

Know your Salvation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 May 2019

Preacher: Stephen Ballingall

[0 : 00] So today we're going to be dipping our toes into Ephesians chapter 1 together, looking at verses 1 to 14. But before we do that, before we come to God's Word, let's pray together and ask our Heavenly Father for His help as we turn to His Word.

Let's pray. Our Lord and Father, we thank you that we have the real privilege of meeting together to study your Word together.

Father, we thank you that you've made us sons and daughters of you and have gathered us together to listen to our Father's voice in His Word. And we ask that as we come before you, you would humble our hearts before your Word so that as you speak through it, we'd be willing to listen.

And please, Lord, would you by the work of your Spirit be changing and shaping all of us more and more into the image of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen. So if you could turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1, that'd be very helpful.

It's on page 976 in the church Bibles, which should all be on your seats. 976. This week and next, we're going to be dipping into this chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, looking at verses 1 to 14 today, as we seek to know our salvation, then the rest of the chapter next Wednesday, as we seek to know our Savior.

[1 : 24] So Ephesians chapter 1, and we'll read verses 1 to 14 together. 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 chose 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 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 blood. 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.

[3 : 05] Amen. Do you ever find yourself forgetting some of just the most basic things in life? If you're chatting to me after the service, if we're talking at the door, and you ask me to do something, or to remember something for next week, I can pretty much guarantee that if you don't see me writing it down on a piece of paper, or on my hand, or making a note of it somewhere, I'm not doing it.

I'm not remembering it. There is no chance. The likelihood of me doing what you've asked is just so infinitesimally small. I could genuinely list for quite some time the amount of things I've forgotten to do over the past month, just because I didn't write them down, as the information went in one ear and straight out the other.

Thankfully, nothing too serious comes with my forgetfulness most of the time. The only real outcome of it has been that I've looked like a bit of an idiot, but there's nothing new there. It's one thing to forget normal, day-to-day stuff that's not that important, usually harmless.

But when it comes to something far bigger, and far more important, then forgetfulness can become deeply dangerous. When it comes to things like children or medicine, if you forget those things, it's dangerous.

When it comes to something like our salvation too, well, it really is a dangerous thing to forget who we are in Christ, and how blessed we are to be united to Him. Because if you forget everything you have and are in Christ, then the world we live in starts to look very big, starts to look very powerful and very intimidating.

[4 : 39] And the world does look like that, doesn't it? It looks like it's powerful, it looks like it's clever and has all the answers, and if we're totally honest, it looks like the world out there that we're not a part of is winning.

Have you seen all the outrage about the banning of abortions in the US at the moment? It just feels like the world we live in has kind of collectively banded together and decided that the Bible's view on life is outdated, unnecessary, and just plain wrong.

Particularly in the UK, where the thing's not even a debate anymore, is it? The most vulnerable and voiceless in our society are being killed off. And people, they don't care that the giver of all life wants it preserved.

When I was out for a walk on Monday, I saw that someone had written in chalk at the steps, you know, at the top of Buchanan Street next to the Donald Dewar statue. And they'd wrote a bunch of messages there supporting abortion.

Things like, my uterus, my choice. And they were proudly sitting next to their message while other people took photos. Does anyone even care what God says about it, or what he thinks?

[5 : 47] You see it in the LGBT movement too, don't you? The whole movement seems like an unstoppable force, slowly marching on, taking more ground and convincing more and more people that their way of life is right and worth celebrating.

People's lives are being actively harmed by this, but is our Christian opposition making any difference? Are we gaining any ground? Do we have any hope? Or even in our church building here, in the middle of all these huge office blocks, these big shops, surrounded by thousands of shoppers going past every single day, how many of them even notice the church?

How many of them, not even notice, but want to come in? And how many of them want to know what God says? Want to listen to his word? Are we making any headway in the world?

It's easier for us to feel discouraged than a little hopeless if we look at all of that, isn't it? It's easier for us to feel like what we're doing doesn't matter, that it's not having any impact.

And the church in Ephesus had very similar feelings. The Ephesians lived in a world which looked very powerful, where idolatry had monopolized the religious scene, and the church looked very poor and weak in comparison.

[7 : 07] The church in Ephesus was one born out of great works, but great opposition too. You read of the birth of the church in Acts 19 and 20, and if you want some homework for later, please do read those chapters when you get home.

It'd be well worth reading if you want more of an idea of how the church came to be. You'd read about how Paul travels there, how he proclaims the gospel very powerfully, and many people turned away from idols to worship the Lord.

Some even gathered all of their idolatrous books together, and then they burned them in public, in front of everyone, in a very visible display of public repentance, away from idols and towards the Lord.

But because they did that, because so many turned away from idols towards the Lord, the idol makers started getting worried. They were quaking in their boots because they looked at what was happening and thought, this is going to hit us hard, and it's going to hit us hard where we care the most about, our pockets.

Because lots of people wouldn't bang their idols anymore. So they whipped up a huge mob with tens of thousands of people involved, the whole town. It was enough to fill a football stadium like Hampden Park or Ibrox or Parkhead.

[8 : 14] And then they got the people in a frenzy and tried to get some of the Christians arrested. All the while the thousands of them were chanting loudly in one voice, great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. For a couple of hours. Artemis dominated the religious landscape in Ephesus. The Artemis show was the big show in town.

It was intimidating. And it looked really powerful compared with their wee group of people meeting together, most likely in someone's house to worship the Lord. The church would have felt quite weak and small in comparison to this huge mob and their idol they worshipped in their huge, impressive temple.

And not only that, but Paul the Apostle, the one who brought the gospel to them, well, he was in prison for preaching the gospel. So he looked very weak compared with the power of the world.

Is this being a Christian and is this being part of a church thing, is it actually working? Does God actually know what he's doing? Do we have any hope? Well, if we forget what the Lord has done for us, then it's really easy for us to be overawed by the world, to feel like we're losing and to feel like we have no hope.

[9 : 28] We don't look like we're on the winning side, do we? So let's dig into these verses as we try to know our salvation and remember all that Christ has done for us. So look with me at the first 10 verses of the chapter and we'll see just how marvelously blessed we are in Christ.

So Paul addressed his letter to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus. The small church in Ephesus is full of faithful believers in the Lord.

And Paul wants them to know that despite them being in Ephesus, they have something far more important to hold on to. They're not only in Ephesus, the huge city with all of its religious power and intimidation, far more importantly, the church are in Christ Jesus.

Being united to him means benefiting from all of his blessings. So because they are in Christ, they are extraordinarily blessed.

Look at verse 3. 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. Every spiritual blessing.

[10 : 38] They've got it all. They've got the works. And this lays the groundwork for what Paul is going to share in the rest of the chapter. We won't work through each phrase one by one, but we'll try to sum up all they have in four blessings.

So blessing number one, they are chosen. In verse 4, it says that they are chosen and verse 5, they are predestined to be saved, to be part of the Lord's kingdom.

The Ephesians who thought they were unimpressive and weak-looking compared to everything around them were chosen by God to be his people. They were specially plucked out of all the peoples of the world and chosen to belong and be brought to the Lord himself.

The God of all creation and all holiness and all glory and wonder wanted them to be a part of his people. You might not feel all that impressive or special, but the God of all creation has decided to include you in his eternal plans anyway.

And not only has he chosen you, he's chosen you before the foundation of the world. He's predestined you for salvation. It's a sure thing and it's all based on the work he's done in Christ.

[11 : 49] You've been chosen in him so you can be absolutely sure and certain of your salvation. Secondly, they are redeemed. Verse 7, in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.

The Christians in Ephesus have been redeemed and forgiven their sins and they really knew they were redeemed. They hadn't grown up in the church family like many of us have.

They hadn't grown up in a Christian culture. They grew up in the city that worshipped Artemis proudly and was actively anti-God, anti-gospel. They were a bunch of idol worshippers who had been redeemed, redeemed from idolatry into something far, far better.

The redemption was huge. It brought them from death to life as chapter 2 makes very clear. And it was only possible because of the great cost of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

They redeemed through his blood, the ransom payment which he shed for them. And redemption almost always involves being saved from something for something.

[12 : 56] From something bad for something good. So what are they redeemed for? Well, they are redeemed for the third blessing which is that they are adopted as sons and daughters of God.

They are redeemed into the heavenly royal family made children of the King of Heaven. The weak people in Ephesus who were before their conversion as the next chapter would put it, sons of disobedience and children of wrath are made into sons and daughters of the living God.

The fact that people are redeemed by God is a genuinely wonderful thing. It's amazing that they're forgiven. But even more wonderful is that they are loved and cared for by him.

It's completely undeserved. It's completely due to his lavish grace. Because we're not only given a clean slate but a home and a family with him.

We are indeed right with redeemed by God but we are redeemed into a relationship of family love and privilege as we bear the name of our Lord and Saviour. So once you leave today as you walk along Buchanan Street later on in the afternoon surrounded by the big impressive buildings and the thousands of people who don't take a moment's notice of the church you're walking the streets as part of the heavenly royal family.

[14 : 16] The most privileged and honoured position there is. So don't forget it. Fourthly, they are included in God's purposes for the whole universe including both heaven and earth.

Paul shares what God's purpose is for the whole cosmos with the Ephesians. It's for things in heaven and things on earth. And the Bible is very clear from the outset that every part of the world is fractured in some way.

There is disorder and fracture running right through the whole creation. Paul says in his letter to the Romans that all of creation is groaning for its redemption. And Christ is redeeming, reordering it so that everything does what God created it to.

He's restoring all things so that the world will be as it was always meant to be. In the fullness of time everything there is is being made at one.

Everything is being united and it's being done in Christ. And we'll get to experience that in perfect, united, eternal relationship with him. We don't have time to go into everything this means but it shouts out that what Christ is doing in the world is more than achieving only your individual personal salvation.

[15 : 35] He absolutely does do that but there's something bigger at play too. He's uniting everything, making everything at one, bringing peace to everything including with your heavenly father who you deserve death from.

For the Ephesians they had a very visual promise of this in seeing Jews and Gentiles who were fractured for ages being brought together united as one made it peace and it was the promise of something far greater happening.

the Ephesian church are not some sideshow. They're not some bit part player sitting on the bench watching the real action of the world happening from the sidelines but they are right at the heart of what God's doing in the whole cosmos.

If you're a Christian who is united to Christ then what you're doing in your church is right at the heart of what God is doing in the whole universe because you're joined to the one who's at the center of it all. And they are chosen in him.

In him they have redemption they're adopted as sons through Jesus Christ and included in God's plan set forth in Christ. Everything they have everything they're blessed with is because of him.

[16 : 54] They're the most blessed people on the planet because of him. And Paul wanted the church to remember all the blessings they had in Christ all the benefits they shared in then and there that they are chosen redeemed adopted and included in his purposes.

It's really easy to forget that though isn't it? I know I find it easy. You don't say it to yourself when you wake up in the morning or maybe you do I don't know your morning routine. I know I certainly don't remember it as much as I ought to.

I'm a bit of a kind of Christian goldfish in that sense. Everything goes in I remember it for about three seconds and then I just forget so much of what Christ has done for me which I know right here right now benefit from.

I'm chosen I'm redeemed I'm adopted into God's family he's my father and I'm a part of his plans for uniting everything on heaven and earth. And so are you. If you're trusting in Jesus then all of these verses are true for you.

you are extraordinarily blessed in Christ so don't forget it. And it's worth saying that being blessed in Christ doesn't mean that this life will be easy everything will go well and that we're all just going to have a lovely time together.

[18 : 12] It's not the way the world thinks of blessing and the Ephesians knew that very well. They were almost thrown in prison for believing and we will be called to suffer too. But Paul was reminding them of how blessed they are in Christ despite our lives not being what the world would call blessed.

It's our temptation to forget everything that Christ has done for us. Everything we have because we are united to him. But remembering it is the antidote to feeling overawed and intimidated and defeated by the world.

So that's what Paul says the Ephesians have now. So let's look briefly at what they have to look forward to in verses 11 to 14. We're told in verse 11 that the Ephesian Christians have in Christ obtained an inheritance.

They had an inheritance in the new creation where everything was going to be united in Christ. The Ephesians, they would have looked poor by the world's standards. Meeting in their small house church with the shadow of the great temple of Artemis looming over them.

But they had land with their name on it. Every one of those Ephesian Christians had an inheritance to look forward to in the new creation, the new heavens and earth. Because they're adopted into the heavenly family.

[19 : 28] They have the birthright of sons. So of course they have an inheritance in the new creation. Of course their heavenly father would provide a place for them there. The world around them may have looked down on what the Ephesians had.

What they looked like as a group. Or maybe they were just ignored because they were so seemingly insignificant. But all of that was just a facade that the world saw. They weren't to be pitied but were among the most lavishly blessed people on the planet as they stood to inherit something far greater than anything this world can afford.

But how do they know this is going to come to pass? How can they trust in this promise when their current situation looks so bleak and unimpressive? Thankfully God gives them a guarantee in the form of the Holy Spirit.

End of verse 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 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

God has redeemed them at the cost of his son. He started the work in them and he's surely going to bring it to completion because the deposit the down payment has already been made. And the whole process despite its grand ending had a very humble beginning.

[20 : 53] All they did was hear the word of truth they heard the gospel preached to them by Paul they believed what they heard they believed in Christ and they were sealed with his spirit.

But this simple process of hearing the gospel believing in Jesus and being sealed with the Holy Spirit is what guarantees the inheritance that's coming. The place in the new creation the new united heavens and earth for those who believe.

The result just isn't in doubt. It's not up for debate and there's no question. Those who believe have been sealed with the guarantee. It's like when you buy a house the second you put that deposit down your name's on it it's all yours there's no going back it's time to get the furniture in.

And ultimately all of this all we've seen today is to the praise of God's glory. Did you notice that repeated phrase when we read the passage to the praise of his glory to the praise of his glory at the end of verses 12 and 14.

All of these blessings you have are absolutely meant to assure you of your salvation. But ultimately they declare the glory of God because he is the one who's done it.

[22 : 05] He is the one who's blessed you with every spiritual blessing in Christ put down the guarantee of all that you stand to inherit in him and he's uniting everything in his son so he's the one who should be praised.

The world may look like it's winning like it's getting all the praise. Social commentators who see the world in the way the progressive liberal media wants it to they may seem like they're the ones who really know what's going on and what really matters in society.

And people just love them for it. They get good jobs good money and their voices are listened to and respected for it. Journalists who speak eloquently passionately and convincingly of tolerance and equality in matters of sexuality of life and of gender they're celebrated widely and held up as role models people we should be aspiring to be like.

They're held up as role models for you for your kids and particularly for the younger generation in school. And if you're not on board then well what's wrong with you?

How dare you say that? You belong in a prison for your hate speech. people like this are glorified in our culture our friends and neighbours absolutely love them and want to give them praise and honour for what they say and do but everything is to God's glory to the praise of his glory there's coming a time when the most celebrated people of our world who are neighbours and friends look to for wisdom and direction in life they're going to be coming back down to earth with an almighty bump because the praise isn't theirs doesn't belong to them they don't have ownership of it it belongs to the Lord of everything and whose wisdom and whose son everything is being united so how is all of this going to encourage the Ephesian church and how is this going to help us keep on going as Christians today well the Ephesians were living in this city dominated by the temple of Artemis in all its might with almost the whole town being in on it in Ephesus it was the

[24 : 18] Artemis show and everything else sat quietly in her shadow their church would have felt weak and powerless in comparison and when they walked out on the street it would have been easy for the Christians to feel like they were on the losing side like they had got it wrong as the whole town was so fanatically following Artemis but Paul wanted to remind them of everything they had in Christ he wanted them to know their salvation inside out so they would have it built in drilled deep into their conscience just how blessed they are in him they may have felt powerless but they were adopted sons and daughters of the living God part of the royal family of heaven itself they may have felt irrelevant but they were joined to the one who was uniting everything together in the new creation they may have felt like they were on the losing side but they had their eternal future guaranteed without doubt and for us we live in a world which doesn't want to listen to the Lord does it it certainly doesn't want to listen to his church anyway whether it's abortion the

LGBT lobby or just about anything else the world has no interest in humoring us by listening to something as seemingly irrelevant antiquated irrelevant as the Bible they think we're behind the times they think we're irrelevant they think we're primitive we're not making that much of a mark on the community and to tell the truth a lot of the time we feel like that too don't we we feel like much of the time we're losing like what we're doing isn't making a difference or working at all but that's exactly why we can't fall into the trap of forgetting everything we have in Christ your heart will at times make you doubt our place or relevance in the world and leave you really discouraged but part of the reason we get so discouraged is that we forget all that Christ has bought for us in salvation we forget all the blessings that we have right here right now in Christ your church might feel weak when you look at it it might feel like it's just not making any headway in its local area that it's easily ignored and not relevant but your weak church starts to look a whole lot less powerless when you realize that it's full to the brim with sons and daughters of the king of heaven and the world we're so afraid of we were chosen to be heavenly royalty before the first foundation stone was even laid your frustrations in this life look a little different when you're absolutely certain of where you're going you know you've got it guaranteed and can look forward to all that eternity holds for you your thoughts that we're on the losing side that we're on the wrong side of history start to look very small when you remember that we're joined to the one who is right at the heart of uniting everything there is and who will bring history to its completion in the new creation we need to remember what we have and are in

Christ remind yourself of it remind each other of it and when you're discouraged look to him remember Christ and see things in the light of having every every spiritual blessing there is in him let's pray together our Lord and Father we thank you for every spiritual blessing which you have so richly and generously given us in your son we thank you that we are chosen that we are redeemed that we are adopted and included in everything you're doing through being united to your son we're so sorry for how we are so forgetful of everything we have in you that it causes us to think that your church is weak and powerless but please Father encourage our hearts help us look to your son and remind us of everything we have in him in Jesus name we pray

Amen Amen