



I AM BLESSED

Part 4 of Ephesians

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Ephesians 1:3–14 | January 29, 2013

A WORKER'S ETHIC OR A DEBTOR'S ETHIC

So, I usually carry some extra money in my wallet because I like to give. So, don't hit me up. That's not the point of the story. But I like to carry extra money, and then if somebody needs something, I like to give it to them. And we've sort of learned this in our family: always carry a little extra on you in case somebody needs something and then you can be generous, or help, or give, and it's something we like to do as a family.

I was talking to somebody recently, a guy, and he needed money for something, and I said, "Well, I carry extra money and I'm gonna give it to you." He literally backed away like I was trying to hand Superman kryptonite. He didn't want anything to do with it. He's like, "No, I didn't earn it." I said, "No, I know. I'm not going to say you did. I just want to give you some money. You said you need money and I'm going to give you some money." He was a non-Christian guy.

I said, "So here, let me help you out." He said, "No, I don't want to owe anybody anything." I said, "Oh, you don't have to owe me anything." He said, "No, I know how it works. You give me money and then I owe you. I've got to do something for you, I've got to do a favor for you, I've got to pay you back." I said, "No, that's not how it works." I said, "That's not how it works at all." He was a non-Christian.

It gave me an opportunity to talk to him about Jesus, and what the Bible says, and in the Bible, it refutes something insofar as we experience in the world, and that's a worker's ethic, that you only get what you deserve. You know, in sports, you only get the points you make; in school, you only get the grade point you earn; in work, you only make as much money as you have coming.

Or a debtor's ethic: if you're to get anything, then you've got to give something, you've got to pay back, you've got to earn it, you've got to make it even. And the Bible talks about that with this word called "wage," and Jesus uses that word a lot in a lot of his parables.

The opposite of that is blessing. It's the opposite of the worker's ethic; you get something you didn't work for. It's the opposite of the debtor's ethic; you get something you don't have to pay back. And so when we come to the Bible and we hear that God blesses us, it runs counter to the way we live the rest of our life. It simply runs counter to the way we live the rest of our life.

And when it works itself out spiritually in our life, I think what oftentimes happens is we come to God either with a worker's ethic or a debtor's ethic. We assume that God doesn't want to bless us, or if he does, we're going to have to pay him back. And so what we end up doing, then, is trying to manipulate God, trying to get God to be good to us, to bless us, to be kind to us, to give to us, to do something for us, and that's what leads to religion, it's what leads to spirituality, it's what leads to superstition.

I AM BLESSED

What we see as we open the book of Ephesians is the fact that I am blessed, in Ephesians 1:3–14. He's writing to the church at Ephesus, and Ephesus was a city of about a quarter million people, highly spiritual. There were literally dozens of gods and goddesses that were worshiped there. People would come in for enormous holidays and events around the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven great wonders of the world. And this was a highly religious, highly spiritual area, and when Paul first pulled into town and he preached the gospel, people got rid of all of their witchcraft, sorcery, divination, and they burned the equivalent of fifty thousand days' wages of various pagan things.

And all of those things had this one thing in common: they were an effort to get God to bless them. And we might look like C. S. Lewis says, with chronological snobbery and look back and say, "What primitive people who thought that they needed to manipulate the gods, or the goddesses, or God to bless them," but we do the same thing. We do the same thing. Sometime we'll call it karma, which is basically the worker's ethic. You get what you deserve. Or we'll call it feng shui. I probably pronounced it wrong, but it's trying to get all of the energy lined up in your house so that blessing will come to you through the organization of physical items in your home. Some athletes are highly superstitious. Some of you are very superstitious.

It works itself out with religion. "If I suffer, then God will bless me; if I give, then God will bless me; if I have a quiet time every morning, then God will bless me. What can I do to make God good?" Here's the good news: God's good, amen? God's good. You don't have to make God bless you, God blesses people.

One of the first things we learned about God in Genesis 1:8, after he makes the man and the woman, before sin enters the world, it says, "And God blessed them." That's what it says in Genesis 1. God is a God who likes to bless. God is a God who delights in blessing. God is a Father who doesn't withhold good gifts from his children. He loves and cares for them and he's generous toward them. So, that's the big idea. God likes to bless his people.

Now, as we enter into Ephesians 1:3–14, we are going to unpack the densest verse in the whole Bible. In the original Greek text that it was written, this is one sentence. So, all of you English majors, just calm down. It's one sentence in the Greek text. And it's an amazing explosion of joy is what it is. It's 202 words, one sentence, and the big idea that holds it all

together is that we are blessed.

BLESSED IN CHRIST

He starts by telling us that we're blessed in Christ. So, Ephesians 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ." There's our identity. "In Christ." For those who are in Christ. Blessing is in Christ and it is for those who are in Christ. "With every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."

First he's going to talk about the Trinity. He says, "Father, Son," and then at the very end, verse 13—this is all, again, one section of Scripture. Verses 13–14, at the end, he talks about the Holy Spirit. So, we're blessed from God the Father, through God the Son, by God the Holy Spirit. Number two, he's going to talk about Jesus a lot. In the first fourteen verses, he talks about Jesus fourteen times, and so it's all about Jesus, and our blessing is in Christ. He's also going to talk about us being in Christ eleven times in the first fourteen verses.

As you're reading and studying Ephesians for yourself, and we spend some months examining it together, just continually make note in your Bible, "in Christ, in Christ, in Christ, in him, in the Beloved." He's starting really strong right out of the beginning of the letter. It's all about Jesus. Are you in Christ? Then you assume, in the grace of God, the position of Christ. And this is where the cross gets important. Jesus goes to the cross, takes our place, so that we could take his place. And we're blessed in Christ, because if we have faith in Christ, we have salvation in Christ, we have new life in Christ, we stand in the position of Christ, and we receive the blessings of Christ.

As well, he tells us that God has given us God. He says, "Blessed be the God who has given himself to us." God has given himself to us, and I can't overstate this. I know sometimes when we come to God, we're like, "I want a car that runs. I want a spouse that doesn't. God, here are all the things that I want from you. I want all these blessings from you." A car is great, a spouse is great, health is great, a job is great, but here's the greatest gift that's ever been given. What's the greatest gift you could give someone? Yourself, your love, your life, your heart, your devotion, your commitment, your affection. To give yourself.

It's why at a wedding, you know what happens? A husband and a wife, a bride and a groom, they'll come together on an altar. Everyone brings gifts except for the bride and groom. They don't bring gifts because they are the gift. A man is giving himself to a woman. A woman is giving herself to the man. The greatest gift we have to give is ourselves. God gave us God! That's amazing. A car's great; God's better. Health is great; God is better. Friends are great; God is better. A job is great, but God is better, and God gives us God.

And this is where Paul gets so excited—so excited. He said, "Let's bless the God who's blessed us." You get that? "Let's bless the God who's blessed us. The God who's given us himself, let's give ourselves to him." And this is the explosion of joy that he begins with.

Now some of you say, "I have not seen this blessing of which you speak at the unemployment office, my dumpy condo, and on the bus. I even looked under the seat, I found gum, not blessing. I don't see the blessing of which you speak." He says that the blessing is in the heavenly places. Some of the blessing comes here in this life, and there is blessing, to be sure, from God in this life, but much of it is stored up in heavenly places. And it's not because God is withholding it from us; he wants us to enjoy the blessings he has for us forever. So, for the believer, this is as close to hell as you'll ever get. For the unbeliever, this is as close to heaven as you'll ever get. For the believer, your blessing awaits you forever, and for the unbeliever, there is no blessing awaiting you forever.

In addition, this is written by Paul—and Mars Hill, where is he when he writes this letter? Prison. I would not write a letter from prison starting off very excited about all of my blessing, would you? "Day one sucks. Day two, guess what? Still sucks. Day three, never guess what. Still sucks." That's how we tend to see our life on the earth. How many of you in prison would get excited and say, "I want us all to bless the God who's blessed us"?

Now, what's happening is the church is hearing this read by one of their pastors as their lead pastor is in jail. And I'm sure the people sitting in the congregation, like you and me, some are sick, some are poor, some are suffering, some are unemployed, some have a relationship complexity, some of them their life is falling apart, and they're wondering, "Man, does God love me? Is God blessing me?" And then they get a letter from a guy in prison who's really excited about all of his blessing.

You see what you're looking for. Have you noticed this? How many of you are married? If you want to see your spouse's love for you, and you're looking for it, you'll see it. If you want to find reasons to be angry at them or bitter against them, you'll find what you're looking for. So it is in our relationship with God. You will see what you're looking for. If you take God at his word that he has blessed you, and then you start looking for the ways that he has blessed you, you will see ways that he has blessed you.

And what I would encourage you to do is then take an account of them and write them down so that you can remind yourself and you can remind others of the blessings of God in your life. And that's exactly what Paul is doing. He's recording it, and that's how we get the letter to the Ephesians from a man in prison, so excited about God's blessing on his life that he doesn't even have time for punctuation. That's how excited he is.

THE BLESSING OF HOLINESS

So, we are blessed in Christ. And then he's going to unpack various blessings that come to us in Christ. The blessing of holiness, Ephesians 1:4. "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." This is important. "Holy and blameless before him."

Ultimately, the world may not understand you as a Christian. Your unbelieving family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, they may not praise you, they may criticize you. They may not see you as living a life that is holy and good, but ultimately, we live for an audience of one. We need to take counsel from godly people, but at the end of the day, we should be holy and blameless before him. It is ultimately what the Lord Jesus says regarding our life at the end that utterly matters, and everything else is insignificant and pales in comparison.

But, Jesus is holy, he is without sin. God becomes a man, lives without any sin. And we are unholy, and Jesus goes to the cross and he dies in our place for our sin, and he trades places with us so that he has condemnation, we have salvation. He takes upon himself all of our unholiness and he places upon us all of his holiness. Here's what this means: you don't need to be perfect, Christ is your perfection. You don't need to live a perfect life, Christ already has in your place.

And you are now, in Christ, if you are a Christian, positionally holy. God sees you in the place of Christ, and out of your positional holiness, you can live practical holiness. Because you are holy, you can live holy. Because Christ has made you holy, you can live holy like Christ. And I'm not saying that we're perfect and we'll never sin, and I'm not saying that this is something that we will ultimately perfect in this life, but it's something we can make progress in in this life. Christ is your holiness and he makes you holy.

And here's how this changes everything: if your identity is in Christ and that he has made you holy, that changes your activity and the decisions you make in your life. So, let's say you are a teenager, and if your identity is teenager, you're probably going to rebel against your parents because that's what teenagers do. But if you're a teenager in Christ, Christ has made you holy, you should be one who is compelled by the love of God to act in a way that is holy.

Let's say you are one who is a college student. If your identity is in, "I'm a college student," well then, you're going to get drunk, and break commandments, and act foolishly, because that's what college kids do. They all minor in folly. But if you say, "No, I'm a college student in Christ, and Christ has made me holy, and I love him and want to live holy," then out of that positional holiness will come practical holiness. Because of who you are, that changes what you do.

Similarly, if you're someone who's single, if your identity is "I'm single," you're probably going to fornicate, and cohabit, and all kinds of other 'ates. You're going to do things you shouldn't do. But if you say, "No, I'm a single person in Christ. And Christ was single, and I'm single, and he's made me positionally holy, and I want to live in a way that is practically holy," that identity will change your activity.

Similarly, you're someone who is married but you reach your midlife and you get a free midlife—say the word—crisis. We've even made this up. "Oh yeah, I'm freaking out. I'm going to go get a car and a couple of boyfriends, girlfriends, or maybe a combination thereof, and I'm just going to live a very foolish, rebellious, youthful life." Why? "It's a midlife crisis. It's midlife—it's a thing. We have a word for it." If your identity is in midlife instead of Christ, you're going to give yourself permission to commit all kinds of sins. But if you realize, "My identity's in Christ, not my age. I'm positionally holy in Christ, this means I can be practically holy in Christ. I will not do what others do because I'm not who others are. I'm Christ's."

Does this make sense? So oftentimes our identity is in, "Am I a student? Am I in college? Am I single? Am I married? Am I divorced? Am I widowed? Am I middle-aged?" Identity is in Christ, and that identity carries us through all the seasons in life, and because Christ has made us holy, those who are in Christ want to live holy lives out of love for him. What change has Jesus made in your life? What things you used to enjoy that now you're ashamed of? What sinful activities you used to live for and now you mourn over? In Christ, you're holy.

THE BLESSING OF PREDESTINATION

He goes on to say—this is going to be fun, at least for me. The blessing of predestination. I said the "p" word. Ephesians 1:4-5. "In love he predestined us." Now, oftentimes when it comes to this issue of election, choosing, predestination, the Bible uses a number of words to explain God picking us. Sometimes people think this is like God playing "Duck, duck, damned." You know, like friend, friend, kindling, kindling, friend, friend, kindling, kindling. It can sound kind of capricious, and mean, and cruel.

But here, it says he predestined us in what? Love. So, whatever you do, connect predestination and love, and don't let it go into a wrong view of a capricious God who's unloving, and cold-hearted, and cruel. "In love he predestined us."

Now, what we're getting into here is a huge debate on theology, and there are some who are called—we'll call them Calvinists, and they believe that God chooses us. There are those who are Arminians—I know I'm simplifying this—and they would say, "No, we choose God." He predestined us. It said previously, "before the foundation of the world." Some would say, "Well, he picked us because he saw we were trying hard." Nope, no one seeks God. That's what it says. Before we did anything good or evil, before the foundation of the world, before a star got hung in the sky, God chose those who are his to be his. That's predestination.

What that means is that your destiny is predetermined in love. You chose hell, God chose heaven. You chose damnation, God chose salvation. You chose to run from God, and God chose to run after you, so he came as Jesus Christ. In love he predestined us. At Mars Hill we have a variance of opinion on this. We hold the Reformed position and that is this: God chooses us first and then we choose God second, that God puts the Holy Spirit in us and then the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to cry out to God.

Rather than debate this, how about we celebrate this? Look back on your own life. Would you tell the story of your salvation, if you are a Christian, "Here's how I was seeking God, and pursuing God, and finally after all of my efforts, I found him"? Paul would not say that. Paul, who was writing this, was a man who hated Christians and was participating in the murder of one named Steven early in the book of Acts. Steven prayed and God later answered his prayers because Jesus himself came down from heaven, blinded Paul, knocked him off a horse, and converted him. That's election, okay? Like, if Jesus comes down from heaven, blinds you, knocks you off a horse, you're predestined, okay?

Look back at your own story. My story is I was religious, moral, not a Christian, I got a Bible from the pastor's daughter that I was dating and shouldn't have been. I finally started reading it for some reason in college, and I'm reading Romans 1, and it says, "And you are called to belong to Jesus Christ." Calling, election, predestination, all language of God reaching down to save us, and boom, it's like a switch flipped in my soul. "Oh, I'm called to belong to Jesus," and I'm in. I've been in every day since.

I was thinking about it this week. When I hear people's testimony of how Jesus saved them, it always sounds like God's the one who did the work if they tell the story right. It dawned on me this week—Pastor Bubba down at Mars Hill Federal Way, he said, "Yeah, we've got a deacon in our church who got saved when you were preaching Genesis 19 on circumcision." I know Billy Graham has preached a ton of sermons and a ton of people have gotten saved, but he never went with the circumcision/altar call sermon, okay? Just never did. That's not the go-to conversion text. Like, apparently the guy woke up drunk, rolled into church, heard the circumcision sermon, gave his life to Christ, now he's a deacon, right? If you get saved while hungover listening to the circumcision sermon, you are predestined. You are predestined. You're predestined, okay?

So, I posted it online and I asked for people's stories, and I'll share a few with you. This could be sort of like the redneck comedy tour. "You might be a redneck if," right? This will be our version, alright? "You might be predestined if." This will be our version.

So, Russell says, "I was busted with a shank in prison." If you just start there, you know you're not a good person on a spiritual quest to find the Lord. "I was busted with a shank in prison. In lockdown, I was given a bedroll and my choice of religious literature. I didn't believe in any of them, but I asked for a Bible. Within the next year in the hole, God revealed himself to me and broke my heart. I was prison gang related, and through me renouncing that part of my life, Jesus was faithful to keep me safe until my release. I'm sitting at Re:Train now." This guy's in our school, hopefully without the shank.

"God is amazing. That he chose me first is so amazing to think about and rejoice in." I love that line. I think that predestination is something that we should not necessarily argue with non-Christians about, but we should celebrate as Christians. We should share the gospel of Jesus Christ with non-Christians, but when we share our testimony with one another, we should make sure that we're telling it in such a way that we're not the hero of the story and we're not the savior of our soul.

Manvere: "I grew up in a Sikh home and was Sikh. When I was fourteen, I was in bed and saw five demons running around my bed, so I prayed and nothing happened. I then called out to Buddha and nothing happened," because he's dead. "Then I tried Allah and nothing happened," because he's a demon god. "And then I heard a still, calm voice in the back of my head 'whisper, 'Jesus Christ,' so I said aloud, 'Jesus save me,' and the demons were instantly gone." Predestined. I mean, he's running through his options. "Hello, Mohammed? No. 'Hello, Buddha? Jesus? Hey, that one worked. I'll go with that."

How about this one? Jen: "I was an atheist at ten, started doing drugs at twelve, perfected the 'good girls secretly gone bad' pretty early. I dabbled in the occult and I overdosed, and God audibly—yes, audibly, pretty terrifying for an atheist—called me." Let me say, if you are a high atheist who doesn't believe in God until he talks to you, you're predestined. Yeah.

How about this one? David: "My wife and I were having scary, crazy stuff happening at our house through dabbling in the occult. One night, a book flew off my bookshelf and landed in front of my wife late during the night." Anyone else freaked out? "In the morning, she tells me what happens and says, 'It opened on this page. Read it.' I read, 'Arm yourselves with the armor of God.'" Ephesians. It was a Bible. If you're in the occult, and demons are running around your house, and the Bible flies off the shelf and opens to Ephesians, you are predestined. Even the Arminians are like, "I'll give you that one. I'll give you that one. You can have that one."

"Wow," I said. "This is telling us how to defend ourselves. We need to become Christians." My wife agreed, then she said, "Is this your Bible?" I said, "Yes, I got it nine years before when I moved out of my previous flat and the landlord told me to throw out his ex-wife's stuff, but I didn't have the heart to throw out the old Bible." This thing had been on the shelf for nine years, and he stole it from some guy, and it flew off the shelf and opened to Ephesians.

"My wife then showed me the first page of the Bible, read out the inscription. It was her grandparents' names with the date 1961 and a Scripture. 'Wow,' I said. 'That's the Scripture.' I asked—thumbing through it, it was Ephesians 6:12. I read, 'Arm yourselves with the armor of God.' Our whole house got saved. Praise God." Let me just say this: if you're worshipping demons and the Bible flies off the shelf that you took from somebody nine years earlier and it opens to the book of Ephesians, and then you open to the very front and it has the exact same verse listed, you are predestined, yeah.

Okay, one more. This one's fun. "I hated God." You know this guy's predestined. Tell me about your—"I hated God." Oh. "I have 666 tattooed on my butt, the Virgin Mary with devil horns—" He has a tattoo of the Virgin Mary with devil horns. Alright, if you are saved, that's weird. You go to Jesus, you're like, "Hey, good to see you." "What about that thing with my mom?" Mary's sitting there shaking her head like, "That was uncalled for."—"a goatee and a tail on my leg, and an angel hanging herself on my arm. One night, just me and my girlfriend were hanging out, drunk of course. We got bored. Well, when she moved into my house, I made her throw out all of her God stuff unless it was Mormon-bashing." So, the only religious stuff he would allow was Mormon-bashing.

"Anyway, we were so bored I told her to put in one of the anti-Mormon movies. She did and my life was changed forever. I found out that Jesus was a real historical figure and not just the main character for the world's oldest novel. I picked up the Bible. I was going to read it so I could tell people why I hated God and how stupid it was. Before I got done with Matthew, I was a believer, started going to church, and was saved." Like, if you have 666 tattooed onto your butt, if you have a tattoo of the Virgin Mary with horns, and an angel hanging herself tattooed on your body, and you get saved, you are predestined, okay?

Let me say this: predestined is a wonderful doctrine. What it means is it doesn't matter how bad you are, God could save you. It doesn't matter where you live, God could save you. It doesn't matter who you are, or what you've done, or what you've failed to do. It doesn't matter how rebellious you are, how religious you are, how ridiculous you are. God could love you, save you, pick you, bless you in Christ. Amen? That's good news. That's good news.

THE BLESSING OF ADOPTION

He goes on to say that we have the blessing of adoption. Ephesians 1:4–5. "In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." He's saying that God has adopted us, and the language here is really important.

Forty percent of kids tonight go to bed without a father. For the first time in the nation's history, the majority of children born to women ages thirty and under are born out of wedlock. Kids never have a dad. Kids never have a dad. And some of you had a dad, but he was a horrible dad, and he was a man who abused you, he's a man who abandoned you.

This whole concept of God being a Father is incredibly important. About fourteen times in the Old Testament, God is referred to as a Father, but it's always nationally. It's never individually, it's never personally. Everything changes when Jesus comes along, and Jesus starts teaching us how to pray. And he says, "When you pray, pray like this: 'Our Father.'" What? This sort of intimate, personal, affectionate language for a relationship with God. He's like a Dad who loves us? My kids call me Papa Daddy. It's like that. Abba Father is like Papa Daddy. That's how Jesus tells us to pray. And more than sixty times in the New Testament, Jesus refers to God as "Father" and teaches us to refer to God as "Father."

Some of you've wrongly been told, because of spirituality, that God is a force. God's not a force, God's a Father. He's not impersonal, he's personal. He doesn't just give you power, he gives you himself. And the language here is that Jesus is like a big brother, and that God adopts us into his family. So, to become a Christian is to have a new Father—God's your Father—and to have a new family—Christians are family. This is incredibly important. Some of you don't have family. We want church to be your family. Some of you don't have a father. We want God to be your Father. Some of you, your birth and the family you were born into, it's discouraging. We want you to be born again into the family of God.

This language is incredibly personal and it changes the way we pray. That's why Jesus often teaches us that God is Father in the context of prayer. If you know who your Father is, you're going to talk to him. If you know how much he loves you, you're going to talk to him. If you know how gracious he is toward you, you're going to talk to him.

So he talks about this great blessing of being adopted. You ever seen a kid get adopted? Doesn't something just ring true in your soul like, "That's beautiful. That kid didn't have a family, now they have a family. Didn't have a father, now they have a father. Nobody was looking after them, now somebody is looking after them. Nobody was loving them, now somebody is loving them." That's beautiful, amen?

That's why Christians have always had a heart for adoption. In the early church, oftentimes children were literally thrown out with the trash, and the boys would be picked up to become slaves or gladiators, and the girls would be picked up to be servants or prostitutes. And the Christians went out and picked up the abandoned children and adopted them because it's a picture of the gospel of Jesus. All who are in Christ are adopted in Christ, and when we adopt and we love children that are not our biological children, but we treat them with the same

affection, and the same inheritance, and the same blessing, we're showing something of the heart of the Father and the truth of the gospel by welcoming them into the family.

"In love he predestined us for adoption as sons." And that language there of "sons," it includes sons and daughters, but in that day the family line, and the inheritance, and all the blessing, it came through the male line, and so men and women are in that position as sons, full rights of inheritance, full family blessing.

"Through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." Let me say this: you're adopted. If you're in Christ, you're adopted. You have a Father named God who loves you. You have a Father named God who listens to you. You have a Father named God who blesses you. And I want you to relate to him in that way. That's why he starts off Ephesians talking about God our Father, and then here he talks about this blessing of adoption.

THE BLESSING OF REDEMPTION

He then proceeds forward to talk about the blessing of redemption. And again, when he talks about blessing, it's just one thing after another. It just keeps exploding. It's almost like a great fireworks display. It just gets bigger, and more glorious, and just continues. And here, he adds the blessing of redemption. Ephesians 1:7: "In him we have redemption through his blood."

Now, in our culture, we use the language of addiction. In the Bible, it uses the language of slavery, that something has mastered us, enslaved us, is harming us and destroying us, and we need redemption. We need to be freed, delivered, released. And the language, if you look at redemption, redeeming, and all the derivatives thereof—I've studied it. It appears hundreds of times in the Bible. It traces all the way back to the Exodus.

In the Exodus, God's people were in Egypt, and they were ruled over by a pharaoh, and he was a mean, cruel man. He thought he was God and wanted to be worshiped as God, and he really harmed God's people. He mistreated and abused God's people. He enslaved them and he made their life very difficult. God came, through Moses, and spoke to the pharaoh telling him to repent and let the people go so they might be free to worship him, otherwise there would be consequences, judgments. And what happened was these various judgments came in the form of plagues.

And over, and over, and over, Pharaoh's heart was hardened. Sometimes it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart, other times it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. God hardened Pharaoh's heart with grace. "Pharaoh, here's an opportunity to repent. Here's an opportunity to stop pretending you're god. The real God says you need to repent, that you need to let his people go, that you need to stop mistreating people and acting like you're god. You're not." The Puritans used to say, "The same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay." God was very gracious, very patient, very honest through Moses with Pharaoh, and his heart got harder, and harder, and harder, and he hardened his own heart.

The final conflict was the promise that if you don't let God's people go, death will come to the firstborn son in every household that does not belong to the Lord. And so death was promised to come to every house in the nation of Egypt, with the exception of those families that in faith took a lamb without spot or blemish, showing the sinlessness of that substitute, in faith, slaughtered the animal, took its blood, and used it to paint the doorpost of the home. So that when death came to the city, it would literally pass over every home that had faith in the blood of the lamb.

This is all very much connected to Jesus. He shows up, John the Baptizer, his cousin, says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Paul tells the Corinthians, "Behold, our Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been slain." And so death came to every home with the exception of those who had faith in the blood of the lamb, a substitute to die in their place for their sins, so that the wrath of God and the death of a son would pass over them.

And then God's people were given redemption. They were liberated, they were freed. They got to walk out of Egypt, and God went with them, and God parted the sea for them, and God provided for them, and blessed them in the wilderness despite their grumbling.

Here's the big idea: when he says that we have redemption through his blood, that our faith is to be in the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who takes away the sins of the world. And if we are in Christ and we have trusted in Christ's death in our place for our sins, the wrath of God passes over us, and we are redeemed from our addictions and slaveries to worship him in freedom with a new life. What this means is how we interact with our sin is very different. It means that we no longer have to accept certain sin in our life, that because Jesus has redeemed us, we can walk with him away from our slavery.

I don't know what it is that enslaves you. For some it's food, for some it's sex, for some it's money, for some it's fame, for some it's power, for some it's glory, for some it's control, for some it's possessions, for some it is comfort. I know not what your thing is, but whatever has mastered you, whatever rules over you, Jesus has come to free you, and by the grace of God, you can walk with him in a brand-new life. And that's the blessing of redemption.

Let me say this too before I move on. We deal with this very concept in great detail in something called Redemption Groups, and it's all based on the storyline of the Exodus, and it really works out the entirety of the blessing of redemption. It's for those who are struggling with sin that they've committed, or sin that's been committed against them, or suffering that has come upon them. And these intensive Redemption Groups go through a curriculum produced by Pastor Mike Wilkerson in his book, *Redemption*, and it's our way of explaining to people the blessing of redemption and how to walk together as God's people in the blessing of redemption. And if you would like to consider that, we would like to invite you into a Redemption Group, and there's more information to be had regarding that.

THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS

He then proceeds to the blessing of forgiveness. And I can feel it in the room; some of you are already tired. You're like, "Man, this is a lot." This is amazing, though. Blessing, blessing, blessing, blessing, blessing, blessing, blessing, blessing. And he's trying to unpack all of these blessings so that you and I would know how blessed we are, amen? So hang in there with me.

The blessing of forgiveness, Ephesians 1:7. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." What haunts you? What do you regret? Looking back in your life, if I said, "One thing you could do over," what would it be? Most of us know immediately, right? Because we feel that shame, we feel that condemnation. Maybe we're even still living in light of some of the implications and complications that came through that sin. If a biography was written of your entire life and it was told truthfully, you couldn't read it. I

couldn't read mine.

We need to be forgiven. It says that we're forgiven for our trespasses. It's talking there about our sin. When God draws a line and we step over it. When God says no and we do it. And sometimes we think that God is wrong, or God is withholding. And then when we sin, we realize that ours is a good Father, and when he tells us to do something, it's good, and when he tells us not to do something it's because it's bad. And then we regret being so foolish and rebellious.

Now, here's what happens when you sin. You've got to decide what to do with it. I'll give you a couple options. You can deny it. "I didn't do it." You can blame somebody else. "It's their fault." You can excuse it. "Well, there are extenuating circumstances." You can diminish it. "Well, it's not that big of a deal. I know people that have done a lot worse than me." You can hide it. "Well, I hope I don't get caught." You can punish yourself. "I need to suffer and pay God back." Or, you could just be forgiven.

One of Jesus' final words from the cross is, "Father, forgive them." If you are in Christ, you're forgiven. You're forgiven. You're forgiven for everything you've done in your past, and you're forgiven for anything you'll do in your future. You're forgiven. You're forgiven. I want you to feel that. I want the Holy Spirit to enable and empower you to feel that. Have you ever sinned against somebody? Met with them, looked them in the eye, said you're sorry, and they said, "I forgive you," and they meant it?

See, today, the Lord Jesus wants you to know that he forgives you. He means it. You're forgiven. You're forgiven. It's a blessing, right? It means we don't need to pay God back. It means we don't need to suffer. It means we don't need to do anything because Christ has done everything. When he died on the cross, he paid the full debt for our sin. And when he says that we're forgiven, we're forgiven. You're forgiven.

THE BLESSING OF GRACE

He goes on to talk about the blessing of grace, and in some ways, this could be an explanation of all of the blessings and their source. Ephesians 1:7-10: "According to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us." You ever been with somebody who's really generous? They give more than you even thought they would give. You know, you went out with your grandpa, he was the "fourth scoop of ice cream" grandpa. He's lavish, like grace upon grace. God's like that. God's lavish with his grace. God's not stingy with his grace. God's a giver, that's who he is.

"According to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth," what's it say? "In Christ." All of this is in Christ. If you are in Christ, you receive all the blessings. If you're not in Christ, you don't receive any of the blessings. He goes on to say, "As a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

Let me explain the grace of God to you. There is common grace, and this is God giving a measure of grace to everyone, believer and unbeliever. The Bible says that the sun rises on the believer and the unbeliever, that the crops grow to feed the believer and the unbeliever. Does God love the whole world? Yes, he does. Does God pour out love, unmerited favor, generosity, kindness, provision on all people? Yes, he does. Yes, he does.

And then there is a special grace, a unique grace, a saving grace for God's people. We get common grace and special grace. Common grace helps in this life, but it's only special grace that is of any help after this life. Common grace is for all people, but special grace is exclusively for God's people. And so if you are in Christ, you are doubly blessed. He's lavished grace upon grace on you. He's lavished common grace and special grace upon you.

I think sometimes in Christianity, we become so familiar with words that we cease to be astounded by them. God isn't asking you to give to him. He's asking you to receive him, and he gives himself to you as a gift. And then he takes up life in you, and he changes you, and then his grace starts to come through you so that his grace might be through you to others. It's an amazing life. It's a supernatural life.

See again, when we have a worker's ethic, we only get what we deserve. When we have a debtor's ethic, we have to pay them back for what we receive. Grace is different than that. Grace is not just to those of us who are undeserving. It's to those of us who are ill-deserving.

Let me ask you this: where are the evidences of God's grace in your life? How has God been gracious to you? Where has God been gracious to you? What things has he provided for you? What things has he saved you from? In what ways has he informed you? And if you look at this: holiness, predestination, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, it's all of what? Grace. And then there's this empowering grace that makes you strong to live a new life like Christ, and with Christ, and for Christ, and through Christ. What this means is the way we treat one another has to be seated, and sourced, and summed in grace. In grace.

THE BLESSING OF BEING SEALED

He continues. It's quite a sentence, huh? The blessing of being sealed, Ephesians 1:11-14. "In him we have obtained an inheritance." How many of you would like an inheritance? See, God has an inheritance. God's a Father, we're his children. We've been adopted into his family, he loves all of his kids, and he gives them an inheritance.

"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined," there's the word again, "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."

He talks about the blessing of being sealed. Now, in that day, if you had a possession, you'd put your seal on it. Some people still do this. They'll put their name on something or they'll tag something as identified with their possessions. In that day, you would put your seal on something and that was to denote, "That belongs to me." He says that, for the believer, we're God's possession. We belong to the Lord, we belong to God. If you're a Christian, you belong to God. Your life is not your own. You've been bought with a price. You belong to the Lord.

And he has put his seal upon you as his possession, and that seal is the Holy Spirit. So, it starts with God the Father, and then God the Son, and here it's God the Holy Spirit. The whole Trinity's involved. So our blessing is from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit, and then the Holy Spirit, he comes and he marks us as God's possession.

And what that is, that is a guarantee of our inheritance. Now again, there is blessing in this life to be sure, but much of our blessing is awaiting us in the kingdom of God. And friends, God is not storing up our blessing there because he is withholding from us, but because he wants us to enjoy the blessing forever. If God were to give us all of the blessing today, it would only be for this life. If we store it up for eternal life, we enjoy it every day forevermore. And the Holy Spirit is our blessing.

Now, let me ask you a question. How many of you want to live for God? How many of you want to live for God? Don't. All the hands went down fast. "That sounded—he yelled. It seemed like he was—but, hmm." The Holy Spirit is God. He empowered the earthly life of the Lord Jesus. And before Jesus returned to heaven he said, "I will not leave you as orphans. I'll send the Holy Spirit." When God's people gathered early in the book of Acts, they were ready to go do ministry and Jesus said, "Not yet. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and you'll receive power," and then the Holy Spirit came upon God's people to give them the power of Jesus to live a life in Christ.

Here's what I want you to know about the Christian life: it's not the life you live for God, it's the life of God lived through you. It's Jesus sending the Holy Spirit to cause you to become a new person in Christ, and to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean there won't be effort on your behalf, but it's Holy Spirit-enabled, grace-empowered effort. And it's God's life for you, it's God's life in you, it's God's life through you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let me say this: this means that a Christian cannot lose their salvation. Some would ask, "Can you lose your salvation?" No. That's the wrong question. The question is, "Can Christ lose a Christian?" It's not my salvation. The Bible says salvation is of the Lord. I don't save myself, I can't unsave myself. I didn't elect myself, I can't unelect myself. I didn't adopt myself, I can't unadopt myself. I didn't seal myself, I can't unseal myself.

And what he says here is: "He is the guarantee of our inheritance." The what? Guarantee. "Until we acquire possession of it." What he says is, once you receive the Holy Spirit, you are marked and sealed as God's possession. He causes you to be born again with a new nature, as a new person, with a new heart, and a new mind, and a new identity to live by a new power, to live for a new Lord. And that's only the beginning, and he will keep you to the end. A Christian does not lose their salvation because Christ does not lose a Christian. The Holy Spirit keeps you. That's the blessing.

TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY

Lastly, he says why. Now let me ask you, why would God do all of this? This is a lot of blessing. Blessed in Christ with holiness, predestination, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, grace, and sealed by the presence and power of the person of the Holy Spirit. Why would God do this? He tells us three times: "To the praise of his glory."

Ephesians 1:6, "To the praise of his glorious grace." That we'd sing, and shout, and cheer. We'd repent of being indie rockers and having our hands in our pockets. Ephesians 1:12 says, "To the praise of his glory." Paul's really excited in prison praising God for all of his blessing. And he says in Ephesians 1:14 again, "To the praise of his glory." So, what we do is bless the God who's blessed us. We bless the God who's blessed us.

Let me close with an illustration that I borrowed from one of our residents here at the church. All theology is cat theology or dog theology. Let me make this simple for you, okay? Cat theology or dog theology. Let's say there is a cat and let's say there's a dog, and they both have the same owner, and they have the best master ever. They sleep in comfortable beds, they eat very good food, they are groomed at the best vet or spa, they are petted, they are spoken to, they are well treated and cared for in every way. These are spoiled pets. The cat thinks, "I must be an amazing and valuable cat." The dog thinks, "I must have an amazing and valuable master." Do you get the difference?

Mars Hill, we have dog theology. And so oftentimes in our world, it's cat theology. "God loves you, God died for you, God blessed you, God has eternity for you, God has a new nature for you, God has an eternal home for you. Look at how amazing you are! Look at how valuable you are! Look at how important you are!" Cat theology.

Look at how great God is. Look at all that God has done. Look at all that God still promises to do. To live for the praise of his glorious grace is not to think God does all of this so that people could see me as glorious. God does all of this so that I might tell everyone how glorious he is, how loving he is, how generous he is, how compassionate he is, how merciful he is, how kind he is, how long-suffering he is, how affectionate he is, how wonderful my master is. Amen?

And Mars Hill, just so you know, we put our service together in an order for a reason. I want you to hear about who God is and how he's blessed us, and then we want you to respond by blessing the God who has blessed you, by praising the God who's worthy of being praised.

So Father God, as we transition now, I pray for those who are not yet Christians. They want blessings, but not Jesus. And I pray that they would see that the greatest blessing of all is Jesus, and all other blessings are found exclusively in Christ. God, I pray for those of us who are Christians, that we would never cease to be astounded and amazed at the blessings that we receive in Christ. And I thank you, Lord God, that those blessings are not just for this life but they're for eternal life. I thank you, Lord God, that even when we find ourselves in circumstances as the Apostle Paul did, suffering, lonely, isolated, scared, hurting, struggling, we will see what we're looking for. And if we take your Word as truth, that you are a God who's blessed us, and we start to recount the blessings in our life, we will find our mourning turn into praising. And Lord God, for some of us who are today feeling exceedingly blessed, life is filled with obvious blessing, I pray that we would know that it is for the praise of his glorious grace. It's so that we could tell others about how wonderful our master is, and how loving he has been, and how generous he has been, and how kind he has been, and how he is not done, and we'll be with him together forever. And Lord Jesus, in closing, I thank you that it says over and over here, eleven times in the first fourteen verses, all of this blessing is in Christ. And so Christ, we thank you for being our blessing and we thank you for being the source of all of our blessings. And we thank you in Christ's name, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.