

Blessings in Christ

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[0 : 0 0] thanks very much so it'd be worth keeping that open in front of you if you have it there page 976 as we just work through that opening chapter that opening kind of section that introduces us to the whole of this letter when i left home from from preston and moved to manchester for some reason i thought it was kind of my duty to try and convince everyone i met how great preston was and so i'd tell them all about its historic football team its unusually large bus station it had the first ever kfc in britain and to be honest you might guess from that list that i kind of ran out of good stuff fairly quickly i don't think i convinced that many people that preston was the place to be and it certainly isn't so it makes sense i suppose but but this opening passage of ephesians is paul telling us just how great not not a place is but how great that the gospel is and unlike me in my hometown he's not having to kind of scrape the barrel here and make something pretty average sound really good he's able to lay out truth after truth after truth of the great benefits of the great blessings of the gospel these blessings which are all reasons he says to praise god to bless god these blessings which are all found you might have noticed in christ that phrase is repeated time and time again in these opening few verses in him in christ in whom all of paul's message in this introduction and throughout the whole of the book is centered on jesus and the exciting thing for us this morning as a church is that these blessings are for all christians as well have a look there at verse one this letter is addressed to the saints who are in ephesus that word saints it doesn't mean as we might be tempted to think some kind of super christians to the kind of spiritual elite the saints is simply paul's word for everyone who has put their trust in jesus and paul's showing that in this in the gospel this ephesian church these average ephesian christians have something incredible to praise god for through what jesus has done and that encouragement for the ephesian church is a great encouragement to us you know we're kind of if we're honest average people in an average church and yet in the gospel we have these incredible blessings in christ now if this morning you are you're a christian you put your trust in jesus then all the things that we're going to look at are true for you right if this morning you're not yet a christian you're kind of asking questions about that well then this passage shows all the incredible benefits that that could be for you which are on offer if you would put your trust in jesus now these are there for all people who follow jesus and so whether that's us this morning this is a course of great encouragement if that's not as this morning we can look at this passage almost as an invitation to come put our trust in christ and receive these great benefits that paul speaks about now i kind of think of this opening passage it's a little bit like if you imagine a firework before it's launched it is so packed full of incredible and exciting and powerful stuff all in a little space and again like a firework as we work through this letter over the next few weeks we're going to see these truths kind of explode out into something beautiful into something visible to other people into something sort of spectacular in how this works itself out in our day-to-day lives so let's get started with this kind of short but sweet introduction to the letter to ephesians four particular blessings four particular reasons to praise god that paul gives us

and the first one is this praise god paul says for choosing us in christ praise god for choosing us in christ let me read verses four to six even as he that is god the father chose us in him that's in christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him in love he predestined us for adoption as sons through jesus christ according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved these are incredible verses that say that right from the beginning of time before we were even born before even the foundation of the world god has said i know you i know you and even though you're going to go astray i am going to bring you back into my family i'm going to adopt you it is the language used and now straight away this idea of being chosen verse four or being predestined the word there in verse five perhaps that could cause us to feel a bit uneasy well does this simply mean the church is a kind of a closed shop that no one else can join does this mean that it's it's pointless speaking to people about jesus would that mean if you're here kind of asking questions about the gospel this morning well actually that decision is out of your hands but well no it doesn't mean any of those things and it's really important that we see that it doesn't mean any of those things paul says this being chosen by god is not a limitation he says it's a reason to praise god and why is that well it's because it shows that salvation this rescue that god offers is his work from beginning to end sometimes we can almost think that kind of being blessed by god getting these good uh things from god it's almost a bit like when you see sort of james bond or indiana jones trying to jump onto a moving train that we have to get ourselves up to speed and if we can kind of put the effort in and and get fast enough and leap on well then you know we're onto a good thing and we kind of get taken away into these blessings but that's paul saying that's not the case it's not up to us to kind of whip ourselves up in the first place it's god who finds us it's god who knows us it's god who who chooses us from the beginning of time to be his people from a to z this is all his work and it's all done verse five in love and really this kind of choosing it is the reason why why the church above everyone else the church should be people who are characterized by incredible humility i wonder what you think people would say if you ask them what is their view of the church today i'm sure a lot of people would say i think the church is kind of arrogant the church is full of people who think they're better than everyone else and the church is kind of full of people who think well you know we've we've worked this out and so god's kind of pleased with us and blessing us but but you obviously just don't get it that somehow we've earned these blessings in christ well paul cuts that idea away at the very root doesn't he this is all part of god's plan he said this is all for god's glory not ours he chose us we didn't seek him out we've got no grounds for pride whatsoever that the rescue that god provides in the gospel is all god's work all from god's grace and so then what does that mean does it mean we don't do anything does it mean we don't speak to people about jesus does it mean we don't pray for other people it doesn't mean that we don't kind of ask questions and try and find out more no it doesn't mean again any of that because that is how god often chooses to work you know primarily god works through his people god works through our sharing the gospel god works through our prayers god works through our kind of looking at his word the bible now ultimately god works through that invitation that jesus himself offers come to me all you who

are weary and burdened and i will give you rest come all jesus says and yet the incredible thing is that when we come to him how we find that he has chosen us from the very beginning and what's our response to that well it can only be as paul says to praise god blessed be the god and father of our lord jesus christ he has not left us on our own he has sought us out he has loved us long before we loved him long before he was even on our radar he has chosen us in christ and that is the first great blessing that we see in this passage that from before the foundation of the universe god chose us in christ to be his children well moving on to the number two the next major blessing we see here is that uh god paul shows us to to praise god for redeeming us in christ praise god for choosing us in christ praise god for redeeming us in christ and it's as if here paul is kind of moving the timeline forward we began in in eternity past before the foundation of the world well now we move into kind of the the era of history our history our world and we move to 2 000 years ago as we see how that adoption that great blessing of god making us his people it is possible and it's through that redemption that forgiveness that we find in christ verses 7 and 8 in him that's in in christ we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight i suppose the question that we kind of ask is why was it that god needed to bring us back why did we need to be adopted what had gone wrong in the first place to create this distance between us and god well the bible says that that problem is sin or trespasses is the word used here we spoke about it earlier what is sin and the answer was rejecting or ignoring god in the world he created not being or doing what he requires in his law sin is not really a concept we like to think about i'm sure very few of us had conversations with our friends about sin over coffee in the last week because we like to think well we're good people and the mantra that our society really lives by is we'll do what you like so long as it doesn't hurt anyone else and that sounds fair enough doesn't it and what could be wrong with that way of living well the bible says that way of living has got two problems firstly that it ignores god like we've just been saying it's an insult it's really a rejection of the very one who created us if you were to say to your you know to your family well i'm going to go away i'm going to live a good life i'm just going to completely ignore you for the rest of time you wouldn't find many people saying oh that seems like a good approach that seems fair now the second problem is as well i think with this kind of approach to life it doesn't really match up with real life it doesn't really kind of fit with the data if i just do whatever i want to do if i have this kind of me first attitude well that does affect other people i can't help but hurt others and none of us have been through life without being hurt without hurting other people we hurt others we damage our relationship with them because we first ignore god and the way he calls us to live we reject that relationship that's possible with him now in fact the bible says in our natural state without god's intervention we're not children of god we're described instead as slaves to sin we're bound by these behaviors that hurt ourselves and hurt other people and also bound by the consequences the the punishments deserved the cost it would take

to make things right again a cost that we're just not able to repay hence that idea of slavery and in fact in ephesians chapter 2 paul's going to put it even more strongly you were dead in your trespasses and sins he says completely helpless but the great blessing of the gospel is that in christ we're redeemed where we are helpless he has acted and that word redemption in verse 7 that's a word that comes from the slave market so the slaves would be kind of lined up they would be for sale there would be someone's property completely helpless not in charge of their own destiny and yet another could pay the cost to have that slave set free that's redemption that slave has been redeemed it's the central theme in the book of exodus that we looked at before easter where god redeems his people from slavery in egypt now we said time and time again that redemption from egypt from pharaoh was a foretaste that a pointer towards this greatest blessing of redemption in christ the forgiveness of sins and how's that possible well verse 7 is clear isn't it this redemption is through jesus's blood and it's speaking there about the cross these these blessings that we enjoy in christ they came at the greatest possible cost for him and this is right at the heart of the gospel and it's at the heart of some of the songs we've been singing already this morning how are sinful people how are people who've hurt others how are people who've rejected god people like us how are they going to be able to come back to god and be called his children you know god can't just pretend these things don't matter just kind of sweep them under the carpet god is a holy god he is perfect and yet if he gives us the the punishment that we deserve well then there's no chance of this incredible relationship that he's chosen us for it seems we kind of hit a brick wall how are we going to get around this well the only solution is that jesus god himself came and he bore that punishment by his blood we have redemption we have forgiveness and what have we done to deserve this well the answer is absolutely nothing this redemption this forgiveness is made possible at the greatest possible cost to jesus but is all according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us that's why it's such a blessing it's all of these good things that paul lays out for us these are not things that we could earn he's not saying if you if you're this good you get this prize if you're this good you get this prize that's kind of the way our world works paul says these are things to praise god for because this is not something we earn or deserve or have done anything towards but it is his free gift to us in the gospel and really that's what it means to be in christ this phrase that comes up again and again it means as the ephesian church had done to put aside our own efforts to prove ourselves to demonstrate our worth to make our kind of good bits outweigh our bad bits and instead simply to trust in christ and his sacrifice that that gift of grace freely offered that great reason to praise god to give our whole lives to him hold nothing back because he has done that for us and so okay so so far we see these incredible blessings that in christ we have been chosen by god that we have been redeemed and it's all entirely by grace and i suppose the focus in these first two has been kind of on us and god how is that relationship going to be restored and we've seen the answer it's all through jesus it's all through the gospel it's all through the the good news of what jesus has done and this next thing that paul goes on to speak

about helps us see and i mentioned this earlier kind of the scale of the gospel paul shows us that the gospel is not limited to just being about us and god but what jesus has done has achieved has kind of universal eternal cosmic consequences for the whole of creation verses 9 and 10 are kind of the climax of this opening section says god was making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him things in heaven and things on earth i see we've moved now from before the foundations of the world kind of through history through the cross and and the focus now is on the future in the fullness of time a time still to come and what's going to happen what is the gospel going to achieve well it unites all things in christ in jesus everything that is currently divided is brought together under his rule under his authority and so the gospel isn't just about us and god it's about a whole new creation that jesus makes possible and that jesus rules over that jesus holds together and the incredible blessing is that is that we're chosen we're redeemed so that we can be a part of that that we're looking forward to that time when god unites all things in christ all things in heaven and things on earth and that idea of things in heaven that's quite a common theme in ephesians when paul uses that word here he doesn't just mean kind of the sky he doesn't even just mean kind of where god is in this letter paul speaks about the heavenly places in quite a specific way uh referring kind of to the spiritual realm and we'll see this again and again that that reality of the the spiritual and that actually there is more to life than simply what we can see or touch or do science experiments on there are very real forces of good and but also of evil and this is something the the ephesian church would have been only too aware of ephesus was a very spiritual place it was home to the worship of a goddess called artemis it was a place where there were a lot of people were involved in witchcraft and magic in fact a lot of the the people who made up this church in ephesus were people who'd been converted from that that lifestyle who turned their back on that instead to follow jesus but this kind of spiritual side of things was something that surrounded them that everyone was doing and so paul's encouraging him here to say look don't worry about that don't look at what your what your neighbors are doing or what your life used to be like jesus is bigger than all of that and i think it can just be the same for us today you know it's so easy for us to look around and say well what's everyone else up to how does following jesus compare to kind of prioritizing my career above everything else or being the most popular or having all the stuff the comfortable life that i need or being in a relationship you know the world around us is telling us that these are the things that matter and yet paul again is saying to us that jesus is bigger than that he is the one thing that has eternal significance the gospel is what is best everything is going to come together be brought to a conclusion in jesus and the final reckoning it's not those with the biggest bank accounts or the most twitter followers or anything else who are going to be celebrating who are going to be in charge it is those who are in christ and as all things are united in him who are going to be

[20:18] able to to rejoice who have that eternal security we we live in a in a world that you could say is is really kind of characterized by division division between people at local levels or national levels a division between different lifestyles and worldviews division between people and god even kind of divisions between humanity and and nature where we don't look after the the planet as we should or we suffer from natural disasters there is so much division in the here and now at every scale and yet the gospel looks forward to this perfect unity in christ and not a unity which is well let's just kind of agree to disagree and get on with things but a unity which is to agree that god is in control that he works out his plans and that jesus is the very pinnacle of that and again what does paul say for our response to be that well it's to praise god that we praise god for uniting all things in christ and we praise him that if we trust in him that we have a place in that and so so far you see we have this kind of past present and future i praise god for choosing us in christ and for redeeming us in christ for uniting all things in christ that's still to come all these things have been achieved through christ god is won this cosmic victory and yet we await the the fulfillment of that we await the fullness of time when this perfect unity in christ is seen everything that we kind of long for is all summed up in him and yet it's hard to wait isn't it you know any child will tell you throughout the the month of december it is difficult to wait for good things and it's hard to wait for something as incredible as what paul's laid out especially when as was the case for this church in ephesus that they're under pressure i remember the church in ephesus they had all this kind of spiritual stuff going on around it and they were kind of the outsiders they were the the different people they were the people who who weren't going with the flow in fact when paul was establishing the church he eventually had to leave ephesus because people were rioting and while some people believed that and joined this church the majority kind of vigorously opposed paul and what he said and you can join the dots can't you if that's how they treated paul well how do you think they treated the church that remained that followed paul's teaching ephesus is is a church that's under pressure and that's the whole reason why paul is writing to them to encourage them to remind them of these great truths that are theirs in christ and yeah as we said it's it's hard to wait under pressure and so paul closes this opening section by pointing us at our last point to praise god for his guarantee through the holy spirit verse 11 down to 14 it speaks about this inheritance this promised unity of all things all coming together in christ how do we know that is going to happen when it seems so different from what we see around us how do we know that we have a part in that when it seems almost too good to believe well it's because here and now in the present verse 13 paul says that those who have heard the word of truth the gospel of salvation and have believed in him again that's in christ 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 paul says the holy spirit is the seal that shows that people belong to god it's almost kind of like the name badge sewn into clothes to show who their owner is and as that he's then the guarantee the certainty that because we belong to god because

we're his we will be part of his kingdom that kingdom brought in through jesus in the future the holy spirit is not something for special christians the holy spirit is someone who lives in all those who trust in jesus to give us a certainty to give us this guarantee that what paul writes about and promises for the future is ours as well just like the church in ephesus to be a christian in 21st century scotland it means sticking out that's the same you know in the majority of the world throughout the majority of history to be a christian means sticking out it means to some extent feeling under under pressure as we're called to live lives which are are different from those around us we have a different worldview we have maybe different positions on social or moral issues the rest of ephesians is going to kind of lay out a different way of living for those who follow jesus and yet this introduction is here to show us that in the gospel we have a good thing in jesus it's happened we're part of it now adopted into his family but there is still more to come this is not it and yet we can look forward with certainty because we've been marked as his people guaranteed that inheritance that only the gospel can offer by the gift of the holy spirit now we live our lives now in light of what's to come and we live our lives now not for our glory but as paul reminds us as he closes this introduction to the praise of god's glory we can live our lives now not having to prove ourselves not having to push ourselves forward not having to raise ourselves up but instead living lives giving thanks to god for all that he has done that we are blessed in christ now with even more to come you know paul finishes um well paul writes and kind of introduces at this letter with this incredible phrase blessed be the god and father of our lord jesus christ who has blessed us in christ with every spiritual blessing let's pray together