

Manifesting the Manifold Wisdom of God

Blessed in Him (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 24, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ When I was living in Vancouver, there was a bank called Scotiabank that had a pretty catchy advertising campaign with the tagline: **You're Richer Than You Think**. It was all over the place on commercials, on the radio, on the side of buses, at the bus stop. Telling me I'm richer than I think.
 - ▶ At the time, I was a full-time seminary student supported financially by my wife, an elementary art teacher. So every time we saw their ads, we'd joke with each other, "Think harder!" For us it was more like: **You're Poorer Than You'd Like to Think**.

- ❖ But I bring this up because the tagline, "You're Richer Than You Think" is actually a pretty good summary of today's passage. Of course we're not dealing with material riches. **As Christians, we're dealing with spiritual riches**. And Paul makes it clear in v3 that every conceivable spiritual blessing is ours, as those who are in Christ Jesus, in union with him.
 - ▶ We've mentioned before that vv3-14 is actually one long, run-on sentence in the original. The Apostle Paul got carried away blessing God for all of his blessings to us. But if it weren't for Scripture, for divine revelation, we'd be ignorant of such blessings. Let's face it, we don't think this way.

- ❖ Think about the last time you heard someone say they feel so blessed – or the last time you said it – what was it referring to? Because you got accepted to that school? Because you have good health? An exciting career? A happy marriage? Good kids? Great friends?
 - ▶ That's what we usually have in mind by being blessed. Material blessings. That's why we feel so blessed. But we're underselling it. Don't you see? **You're more blessed than you think. You're spiritually richer than you think.**

- ❖ Perhaps this is the reason God wants you here this morning. If you're one of his adopted children, perhaps your heavenly Father brought you here to be reminded of how wide and long and high and deep is his love for you. Of how he has blessed you *in* Christ and *through* Christ – more than you can even ask or imagine. Christian, you are richer than you think.
 - ▶ Until we believe this, until we start listening to the declarations of God's Word more than the accusations of our flesh – until then, we've yet to experience the fullness of these gospel blessings. It's no surprise if our assurance is weak, if our love is lukewarm, if our worship is tepid.

- ❖ The reason why the Apostle is so confident in his faith, so brimming with love for God and the saints, so prone to lose himself in doxology as he writes his letters – is because he thought deeply about his salvation. **He went beyond the surface of the material blessings that God may or may not will to shower on his people, and he dug down deep to the spiritual blessings found in Christ**. That's where he rooted his faith, his love, his worship.
 - ▶ And that's what I hope to do for us today. As we walk through vv3-14, I want to identify and unpack four spiritual blessings that are made available to everyone who is in Christ – who hears the gospel of salvation and believes in him (1:13)

- ❖ But before we go into the specific blessings, let me make two general observations. **First, it may be obvious but it's important to clarify that these blessings are only derived from, experienced in, and secured by the God of the Bible.** These are not the ordinary blessings you'll find mentioned in the other religions of the world. **No, these are unique spiritual blessings because they're unique to the Triune God of Christianity – the One True God who eternally lives as three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

- ❖ Notice how each person of the Trinity is present in these verses, and each plays a unique role in relation to these spiritual blessings. We could say like this. **The Father is described as the source of every spiritual blessing.** He's the who in v3 "who have blessed us".
 - ▶ And read on. "Who has blessed us *in Christ*". If the Father is the source of every spiritual blessings, **then the Son is the sphere in which we enjoy these blessings.** They're experienced in the context of a relationship with Jesus. They're found in him. That phrase (or "in Christ") pops up 11 times in these verses. It implies that none of these blessings can be received or enjoyed apart from a union with Christ by faith.
 - And finally if the Father is the source, the Son is the sphere, **then the Spirit is the seal guaranteeing these blessings.** He makes sure we come to full possession of every spiritual blessing the Father sourced and the Son secured. That means we're not in full possession of all of it yet.

- ❖ So there is definitely an element of our salvation that's future and yet to be experienced or enjoyed. **But that needs to be balanced with a clear affirmation that these blessings are not entirely future but mostly for the present.** That's our second general observation. It's important because of the confusion sowed by that phrase "in the heavenly places".
 - ▶ When it says in v3 that we're blessed "in Christ with every spiritual blessing *in the heavenly places*", it's makes you think of a geographical place. But literally the phrase is "in the heavenlies", and it's found in only four other verses in this letter. There Paul is either referring to the sphere in which Christ reigns (1:20; 2:6) or in which the "rulers and authorities" (3:10) and "spiritual forces of evil" operate (6:12).
 - **So it's best not to think of being blessed "in the heavenly places" as suggesting that all our blessings are stored up some place in heaven and waiting for us to enjoy when we one day die.**

- ❖ **No, when he speaks of the "heavenlies", Paul is referring to the unseen sphere of spiritual realities all around us.** Where both Christ reigns and evil spiritual forces still operate for now. But the big implication is this – it means these spiritual blessing are to be embraced and enjoyed in the here and now.
 - ▶ That may seem too obvious to you. **But let's be honest, too often we settle for a salvation that really doesn't start until this life ends.** We go on living day to day anxious and fearful, discouraged and discontent. Yes we have hope but that's for distant, unforeseeable future. In the present, we don't feel very blessed. *But don't you see?* Paul is telling you that you're spiritually richer than you think – right now today.

The Blessing of Sonship

- ❖ Let's consider the first of these four spiritual blessings: **the blessing of sonship**. We already touched on this last week, but we didn't go into the privileges of sonship. We talked about the concept of spiritual adoption where God – in eternity past, before the foundation of the world – made a decision to choose people for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ (vv4-5).
 - ▶ **So in Christ you were chosen from eternity past to experience adoption in the present time when you received the gospel of salvation by faith.** At your conversion, a legal status change occurred in the courtroom of heaven. You went from orphan, alien, stranger to God, to a legal son entitled to all the privileges of sonship.

- ❖ We mentioned last week how being called “sons of God” may sound strange to 21st-century Christian women, but your 1st-century counterparts would've welcomed the label. Because they understood that, in Paul's day, special privilege was reserved for sons. So it was very subversive and pro-woman, for Paul to include Christian women whenever he spoke of sons.
 - ▶ **So far from being gender exclusive, Paul's concept of sonship is extremely inclusive.** His point is that no matter your gender, your ethnicity, your nationality, your socioeconomic status – **if you're in Christ Jesus, then you're all sons of God.**
 - Paul makes that very point in Galatians 3:26-28, “²⁶*for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” So in the gospel, the concept of sonship is redefined to include more than just free Jewish males. It's inclusive!

- ❖ But not to the degree of having no boundaries whatsoever. **Sonship is extremely inclusive but not completely. It's not irrespective of your faith.** Let's not make the mistake of assuming the universal fatherhood of God, that everyone is a child of God.
 - ▶ He's definitely the Creator of all (Acts 17:25-29) but God is not the Father of all. **Sonship is not a gift that comes simply through being born. It comes through being born again.** Remember it's adoption as sons *through Jesus Christ* (1:5). You are all sons of God *through faith* (Gal. 3:26).
 - So if you have yet to put conscious faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, then don't take any comfort in sonship, in this idea of relating to God as Father. That's a spiritual blessing (privilege) reserved for those who have turned from trusting in themselves to trusting in Christ. That's what a Christian is.

- ❖ My favorite professor in seminary was **J.I. Packer**. He says the question “**What is a Christian ?**” can simply be answered: **Someone who has God as Father.**¹ He says this identity is so fundamental to the faith that you can't understand Christianity apart from it. He says, “*if you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father.*”

¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg. 200.

- ❖ But the reality is most Christians don't take time to think about this, which is why I'm saying you're more blessed than you think. We ought to think deeply about what it means for God to be our Father, about what our sonship implies. I can think of two things in particular.
- ❖ **First, sonship implies free access.** If you find me in my office, behind a closed door, with my nose in a book or my eyes closed in prayer, then you shouldn't barge in and interrupt. It's common courtesy, common sense. Everyone I know knows that. Except one. She's almost five, and she'll interrupt whenever she wants. But that's okay because she's my daughter and I'm her father. She's more blessed than she thinks. She's got free access to her father.
 - ▶ Paul says the same thing in chapter 2:18, "*For through [Christ] we (as in Jews and Gentiles) both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*" Through the same Jesus, in one and the same Spirit, we all have access to the Father.
- ❖ But it doesn't just mean free access. **Sonship also implies responsibility.** Remember v4 says we were chosen for sonship "*that we should be holy and blameless before him*". We have a responsibility to grow up to be like our Father. Paul says later on in chapter 5:1, "*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.*"
 - ▶ The Heavenly Father lavishly blesses his children but he doesn't spoil us. **He expects us to live lives that strive to imitate him in his holiness.** That means a responsible life of obedience and self-discipline.
 - Think about royal sons in the days when kings ruled with absolute power. Those boys didn't have the same kind of childhood as us. They were forced to undergo greater discipline and training than other children because they had to be made fit for their higher destiny – to one day reign as king over the land.
- ❖ **The point is a Christian must remember that sonship is no excuse for indifference, for a cavalier attitude towards your faith.** If you're a son of the King of kings, remember what your destined for. You're destined to rule with Christ, as co-heirs. That's great responsibility and not to be treated lightly.

The Blessing of Redemption

- ❖ Let's look at our second point: **the blessing of redemption.** This blessing explains how it's possible for sinners like us to even be recipients of the blessing of sonship, of free access to God and the right reign with Christ.
 - ▶ It makes very little sense when you consider the way Paul describes our human condition in chapter 2. He says we were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked. We were spiritually dead in our sins. We were sons of disobedience, by nature children of wrath. It's not a pretty picture.
- ❖ Later in chapter 5:8, he tells his Christian readers, "*for at one time you were darkness*". Not you had a little darkness in you. No, he says you *were* darkness. **Apparently we're more sinful than we'd like to think.** *So how could God adopt you and I and call us sons?* That's a puzzling question.

- ❖ The word you're looking for is **redemption**. It means "deliverance by payment of a ransom price". In biblical times, it was not uncommon to find yourself in an economic bind where you're forced you to sell yourself into slavery.
 - ▶ You do it out of financial necessity, and your hope is that a generous patron or a rich uncle might redeem you by paying your debt, your ransom. **However it happens, the point is redemption is costly and you can't do it yourself.**

- ❖ Now if you look in v7 you'll notice that our redemption is equated with the forgiveness of our trespasses, our sins. And that makes sense since the Bible often speaks of us being slaves to sin. But think about that with me. If you're a slave to sin and you try to make a ransom payment, you can't actually pay "sin". **Sin is not an individual, an actual person. So in our redemption, who's actually receiving the ransom?**
 - ▶ Is it the devil? No, we're not enslaved to the devil. That's giving him too much credit. We're not in debt to the devil. **Our redemption is not a deliverance from the devil's grasp. It's actually from God's.** We have a sin debt to God. The ransom payment goes to God, to redeem us from his just judgment, to deliver us from his wrath against our sins. And the ransom price paid was the blood of his Son. V7 says our redemption is made possible "through his blood". Through the shed blood of Christ on the cross.
 - So just to be clear, the text is saying that you and I are debtors to God, and the ransom price is too high for us to ever afford. God demands a ransom and yet amazingly he supplies it himself.

- ❖ Here's the implication. Think about it. **If God is both the one who demands a ransom and the one who supplies it, then you know that he's perfectly satisfied.** You know your redemption is complete. You wouldn't have that assurance if God were only the supplier of the ransom. If he were merely the supplier, what if the person he pays on your behalf reneges and comes back at you demanding more?
 - ▶ **But there's no need to fear, no reason to worry, because in our redemption God satisfies his own demands.** That's the great comfort and assurance we derive from the blessing of redemption.

The Blessing of Knowing God's Will

- ❖ Here is a third spiritual blessing available in Christ: **the blessing of knowing God's will.** That's one of the top questions I'm asked as a pastor, "How do I know God's will?" Now by asking that, the person I'm talking to is usually referring to knowing God's will for his life in particular. "What's God's will for my love life? For my future career? What's God's will out of these colleges I've been accepted to?"
 - ▶ But our perspective is too small minded. Our understanding and search of God's will is narrowly focused on our little, finite lives. But God desires to reveal to his children much, much more than that. **He wants to give us knowledge of his will, his purpose, his plans for the entire cosmos, for all things in heaven and on earth. It's his will on a grand scale!**

- ❖ Look at vv8-10. Paul is talking about the riches of God's grace, "⁸*which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*"
 - ▶ **History is not a sequence of random events and unpredictable choices.** It's not cyclical and doomed to repeat itself. No, this says history is moving towards a goal, according to a purpose. For the longest time this plan was a mystery. It belonged in the secret will of God (Deut. 29:29). But now God is lavishing grace upon us, and a component of this grace is the making known to us the mystery of his will.

- ❖ Later in chapter 3 Paul speaks of "*the plan of the mystery hidden for ages*" (3:9), and there it's in reference to the inclusion of Gentile believers in the people of God. So that along with Jewish believers, God is creating a new humanity God with Christ as our head. That's an amazing plan still unfolding in our day.
 - ▶ But here in our text, Paul is talking about something grander. Not just the uniting of Jew and Gentile but the uniting (*anakephalaioo*) of "*all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.*"
 - Later in chapter 1:22, Paul speaks of Christ already being the head (*kephale*) of the church. **Well one day, at the fullness of time, we're being told that all things will be subjected under his headship.**

- ❖ Now the question is: ***Who or what is included in the "all things" mentioned in v10?*** Obviously all Christians, the living and the dead. It would include angels too. "All things" would also include the universe itself. The cosmos. One day creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and will be subjected under the perfect rule of Christ.
 - ▶ And those who reject Christ and refuse his salvation will also be included in the "all things" united in him. Not in the sense of being saved in him. But in the sense of being under the just judgment of Christ. **Paul says one day every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord** (Phil. 2:10-11). Some reluctantly through clenched teeth – but all the same, everyone of us will be subjected under the perfect rule of Christ.

- ❖ This is God's plan. This is his will. It's not a mystery anymore. We know where history is headed. And if you're with Christ, in Christ, you don't have to worry about being on the wrong side of it. **I don't think we realize how blessed we really are to have this knowledge given to us in Scripture, to have this mystery revealed.** These are things even angels longed to look into. Things the prophets of old searched and carefully inquired (1 Pet. 1:10-12). And we take it for granted that God has made known to us the mystery of his will.
 - ▶ Let this sink in. **We worry all the time about not knowing God's will for our lives – for the remaining days we have on this earth. When all the while, we have personal knowledge of God's will for all of creation, for all of eternity.** Church, we are far richer than we think.

The Blessing of a Secure Inheritance

- ❖ This leads to our fourth spiritual blessing: **the blessing of a secure inheritance**. We touched on this earlier when we said one of the privilege of sonship is our destiny to one day reign with Christ. As adopted children we are co-heirs with Christ, sharing the inheritance with God's Only Begotten Son.
 - ▶ Look at v11, "*In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will*". Now in vv12-13 the Apostle goes on to emphasize how this spiritual blessing of an inheritance belongs equally to both Jew and Gentile believers.
 - The "*we who were the first to hope in Christ*" in v12 refers to Paul and his fellow Jewish believers. While the "*you also*" in v13 refers to his Gentile Christian readers. And so when he speaks of "*our inheritance*" in v14, Paul's referring to both groups equally.

- ❖ Now again I don't think we understand how blessed we are. **We don't grasp the magnitude of this – of having a share in the inheritance of Christ**. You see, an inheritance in biblical times was not understood like it is by wealthy or middle class people like us.
 - ▶ We see it as a nice bonus. **Most of us are not depending on our parents to leave behind an inheritance**. We'd get by just fine without one. But in biblical times, your life depended on it. Your inheritance would be to receive your father's vocation, his livelihood. You'd get his farmland, his fishing boat, his carpenter's shop, etc.
 - So to lose your inheritance is to lose all hope. Life would be a struggle to survive. You'd likely end up someone else's slave. So maybe the reason why this talk of getting an inheritance doesn't floor us is because we're so self-reliant that we never felt we needed one.

- ❖ It's also because we're not even sure what the inheritance is. **What's this inheritance?** A mansion in the clouds? A vault full of gold? An 18-karat Apple Watch Edition? Of course not. **The inheritance Paul has in mind is not a material blessing but a spiritual one.**
 - ▶ We get a hint at what that inheritance is in that phrase in v14 about being "*sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance*". That word for *guarantee* was a commercial term. **In ancient times, you'd make a commercial transaction by putting down a guarantee. It's like the downpayment on a mortgage**. You have a mortgage on your house and that downpayment is the first installment of the overall price you're going to pay.

- ❖ So in giving us his own Spirit as downpayment, God is giving us the first installment. He's giving us a foretaste of our future inheritance. **Where one day you'll acquire full possession of your inheritance, that is, you'll get the fullness of God himself**. Christian, this is why I say you are richer than you think.

- ❖ C.S. Lewis has this great little illustration in *Mere Christianity*. He says, “*Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.*”

- ❖ **Some of you had the impression that becoming a Christian meant God was going to come into your life and just help you straighten out the place.** To help clean up some messes. To work out a few kinks. To help you get over a few humps. You know you’re not perfect. You know you need God’s help and you’re thankful for it.
 - ▶ But friend, don't you see? You're richer than you think. You're more blessed than you can fathom. **You thought God sent his Son to the cross for you, just to come into your life to make a better version of you. No, Jesus died to make a brand new you.** To make you into a dwelling place fit for a King, where God himself plans to take up residence (cf. Eph. 2:22).

- ❖ **So think about all those times in life where it feels like God is shaking you up.** Like he’s testing your faith. Like he’s stretching you to the limits. Like he’s knocking down the walls you put up around your precious dreams and ambitions that you’ve tried so hard to protect. He’s tearing them away. God’s doing a number on you. I know it hurts.
 - ▶ But I hope you see now how blessed you are. You thought your inheritance was just eternal life? Having no more sin, no more sadness, no more pain? Oh you’ll get that but much, much more.

- ❖ You're more blessed than you think. Perhaps you do need to think harder. To think more deeply. To think more frequently. Make that a goal this week to discuss around the dinner table or in the small group, and make for yourselves a list of all the spiritual blessings God has given you in Christ. And use that list of blessings to launch you – just like the Apostle Paul – into a doxology of praise, blessing God for blessing you.