

When we think about Christmas, we think about... Jesus! But we also think about a whole bunch of other things too, things like family get-togethers, food, college football games, and gift-giving.

Gift-giving: I can't count the number of times people have told me how much they dread Christmas shopping! But I don't think it's because they don't like giving gifts. We love to give our loved ones gifts. But I think the shopping part of the gift-giving is the thing we dread.

God is a great gift-giver. When He gave us His Son, Jesus, He gave us the greatest gift that we could ever receive, that is the gift of salvation. But what does salvation mean? In his letter to the church in Ephesus, St. Paul provided a lot of detail as regards what this gift includes. This morning we're going to talk about our salvation and what this has to do with our daily walk with the Lord.

PRAYER

READ Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ 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,¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

That's a mouthful! One point I want to make before we get started is as regards the kind of reading this is. The letters of St. Paul are in the category of teachings, which we might put in contrast to the other kinds of writings in the Bible, like narratives (as in the Old Testament histories and the Gospels), wisdom literature (as in Job and Proverbs), and poetry (as in the Song of Solomon and Psalms). St. Paul wrote letters to churches in Asia Minor over a period of 15 years addressing specific issues of the day. From these letters we glean the doctrine of the Christian church, like salvation, and patterns of behavior suitable for followers of Christ.

The first chapter of St. Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians* is the object of our investigation this morning. Paul began this letter by explaining to the reader what salvation is. I'm going to provide an explanation of what Paul said, and then we'll consider what this means in our daily lives.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is broken into 3-parts. We see this in how each part is devoted to the work of one person of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The first part of this reading focuses on the Father. We read, **Ephesians 1:3-6, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who [that is, the Father] has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he [the Father] chose us in him [Jesus] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him [the Father]. In love ⁵ he [the Father] predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his [the Father's] will, ⁶ to the praise of his**

[the Father's] glorious grace, with which he [the Father] has blessed us in the Beloved [Jesus].

We read that God has given us **“every spiritual blessing.”** Spiritual blessings are gifts for the heart and spirit which we need in order to live in harmony with the Spirit of God and each other. We know that “God is love,” so one of the blessings He gives us is love. We know that God is patient, so one of the blessings is patience. We know that God is faithful, kind, and generous, so God’s blessings for us include all of these things as well.

On the personal application side our morning meditation might include identifying all of the spiritual blessings we have received from God, giving thanks for them, and then praying that they may enrich our walk with Him and with one another.

We also read that our Father in Heaven **“chose us in (Jesus) before the foundation of the world,”** and that **“he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.”** A doctrine we glean from this is our prolife stance as a church. We believe that a person is conceived in the heart of God even before they are conceived in the womb. Prenatal, a baby is a person. And this is a gift: God knew you, God had a plan for you, God loved you even before you were born.

The other important thing we learn here about our salvation is that God adopted each one of us as His **“son.”** In Bible times, the first born son inherited his father’s entire estate, while all of the other children were left out in the cold. What Paul is telling us is that you and I are like the first born son of our Father in Heaven. Everything He has belongs to us.

The next section is about the blessings from Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity. We read, **Ephesians 1:7-12, In him [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight⁹ making known to**

us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.¹¹ 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,¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

We read that **“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him.”** Earlier we read about how the Father predestined us to be his sons with an inheritance in Heaven, and now we see that Jesus is a part of this blessing too. We don’t distinguish between the three persons of the Holy Trinity as if they were three gods. However, we do distinguish between the different roles they each have in our lives.

So, whereas, our heavenly inheritance comes via the Father and the Son, we read that through Jesus we have **“redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.”**

Our redemption is only attributed to Jesus, for only He, man and God, could shed blood on our behalf, for the forgiveness of our sins on the Cross.

We also read that God has revealed to us **“the mystery of his will,... as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in (Jesus)...”**

The **“fullness of time”** came with Jesus’ Crucifixion and Resurrection. With that work completed God joined all of us together as one unit. He made us one body with many members. He united all things, that is, the church, in Jesus us with a single mission to be a blessing to this world.

On the application side, when we work together in our committees we might remind ourselves of this unity, that it is spiritual, that is in Christ, and that it is for His mission for which we labor.

The final section of this Scripture reads, **Ephesians 1:13-14, In him [Jesus] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him [Jesus], were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his [the Holy Spirit's] glory.**

These verses emphasize the 3rd person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. We read that when we believed the Gospel, we **“were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance....”**

To be **“sealed”** means that you were marked, tagged, identified in some unique way by God as His son. Indeed, in your Baptism you were marked as a child of God with the sign of the Cross on your forehead and on your heart, and nothing can take that away from you. You belong to Him forever.

Here, again, we find the promise of **“inheritance.”** Three times in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit we have been promised an **“inheritance.”** This emphasis is important. It means that God loves you so much that He has given you everything you need from now unto eternity. He wants you to receive this promise with a sense of confidence. He wants you to know that everything He has belongs to you.

In this passage inheritance is the center-piece of St. Paul's explanation of our salvation. Let's think about this for a few moments. First, I have two stories about people receiving unusual inheritances.

There was Tomas Martinez. He was a 67 years old homeless man, living on the streets of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. Police attempted to find him in order to give him the good news that he had an inheritance from his ex-wife who had died. But when he saw the police, he fled! Apparently, he thought they were going to arrest him for vagrancy. Tomas disappeared without a trace. His inheritance was for 6-million dollars! The Bolivian newspapers said he was a “new millionaire

paradoxically not knowing his fortune.” Evidently, Tomas’ ex-wife did not blame him for leaving her several years earlier.

And then there was the brothers Zsolt and Geza Peladi. They were in their 40s. They were so poor they lived in a cave outside Budapest, Hungary, and sold scrap they found on the street for pennies. They learned of their inheritance after charity workers for the homeless in Hungary were contacted by lawyers handling the estate of their maternal grandmother. One of the brothers said, "We knew our mother came from a wealthy family but she was a difficult person and had severed ties with them, and then later abandoned us. We lost touch with her and our father until they died." The brothers’ inheritance was \$7 billion dollars.

Tomas Martinez was estranged from his ex-wife, and the Peladi brothers were estranged from their whole family. But somehow they were reconciled with these inheritances.

Their situation is similar to ours. We were estranged from God because of our sin, our rebellion against His law, because of our wicked, selfish, malicious, and immoral ways. But Jesus died for us anyway. And with the blessing of salvation, God gave us an inheritance.

Some people think that IF they get into heaven, it will only be by the skin of their teeth. Friends in Christ, if you’re in, you’re ALL IN! Your inheritance in heaven is so great it cannot be measured. Your inheritance in heaven should make you feel like a homeless person who has just received the news he’s inherited \$7 billion dollars!

Brothers and sisters, your inheritance is eternal life. So you may live your life with no fear of death. Your inheritance includes the Holy Spirit. So you may live with confidence, knowing in your mind and in your heart that the Lord will guide your way. Your inheritance includes peace of mind and joy in your spirit. So you may live without fear. Your inheritance includes the promise of angels who will watch

over you. Your inheritance includes God's promise to answer your prayers "that your joy may be complete."

Warren Buffett said, "Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone else planted a tree a long time ago."

Someone else said, "What we do for ourselves dies with us. But what we do for others and the world remains and is immortal."

When a person receives a significant inheritance, they can squander the legacy they have been honored to receive, or they can build on it. What kind of legacy will you leave with the inheritance you have received from the Lord?

Friends in Christ, this week let's consider the depth and breadth of our Lord's work in our hearts and in our spirits, and let us give thanks for it.

This week let's begin to build a legacy with the inheritance we have received as sons of God, asking ourselves what can I do with the joy in my heart, my peace of mind, the fearlessness with which I live to be a blessing to the people around me.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.