

This is an exciting time to be part of the Windsor Fellowship Church. Well at least I'm feeling excited. I hope you are too. However, the reality is that this enthusiasm, this excitement will wane. If you've been a Christian for even a relatively short time you'll know that the Christian life isn't always full of energy. Sometimes it simply feels hard work. Church can feel like such a chore. It doesn't feel dynamic, engaging. It's the same people week in week out. It's my turn to put the chairs out again. And, because we're so small, my turn comes around so quickly.

More than that we don't have the numbers, the resources, the children, the cultural engagement, that the church down the road. We seem so small and pathetic. Why should I bother?

Now, as I said, I don't think that negative feeling is where we're at. I think you lot are amazing, you've established this church, you're involved with each other, you're operating effectively as a family. And I'm praying that carries on. I don't want anyone to stop doing what you're already doing, my hope is that I'll be able to encourage each of us to do more.

But, there will be times when we feel despondent about our Christian life. We'll feel fed up with our church and perhaps fed up with our church family. Maybe you're actually feeling like that today. But, whether you feel that now, or at a time in the future, this letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians is a wonderful antidote to those feelings.

This letter is an exhortation to praise God because of who he is and what he has done. You could summarise the whole letter by saying that chapters 1-3 are a call to praise God for his amazing grace. And chapters 4-6 tell us how to live in response to God's amazing grace.

The vast scope of what God has done, is doing and has promised to do, is described in an overwhelming stream of theology and doctrine in the 1st 14 verses of this letter. As I said on the weekly email, verse 3-14 is one sentence in the original Greek. Paul is so excited, so overwhelmed with all that God is and does, that he seems like an overexcited child who just can't wait to tell you everything that's happened to them.

You know with children you sometimes just want to say to them, breathe, pause, take a moment, and then just calmly and carefully tell me what you want to say. But, that would be to miss the point. The child is so excited, so overwhelmed, the detail, what happened to whom, when, isn't the key thing. The key point for the child is that we realise the joy, the delight, the excitement in whatever has just happened.

That's like Paul here. He gushes out exuberant descriptions of who God is, what God has done, what God is doing, what God will do, why God does all this, what the result of all God does is for us. It's breathless, it's exciting, it's for one main purpose.

Paul wrote this amazing sentence to cause us to sit back in wonder and amazement and to praise God. Look at verse 3, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Verse 6, "to the praise of his glorious grace." Verse 12, "in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory." And finally verse 14, "to the praise of his glory."

Even though each verse in this opening passage could be at least one sermon in its own right, we're not going to do that. Paul didn't write this sentence for us to sweat the detail. They'll be time for that as we go on in this letter. The

ideas and concepts that Paul introduces here, he expands on throughout the rest of the letter. For now, for those of us who are Christians and belong in God's family. For now, please delight, savour and revel in all that God has done, is doing and will do. Praise God for his amazing grace.

Now, if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, if you don't count yourself as a member of God's church, please do listen carefully to what Paul has to say. What is described here is the most amazing, glorious, overwhelming truth that you will ever hear. Nothing can compare to what Paul describes in these verses. Please listen carefully and see how you can be part of it too.

As I've said, originally this was all one sentence. So, it doesn't neatly divide up into the classic 3-point sermon. However, I do think Paul has a logical progression in this stream of exuberance. He starts by highlighting what God did, past tense, before the creation of the world. Then he gets excited by what he does for us in this life, present tense, our reality now as Christians. And then he motivates us to praise God by pointing us to our glorious future. It's the past, present and future tense of all that God's amazing grace means to us.

And all of these reasons to praise God flow out of the big headline statement that Paul makes in verse 3. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." If you're a Christian, you have already been given every spiritual blessing. That's not some blessing, it's every spiritual blessing. The simple truth from this verse is that we lack nothing. We don't need anything new, we don't need anything more, we have it all.

"But, wait a minute," I hear you cry, "that's not what it feels like to me." The Christian life can be hard work, it's tiring, it really, really doesn't feel like I have every spiritual blessing. And of course you're right. We have all this blessing now, but these blessings are in the heavenly realms. The heavenly realm is the place where Christ now resides, with all authority. This is the place we all truly belong. There's a now and not yet to the Christian life. We do have every spiritual blessing, the now of the Christian life. But, we don't experience the full implications of that blessing until Christ returns, the not yet of the Christian life.

This is like developing a photo in a dark room. I don't know if you remember back in the olden days, before digital cameras, when you had to wait to see what your photo was like! My brother had a darkroom and it was fascinating to see the photos gradually become clearer. The moment the photo was taken the picture was captured. It was all there, but it took time for the picture to fully develop and become clear. Even though it took time nothing else was added to the photo; it was there the whole time.

That's exactly like us as Christians. The moment we became a Christian we were given every spiritual blessing. And, during our earthly life, these blessing will become increasingly evident to us as our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ develops. But, it won't be a completely clear and sharp image until either we die or Christ returns.

But, even now, even whilst we don't fully experience the implications and reality of these blessing, the natural response is to praise God for them. But, what are those spiritual blessings? What specifically is it that God has given us in Christ?

Well that's what Paul gets so overwhelmingly excited about from verse 4 onwards. This splurge of wonderful truths are the spiritual blessings that we've been given. Look down from verse 4 and:

- **Praise God for what he's done!**

Verse 4, God the Father chose us before the creation of the world. Verse 5, he predestined us. And in verse 11 you get them both again, chosen and predestined. It's true often we find it hard to grasp what this means. God chose us, he predestined us, before the creation of the world. That is before anything existed. When there was literally nothing, only the awesome Trinitarian God. Before time began, before anything came into being. God the Father chose us. That's all Christians, through all of history, were chosen by God the Father.

But, chosen and predestined for what? Look at verse 4. "To be holy and blameless in his sight." So, God looks at those he's chosen and sees them as holy and blameless. If you're a Christian, that's you! Just think about that for a moment. You, sinner that you are, when God looks at you, he sees perfection. That's got to be a reason to praise God!

But, not only that, look at verse 5. "He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." Just pause and think about what this means. God has adopted you as his child. You have been adopted into God's own family. All the privileges of sonship are yours because God has predestined you.

Now, there is lots of discussion about the implications of predestination. And we're not going to have that discussion now. That's not why Paul wrote this. He wrote this to give us great assurance, great security, great joy, that God the Father has made us his. We belong to him, we're in his family.

Henry and Helena are my children. Whatever happens, whatever they do, good or bad, they will always be my children. They belong in the Matthew family with all the rights and privileges that affords them. Likewise, all of us who are Christians belong in God's family. Praise God for your true, eternal, real identity.

We don't deserve this; we cannot earn this. How can we? It happened before we were born, even before the creation of the world. This adoption is entirely the work of God through his free gift of grace. This results in praise. Look at verse 6. "To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."

But, how does this work? How is it possible for me, a sinner, to be seen as holy and blameless? How can I, thoroughly sinful as I am, be adopted into God's perfect family? We've had a hint so far. Verse 3 "in Christ", verse 5, "through Jesus Christ." Verse 6, the grace is "freely given in the One he loves." This is all about Jesus. We get all these spiritual blessings through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, from verse 7, Paul fleshes out some of the detail about how all these amazing spiritual blessings can actually be ours. Look at verse 7. We have redemption. The word redemption means to pay the price that is owed to free a slave. The Bible makes it clear that we were all slaves to sin. We needed to be freed from that slavery. And the price that was paid that freed us is Jesus' blood. See verse 7, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." Through Jesus' blood we are redeemed, our sins are forgiven.

There is an awesome magnitude to our salvation. God the Father chose us before the creation of the world. God the Son died for us almost 2,000 year ago to pay the price we owed for our sin. But, it was only in our lifetime that God the Holy Spirit made this known to us. Before that we were dead in our sins, then we were made alive in Christ.

The whole of our majestic Trinitarian God is involved in beautiful symmetry in our salvation. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit working together to make us part of their family. How should we respond to this? By praising God!

Of course it's not just past and present tense reasons to praise God. We have a future to praise God about as well. God has made known to us the mystery of his will. Something that has been made known is no longer a mystery. God has made known to us that his will is that the ultimate goal of all things is for them to submit to Christ. That's where this world is heading. That is the future for all of creation. Look at verses 9-10, "he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment-- to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ."

And, for Christians, knowing this future is another reason to praise God. The future isn't something to fear. The future isn't unknown. For Christians, the future is secure, guaranteed and awesome.

Paul tells us why Christians can have such, security and such confidence in the future. See the 2nd half of verse 13. "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." The word marked is the idea of being branded. You know how a farmer brands his cattle so that it's clear who owns which cow. That's what God has done to us. We've been branded with a seal. This branding is the Holy Spirit living in us.

And a seal is what you get at the bottom of a grand document. It's attached to show it's genuine. Here are my ordination papers, they're sealed to show they're genuine.

Branded, sealed by the Holy Spirit, who is God himself. You can't get a more reliable, secure seal or brand than that. And what is the Holy Spirit doing for us? Verse 14, the promised Holy Spirit "is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession." Our inheritance, our life with God as part of his family living in his kingdom is guaranteed. How is it guaranteed? By God the Holy Spirit living in us.

This amazing sentence which covers so much, from before the creation of the world, to culmination of all things in the future. It tells us about how we benefit from God's plan for salvation, what God has done, is doing and will do for all those who belong to him. And why did Paul write this sentence?

It's simply summed up in the last 6 words. In response we do all things "to the praise of his glory."

Let's Pray!