

40 Days of Gratitude

SESSION 4: 12/18/2022

SAINTS IN CHRIST

EPHESIANS 1:1-23

MAIN POINT

Because of Jesus' work on the cross, we lack no spiritual blessing because we are saints in Christ.

INTRODUCTION

Frisco First Baptist Church is giving away 40 days of gratitude journals. We are hoping the practice of expressing daily gratitude will impact our relationship with Jesus and one another. Please take a journal, spend a few minutes daily reflecting on at least one thing you are grateful for, and write it in the journal.

Have you picked up your journal yet? If so, what are some of the reflections you have written? Is this daily remembrance of gratitude making a difference?

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins by describing how a person is changed when he or she enters into a relationship with Jesus. Spend a few minutes brainstorming together all of the ways you are different in Christ. Create two lists: one of who you were before Christ, and a second list of who you are in Christ.

In Ephesians 1, Paul described the marvelous spiritual blessings that belong to the church in Jesus Christ. All of these blessings are assured to each believer, for they flow from God's grace, wisdom, and eternal purpose. Behind each of these blessings is God's desire that our lives glorify Him.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 1:1-2.

What images come to your mind when you hear the word 'saint'? Does Paul seem to share that understanding? How do you know?

When we hear the word *saint*, we might think of selfless people who never seem to struggle with sin of any kind. But Paul's use of this word is not dependent on a person's conduct; rather, it is a term loaded with an understanding of what happens to anyone who comes into Christ. When we come to know Jesus, we are changed at the very core of who we are.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 1:3-6.

Why is it important to know that God intentionally chose you to be part of His family?

How does knowing that give you confidence and security in your salvation?

What does the fact that God adopted us show us about His nature and character?

It's amazing to think that you have been in the mind and heart of God before the foundation of the world, but that's exactly what these verses tell us. Because of His great love and mercy, God graciously chose to bring us into His family. Because that choice was based in His character and not our own goodness, we can know that nothing we do will make Him reverse that choice.

Why is our adoption to the praise of God's glory? What about our adoption glorifies Him?

Given that, what is the right response to our adoption? What would be an inappropriate response?

Given that we were chosen by God, there is no room for pride. He chose us for His glory, not our own, so we have no claim on that choice. Our adoption doesn't fill us with pride, but brings us low in gratitude as we reflect on the grace of God by which we were chosen in Him.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 1:7-12.

How does your redemption shape the way you deal with your sin and your struggles?

In the case of the believer's redemption, the price paid was the blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:18-19) referring to His sacrificial death. If you are a Christian, understand that God has redeemed you to provide Himself an inheritance. This is part of what He has planned to accomplish through Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus secured the redemption of sinners. Every time a sinner repents and turns to Christ, that redemption is applied to his or her life.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 1:13-14.

What did Paul say was the Holy Spirit's function in salvation? How does the Spirit enable you to live a holy and blameless life?

If the Holy Spirit is the down payment, what are the remaining promises of our inheritance in God through Christ?

Once we repent of our sins and trust Jesus to save us, the Holy Spirit seals our salvation and guarantees we'll always be God's children. We can live confidently, knowing our salvation is secure in Christ for all eternity because of the Spirit. The seal of the Spirit shows ownership; we belong to God for eternity. In addition to sealing us to God in salvation, the Holy Spirit also serves as a pledge, or 'down payment' from God, guaranteeing that He will finish the redemptive work He began in us at the moment of our salvation (see Philippians 1:6).

HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 1:15-23.

What difference does growing in our knowledge of God make in our daily lives? How is your knowledge of God and His power different today than it was five years ago?

What did Paul mean by ‘the eyes of your heart’ (v. 18)? Why do our spiritual eyes need to be reopened occasionally?

The phrase *‘eyes of your heart’* is found only here in the Bible. It’s a beautiful picture of a person’s inner self (or heart) having the ability to see ultimate reality. Natural light must strike our external eyes in order for us to see external realities. Likewise the eyes of our inner self must be enlightened by God’s revelation in order that we may see ultimate reality, the immeasurable greatness of God’s power.

How would you go about your day if you fully understood the power available to you as a child of God? What would look differently about your life?

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian believers shows that God’s will is for all Christians to grow in spiritual insight. Though we might feel powerless in the face of a given situation, with our hearts we see that we share in Christ’s victory.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How does knowing you are adopted by God change your view of yourself and of God?

How do you feel about the quality of love of the One who has chosen you? How does this affect your love for others?

Which of the spiritual blessings in Christ from this passage do you have the hardest time believing is true for you? Why?

PRAYER

Close in a time of praise, inviting your group members to voice sentence prayers, either silently or aloud to the group. Begin the prayer time with your own statement of praise, such as “I praise You, God, that I am in Christ, that I am a saint, and that I am blessed.”

COMMENTARY

EPHESIANS 1:1–23

1:1-2. Paul expressed his authority simply: apostle of Christ Jesus. Apostleship was never self chosen; rather, it was by God’s will. Paul understood saints to be the same as believers. He was not referring to a super class of Christians. Paul’s greeting of grace reminds us of God’s initiative in salvation. He has provided undeserved help for the helpless. Peace (a traditional Jewish greeting) focuses on the result of salvation. Notice

that the twin blessings of grace and peace have their source equally in God our Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:3. The verb blessed as applied to God points first to His kindness extended to others. Its meaning also includes praises returned to Him by those whom He has blessed. The Heavenly Father is the Source of our every spiritual blessing, and for that matter of our material blessings. Here, however, Paul focused on benefits that exist in the heavens, that is, the supernatural realm invisible to natural sight.

1:4-5. The Old Testament Israelites were often referred to as God's chosen people. Now, however, it is Christians whom Paul called the chosen people. In the mind of God, before all eternity we existed, and before Christ died for sinners, God chose us to be in Him. This teaching, often called the doctrine of election, is difficult to fully understand. Yet Paul emphasized the result God intends for His chosen ones: to be holy (morally pure, a positive term) and blameless (free from guilt, a negative term). Predestined persons are the same as those God has chosen. The source of God's saving plan is His favor and will. He was pleased to make this plan, and His determination to accomplish His pleasure cannot be thwarted. The Agent of God's plan is Jesus Christ, His unique Son, who achieved the plan through His death (1:7). The Father's plan called for undeserving sinners to be adopted as His sons and daughters, giving His Son a family of siblings.

1:6-8. Paul moved from the benefits we receive through God's plan of salvation to the benefit God receives: the praise of His glorious grace. When we realize how magnificently God has displayed His grace, we can't help but praise Him. Our inclusion in God's gracious plan (He favored us) occurs only in living union with Christ (in the Beloved), God's Son. Because of His grace, the Father's love for His Son Jesus has overflowed toward us (in love, 1:4). Redemption referred to the payment of a price (ransom) in order to set slaves free. Paul taught that the death of Christ was the price paid to free sinners from their bondage to sin. The basis of redemption is the riches of His grace, God's limitless mercy. One result of redemption is forgiveness. Punishment is no longer due to we who deserve it, because Another was punished in our place. The term lavish means more than enough. God's rich grace toward undeserving sinners has overflowed like a mighty waterfall. Thus redemption brings to us who receive it the wisdom and understanding we need to live right.

1:9-12. God's plan is more inclusive than the salvation of individuals. He will bring everything together in the Messiah. Everything will be recognized as submitting to the authority of Jesus Christ. Nothing and no one will escape. Paul was not teaching universalism here, that every person will eventually be saved. Rather, one day every part of the universe will be renewed and brought into subjection to its true Lord. Through redemption and adoption into God's family, Christians have become His special possession. Paul repeated terms he had already used to stress the settled nature of God's plan. As we have seen, God's choice of persons for adoption brings Him praise (1:5). In the same way, His redemption of sinners and making them His inheritance brings praise to His glory.

1:13-14. In addition to all the other spiritual blessings Paul noted, he now mentioned that believers are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Each believer in Christ receives the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). His presence proves we are truly His children and under His protection. The term down payment referred to a portion of a sales price paid in advance to secure someone's legal claim to an item. The down payment also guaranteed that the rest of the price would be paid. The very Spirit of God in the lives of believers is only the beginning of what we receive in salvation. Paul looked to our future inheritance, the full enjoyment of eternity, when our redemption will be complete. Again

the apostle noted the benefit to God from His wonderful plan. Throughout all eternity, salvation will result in the praise of His glory (1:6,12).

1:17. Paul's thinking moved easily from thanksgiving for his readers to supplication for them. In a nutshell, he entreated God to give them a certain kind of spirit. The term wisdom refers to an understanding of things as they really are and revelation refers to God's truth as disclosed in His Word as well as in His Son. Paul was not interested in his readers gaining abstract information. He longed for them to have personal knowledge of God by a life of fellowship with Him. Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers shows that God's will is for all Christians to grow in spiritual insight. He stressed understanding God's calling on their lives, God's inheritance of them as believers, and the believers' recognition of God's power.

1:18. When we were converted, our renewed hearts were given new 'eyes.' Now God's light needs to strike our heart-eyes. The first ultimate reality we need to see with our heart-eyes is the hope of His calling. God took the initiative to call us as individuals to salvation. This calling became real in our lives when we became Christians ("when you heard the word of truth ... when you believed," v1:13). But all this looks forward to a glorious future hope, the fulfillment of eternal life guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. In Scripture, hope is not some vague expectation but rather is an assured promise. Paul longed for all believers to live in joyful expectancy for the future as a result of the fact that God has called us to Himself. The second ultimate reality we need to see is the glorious riches of His inheritance among the saints. In 1:11 Paul acknowledged that "we were also made His inheritance." The Israelites had been spoken of as God's inheritance (Deut. 4:20; 9:29; Zech. 2:12). Now Christians are called God's esteemed possession. Paul did not think of this merely in individualistic terms; rather, we are among the saints. The apostle did not think it presumptuous for believers to think that we are something very special to God, something he called glorious riches. Paul longed for all believers to see that we are God's prized inheritance.

1:19. The third ultimate reality we need to see with our heart-eyes is the immeasurable greatness of His power to us who believe. Only divine power is sufficient to bring the two previous realities to fulfillment. Thus Paul prayed that believers will get a grip on the vast power that God has deployed. The apostle piled up four words that are similar in meaning. Power in the original language is the basis of the English term dynamo. The Greek word rendered working is the basis of our English term energy. The phrase His vast strength, literally 'strength of His might' translates two Greek terms that when combined suggest power in action, not a mere abstract quality. Paul longed for all believers to be fully persuaded that there is no power shortage with God. He will accomplish everything He has planned for His beloved saints.

1:20. How much power does God have? He has the power involved in raising Jesus from the dead. No other power, whether angelic or demonic, is able to raise the dead. Yet by God's power the death of Jesus was reversed. He received resurrection life that can never die. That same power is already at work in believers. How much power does God have? He has the power it took for seating Jesus at His right hand. Luke described Jesus' ascension from the earth (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). Paul and other writers knew that this meant Jesus had been exalted to the most prestigious position in the universe (Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:3). By in the heavens, Paul meant the supernatural realm invisible to natural sight.

1:21. Four similar terms (ruler and authority, power and dominion) point to various supernatural and natural opponents of Christ. By every title given, Paul was considering names that people use to refer to powerful individuals. None of these threatens Christ's supremacy during the present period or in eternity. Although not all such enemies of

Christ have conceded His sovereignty, they have already been defeated. Christ's enthronement at the Father's right hand demonstrates that He already reigns in complete supremacy.

1:22-23. Paul quoted from Psalm 8:6. There the psalmist was reflecting on the grandeur of mankind, created in God's image, as the pinnacle of creation. Yet human dominion has been distorted by sin. Thus the psalmist also looked forward to the Perfect God-Man Christ Jesus, in whom the true dominion God intended for humanity has been established (Heb. 2:9). The supremacy of Christ, raised from the dead and seated at God's right hand, is summarized by the phrase, God appointed Him as head over everything. Nothing is excluded. But one purpose of this supremacy is for Jesus' headship to be for the church. For the first time in Ephesians, Paul referred by name to the worldwide fellowship of believers under Christ's lordship.