

SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14

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Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He freely bestowed on 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 on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having being predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

You may have listened to this and thought: Okay Pastor, I was with you for the first couple of verses. And then Paul got to be Paul, and it got into such strange theological jargon, that I found it difficult to understand. If that's where you are, that's a good place, because we are going to unpack these verses and see what they have to do with the spiritual blessing that Paul is talking about in vs.3, that awe have spiritual blessings or gifts that God has offered us and which we may have overlooked or hadn't realized their potential in the year that has gone by. That is distinct possibility! Sometimes we take so many of the things that are in the bible and we gloss over them, or when we need to remember them, we forget them. Or even if they come to our attention, we're so caught up with other things that we are thinking about, that we fail to recognize that God is actually sending something to us that we need for this moment. So, let's unpack these 10 or 11 verses in the first chapter of Ephesians, and see what these spiritual blessings or gifts are that God has given to us and that we can use in the year 2021.

What has He given us, as per these verses?

1. He's chosen us.

Vs. 4 says that He chose us, not that we chose Him but He chose us. For what? So we would be holy and blameless before Him. He chose you, He chose me so that we, you and I, could be holy and blameless. Which means that He knew something about us. He knew something about what can be given to us to achieve this holiness and blamelessness, as it were, that we could live. God chose us to do this.

He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.

What a gift! To think that the eternal God chose you and me from all of His creation! He chose you and me, and we know that God's love is extended across all His creation – for God so loved the world.

Yet, Paul is now moving from the general to the specific, and he's saying: Listen! You and me, God chose, and He chose us to live a life that would be holy and blameless. If God did, then God knows that it is possible for you and for me. Maybe you're struggling with living that kind of a life, and you're saying that it cannot be. Well, we need to take a step back and say: But one of the spiritual blessings that God has given to me is that He chose me to be holy and blameless.

2. We are adopted as His sons and daughters.

Vs. 5 says that we have been adopted as sons and daughters. In fact, John 1:12 says, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." We've become sons and daughters according to the kind intention of His will, and so we praise Him for His grace through which this happened. Think about it for a minute. You and I are now sons and daughters of the most high God. We have Him as our Father, and if He's the King of Kings, then we are princes and princesses of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I love that old chorus that says:

Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist
Without the knowledge of Your parenthood, and Your loving care.
But now I am Your son (or daughter), I am adopted in Your family
And I can never be alone
'Cause Father God, You're there beside me.
I will sing Your praises; I will sing Your praises.

Did you get that line? "I can never be alone." Beloved, as sons and daughters of God, you and I can never be alone because God is always with us. Maybe in the year that went by, you have felt that you're alone, that you've not had anybody to stand by you and the pandemic could have been part of the reason. Yet, the good news for us, God reiterates to us in the year 2021 – "As My son and My daughter, you will never be alone because you're adopted into My family. You're My child and I will always be with you."

3. We have been redeemed and forgiven.

Vs. 7 says that we have been redeemed and forgiven. He qualifies that by saying "according to the lavish grace that has been bestowed on us." What does that mean? That we have been redeemed and forgiven, not because we are worth redeeming or being forgiven, but because God in His great love and mercy has extended grace to us – unmerited favor, as grace is often defined. He said, "I created them in My image. They've gone astray, but I will do something to redeem them back to Me." And you know, as we went through Christmas, that Jesus the incarnate Son of God came and gave His life for us, to redeem us from our sins and to set us on a path that will lead to His presence.

4. He has revealed to us the mystery of His will.

Vs. 9 talks of the mystery of God's will. What does God want? What is God's plan and purpose for the world, for me, for the things that I'm doing? How do I align with God's purposes? God says that all of His purposes are captured in His Son, Jesus. And you and I, who have accepted the salvation that Jesus has brought to us, will find God's will wrapped up in Jesus Himself living in our hearts. God's will is now clear. It's no longer a mystery. The mystery of salvation for the entire world, and specifically for you and me, is now open and bared so that we can know it.

5. We have obtained an inheritance.

Vs. 11 says that we have obtained an inheritance so that we can showcase His glory. In other words, an inheritance that we have for us waiting in heaven, we think about that and we embrace that wonderful thought. Then we say because of that, because of the fact that one day I will be with God in heaven, it changes my life. And my life is lived in such a way that it showcases God's glory here on earth even though the inheritance is waiting for me in heaven. It has a bearing on the way I live my life.

6. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

In vs. 13, he says that we are sealed. God gives us His Holy Spirit. After listening to the message of salvation and believing it, we are now saved. And the moment we are saved, we are given God's Holy Spirit to be and live in our hearts.

7. We are God's own possession.

Vs. 14 says that we are God's own possession. We are redeemed from sin, but one day God will redeem us from this world itself into His very presence.

How beautifully Paul has outlined spiritual blessings for us that we, as Christians, need to walk in. We need to understand that we are a blessed people, that God has said to us, "I chose you." We are adopted as sons and daughters. We are redeemed and forgiven. The mystery of His will is made clear to us. He has given us an inheritance. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, and we are God's own possession.

A great message from Paul, but how does that distill into our own lives? Would it make a change for me in this year 2021? How do I appropriate it into every day, every hour, every minute, so that I am living in the light of these spiritual blessings? Let me unpack it a little bit for us as we look at all of these seven areas and say, "How does it impact my life?"

I want to look at it from three places in a continuum. I want to look at it from the past, the present and the future. How has it impacted my past, my present and my future? How has it impacted the past, and that becomes the foundation for who I am, what I do and whom I believe in. How it impacts the present – for the present, all those spiritual blessings will give me a sense of purpose. How it impacts my future and how my future then gives me hope. Those are the three areas that we're going to look at these spiritual blessings.

- The past gives us our foundation,
- The present gives us our purpose,
- The future gives us our hope.

THE PAST

The past gives us a foundation, and really, that is true of everything in life. our upbringing, our relationships, our education, and our family, everything in our past contributes to the foundation that we have. All that we have done is what we stand on today as our foundation.

Similarly, the things God has given us is the foundation on which we stand as we face 2021. What has He done for us or given us? Let's take from those seven areas, five that will be our foundation:

- He chose us,
- He adopted us,
- He redeemed us,
- He forgave us,
- We are His possession.

This is the foundation on which we stand – we are a chosen people; we are adopted sons and daughters of God. We are a redeemed people. We are a forgiven people and we are God’s own possession. All of these things He has given to us to give us a solid foundation. As we look at that foundation, we think to ourselves, “My goodness! Look at who I am. I am a chosen person, I’m a forgiven person, I’m a redeemed person, and I’m God’s own possession. Wonderful things that are part of who I am and what God has given me. That’s my past, that’s the foundation on which I stand.

THE PRESENT

Based on the foundation of my past, I look at the present and see how it can give me purpose. As we look at the present, we realize that the present is always evolving; it’s always changing. Nobody envisioned the world with COVID at the start of last year. Today is different from yesterday. We just had a new baby in CAP. A husband and wife became parents overnight. We had a marriage at CAP. Two people who loved each other, a bachelor and a spinster came together and are now one, husband and wife.

Change happens. The present continues to evolve. To navigate the uncertainties of the days, we not only need to stand on a firm foundation but also constantly utilize the resources available to us in real time. The present is always present continuous time. It’s constantly moving; it’s not static. It’s dynamic. So, we utilize our resources, we put to use our various talents and capabilities. We reach out to family and friends when we are out of our depth, but it all has to do with the physical world we live in.

However, the challenges we face are not just from the physical world. The Bible tells us that, “We battle not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” That’s why Paul says in the concluding 6th chapter, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”

So, as we live in this present continuous, evolving, constantly changing time – the present – and we reach deep into our own resources, our own contacts and everything else that we have that helps us to meet the challenges of the day, we also recognize that at some point they don’t match up. We need something way beyond that. We need to tap into what God has to offer.

What does God afford us in the present to combat and overcome these challenges so that we can continue to fulfill our purpose in being here? He has revealed the mystery of His will. Then everything is summed up in Christ. That’s His gift for us in the present. Everything, beloved, even our situations have to find an answer in Him who is our Savior, our Redeemer and our God.

We know that Jesus has an express and specific will for me: how I navigate through this situation in my life, how I view difficulties, how I treat people, how I manage my life and why I am on this earth in 2021. And how do I know His will? Because everything is captured in Jesus and that’s the gift that we have been given as we walk through every moment of every day. You may say: He’s unraveled the mystery of His will. But how do I know God’s will? How do I know it for my life?

Paul goes on to say that the moment you were saved, He gave you His Holy Spirit as a pledge. How does that help? You’ve heard me say this many times but it bears repeating especially as we see how to bring the resources of heaven to weigh in on our struggles, uncertainties and fears. The Holy Spirit, we read in 1 Corinthians 2:10ff, understands the mind of God. “Who understands the mind of God but the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in your heart and mind.” God’s Spirit who understands the mind of God is available for you and me within our own person. And all we need to do is ask Him. What does God want me to do in this situation? What should I say when confronted

with this particular situation? How do I navigate through this difficult time? How do I make two ends meet? What is God's express will for me?

We look to God to navigate the present and to find a purpose as it is fulfilled in us walking with Christ. Christ in us, and we allow Him to shine through us so that everything that God has for you and me in terms of fulfilment, in terms of overcoming difficult paths or challenging situations, everything is wrapped up in Jesus. And Jesus is in your heart and in mine.

Here, I have to pause and ask the question: Is He in your heart? Because if He's not, then all you're left with are the resources that are at the end of our hands – your contacts, the gifts that you have, the talents that you have, all things that are contained in the physical spectrum of this world, but not able to meet the challenges of the spiritual realm that wages its attack on you and me. The best decision that you can make in your entire life would be to invite Him into your heart and say, "As I step into this year 2021, I want to invite You into my heart, Lord Jesus. Because I don't want to go through another 2020. Come into my heart!" And all you have to do is acknowledge that you have sinned against Him, done wrong things. Ask for His forgiveness. Accept that He gave His life for you. That's how we are redeemed, that's how we are forgiven. We appropriate the finished work of Calvary into our lives. This is the most important decision that you will ever make in your life.

So, with Jesus in our lives, the Spirit of God guiding us, we are able to find our purpose in the present.

THE FUTURE

The future gives us hope. Bringing God's gifts to us helps us understand our past or our foundations. Looking at what He has made known to us (His will) and given to us (His Holy Spirit) helps us to walk in God's purpose for our lives. Then we look at the remaining gifts He has given us, and we see that we have a glorious future that awaits us. That must fill us with hope.

As Christians, we can never, and must never lose hope in our lives. Why? Because we are sons and daughters of the Most High God. We don't live life in our own strength and in our own wisdom, but on God's. We are never in a situation where we run out of options because God is always with us. Omnipotent God, all wise God, who can bring all that He is to bear on our situations and take us through it. God always has a way forward, a plan, an answer, more strength, heavenly wisdom and even patience to help you find your way forward.

Where does this hope come from? From the knowledge that we have an inheritance in heaven waiting for us; that one day we will join Him in glory and live with Him forever. Our future is secure. That's why Paul says in 1 Thessalonians ch.4 that we don't grieve as ones who have no hope for we will see our loved ones again. we will all be together in heaven. What a glorious day that will be, when we see our loved ones, maybe our parents, fathers, mothers, children, and grandparents, maybe whom we never met but will get a chance to meet. Glorious day, and that's the hope, that's the inheritance that God has given to us, that the end of this world is not the end of life for us but the beginning of eternal life with Him. God has given us His Holy Spirit as a pledge that that promise will become a reality.

Maybe we've forgotten that God is on our side, and maybe we've followed the things of this world and allowed them to obscure and diffuse the magnificent light of God's presence. Or maybe you've got off the road; you're sitting by the side of the road and wishing away this chapter of your life. but New Years are like new chapters in the unfinished scrolling of our lives. they allow for course corrections. They allow us to look at life through new lenses, the lenses of the Master craftsman whose workmanship we are, and to rise up with firm intent and greater resolve and seize the New

Year and say: If God has given me this year, then every single plan and purpose that He has for me is going to be fulfilled because my foundation is in Him, my purpose is in Him and my hope is in Him.

While I was listening to the watch-night service and we were singing "In Christ Alone," I was really taken up by the incredible truth of the words in the 4th verse. The reality of those words gripped me anew.

No guilt in life, no fear in death;
This is the power of Christ in me.
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.

Jesus commands your destiny, not the situation, not the circumstance, not your boss, not your family, not your relationships. Jesus commands your destiny.

No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand.
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I stand.

Church, let that be our stand as we face 2021 with all its difficulties, challenges, plans and struggles, till He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

My past tells me that I'm chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, His own possession.
My present tells me He has revealed His will to me and His Holy Spirit helps me understand it.
My future tells me that this world is not my final habitation. No, I will spend eternity with Him and all my loved ones who have gone on ahead.

So, bring out the enthusiasm! Banish the negativity! And embrace the year for all of its potential!
Because till He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I will stand. We, you and I, in the power of Christ we will stand and face this year 2021.

God bless you.
