

The Gospel Fills Paul With Joy

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[0 : 00] And we're going to turn to our Bible reading. Do grab your Bible. If you don't have one, we have some spread around the auditorium. Or if you wave your hand, someone would love to show you where one is or bring one to you.

And we're going to be beginning a series in Ephesians. Edward Lobb, who helps our ministry team, is going to be preaching. And he begins in this great letter to the Ephesians this evening in chapter 1.

And we're going to be reading together Ephesians 1, verses 1 to 14. If you're using a visitor's Bible, that's page 976. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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, even as he choose us in him 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.

[1 : 38] In him 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, 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.

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, so that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be to the praise of his glory.

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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Amen. This is God's words, and we'll return to it shortly. Well, good evening friends.

Very good to see you all. Let's turn to Ephesians chapter 1. If you have one of the big red hardback Bibles, you'll find that I think on page 976. Ephesians chapter 1.

[3 : 18] I'm giving to this series of sermons the title, The Glorious Fundamentals of the Christian Life. So we're beginning this new series of sermons today, in this letter.

I've got four Sunday evenings now, four on the trot, in which I'm hoping to cover chapters 1 and 2, and then, God willing, we'll pick it up again at chapter 3, a bit later in the year.

But let me first give you a few words of introduction to the letter as a whole. Whenever we read one of Paul's letters, the big question to ask is, why did he write this letter?

Why did he write it? In our modern world, communication is so quick and simple. You sit down at your computer or your iPad, you tap out what you want to say, you press a key, you hear a sound that says, whoosh, and it's gone.

Another thing is off your to-do list for the day. So you go to Greg's with a light heart, you buy your sandwich, and you quickly forget the message that you've sent. But in Paul's day, it was not like that.

[4 : 29] Writing a document like this was a really big deal. It was a costly thing. Parchment was very expensive. Pens and ink had to be obtained.

Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote this letter. He mentions his chains at the end, chapter 6, verse 20. And then when the document was completed, it had to be conveyed from Rome to Ephesus.

So it had to be carried by hand by some trusted friend. And Rome and Ephesus are something like a thousand miles apart. And two oceans, the Adriatic and the Aegean, had to be negotiated.

So you didn't take the writing of a letter like this lightly. It was a big job. And therefore, there had to be a really good reason for Paul going to all this time and trouble and expense.

So why did he write it? Why did he go to this trouble? I think the best answer is this. It'll take me a minute or two to say it. But the best answer, I think, is this.

[5 : 31] Paul had visited Ephesus for the first time in about 54 AD. The story is told of that very briefly in Acts chapter 18. He stayed there for a very short time, reconnoitering the place.

He then went away, then returned a few months later, and that's when he set to work, determined to evangelize this important city, where he then stayed for the best part of three years, which was Paul's longest residence in any one place.

The story is told in Acts 19, and we saw part of that this morning. Now, we can be sure that the reason he stayed there for such a long period was because he understood the strategic importance of this great city.

Ephesus was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia Minor. Asia Minor covered a large part of what we now know as Western Turkey. There is nothing to be seen at Ephesus today but a few ruins.

I've been there many years ago. Just a few columns are lying about. Nothing. There's no city there now. But in Paul's day, it was a real hub. Situated on the coast, it was a center of trade, it was a center of Artemis worship, and its commercial activities reached out throughout Asia Minor.

[6 : 48] And Paul could see that if the gospel could become well established in Ephesus, it would spread out to other centers of population in Asia Minor, cities like Smyrna and Colossae and Laodicea.

But Paul did leave Ephesus eventually, after that period of three years, because he had work to do in other places. And it was several years later, it could have been six or seven years later, perhaps in the year 63 AD, that Paul found himself in Rome, arrested, handcuffed, able to receive visitors, able to write letters, but not able to go about freely.

So why did he write this letter to his Christian friends in Ephesus all those years later? Well, it's here that we have to do a little bit of sleuth work and become like Sherlock Holmes, though I don't think it's as hard as some of the cases that Holmes had to crack.

In this letter, Paul is spreading out for his readers the gospel and the lifestyle created by belief in the gospel.

If you like, it's the truth about Christ and the consequences of believing that truth and living by it. Gospel and consequent lifestyle. But here's a thing to notice.

[8 : 04] Ephesians, unlike almost all of Paul's other letters, is not targeting any kind of specific false teaching and it's not exposing or countering any specific areas of false or immoral conduct.

Now, in Paul's other letters, there's almost always a problem to be addressed. So, for example, there was false teaching in Galatia and Colossae. There was wretched immorality at Corinth.

At Rome, there was the need for Jewish and Gentile Christians to understand and accept and welcome each other as equal parts of the same fellowship. Now, there had been problems of false teaching at Ephesus and Paul addresses these in 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy because Timothy was for a time Paul's chief representative and responsible leader in Ephesus.

But in this letter, there are no specific problems to be targeted of that kind. Yes, there's general teaching about the constant need to battle with sin and to be aware of the dangers of false teaching and of the attacks of the devil, but no specific targets for Paul to get the sights of his rifle trained on. So, why should Paul feel the need to write this letter which makes no reference to particular local problems? Well, Paul had been living and working in Ephesus for some three years.

[9 : 25] He must have taught the truths contained in this letter to the Ephesians hundreds of times over. That's what he did. He preached the gospel and he explained the Christian life. But, several years had passed and he hadn't seen the Ephesians or been with them.

And he must have said to himself, I need to go over the fundamentals of the Christian faith and the Christian life with my dear Ephesian friends. Paul was the wisest and most experienced of pastors. He knew that however well a church had been taught and equipped in the past, it was in constant danger of drifting. Drifting away from Christ.

Drifting away from battling with sin and the devil. So his motivation in writing was to say to the Ephesian Christians, this is our wonderful gospel, brothers and sisters. Don't forget it. Rejoice in it. Stay engaged in fighting for it and in fighting sin and the devil. Don't give up. Don't be like the jellyfish that got stranded up the beach and lost the will to live.

[10:29] Any church can very quickly drift away from the gospel. In this church, I'm very thankful for this, but in this church the gospel is clearly preached and the ethical implications of the gospel are pressed home week after week.

If that urgent pressing teaching were to be abandoned, this church would quickly become just a branch of the world. a kind of smiley social club which embraces all the world's agendas and becomes indistinguishable from the world.

And this is what has happened to so many churches in recent years and it's the reason for their demise. So if we at this church were to follow the same course, our big aims would quickly be to reverse climate change, to promote rainbow flag values, to assert that all forms of religion, including atheism and paganism, were equally valid and true.

That's what so many churches have done and do today. And where churches take that path, the world applauds them. But they cease to be the church. There's nothing distinctively Christian about them.

Their agenda has become the agenda of the world. But a church that is determined to be true to Christ and true to the Bible has got to be disagreeable or at least willing to be disagreeable.

[12:00] We need the tenacity of a bulldog. A dog which has got its teeth into a piece of fillet steak and is giving it up to nobody. This wonderful gospel with its ethical implications is unique, it's infinitely precious, but the world does not like it.

As Jesus said, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. In other words, my friends, take it on the chin. You're in good company because you're in the Savior's company. You can bear it. So Paul is spreading out this wonderful gospel along with its ethical and social implications to remind the Ephesian church of everything that he had taught them several years before.

And the implication is stick with it, treasure it, re-digest it, get its details deeply into your system. So whatever you do in life, whether you're butcher, baker, or candlestick maker, be above everything else, a man or a woman of the gospel.

Just look with me at the very last verse in the whole letter, chapter 6, verse 24, where Paul says, grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

[13:17] And the implication is love the Lord, Ephesians, with a love that cannot be corrupted or diminished or tarnished, a love that doesn't fade with the passage of the years.

Excusez-moi, as they say in Notre Dame, just take a nice little sip of this fresh Clyde water. Ah, the taste of Scotland, that's better.

The unhappy Christian, the unhappy Christian is almost always the half-hearted Christian. The one who's drawn to Christ, yes, drawn to Christ, but doesn't want to let go of some precious little idol. The truth about the idol is that it has no power to breathe life into our souls. It offers no future in glory, only decay and ruin in the end.

So what Paul is saying to the Ephesians, he is saying to us too because he is our apostle. He's the apostle to the Gentiles. He's our teacher. He's reminding us of the central features of the gospel and we can never tire of thinking about them.

[14:32] The gospel is our life. It's our source of soul nourishment. It's milk and honey to us. It's strawberries and cream. We need to keep feeding on it if we're to be strong and undaunted Christians.

It's our delight. It's our joy. It's the fountainhead of our praise. And as for its ethical implications, we need to be constantly challenged by them lest our lifestyle drift away from Christ and we become indistinguishable from the world around us.

Well, let's turn now to chapter one and see how Paul begins to unfold the great gospel to his readers. I've got three brief preliminaries. First, from verse one, let's notice the two dimensions of where Christians live.

Two dimensions of where we live. Paul is writing to the saints. That means all Christian people. It's not some special elite group. But where do these Christians live? Verse one, they are in Ephesus but also they are in Jesus.

In Ephesus describes their geographical location in the world and that is a temporary home. In Christ describes the eternal reality of where they belong.

[15 : 46] Where is their true home? Now, if you and I are Christians, we are in Glasgow temporarily but in Christ Jesus eternally.

We have a present home and we have an ultimate home. Now, secondly, this theme of being in Christ is rapidly developed over the next few verses.

So look with me from verse three onwards. Verse three, God the Father has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

verse four, he, God the Father, chose us in him, in Christ, before the foundation of the world. Verse five, he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.

Verse six, to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved. Now, the beloved is Jesus. Verse seven, in him, that is in Jesus, we have redemption through his blood.

[16 : 49] verse nine, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ. Verse 10, as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, that is in Christ.

Verse 11, in him, we have obtained an inheritance. Verse 12, we who were the first to hope in Christ, that is Jewish Christians, and then verse 13, in him, you also, Gentile Christians, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

So do you see how absolutely and utterly central Jesus is to the whole gospel? God the Father has poured out his blessings on the church solely by the agency of Jesus.

Christianity is Christ. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians chapter one, all the promises of God find their yes in him, that is, in Jesus.

so God made the promises of salvation blessing throughout the Old Testament, and Jesus is the one who has delivered on them all. So we need to beware of any so-called gospel that speaks only of God, but somehow pushes Jesus out into the margins.

[18 : 06] Jesus cannot be marginalized or relativized. He is at the center of the gospel. He is the gospel, delivered to us by the loving purpose of God the Father. Everything we enjoy from God is in Christ.

Now thirdly, let's notice that Paul always treats the church as a unity, an entity, not just a collection of differentiated individuals, but rather as a body where brothers and sisters belong deeply to each other because we are united in the Lord Jesus.

And if you run your eye again over verses 3 to 14, you'll see the words us and we and our occurring again and again.

If we belong to the Lord Jesus, we really do belong to each other. So we learn to care about each other because we care about the Lord Jesus and he cares about us.

And this is one of the great joys about becoming a Christian. in being joined to Christ, we discover that we are joined to one another. It's we and us.

[19 : 15] It's our Lord Jesus, our gospel, our salvation, our inheritance in heaven. So this means that we effectively take each other by the hand and we help each other along the steep and rocky pathway of life where, to use Pilgrim's Progress language, we meet tempters and temptations and giants who threaten to dismember us and lions and foul creatures who've crawled out of the pit of hell.

We're in this together. When we come to Christ, gone is the isolation and loneliness of so much of the modern world where each individual is just doing his or her own thing, his or her own thing, living life through, very often, through a little screen.

Do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do. He is covered with something very often, aren't they? Because we don't want to listen to real people. We want to hear something else in here.

So we laugh at jokes that nobody else can hear. We listen to music that nobody else can enjoy.

Now the church, thank God, is we and us and our.

Of course, we continue to be individuals who vary enormously. That's obvious. But what unites us is far greater than our little idiosyncrasies. We belong to each other.

[20 : 36] We rejoice together over happy events. We weep together when we suffer losses. Well, let's get our teeth into the text now.

At verse 3, Paul breaks out, almost like a racehorse breaking out of the trap. He breaks out in an outburst of praise. And I think it's worth noticing this because there's a lot of doctrine here in this chapter.

And we can sometimes think of doctrine as being dry and academic. We might even want to say to the apostle, Paul, shouldn't doctrine be dry and precise and fusty and smelling of university libraries where students fall asleep on summer's afternoons?

Of course not, Paul replies. If you understand these things, they're going to set you a light. You'll be dancing. You'll be singing. I'm not going to give you some desiccated lecture on the doctrine of election and the doctrine of predestination or the doctrine of redemption and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

I'm going to teach you about these things certainly because they're so important. But I can only do it as an outburst of praise and joy. 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.

[21 : 54] That's the framework in which Paul teaches these great gospel doctrines. Blessed be the God who has blessed us. That word blessed means all praise, glory, honor and thanksgiving.

It's a word filled with thankfulness and joy and reverence. So Paul is saying how wonderful God is that he should care to bless us so richly. We have deserved nothing and he has given us everything.

Now these blessings, verse 3, are brought to us in Christ. We've thought a little bit about that already. And notice this, they're spiritual.

In the Old Testament, God's blessings to his people were largely material. The blessings of good health, plentiful families, productive farms, protection from enemies and so on.

Now God continues to bless us materially. Every good thing we enjoy comes from his hand. But the blessings of the gospel are spiritual. They are about great realities which are beyond this world.

[23 : 00] Spiritual means non-material. And these blessings are given to us, says Paul, in the heavenly places, which means in the unseen world of spiritual reality.

And that is real, permanent, ultimate reality. Now because we are earthbound creatures ourselves, we tend to turn this truth on its head and we think, well this world is what is solid.

This is real reality. Soil, rock, water, fish and chips. This is the world that we touch and see and eat. But the heavenly places seems very flimsy by comparison.

Not solid, not tangible, not visible. But Paul and all the New Testament writers teach us to reverse that thinking. The New Testament's teaching is that this earth in its present form is the thing that will not last.

The rocks and the mountains and the oceans which seem so permanent will one day be gone. But the heavenly places are the indestructible reality and it's there in that indestructible realm that God has blessed his people with all the blessings described in verses 4 to 14.

[24 : 13] And if you and I have been blessed there, those blessings can never be taken away. Yes, we are in Glasgow but we are also in Christ Jesus and he is in the heavenly places where, if we are Christians, our true home, our true identity is found.

So what are these great spiritual blessings with which we have been blessed in Christ? The blessings that Paul is insisting the Ephesians must never forget. I want to describe them under four simple headings, four simple words.

Chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed. C for chosen, A for adopted, R for redeemed, S for sealed.

C-A-R-S. Cars. Vauxhall. Ford. Chitty-chitty. Anyway, is that a helpful thing for our memories?

Probably not. Anyway, first here we go. Chosen. C for chosen. In verse 4. This is the first of the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places that Paul speaks about. Verse 4.

[25 : 18] Even as he, that is God the Father, chose us in him, in Jesus, before the foundation of the world. So for example, if you became a Christian in the year 2010, was it because God chose you then in 2010?

No. In the year 2010, at the level of your conscious humanity, you chose him. You opted for him. You made a conscious decision to submit to his rule.

But only because he had already chosen you before the foundation of the world. Your choice of him was secondary and responsive. His choice of you was primary and decisive.

And it was made a very long time ago. But notice the place not only of God the Father in this, but the place of Christ as well. He, the Father, chose us in him, in Jesus.

God, the Father, involved us in Christ and with Christ from the very beginning. It was as if the Father was preparing to bring his whole family into the world.

[26 : 28] Christ, his firstborn son, and then along with Christ, many sons and daughters, a great family who will finally in the heavenly places be united with him.

And then still in verse 4, this great family chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, you'll see, have been chosen for a particular purpose. And that is that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Now, holy and blameless is not our natural state. By nature, we are unholy and blameworthy, deserving not to be part of his family, but to face judgment.

But his choice of us indicates that his purpose for us is a purpose of transformation, to take the rough, soiled thing that is you and me in our natural state and to transform us to become beautiful in his eyes.

Now, this process of transformation will not be completed in us while we're still in this world, though it will certainly be started and progressed and moved forward in this life. But finally, in the heavenly places, when we see the Lord Jesus face to face, we shall be like him.

[27 : 44] And all that has spoiled us and soiled us will be gone. And to know that we're chosen to be holy and blameless is a great incentive to us to battle lifelong with sin and never to grow complacent.

Now look at the next phrase. In love, he predestined us. Choosing us and predestining us are two words which describe different aspects of the same wonderful divine process.

according to verses four and five, we are chosen to be holy and blameless and we are predestined to be adopted into his family.

Chosen for holiness, predestined for adoption. Two slightly different ideas, but both of them are parts of a divine decision taken, look at the end of verse four, taken in love.

So it's love, the love of God that lies behind his decision to choose and predestine every Christian. So we're bound to ask, but why should he love me?

[28 : 52] Am I a paragon of every human virtue? Have I won 20 gold stars for being consistently honest, truthful, loyal, unselfish, and kind from my youth upwards? The truth is, I've been a cad.

I've been sly, deceitful, difficult, awkward, in fact, the words of Jesus sum me up exactly. Out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

These things, says Jesus, defile a person. I am a defiled human being by nature. So how could God love me, love me? Well, the answer to that question is ultimately beyond our power to comprehend. But the Bible does give us one or two clues. In the book of Deuteronomy, God says that he chose Israel to be his special nation, not because they were upright and godly, because they were not, but simply because he loved them.

So if Israel were to say to God, but why do you love me? His reply would simply be, I love you because I love you. The reason for his love is not in them, it's in him.

[30 : 13] Now think of it like this. Have you ever met a little boy who has a developed propensity for naughtiness and rebelliousness? Yes, you have.

It was probably you. You might have been a shocker. You might have been the sort of little boy that makes people shake their heads in wonder and turn their faces away in embarrassment. And yet the parents of that little gangster love him, love him to pieces, not for his bad behavior, but because he's theirs.

He's their child. And God loves those he has chosen and predestined for adoption, not for our behavior, but because he loves us and is preparing a wonderful future for us.

The reason for this great love towards us lies not in us, but in him. And it fills us with wonder. It's impossible that we could have been chosen because we're good.

None of us is good. And all this leads us to be humble and grateful, not boastful. We have nothing to boast about. John Calvin wrote this, God's choice of us is free and beats down and annihilates all the worthiness, works, and virtues of men.

[31 : 28] Now that's counterintuitive, isn't it? By intuition, we think, God will choose me because I'm adorable and virtuous and a worthy recipient of his grace. No, certainly not.

He chooses us. He predestines us for reasons deep in his own heart which we cannot fathom. Now, friend, if you're not a Christian at the moment, I imagine there are a number here tonight who are not yet Christians, don't say, my case is hopeless.

I'm clearly not chosen. Friend, you don't know that. You don't know that you're not chosen. All of us here who are Christians were once not Christians, but we did as the Bible told us to.

We repented, we capitulated, we put our trust in Christ, and we began to obey him. And we soon discovered that we had been chosen and adopted into the Lord's family. So if you're not a Christian yet, come to the Lord Jesus, and very soon you will realize that you are his chosen.

Now secondly, adopted. The adoption that Paul writes about here in verse 5 is related in the closest possible way to predestination, because as Paul tells us, Christians are predestined for adoption through Jesus.

[32 : 46] And this adoption into God's family is a wonderful thing. Now in our modern world, the idea of adoption is not necessarily associated with difficulty, but it can be.

we know that adopted children sometimes have been damaged by early failures of care, perhaps by drug addiction in their mothers, and there are other problems. Now don't misunderstand me, when a couple adopt a child and set their hearts on bringing the child up in a loving and secure environment, they are doing a wonderful thing.

Adopting a child is a great act of love and self-sacrifice. And if the parents live wisely and give themselves to their parental duties, early damage can be wonderfully mitigated and a child can grow up into a happy maturity.

It really does happen. And this is not unlike the way that God adopts us, because each of us comes to him as a damaged child. After all, we're the offspring of Adam and Eve.

We're waifs and strays born into a damaged world. We're the sort of people who, as Paul puts it memorably to Titus, hated by others and hating one another.

[34 : 00] That's what we are by nature. God adopts hateful children and like a sculptor bringing something beautiful out of hard granite, he fashions us increasingly to reflect his own features.

The child grows more and more like the parent. The Christian life is a life of continuous growth into the likeness of the Lord Jesus, who is himself the exact image and representation of God the Father.

Adoption conveys to us the power to grow into the likeness of Christ. And it also gives us a great sense of security. In the world of Roman law, in the first century where Paul was writing, an adopted child had the full legal rights and status of the natural children of a family, full protection, full rights of inheritance, bearing the family name with pride.

And so it is with us when we're adopted into the Lord's family. We become God the Father's heirs, co-heirs with Jesus of the kingdom of heaven. That's what Paul says in others of his letters.

So we have a great security. We belong. And this is so important for people like us to grasp, because in our modern world, society is increasingly fractured.

[35 : 22] and more and more people feel isolated. Think of employment. It's far less secure than it used to be. It's rare to have any certainty that your job is going to go on for years and years.

Family life is far less stable than it used to be. Men and women, we know, sadly, leave their partners, start a new relationship with somebody else. Children suffer.

They suffer anxiety and depression, which afflicts so many young people today because they don't have the stability of living with a mother and father who are lovingly committed to each other in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse.

Faithful marriage is one of the great stabilizers and strengths of human society. But many people today have not had the advantage of growing up in a happy and stable home.

I myself came from a broken home. My parents were divorced when I was in my mid-teens. That had a deeply disrupting and bewildering effect on my young life. But as it gradually dawned on me over many years that I was adopted into the Lord's family, my bruised and wounded heart was put together.

[36 : 34] Humpty Dumpty discovered that the pieces could be put together again by the grace of God. And some of you will have come from similar backgrounds, I know that. So do dwell on this great truth of adoption.

If you're a Christian, God is your father. The Lord Jesus is your wonderful elder brother and your savior. You're safe in that family. Even the strongest of human families are eventually broken up by death.

Your mother and father will leave you eventually when they die. But if you're adopted into the Lord's family, you belong to a family that all the powers of hell cannot destroy.

Thirdly, redeemed. Look at verse 7. In him, in Jesus, we have redemption through his blood. Now this word redemption means deliverance by the payment of a price.

In the ancient world, it was particularly used of ransoming slaves. Now in verse 7, the price paid for our redemption was the blood of Christ. The death of Jesus on the cross where he shed his blood in death, that is always the very center of the Christian gospel.

[37 : 50] And do take this in, friends, if you haven't yet. Jesus did not die on the cross simply to give the world an example of how to end your unjust suffering bravely.

Now the cross is the crowning example of how to end your unjust suffering bravely. But the primary reason for Christ's death is different. And it's shown to us clearly in verse 7.

It was to redeem us, to liberate us from the power of sin and death so that we should not be in the end condemned but rather saved. And what does this redemption by blood bring us?

Verse 7 tells us it brings us the forgiveness of our trespasses. Forgiveness. I want to ask you to think for a moment of the worst sin, the worst sin that you've ever committed, the thing that has most troubled your conscience over the years.

If you are a Christian, that sin is forgiven. It's dealt with. You may never forget it, but the Lord forgets it.

[39 : 00] As he says in Hebrews chapter 8, I will be merciful towards their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more. And as Paul speaks of the forgiveness brought about by the death of Christ, the forgiveness that utterly restores our broken relationship with God the Father, it leads him on to speak lyrically beautifully about the way Christ's death not only unites the believer with God the Father but unites and heals the brokenness of the whole cosmos.

He does this. Look at verse 7. According to the riches of his grace which he lavished of upon us in all wisdom and insight 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.

In fact, Paul expresses just the same idea in Colossians chapter 1, chapter 1 verse 20, where he says that through Christ God is reconciling to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Now this is quite wonderful, isn't it? On the human level, the blood of Christ brings about the forgiveness of our sins, but on the cosmic level, it brings about in the fullness of time, verse 10, the uniting of all things.

And the implication is that not only is there a brokenness in the relationship of human beings to God, there is a brokenness and a disorder in the universe. Paul writes back in Romans chapter 8, of the whole creation groaning together in the pains of childbirth right up until now.

[40 : 49] The whole creation is somehow in the delivery room, in the maternity hospital, crying out, I can't bear this anymore. It's hard to know exactly what Paul means by the pains of creation.

No doubt he would include the horrors of earthquakes and tsunamis and famines, pandemics and plagues, but I think we have to suspect that he's thinking more widely and deeply than simply of these relatively limited things, that somehow there is a brokenness and disorder in the whole cosmos, but whatever that disorder is, it's going to be put right in the end by Christ and by his blood shed on the cross.

So isn't Paul opening our eyes here? Think of the cross. Who would have thought, standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus, looking at him hanging there, looking at the blood and the filth and the sweat and the agony of one man in his death throes, who would have thought that that death could bring about the restoration of peace and order to the whole universe?

peace. We're now fourth and briefly, sealed, sealed. Verse 11, in him, in Christ, we have obtained an inheritance.

Now look on to verse 13. In him, you also, that's you Gentiles, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in him, 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.

[42 : 31] So everybody who is a Christian has been sealed with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit promised by God the Father and poured out upon us by the Lord Jesus. Paul is saying the gift of the Holy Spirit is like a seal, not the fish eating mammal, but the seal which a king or a person of noble blood would use to authenticate his documents as being truly his.

So he would take a blob of hot wax, pressing it down on the document and stamping it with his unique initials or heraldic device. Now what Paul is talking about here is possession. Possession. Not so much our possession of our heavenly inheritance, but God's possession of us. Christians are his inheritance.

inheritance. And he has set his seal on each one of us as his guarantee that we belong to him eternally. If you look at verse 14, I think your Bible will have a footnote that gives an alternative translation.

Until God redeems his possession. And that phrase I think better conveys Paul's meaning than the phrase in the main text. The Holy Spirit has been given by God to every believer.

[43 : 47] forever. And Paul's point here is that God has given him to each Christian as a seal, as his guarantee that we belong to him always. And therefore we will certainly be saved.

So friends, we have great cause to rejoice if we belong to Christ. In Christ. In Christ. We are chosen without deserving it. we are adopted into a family that can never be broken up.

We are redeemed from slavery to sin. And we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, which means that God says to each Christian, you belong to me and you are mine.

Forever. Well, let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Amen. 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. So help us, dear Father, to rejoice with the Apostle Paul. And we pray that you will take these great truths and write them on our hearts deeply and permanently to the praise of our Savior, in whose name we ask it.

[45 : 15] Amen.