

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 8-27-17

August 27 we will study Ephesians 1:3-14. Discussion questions are:

1. If called on to stand in front of the class and bless someone, how would you go about it?
 - a. If you understand “blessing” to mean saying something good about someone or doing something good for someone would that change how you go about blessing someone?
2. When God promised to bless Abraham, what changed in Abraham’s life immediately? What changed ultimately?
3. How does the word blessing change when you get to the New Testament?
4. How does Paul use the word blessing in today’s text?
5. How do you understand each of the following blessings:
 - a. Chosen
 - b. Adopted
 - c. Redeemed
 - d. Forgiven
 - e. Inheritance
 - f. Sealed
 - g. Mystery revealed
 - h. Access to God
 - i. Experience resurrection power
6. In light of what you have learned today about blessing, how does Matthew 7:11 make you feel?

Sermon: *What Is A Blessing?*

If you were called on this morning to come up here on the stage and spend several minutes blessing me, what would you understand the task to be? I think that would be a rather nebulous request. You would likely stand up here and make some statements that had the word “bless” in them a lot. You might just walk up here and say “Bless you.” and then return to your seat. We use that word “bless” all the time and yet its definition is anything but clear to us. For one person a blessing means financial security, for another person to have God’s blessing means to have good health, for another person it means my relationships are all healthy. We use the word “bless” in all sorts of contexts: “Bless this food.” What is it we want God to do to the food? Make it taste better? “Bless this project.” “Bless my family.” What specifically are you asking God to do for your family? “Bless your heart.” What does that mean anyway? A child falls and skins his knee and we say, “Bless your heart.” He didn’t skin his heart, he skinned his knee! We even have a slang expression, “I had this big fish on and bless God he broke my line.” What does that mean? Is that cursing? Is that just casual, thoughtless use of the word?

Ephesians 1:3 says all spiritual blessings are in Christ. What are spiritual blessings? The great blessing passage of the Old Testament is in Genesis 12 when God promises Abraham that if he is obedient God will bless him. What changed in Abraham’s life when God blessed him? Jesus gathered little children around him and blessed them. Did anything change in the lives of those children when Jesus blessed them?

What does the word “blessing” mean? You need to know that word and understand its meaning and use it precisely because God’s blessing is life’s most precious possession and if you don’t even know what it is, how can you appreciate it? You possess nothing as precious as the blessing of God. But what is this thing called blessing?

Literally the word bless means to speak good or to do good things for another. So when you say, “Lord bless this food.” you are saying, “Do good things to my body with this food.” When you say, “Lord bless my family.” you are saying, “Do good things to my family.” When you bless God you are saying good things about God. Blessing someone is speaking good about them or doing good for them.

There are all kinds of blessings in the Bible. There is the kind of blessing where God communicates to His people. “I will bless you.” There is the kind of blessing where people speak it to God. Like *Psalm 103 - Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.* So God blesses people and people bless God and then there are blessings spoken by God or people over things. *Deuteronomy 28:4-6 - “Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.”* Ed Poblete shared with me that in the Philippines they never open new business or construct a new building without having some religious figure there to bless the place or the event. There is a fourth kind of blessing that is spoken from one person to another. At the end of Genesis Jacob blessed Pharaoh. The worthy woman’s children in Proverbs 31 rise up and call her blessed. If your children walked in the front door of your house and said “Blessed are you mother.”, most American mothers would not know how to react.

So there are all kinds of blessings going on in the Bible. In the Old Testament the word “blessing” occurs 415 times and it usually refers to God sending his favor on someone. He is assisting them in a goal or a project. Most of the time in the Old Testament a blessing takes one of three forms. Most frequently it is the ability to bear children. When God promised to bless Abraham he goes on to say, *“I will...make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.” – Genesis 22:17* Secondly, in the Old Testament a blessing referred to the ability to defeat one’s enemies. *“And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, “Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the cities of their enemies.” – Genesis 24:60* Third, in the Old Testament a blessing referred to the strengthening of friendships. When people met and departed they would typically say, “Bless you.”

In the New Testament the word “blessing” takes on a different meaning. This is especially true in the book of Ephesians. In the New Testament “blessing” doesn’t mean “You will have a lot of children.” or “You will be able to defeat your enemies.” or “Your friendships will be stronger.” It has an intensely spiritual meaning. So Ephesians 1:3 is just extremely important. *“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....” – Ephesians 1:3* Whatever blessings are out there in the treasure house of God have all been handed to us through Christ. That is a whole bunch of blessing! From vs. 3-14 Paul enumerates a lot of those blessings. Do you remember the list

Jesus announced at the beginning of his first sermon, each one began with the word, “Blessed”? At the end of each blessing he says, “Here’s what the blessing is.” Let me just mention a few of those: the kingdom of Heaven, being comforted, being filled, receiving mercy, seeing God. All of those are blessings. They are the result of being in Jesus’ kingdom.

In the book of Ephesians “blessing” primarily refers to salvation. Man by nature is not into spiritual things. The average man on the street can’t talk about spiritual things with you. For that matter lots of church folks can’t either. By nature we are into the things we talk about: houses, cars, holidays, hobbies, kids and grandkids, politics and shopping. Spiritual things on the other hand do not roll off our tongues so easily. To those of us who are in Christ they ought to be becoming increasingly natural.

Let’s notice what some of these spiritual blessings are that we should be able to talk about comfortably.

Ephesians 1:4 – “...he chose us in him before the creation of the world.” Now that’s a spiritual blessing, to be chosen by God long before we were even created. Your salvation was not an afterthought. Before God said, “Let there be light.” He had already planned to save you. You were chosen to be holy and blameless. You were chosen for blessing by God. When Abraham was 99 years old, God said, “Come and walk before me.” He was invited to go for a walk with God. That is a phenomenal blessing, to walk and talk with God. Few men have been blessed with such an opportunity. Enoch was blessed to walk with God and did it so well God took him home allowing him to bypass death. Salvation is essentially God enabling you to be worthy to walk with him.

Ephesians 1:4 – “...he predestined us to be adopted as his sons....” Predestination is a very biblical concept but it must be understood in context. Predestination means one of two things. It either means God put everyone’s name in a hat and began drawing out at random those who would be saved and those who would be lost or it means God chose those who were willing to be chosen, who would listen to the word of truth and would respond to it. He explains that in vs. 13, “...you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit....” – Ephesians 1:13 Those who have been predestined are those who choose to let God choose them. We have been predestined for adoption. To be adopted by God with all the privileges of sonship is a blessing without comparison.

Two more spiritual blessings are mentioned in vs. 7. Ephesians 1:7 – “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins....” We have been redeemed and we have been forgiven. Those words are not identical. Redemption is a word that comes out of the world of slavery. It is better translated “ransom.” We all know stories of someone kidnapped and held for ransom. Paul is saying we were spiritually kidnapped by Satan himself and held for ransom. The problem was no one was rich enough to pay the ransom until Jesus came and paid the greatest price possible to ransom you. The other blessing mentioned in this verse is forgiveness. That means our sins have been placed on someone else’s back and carried away. In the Old Testament once a year on the Day of Atonement they would take one goat, pronounce all the sins

of the nation onto that goat and send him out into the wilderness to symbolically carry the sins of the nation. Jesus became our sin bearer and because of that we are forgiven.

There is another phrase at the end of vs. 7 I want you to see. “...in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” The value of anything is determined by the price. How much is it worth on the market? The value of your salvation is determined by the price that was paid for it. The price was the life and death of Jesus.

There is another spiritual blessing mentioned in vs. 14. “...the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance....” – Ephesians 1:13-14 In Christ we have an inheritance for eternity. I read the other day about a unique will. It simply said, “I, John Jones, being of sound mind, spent it all.” Jesus didn’t spend it all. He paid it all. “I, Jesus Christ, being of sound mind, give it all up.” He gave up his perfect home in Heaven. He gave up his position of being equal with God. He gave up his life. He gave it all up for us.

In that same verse another spiritual blessing is mentioned, the Holy Spirit. In Bible times when you sent a letter you took a ring which had your family seal on it, dipped that in wax, and sealed the letter with it. When the letter arrived, if the seal was broken you would not necessarily rely on what it says. If the seal is intact you know the letter has not been opened. You and I have been sealed with a special seal. There are no other seals like this one in existence. This is God’s guarantee that our salvation is secure. That seal is the Holy Spirit.

In verse 9 there is yet another spiritual blessing called “the mystery of his will.” In chapter 3 he will tell us that the mystery is that the Gentiles have become fellow heirs with Israel in receiving God’s eternal inheritance. Gradually as a congregation we are coming to understand that the church must be diverse in whom it reaches out to. Our calling is to share the mystery of inclusiveness to people of every race and every socio-economic level.

There are 2 other blessings given in chapter 2. One is in vs. 18 and that is access to the Father. “For through him is we both have access to the Father....” – Ephesians 2:18 Access to God! To be able to go into His throne room and speak to Him. What a blessing!

Then in vs.5-6 there is one other blessing, resurrection power. “...when we were dead in our transgressions, he made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him.” – Ephesians 2:5-6 All of us who have been baptized into Christ have experienced resurrection power. The Bible says when you come up out of that watery grave you are raised with Christ.

One of the most powerful pictures of blessing in all the Bible is in the Old Testament in the words the Lord commanded the priests to give to the people. “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.” – Numbers 6:24-26 The essence of blessing is to be assured that we belong to God and he delights in us. To be a blessed person is to be a person who has experienced God’s affirmation. It is to be a person who feels God’s acceptance. It is to be a person who enjoys God’s approval. What oxygen is for the lungs, the blessing of God is for our spiritual man.

The tragedy of the 21st century is most of us look for blessings in the wrong places. We look to people to bless us. We want the approval of people. Real blessing comes only from God. Listen to what Jesus said about that. Matthew 7:11 – “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

“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.” – Ephesians 1:3