, a mystery if you like, that will only become clear to us in heaven. How can mankind have freedom of choice if God already knows what our choices will be? This morning is not the time to embark on a debate on this topic. Great theologians have spent their lifetime's work untangling that one. How is predestination, and adoption a blessing? Well, to my way of thinking, it's an unspeakable privilege to be considered a child of the living God. We are not servants. Great as angels are, they are not part of the family. However unlovely we are, God the father chose us to be his children. We now have access to him, through prayer and by the Holy Spirit. We trust him to provide for our daily needs, to show us kindness, to protect and discipline us, to forgive us and love us. All these things we would look for in an earthly father, but so much more from God who created all things: who is all powerful; All loving. He has chosen us to be in his family. Not that we are worthy by any inherent goodness, we are not superior to those who reject the gospel or who doubt God's existence. It is all by God's grace and mercy that we are saved.

So, the first blessing is that we are chosen by God the father.

The second spiritual blessing is that we have been Redeemed by the Son, Jesus. We, who are all sinners, in captivity, are liberated by the sacrifice that Jesus made by dying for us and rising again. God didn't simply provide a substitute sacrifice (as he did for Isaac back in Genesis) but he became that sacrifice. This is Amazing Grace. Paul, in verse 8, talks of God lavishing his grace upon us. There are no half measures here, this is overwhelming, undeserved kindness from the King of kings. Do you struggle with sins, past and present? Does Satan love to remind you of your failings? This is the blessing to hold onto. The debt has been paid. You are made right with God and he sees Jesus, his son, in your place. What a costly ransom.

Nearly five years ago David and Shirley Donovan and Alanna were redeemed from captivity in Nigeria. Money changed hands, they were released. Ian was killed before that could happen, but he was already ransomed by Jesus's blood and will live forever in glory as a child of God. So we see the concept. Do we accept it for ourselves or are we still holding onto our unworthiness? Only God by the Holy Spirit can give you that assurance, not my words, but His. We are redeemed, united under Christ, unlike any human ruler with flawed motives and intentions. He who has everything in his hands desires that we are united, for his glory. This is not some vanity project for God is God, not a trumped up dictator. We can be confident that, despite our earthly struggles with health issues, relationship problems, financial hardship whatever we face we come together in unity under Christ.

How are we doing so far? Number 1. We are adopted by God the father. 2. We are redeemed by God the Son and finally 3. in verses 13 and 14, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Our inheritance is assured. The guarantee, the down-payment, if you like, has been made. Now this differs from life in the earthly realm, once again. I've just paid a percentage of the total cost of our family holiday for next year. God willing six of us plus two small people will get together next July. This may or may not actually happen, but the deposit indicates our intention. An engagement ring on a fiancée's hand indicates the intention to be married. The Holy Spirit is the seal of authenticity, of intention on all God's people. Jesus is coming back for his bride, the church. These spiritual blessings are not dependent on how we're feeling today, on the state of our health, wealth, relationships etc, they are in the heavenlies, not up for negotiation. They are completely reliable and a cause for us to praise our God today.

Look around us at the world we live in. Creation reveals God's wisdom and power.

Look around us at the people of God. The church reveals God's love and grace. To his glory.

Do you know these blessings for yourself today? If not, please do speak to someone before you leave. Maybe you are blessed with an abundance of earthly blessings? Enjoy them, but don't rely on them for they are only temporary. These spiritual blessings we have heard of today are personal (for you), eternal (forever) and totally, totally dependable, (for sure). We thank you Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen