Every Spiritual Blessing
Ephesians 1:1-14

When life gets hard, choose gratitude. Thank God for the infinite wealth of spiritual blessings He's given you. You were chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and sealed by the Spirit.

Review: We help people FIND and FOLLOW Jesus
- **FIND** – not because He’s lost but because we’re lost – we help people find salvation in Jesus
- **FOLLOW** – salvation is just the beginning of the Christian life... teach them to obey Jesus in every area of life = become His disciples

**Fall 2017 Goal:** Initiate spiritual conversations with at least 2 people far from Jesus

If your goal is to help people find and follow Jesus... few books better to study than Ephesians!
- Whole Christian life in one book
- Titled series: ALIVE TOGETHER
  - The book tells us how to find life together in the family of God
- 6 chapters – 3 on right beliefs and 3 on right practices
- Covers Trinity, Christology, the Gospel, the Church, Spiritual gifts, the Future, Morality, Marriage, Parenting, Spiritual warfare, Relationships... almost everything you need to follow Jesus is found in this book.

To understand this book, you need to know that ancient Ephesus was a very hard place to follow Jesus!
- **Map** – located in modern Turkey near the western coast
  - Visited Ephesus 2 years ago – here’s some of the things I saw
- **Full of idolatry**
  - Full of statues and temples to the gods
  - Nike – goddess of victory
  - Hermes – god of shepherds and good luck
  - The greatest idol in Ephesus: Artemis
    - her temple in Ephesus = 1 of 7 wonders of ancient world – up there with pyramids
    - hardly anything left of it today
    - but we know it was awesome and in the center – massive statue of the goddess Artemis – covered in breasts or eggs to symbolize fertility
  - All of Ephesus worshipped Artemis – not optional – all of city life focused around her
    - Our 4th of July = their annual Artemis festival – everyone went – where you found a spouse – your civic duty to go and worship her
  - So for a Christian in Ephesus to not worship idols meant cutting yourself off from the life of your city – from business, from relationships, from entertainment... incredible sacrifice
- **Immorality**
  - As you walk the main road in Ephesus you will see this symbol – showed visitors the way to the brothel in the middle of town
  - Prostitution was not “under the rug” in Ephesus – it was out in the open for all to participate in – was normal, accepted
- **Persecution**
  - Acts 19
  - Demetrius, silver smith who made and sold silver shrines to Artemis, noticed that as people in Ephesus began to accept the gospel, they stopped worshipping Artemis, and stopped buying his
shrines. So he riled up the rest of the silversmiths and they came after Paul and led a city wide riot against the Christians.

- Christianity was not popular in Ephesus.
- Paul left Timothy to pastor the church in Ephesus and he wrote the book of 2 Tim to encourage Timothy in that work. He says in 1:8... read 2 Tim 1:8
- To be a Christian in Ephesus was to suffer. Persecution was normal.
- It was not like here in CS where following Jesus is relatively easy. It was much more like following Jesus today in Afghanistan where you’re putting your life on the line to call yourself a Christian.

So, Paul writes the book of Ephesians to tell Christians how to FOLLOW Jesus in an incredibly hard place.

So, where does he begin?
- If you want to encourage a believer to follow Jesus when it’s hard, where do you start?

Let’s find out by reading first 14 verses
- I would usually break up a passage this long and read it in parts
- The problem is: there are no breaks! In Greek v3-14 is ONE SENTENCE!!
  - Talk about a run-on sentence! 202 words without a pause!
  - Like when my son talks about Minecraft – so excited! Doesn’t take a breath.
  - I think Paul got really excited in the course of this introduction – and got caught up in it – and just kept going in one breath.
- So we’re going to read it all as 1 sentence... as Paul intended.

Read Eph 1:1-14
So back to the question: if you are going to encourage believers to follow Jesus when it’s hard, where do you begin?

For Paul: you begin with GRATITUDE!
That’s the big idea of the passage – you see it in v3 – read v3
- Uses the word “Blessed” twice – two different ways
- First time its blessing directed to God = our praise and thanks offered to God
  - “Let us praise God, let us thank God”
- Why? Answer’s in the 2nd use of the word “blessed” – we bless God because God first blessed us
  - He’s been good to us and given us good things
- Paul then spends the next 11 verses listing out God’s good blessings in our lives.
- Fascinating to me: doesn’t start with advice or a to-do list or conviction or warnings...
- He starts with gratitude – he reminds them that God has blessed them in so many ways
- Turns out Paul was way ahead of his time!
  - Recent scientific studies have concluded that practicing gratitude leads to a better life
  - Forbes magazine compiled a list of 7 scientifically proven benefits of practicing gratitude:
    - Leads to better relationships
    - Improves your physical health
    - Improves your psychological health
    - Increases empathy and reduces aggression
    - Helps you sleep better
    - Improves your self-esteem
    - Increases your mental strength
  - Gratitude makes everything in life better
    - I cannot tell you how many times in life I have been shocked by the emotional, physical, and spiritual power of practicing gratitude.
    - It changes everything for the better.
- So when life is hard... respond with gratitude. That’s your first step.
  - Before you pray for easier circumstances
  - Before you talk with friends
  - Before you try to solve your problems
  - Start by giving thanks to God for what He’s done for you... that’s always step 1

Paul begins with gratitude: let’s remember God’s blessings in our lives
But what blessings in particular?

Notice what’s not included in the blessings of chapter 1:
- money or possessions, health, relationships, education, employment, vacations
- When we see #Blessed online it’s usually connected to a physical or material blessing
- But Paul doesn’t include any of them
- Not because any of those are bad – we should give thanks for them!
- But it’s an issue of priorities – all of our physical and material blessings pale in comparison to the wealth of spiritual blessings we have in Christ
- That’s why the poor, unattractive person who knows Jesus is far better off than the rich, beautiful person who does not – our spiritual blessings trump everything else

So what spiritual blessings do we have in Christ?
Paul makes a bold claim: We have EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING in heaven through Jesus
You have everything spiritual you need in life through Jesus – you are lacking nothing if you know Jesus
Paul then spends the next 11 verses outlining 3 of the most significant spiritual blessings we’ve received
  - He doesn’t list all of our spiritual blessings – that would take many chapters!
  - He just gives us these 3...

CHOSEN by the Father, REDEEMED by the Son, SEALED by the Spirit
Let’s look at each of those in detail

1. CHOSEN BY THE FATHER
   - “Chosen”
     - to select something or someone out of a range of options
     - God chose each of us out of all of the human race
     - Verb conjugated in a way that indicates a very personal choice, not a random choice.
     - In other words, God already knew every person who would ever live in infinite detail – all the good and all the bad each person would ever do – and knowing all the facts... He chose you. It was an intentional, fully informed choice.
   - And just to make sure we get the point, Paul uses a synonym in the next verse: “Predestined”
     - “to decide upon beforehand”
     - Long ago God made certain decisions about your life that must come true
   - Now let’s unpack this idea of predestination
   - When did it happen: before the foundation of the world = before Creation
   - Why did it happen:
     - out of love – end of v4
     - out of kindness towards us – end of v5
     - So predestination is NOT based on our worthiness or merit or performance... based on God’s kindness and love towards us.
   - Out of love, He chose us... for what? 2 answers:
     - To be holy and blameless
       - His goal for you is not just to get you to heaven when you die
       - His goal is to make you perfect – sinless, righteous
He’s growing you towards that goal now
He will finish the job when we see Jesus – we will be perfected forever

**To be adopted as sons**
- He predetermined that you would become an adopted son
- Why not “sons and daughters” – ancient context: sons had more rights; God doesn’t give male believers more rights than female believers – we are all equally privileged in His family
- So predestination and salvation are less about getting you to heaven and more about making you part of God’s family – it’s about relationship, not just destination. God chose you to become His child.

- **The word predestination tends to open a can of worms – unleash strong emotions/objections**
  - Let me try to explain how I see election working
  - I’m pretty sure I’m wrong; I don’t think ANY human can fully understand election because it is TOO BIG for us. We are finite. God is infinite. We are time-bound. God is above time. We simply can’t wrap our minds fully around predestination.
  - So I’m sure my explanation is inaccurate in the absolute sense... but I still think it’s more accurate than anything else I’ve ever heard
  - Here are 5 key facts about predestination as it’s presented in scripture...
    - **Truth #1: Freewill still exists.**
      - People really have the choice to believe or not.
      - When a jailer in Philippi asks, “How can I be saved?” Paul doesn’t say, “Hope that you’re predestined!” He says, “Believe, and you will be saved.”
      - Legitimate offer to anyone and everyone. We have the responsibility to believe.
      - No one will be condemned because God didn’t predestine them. They will be condemned because they chose to reject God. The universe is not a puppet show.
      - Somehow predestination and free will exist side by side. I don’t know how. It is beyond the scope of my tiny brain to comprehend it. But the Bible is clear. Both are true.
    - **Truth #2: Jesus died for all people**
      - Including those who reject Him
      - 1 John 2:2 “Jesus is the propitiation/satisfaction for our sins, and not only ours, but also for those of the whole world.”
      - The biblical evidence is plain – Jesus’ death was for all human sin
      - Result: the gospel is available to all, and anyone can be saved – anyone who believes will be saved
      - Jesus’ death is not just for the elect – it is for everyone
    - **Truth #3: God wants all people to be saved**
      - We read that last week in 1 Tim 2:2 – God desires all people to be saved – He does not want hell for anyone
      - Now if God wants everyone to be saved, why didn’t He elect everyone? I don’t know. I have absolutely no idea! We’ll have to ask Him.
      - The key is that God doesn’t hate the un-elect. He doesn’t want them in hell. He loves them more than we do. He loves them more than they love themselves.
    - **Truth #4: All people by nature reject God**
      - Rom 1 – Paul tells us that every person who reaches an age and mental capacity to see God’s fingerprints on creation chooses to worship creation instead of God. That’s just what we do.
      - As we saw last week in 2 Cor 4 – Satan has placed a veil over the eyes of unbelievers so the gospel looks foolish to them.
      - By nature we love sin and hate God
    - **So Truth #5: Salvation only possible if God initiates**
      - God must take the first step towards us because we will never take the first step towards Him
- He must remove the veil placed over our eyes by Satan – He must turn our rebel hearts towards Him
  - So here's how I see it:
    - Before the foundation of the world when God looked into the future He did not look upon a neutral humanity and choose some for heaven and some for hell
    - He saw ALL running towards hell and grabbed some of us kicking and screaming and turned us around to see the gospel, believe, and be saved
  - Why did He pick me and not my neighbor? I don’t know.
    - Not because I’m better or more likely to believe
    - Not because He doesn’t love my neighbor and want him to be saved
    - I really don’t know – God doesn’t answer that question for us
- What He does is tell us just enough about predestination to give us CONFIDENCE
  - That’s ultimately what this is all about: the doctrine of predestination is meant to give believers confidence
  - We are not the ones who chose our salvation – God did, infinite time ago
  - And so if God chose us to be saved before time began, already seeing everything we would think, say, and do, then there’s nothing we can do in this life that could surprise God and cause Him to revoke our salvation.
  - His choice was made eons ago when He already had all the facts. Nothing can change that now.
- You were chosen by name before time began to become a child of God once and for all.

2. REDEEMED BY THE SON
- Read 1:7
- This is HOW a holy God can adopt sinful children like us – through Jesus, His Beloved Son.
- “Redemption” = slave language = freeing a slave
- We were enslaved to the consequences of our sin
  - Rom 6:23 “The wages of sin is death” – death in every sense of the word, both physical death and spiritual death. We were separated from God and under His wrath. We deserved to be condemned.
- But Jesus saved us from those consequences of sin by dying in our place.
  - By His blood, sacrificed for us, we have been forgiven – the guilt of our sin is erased.
  - We are free from wrath and condemnation
- Notice the words Paul uses to describe QUANTITY of forgiveness that God has given us in Jesus:
  - “the RICHES of His grace”
  - “which He LAVISHED on us”
  - God has not been stingy with grace. He’s flooded your life with grace
    - Poured out a hurricane’s worth of grace into your life
    - so much you can never exhaust it
  - God’s grace of forgiveness is like tortilla chips at a good Mexican restaurant.
    - They don’t charge you for them – they’re free
    - And you can’t exhaust them – they just keep coming no matter how much you eat
    - And in a really good restaurant – you don’t even make it to the bottom of the bowl before a new bowl’s brought out.
    - That’s God’s grace through Jesus – forgiveness is not LIMITED... it is infinite. You will never exhaust it. No matter what sins you commit, you will never get to the end of God’s forgiveness.
  - As Paul says in Romans 5... “where sin increased, grace increased all the more” – grace always exceeds sin
- This is the GOSPEL: Jesus died and rose again so that we could be forgiven no matter how horrid our sin
  - God has made that gift of redemption available to all of humanity
  - But He doesn’t force it on us – you must say, “YES”
  - In faith receive the gift of eternal life through Jesus
3. SEALED BY THE SPIRIT

- Read v13
- Referring to wax seals kings and others in authority would use to claim or secure something
  o seal carried the King’s authority – killed if you broke it without his permission
- All my books in my office have a seal with my name
  o If someone takes a book and sells it on ebay, the seal proves, it’s still mine.
- The Holy Spirit is God’s seal on your life
  o No matter what you do, no matter what anyone else does to you, you always will belong to God as His child because the HS has sealed you permanently
- Paul makes a similar point when he says the HS is “a pledge of our inheritance”
  o = a down-payment
  o our inheritance is a resurrected body with God in the new heavens and the new earth
  o That’s what’s coming in your future if you’ve trusted in Jesus
  o God didn’t want to leave ALL of that for the future, so He gave you a down-payment on your future – His Holy Spirit living inside of you now is His down-payment on your future in heaven – the HS guarantees you will be welcomed by God in the next life
- That’s what Paul means when He says the Spirit is given “with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession”
  o we are His possession
  o we’ve already experienced redemption from sin’s consequence
  o we will in the future experience redemption from sin’s presence – that will happen when we are reunited with God in the next life
  o The down-payment of the Spirit is our guarantee that future, final redemption is coming
  o Some of you dropped your kids off in our children’s ministry – put a sticker on them – proof that they belong to you and guarantee that they’ll be picked up by you at the end of the morning!
    ▪ Don’t leave them with us! Be like God. Redeem your kids! That’s what God has promised to do for you and me at the end of this life.
- Point of all this: our absolute eternal security
  o We belong to God and His Spirit is proof.
  o His Spirit guarantees that you are God’s child and will spend eternity with Him.

Summarize: When life gets hard, where do you begin? With GRATITUDE – say Thank You to God
For the incredible spiritual blessings you have through the Father, Son, and Spirit
- CHOSEN by the Father to be holy and adopted
- REDEEMED by the Son to be forgiven of every sin
- SEALED by the Spirit so you know you will be saved

No better way to thank the Father, Son, and Spirit than by singing the Doxology
- first published in 1709, one of the most famous hymns ever written
- we’ll sing an updated version
- the goal: to actually do Ephesians 1 – to give blessing to the Trinity – Father, Son, and Spirit for saving us and blessing us infinitely beyond what we deserve