

The Work of God in Salvation

by Eryl Davies

The sermon explores the glory of God in salvation, highlighting the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in predestination, redemption, and forgiveness.

Duration: 1:26:29

Scripture: Isaiah 45:22, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 1:7, Ephesians 1:9-14

Topics: "Salvation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Ephesians chapter 1, specifically verses 1-14. He highlights the richness and abundance of God's grace, emphasizing that it is inexhaustible and priceless. The speaker uses the analogy of a swollen river flooding its surroundings to illustrate the superabundance of God's giving. He also discusses the brokenness and imperfection that entered the world due to sin, but emphasizes that God has a cosmic plan and purpose that is working towards a tremendous climax. The sermon concludes with a personal anecdote about a talkative passenger on a long-haul flight, illustrating the importance of taking the initiative to share about oneself in order to be known.

Transcript

Will you please turn to Ephesians chapter 1, and we read together the first 14 verses. Ephesians 1, 1-14. Let's hear the word of God.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and 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 with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in

Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of His glory.

Amen. And may God bless that reading of His word to our hearts. Yesterday we began to consider the glory of God in salvation and we were concentrating on the words in Ephesians 1, verses 3-6, focusing on the work of God the Father, God who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.

Some of those blessings identified are that He chose us in Christ in verse 4. In verse 5, He predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ. And in verse 6, He highly favoured us in the Beloved and all to the praise of the glory of His grace. The Apostle Paul now makes an important transition from the work of the Father to the work of God the Son in verse 7 onwards.

And this is marked by the phrase, in Him or in whom, which we find at the beginning of verse 7. It's important not to exaggerate the difference between verses 3 and 6 and verses 7 to 14 because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are together in planning, accomplishing and applying the work of salvation. However, there is a difference of emphasis and that emphasis in these verses, particularly from verse 7 to 12, are on the work of God the Son. What happens in verses 7 onwards is that the Apostle is telling us in more detail how God the Father's eternal plan has been carried out and how it will be finally accomplished in and by His Son, the Lord Jesus.

So we're considering this morning the glory of God the Son in verses 7 to 12, the glory of God the Holy Spirit in verses 13 and 14. Now I'm very conscious I'm going to be very basic this morning. Some of you may be relieved.

But I'm very eager that young Christians should be able to follow and understand the text here in verses 7 to 14. And I appeal to you, young and old, to grapple with this text and seek by the Holy Spirit to understand what God has revealed to us here. Now the Apostle is praising God because of the way in which God has blessed us in Christ.

And after having mentioned election, predestination, he now begins to identify further blessings with which we have been blessed. So there is in verse 7 redemption and forgiveness. In verse 9 there is revelation.

And that revelation concerns, in verse 10, the restoration which is going to be cosmic and glorious. And I believe what's happening in verses 11 to 14 is that the Lord is giving us reassurance, reassuring His people of their place in His eternal purpose and inheritance. Right at the end of verse 14, as at the end of verse 12 and end of verse 6, we are reminded of our responsibility.

All that God is doing in Christ and working by the Holy Spirit is to the praise of His glory. We look then, first of all, at redemption in verse 7. In Him we have redemption. Redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace.

A young man in Germany in 1505 had just achieved his master's degree. And he planned to study further. There are some students who just want to go endlessly studying and studying.

His father wanted him to become a successful lawyer. But this young man was unhappy and he was depressed. And he tells us the reason.

Inwardly, he felt dirty, sinful. He felt guilty before a holy and a righteous God. When he thought of dying and facing God in judgment, he knew that hell was the only place he deserved to go to.

After all, Martin Luther thought God is holy. God hates sin. God never relaxes His righteous standards.

For these reasons, Luther's heart sank at the prospect of standing before God as judge. How can I be right with a holy and a righteous God? That was Luther's problem. And that is our problem.

And while walking to university after a brief holiday at home, remember how a dreadful storm broke out. A thunderbolt fell on the ground so close to him that he was thrown to the ground. In fear and desperation, he cried out for help.

His life was spared by God. And then he began to seek earnestly for the answer to his question. How can I, a guilty sinner, be right with a righteous holy God? Now, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ gives us the answer.

And in God's grace and providence, Martin Luther found that answer in the word of God in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the apostle is touching on this answer here in verse 7 when he tells us that in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace. Notice again the words carefully.

In him, says the apostle. That is, in Christ. And in Christ alone, the answer is to be found to our sin problem, our estrangement from God.

No one else can help us. No priest, no church, no organization, no ritual, no amount of religion, no amount of doing one's best can save us. That is what Martin Luther discovered.

And millions of people like him. But what does Christ have? Paul writes clearly, we have redemption. It's a possession, it's something which as believers they have received.

We have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of sins. Now, redemption is a key word for understanding our Lord's death.

It's been described as a dramatic metaphor describing our Lord's death. The idea includes the picture of slavery. It includes the idea of being released, being delivered.

And being set free on payment of a price. A costly price. And the idea of redemption is embedded deeply in the Old Testament Scripture.

The most famous example is the Exodus when the Jews were slaves in Egypt. They were suffering helplessly in that country. And God promised through Moses, I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

And in that situation of slavery, God acted in his mercy, fulfilling his covenant promise, exerting his power, freeing his people, judging the Egyptians and their Gants. No price was paid. But the great power of God was exercised on behalf of his people.

And Israel was redeemed. In the Old Testament, a slave or a prisoner or even an animal could be redeemed on payment of a price. The Roman army had the custom of allowing soldiers they'd captured to be redeemed.

They could be set free by the payment of a price. The more important the person, the higher his status, the higher the price. The whole process was known as redemption.

Now it's this idea that our Lord Jesus Christ uses to describe his mission on earth. Matthew 20, verse 28. This is what he says.

The Son of Man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. In order to rescue and deliver sinners from the slavery, the power, the guilt and the punishment of their sin, the Lord Jesus will provide himself as the ransom. His own life will be laid down on the cross on behalf in the place of sinners.

And this is why he's come into the world, he says. He came not to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. The Apostle Paul uses a similar picture in Galatians 3, verse 13.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. How? Well, says the Apostle, by becoming a curse for us. It was costly.

It was expensive for the Lord Jesus Christ. The curse which belongs to us because of our sin fell on the Son of God, our Mediator. There's a price to pay.

And here in Ephesians 1, verse 7, the Apostle reminds us of this. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. And this phrase, through his blood, brings us to the very heart of the Christian Gospel.

Now I know some of you have questions in your mind. You have doubts. There are things that you can't understand about the Gospel.

Some of you are wondering, well, is it really necessary? Why can't God just forgive sin if people repent and believe? I've heard people tell me, well, if someone hurts me or offends me, and if they apologize, I just say, I forgive you. It's no big deal. Why all this fuss about blood, about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? Why can't God do the same as we do in forgiving sins? These are important questions.

Unless you understand the biblical answer to those questions, you'll never understand the meaning of the cross or the necessity of the cross in God's gracious purpose. And so these questions and the answers take us to the heart of the Gospel. And I just want to stay here a little while this morning.

Let me remind you that God is very different from ourselves. Unlike what many New Agers are telling us, we're not part of God. They're telling us that the whole universe is God.

And as part of that universe, we're part of God. We're all divine. We don't need redemption from sin.

We don't need forgiveness of sin. All we need is illumination. We need to understand our innate divinity.

We're all part of this great cosmos, being of God. There are silly people who stand publicly, sometimes on television, speak on the radio, sometimes certainly in the open air before thousands and thousands of people shouting out, I am God! I am God! I am God! It's blasphemous. The tragedy is they believe it.

The Bible says that God is wholly different from ourselves. He is apart from us. He is transcendent.

He is distinct from his creation, but he is present in it. He is the creator, and his creation is no part of himself. God is the eternal being, distinct, transcendent, wholly other than ourselves.

So when we ask our questions, we must begin to realize the vastness of this God and how wholly other than ourselves he really is. But we must go even further and remind ourselves that this transcendent God is holy. We've heard a great deal about this aspect of God's character already this week.

It cannot be emphasized too much. It means that God is spotlessly clean and pure. There's no speck of dirt.

There isn't a grain of evil in the nature of God. His purity is dazzling. It's magnificent.

So much so that the angelic beings in heaven veil their faces, they cry out in his presence, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. I say it reverently, but if it were possible to take an x-ray picture of the very being and essence of God, you'd see absolute purity. God is holy.

And we are unlike God in this respect. We are sinners. We have a sinful nature.

And even as believers, the corruption of sin remains within us. The power of sin has been broken. The guilt of sin has been met in the death of Jesus Christ.

The punishment of sin has been paid. But even in the believer, the corruption of sin remains within us. And there can be many dirty, questionable areas in our lives.

We've never met a perfectly clean, sinless human. I've met people who've claimed to be perfect. I remember as a young student here in Aberystwyth, just three months after my conversion, paying a visit to South Wales and meeting down there in the South, a young couple.

And I was astounded. They told me that they were perfect. They were sinless.

I was so shocked. I was speechless. I looked at them and I thought, well, if that's true, then I can't be a Christian.

I'm struggling with indwelling sin. I heard a few weeks later that they'd separated. They'd been quarrelling.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. The truth is not in us. We've not met a perfect, sinless person.

And yet somehow, we are to think of God as being utterly, completely clean and pure. God is light. And in Him, there is no darkness at all.

But not only is God pure, He also hates sin. Now, unbelievers can be very angry when there is injustice or a violation of human rights. Perhaps corruption.

Perhaps murder. Perhaps the abuse of a young child. You can see them sometimes in the street or outside a court expressing their anger, their indignation.

If only they can get hold of this person who's committed the crimes. Yet, they themselves are sinful. They can be guilty themselves.

Immorality, adultery, stealing, deception, violence. Their hatred towards sin is just partial. Christians, on the other hand, know what it is to hate sin more universally.

Because of the miracle of new birth, God has given us a new principle, a new nature. We have a new disposition. We hate sin.

We love God and love righteousness. There are times, I'm sure, you've known such occasions. There have certainly been times when I have felt like vomiting after hearing and seeing things which have been evil and wicked.

And one's nature just reacts. It's sickening. You feel angry.

God's name is dishonored. His law has been broken. Maybe Satan is someone in the account who blasphemes the name of God and of Jesus Christ.

Who calls Satan God. Worships Satan as God. It's a sense of indignation that comes in one's heart.

They call evil good. But however much we hate sin as believers, we struggle with our own personal sin and indwelling sin. And we can fall into sin.

But God's hatred of sin is intense. It's perfect. All sin is offensive to God whoever commits it.

Whatever it is. God cannot stand. He cannot tolerate sin.

And the anger and the wrath of God is the permanent opposition and reaction of His holy nature to sin. He cannot but react in anger. He would cease to be God if His holy nature did not respond in hatred and opposition to sin.

It's not a whim on God's part. It's not a decision which He makes. It's not an occasional mood which He adopts.

This is His holy nature. And when confronted with sin, this perfect, clean, pure, holy nature reacts. This is our God.

Luther's question, how can I be right with such a God? I'm a sinner. I'm condemned. I'm condemned.

And this God is righteous, the Bible declares. It reminds us that God acts consistently. All that God says, all that God does is consistent with His holy nature.

And His law mirrors and expresses His holy nature. The law isn't something arbitrary. It expresses the beauty, the majesty, the purity of His being.

And God cannot close His eyes to sin. He cannot condone it. He cannot leave sin unpunished.

God maintains, and has to, as God, maintain the standards of His nature and of His law. But you see, as sinners, this means so little to us. Even as Christian men and women, we play fast and loose with sin.

We're not sensitive to it. Sin is hateful to God. God cannot.

It's impossible for Him to lower His standards. Christians do. God cannot.

God cannot pretend that He has not seen sin. He must punish it. His holy nature demands it.

And Luther's problem is our problem. Is there hope? Of course there is. The Gospel gives us good news.

And here we find it in verse 7. In Him, in Christ, we have redemption through His blood. Does it still sound strange to you? The blood of Christ? The necessity of death in order to give us forgiveness? Well, the Bible declares that the wages of our sin is death. It's the sentence which God has declared.

And the Bible declares without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. And the Old Testament helps us to appreciate this. The blood of the animal sacrifices pictures this.

God's wrath is being appeased. Sin has to be punished. The worshippers in the Old Testament taking a sacrificial animal to the priest.

The high priest would place his hands on the head of the animal representing the transfer of their sins to that animal. The animal was then killed. Its blood presented as an offering to God.

And each morning and evening in the temple, the unblemished lamb was offered, killed. The blood was offered at the altar. So what happened in Egypt at the Passover? Before the angel of death came and visited and judged the Egyptians, God's people were to take a lamb and they were to sprinkle the blood over the posts and the lintels of their doors.

And only then would they be safe from death. They would not be punished. They'd be saved because of the blood.

And all these animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, they point forward. They're tokens. They're signing that Jesus Christ is coming.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He will come and sweep away all the types of the shadows in the Old Testament. God has now provided His own sacrifice.

The sacrifice of His own Son. And on the cross, the Lord Jesus bears the guilt and the punishment of our sins. Our sins are laid on Him.

It pleased the Father to bruise Him, to lay on Him the iniquity of us all. He suffered the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God. And the Son of God voluntarily and deliberately surrenders Himself to death and to punishment.

His life is given in death. And through His death and the shedding of His blood, God's wrath having fallen upon Him, and all that that wrath unleashed against Him instead of us, God's law has been satisfied. The curse has been met.

The sinner who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ can be pardoned. Peter in his first letter, verses 18 and 19, tells us we've been redeemed not by corruptible things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as a Lamb without blemish and without spot. I don't know if you've read Beth and Lloyd-Jones' book, *Memories of Sandfields*.

It's a fascinating book and she refers to some of the converts under the ministry of her husband, Lloyd-Jones in Sandfields, Port Talbot. One of those characters she describes is Harry Woods. He'd been converted under Lloyd-Jones and he had a tremendous appreciation of the work of Christ and experience of grace in his life.

One day he was walking along the beach in Aberavon and for many years there had been an old coal ship which had been wrecked. It failed to make the docks one day in a storm. It had broken up on the beach and for many, many years it had just been left there.

This particular day, Harry Woods stood and stared at the wreck of this old ship. As he gazed at it, he thought, this is a picture of my own ugly, sinful heart. My old life.

He wept and wept and wept. He saw his old life. He recalled some of his sins.

He remembered the ways in which he had blasphemed the name of Christ. He stayed there obviously a long time. Then he noticed the water coming in and slowly covering this old wreck.

He was amazed. Within half an hour or so, the old wreck was covered. This was a new picture to him.

He could see the precious blood of Christ hiding all his transgressions. He was covered. He was now justified, declared righteous.

His sin was not to be seen. God had remembered them no more. He had forgotten them.

He had been released from the guilt of the sin. He had been released from the punishment of his sin. As soon as he could, he shared with Lloyd-Jones what he had seen.

And how God had blessed him just seeing that old picture. But notice how verse 7 goes on to tell us about the forgiveness of sins. Why does Paul mention forgiveness of sins alongside redemption? Most commentaries don't even ask the question.

One or two do. And give us one or two helpful suggestions. But clearly, forgiveness and redemption are inseparable.

To have redemption involves having forgiveness from God. But I believe it's mentioned because forgiveness is usually the first thing that we are conscious of, that we experience as a result of our deliverance. As we are released from the guilt of sin, we know that the punishment of our sin has been met by Jesus Christ.

We become aware of forgiveness. Do you recall Spurgeon's conversion? When he was listening to the old Methodist layman preach on that text from Isaiah 45, look to me and be saved all the ends of the earth. As he ran out of steam towards the end of that short sermon, he turned to Spurgeon, young man, you look very miserable.

You always will be miserable if you don't obey my text. Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look, look, look, he said.

You have nothing to do but to look and live. Spurgeon says immediately he saw the way of salvation. He trusted Christ.

And I quote him, I could have jumped from my seat and I could have called out to the wildest of those Methodist brethren who are present, I am forgiven, I am forgiven, I am forgiven, says Spurgeon. A monument of grace. A sinner saved by blood.

It's a precious experience. As we trust in Christ, we are released from guilt and punishment of sin and we have forgiveness. But perhaps Paul is also reminding us that sin is our major problem again.

It's not economic, it's not social, it's not domestic or educational. Sin is our major problem and our wrong relationship to God. It's the first time that sin is mentioned in Ephesians.

It doesn't occur again until early in chapter 2. And the Apostle Paul is underlining the fact that we need to be rescued and delivered from the power and the guilt and the punishment of sin. Notice too that the word sin here is in the plural. And it means trespassing and deviating from God's law.

We've all deviated from God's righteous standards. Our problem outside of Jesus Christ is that we are guilty. We owe a vast debt of obedience to God and we are unable to pay it.

This phrase therefore, the forgiveness of sins, reminds us that Christ redeems us. He has redeemed us on the cross. He's paid the debt for our release.

He's taken our punishment upon Himself. And forgiveness literally means to be released from that which binds and enslaves. Have you ever been caught in some bramble and you couldn't free yourself? I remember as a child being entangled in branches of a tree.

Impossible to free myself. There was no one around. I had to wait ages for someone to come and free me.

This is what Christ does. He frees us. He liberates us from the kingdom of sin and of darkness, from our guilt and punishment.

He pays the price for our deliverance. It's paid for by the Lord Jesus Christ. But notice that Paul adds more to this description of the wonders of God's plan of redemption.

God redeems and God forgives our sins according to the riches of His grace. The Apostle loves this word grace and we're going to come across it again this week. What makes forgiveness mine? Well, it's grace.

Grace alone. Why have I been redeemed at such great cost? Because of grace. It's undeserved.

Why did the Father choose me and adopt me? Because of grace alone. Have I deserved any of His love? No, it's nothing at all. It's completely undeserved.

It's unmerited. It's all of grace. But the Apostle Paul loves this word riches.

He uses it several times in this letter. It's the riches of His grace. God's grace is rich.

It's glorious. It's abundant. It's plentiful.

It's inexhaustible. It's priceless. It's magnificent.

It's effective. It's powerful. God has riches and riches of grace.

And verse 8 emphasizes and amplifies the richness of God's grace again, which He made to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence. Abound is another Pauline word which he loves. Highlights the superabundance of God's giving.

Just like an overflowing river, swollen river flooding the surrounding area. If you've been to Switzerland and been to the Trommelbach Falls in the heart of Lauterbrunnen, a valley near Interlaken in Switzerland, you'll know something of the abundance and the power and noise of the waters there. It was so dreadful and overwhelming, I refused to go in.

And I sent the rest of the family and I stayed outside. I was somewhat frightened by it. But by a clever use of tunnels, galleries, bridges, you can actually see ten glacier-fed waterfalls inside the mountain.

And this raging Trommelbach alone carries the waters of the gigantic glaciers of mountains like the Eger and the Jungfrau. We're told that its force pushes down more than 20,000 tons of glacial rubble every year and 20,000 liters per second. The noise, the power, the depth of the water.

Abundance. Paul is using this kind of imagery. God's grace has overflowed from heaven into the lives of sinners, dirty, wicked sinners.

He has forgiven them. He has redeemed them. God's rich grace has flown towards us in all wisdom and understanding.

Enabling us to see what He has revealed concerning His purpose. Enabling us to understand what He wants us to do and how we should live. How we should please Him.

Oh, blessed, says Paul, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us, He has chosen us, He has predestined us, He has lavished His grace upon us, He has redeemed us, He has forgiven us. His grace has superabounded towards us. Notice then, in verse 9, there is revelation.

Here is another major blessing which the Apostle identifies for us. Having made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself. Revelation.

During a long-haul flight to London last autumn, I was comfortably seated. We'd had a meal. And I thought I was going to read a book.

Then a passenger approached me and wanted to talk. And one of those talkative passengers. I knew nothing about him.

I'd never met him before. And before long, he was telling me all about his life in great detail. All about his work, his travels.

I knew all the details about his family. He told me some of his problems. He told me his plans for his family and for his work.

When I got off the plane, I felt I knew this man. Now, if he hadn't taken the initiative to approach me and tell me about himself, I would not have known anything about him. He would have remained a complete stranger to me.

Now, think of it in relation to God. God is infinite. He is transcendent.

He is apart from the universe. He is hidden away in unimaginable splendor. Human reason cannot penetrate the mystery of God's character or his plans.

Paul tells Timothy that God is the blessed, the only ruler, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. He alone is immortal. He lives in unapproachable light whom no one has seen or can see.

The glorious news is that this hidden God has been pleased to unveil his character. He has stepped something of his glory upon creation. The mountains, the hills, the trees, the seas, they speak of the eternity, the power of God, the Godhood of God.

Man instinctively knows there is a God, that this God is to be worshipped. We have a conscience that God has unveiled more of himself in the Bible through the prophets and the apostles. And we have a sufficient revelation of him and his purposes concerning salvation, concerning the future.

And he has revealed to us the mystery of his plan to us in the Bible. You can understand perhaps now the use of this important word mystery in verse 9. Paul uses the word mystery about 21 times. At the end of Romans 16, he describes the Gospel as a mystery which has been hid, but now revealed.

Colossians 1.29, he says, Christ in you, the hope of glory, this mystery has now been revealed. Our Lord uses this word mystery in Matthew 13 to explain why he is teaching parables. Now the apostle tells us that God, having made known to us the mystery of his will, his plan is beyond our grasp.

And only if he takes the initiative to make it known to us, is there any possibility of us knowing about it. And here it is revealed infallibly in the Bible. This is why it's important to read the Bible.

Familiarize ourselves with the Bible. But this revelation is related in this context to what I'm calling restoration in verse 10. It's the mystery of his will.

Notice in verse 10, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, in him. I want to stretch your minds just a little more. Think forward to the future.

God has a plan. That's what this word dispensation in the authorizing of the new King James means. It's God's plan.

It's a plan concerning the future, the fullness of the times or when the times will have reached their fulfillment. God is revealing to us details concerning the end of the history of the world. The return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He'll return personally, visibly and in glory. It's a plan in which Christ is absolutely central. Notice, in the dispensation of the fullness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ.

It's emphasized at the end of verse 10, in him. Nothing is going to happen apart from Christ. Christ is going to consummate the purposes of God.

They're going to be cosmic. It's breathtaking. It's not just personal salvation.

There's going to be redemption which will extend to the world. In verse 10 it involves all things in heaven. Sinless angels.

Those who love and obey God. Believers who've died. And all things on earth.

Christians still alive. But also the earth itself. Nature.

Waiting for the redemption of the body. It's an amazing plan. It really is breathtaking.

In Colossians 1, verses 16-19, the apostle gives us something of the majesty of Christ in relation to his work as creator. All things, he says, were created that are in heaven, that are on earth, visible, invisible. Whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.

Notice, all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things. By him, all things consist.

The very hands of Christ preserve, uphold the universe. If he was to release his grip of the universe, the world would just disintegrate. By him, by Christ, all things consist.

Later in chapter 2 of Colossians, verse 10, Paul tells that Christ is the head of all principality and power. All angelic creatures. Supernatural beings.

Those powerful angelic beings who obey and serve God. Over all these, Christ is the head. In heaven and on earth.

But you remember how the Bible tells us that there was sin. And some of those angels fell. Satan and his hosts were cast out of heaven.

Adam was created in the image of God perfectly. And then Eve. There was perfect harmony.

No sin. No violence. As husband and wife, they were not quarreling.

No bad word between them. No cold look. No piercing eyes which a partner can give which tells you the story.

You're in trouble. No criminals around. No courts.

No physical abuse of children. Or women. Eve didn't want a divorce.

There's no homosexuality. No drug abuse. No lotteries either.

No war. No famine. No violent storms.

The ozone layer was absolutely perfect. No disease. You didn't need an aspirin.

You didn't need a doctor. And there was no death. No death.

Then there was disaster. The greatest disaster this world has ever known. Sin entered the world.

Paul says in Romans 5. Sin wasn't here before. Sin entered by one man, Adam. A dramatic change takes place.

Adam and Eve are now sinners. They're separated from God. They plunge all humanity with them into a condition of guilt and condemnation.

Rebellion. And wilderness. In the subsequent history, we're familiar with violence.

Pride. Deceit. Lying.

Jealousy. Selfishness. War.

It's part of our human sinful experience. At the fall, a curse was placed upon creation. The creation, Paul says in Romans 8.20, was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope.

So there are diseases now. Disharmony crept into creation. Violent storms, troubles, decay, thorns, weeds, sweat in working the soil.

The harmony, the unity was broken. The original perfection of God's creation gave way to imperfection. But brethren and sisters, there's going to be a huge change.

God's eternal purpose is working forward to a tremendous climax. God has got a cosmic plan. Here's the mystery which is revealed here.

Romans 8.21, Paul tells us that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay. And that groaning of creation, waiting for the redemption of our bodies, it's an exciting prospect. Christ is going to return personally.

He's going to come visibly. Every eye will see Him. He's going to come in glory with the angels, the archangels.

He'll come suddenly. Every knee will bow before Him. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Unbelievers will hear those dreadful words of the Lord Jesus, depart from Me. And in body and in soul, punished in hell eternally. The devil and his evil host thrown into the lake of fire.

The bodies of Christians are going to be raised. We who are alive are going to be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye. We shall meet the Lord in the air.

Better even than our open air meeting yesterday. We'll be with Him. And as we are glorified, so creation is going to be restored to its original harmony and perfection and glory.

How? We just don't know. From 2 Peter 3, we gather that the elements will melt with fervent heat. Then there are going to be new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

Who's going to do all this? It's Christ. He's going to sum up together and head up all things in heaven and on earth. There's going to be perfect harmony.

In Isaiah 11, verse 6-9, we read the wolf will lie down with the kid and the calf. The young lion and the fatling together. The cow and the bear will feed.

Their little ones will lie down together. They shall not hurt or destroy for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. All will then be united.

Perfected in Christ. God will be all in all. And that's where history is moving to.

Friends, we're going places. We're moving. We're moving forward to this final, this last, this glorious day.

God's glorious plan involves the whole cosmos. Notice in verses 11-14, reassurance. If you scan verses 11-14, you'll see that the emphasis alters slightly to that of an inheritance.

And the word inheritance occurs in both verse 11 and also in verse 14. I think there's an important reason for the shift in emphasis. After talking about God's great cosmic plan for the future, the Apostle now becomes more personal.

In verse 11 he says, in Him also we have obtained inheritance. In verse 13 he says, referring to the Ephesians, in Him you also. Then again in verse 14 he says, the guarantee of our inheritance.

These verses from 11-14 are closely related to what he said in verse 10. And I believe that they're providing assurance for Christians, considering their own personal participation in future glory. I know that there's been much controversy over verse 13, and very often the verse has been lifted out of context.

But I want to handle briefly verses 11-14 as a unit this morning. Possibly someone is asking, how do I relate to this future, the consummation of God's plan? Are all Christians guaranteed to arrive there and participate in future glory? Is it possible for one Christian or more to be left out? To be forgotten? Or even for a Christian to fall from grace and to be lost? Could I as a young Christian let Christ down in some situation and not make the glory? Someone may say, well, I'm very weak as a Christian. I don't know what lies ahead of me.

Can I keep it up? Will I get there? That's a big question for some of us. I believe in verses 11-14 that there are four grounds of assurance here. First of all, notice our union with Christ.

In verse 11 again, in Him also. You can't escape this phrase and this teaching in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We've already seen part of the significance of this phrase and the teaching.

But we have to emphasize it again. The Christ who will restore and unite and sum up all things in heaven and on earth, the end of the world, is our Savior and our Lord. He is no stranger to us.

He is the one in whom the Father chose us in eternity. He is the one who has redeemed us by His precious blood. He is the one who loved us and gave Himself for us.

He is the one with whom we have mystical, spiritual union as believers here. We're in Him. He is in us.

We know His life. He supports us. He keeps us.

Nothing is going to separate us from the love of God in Christ. Even our bodies when they die and perish will not be forgotten. They're going to be erased and fashioned like unto the glorious body of the Lord Jesus.

It's impossible for any Christian to fail to enter glory and enjoy this inheritance. Have you ever had the experience of being abandoned somewhere? Well, being in Abbott, I recall one of my six years here having to get from Merseyside to Aberystwyth late May on a bank holiday, Monday and my examinations were starting on the Tuesday afternoon. I'd been home for a long weekend with a friend from college and on the Saturday, quite suddenly a national rail and bus strike was announced and I was stranded.

There was nothing for it but for the two of us very early in the Monday to hitchhike from Merseyside. We made it to Welshpool by lots of small lifts. We walked for two or three miles near Welshpool.

Then a farmer picked us up in his van. He had five or six pigs there. A couple of dogs.

And he was going to just this side of Machynlleth. Brilliant trip. Smelly, noisy.

And he said to us, boys, that's as far as I'm going. You've got to get out. There weren't many cars around that day or that evening.

We had to walk most of the way to Aberystwyth. It's a pleasant walk. It's a bit long.

Abandoned. It was even more painful last October because I'd been preaching over a long weekend in the north of England. Had a marvellous train trip up there.

Everything on time. It was unbelievable. It was an encouraging weekend.

And so the brethren put me on this train. It was to take me right down from the north of England to Bristol Parkway. There was a connection within a few minutes and I'd be home.

I settled on the train. And within about two or three minutes the guard on the intercom told us all the train was to be terminated at Birmingham New Street. This was late, getting towards late evening.

All trains from Birmingham out had been stopped, cancelled because of storms. Trees had fallen. Some of the lines had been flooded.

There was consternation on the train. There was even greater consternation in Birmingham New Street. Hundreds and hundreds of us.

No one seemed to know what was happening and no one seemed to care. Abandoned. People were crying.

People were distraught that there were young students having to reach Bristol or Exeter or Plymouth. I won't tell you the rest of the story but it took me a long time to get back. Abandoned.

And that's the fear that some Christians have. That somehow with this great purpose of God in the future, they may miss out. I can tell you that the Lord is going to take you all the way to heaven.

He will not forget one Christian ever. He is with us. We are in Christ.

We have His presence. The Lord will not take us through our teens and then drop us when we reach the age of 21. He doesn't do that.

He won't take us through our twenties and thirties and then say, well, I've had enough of you. He won't separate Himself from you. You may have walked out on a wife or a husband but God won't walk out on you if you're a believer.

Nor will God leave you when you're old, when you're lonely, when you're ill, when your mind goes, when you're confined to a home. No one wants you. He'll keep you.

He'll ensure that you get to glory. You're being kept by His power. And you are in Christ.

Christ is in you. Don't fear. Secondly, notice God's sovereign omnipotent purpose.

Verse 11. Are you still doubting? Well, look at verse 11. The emphasis is all on God.

Not on the Christian. Not on the Christian strength or will. But on the mighty sovereign God.

In verse 11 we read, we have obtained an inheritance. The NIV translation is very weak here. The idea is that of being made an inheritor by the casting of lots.

But the idea is that of choice. The choice has been made by God. The Greek verb is in the passive mood here.

It's not essentially my decision. It's what God has done. We've received this inheritance because of God.

We did nothing to deserve it. God has predestined. It's God's decision.

There's further emphasis in verse 11. Some of the key words used in verses 4 and 5 are used again here. The choice was made by God.

It's according to His purpose. This is His great plan. And His plan involves us personally.

Again, He says He works all things according to the counsel of His will. No one suggested to God what He should do or who He should save. No one sent Him a letter or a petition.

It shows us unconditionally in the Lord Jesus Christ. God did it. He did it because He loved us.

It is His purpose. And He won't fail. He has redeemed us in Christ.

He has adopted us. He has sent His Spirit into our hearts. He has committed to us.

He has sealed His own covenant with His people with the blood of Jesus Christ. It's an eternal covenant. He will never abandon you.

And this God is working, energizing, according to the counsel of His will. He has the power to accomplish it, to keep every believer, however weak we may feel we are. Nothing will stop Him from bringing all His elect to participate in glory and in His cosmic regeneration of the universe.

Thirdly, notice saving faith here in verses 12 and 13. It's a fascinating and encouraging and grand of assurance here. There's a contrast here.

In verse 12, the apostle refers in the first person plural to we. Then he further describes the we as those who first trusted in Christ in verse 12. Here are the believing Jews who before the Gentiles trusted in the Messiah.

Then in verses 13-14, by contrast, he turns to the Gentile believers in Ephesus. In Him, you also. They too had received the Gospel.

They'd heard. They trusted. And Paul wants them to know that what is true for the church is true for them personally.

They're in God's plan. There's something big being expressed here, I believe, because not only is it the beginning of their Christian lives, but it's the commencement of God's great plan being initiated. All things in heaven and earth are going to be brought together under Christ's headship.

Here are Jews and Gentile believers, one in Christ, the middle wall of partition being broken down. And the Lord is moving, marching forward. It's pointing to the great fulfillment of this cosmic plan.

It's exciting. I hear reports in Israel, for example, of Jewish and Arab Christians in some of the assemblies in Israel, one in Christ, loving each other, embracing each other, praying for each other, living together. There are some Republican and Unionist Christians in Ireland who know this deep unity.

I've been in a situation quite recently where there have been Congolese in Rwanda, Angola, Sierra Leonean, Cameroonian and other people, some of them believers, together in Jesus Christ. Many of them were asylum seekers. Or have you been in an Asian fellowship? People from different countries in Asia.

Sometimes I've been in Asia, in situations where Japanese and Koreans are together. And they've hated one another because of the cruelties inflicted on the Koreans by Japan. To see the harmony, the love, acceptance of one another and forgiveness.

This is just a pale picture of what's going to happen. We're all going to be united as believers in Christ. The whole universe is going to be redeemed and restored.

And then notice, in verses 13 and 14, the sealing with the Holy Spirit. We're introduced now to the work of God the Spirit. My time has gone, unfortunately.

But there are 11 references to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians. And they cover varied aspects of his ministry in the church and in the application of salvation. God the Father, of course, plans our salvation.

Appoints Christ as mediator. He chooses the elect. He predestines us to adoption.

He reveals his plan. He sends his Son. He spares him not on the cross.

He raises him from the dead. God the Son is involved. He came from heaven.

He humbled himself as a servant. Became man. He was obedient to death, the death of the cross.

He bore our sin. His own body on the tree. He rose.

And in his exaltation, he ascended. He's now in session, the right hand of God the Father. He's ruling over the entire universe.

He's the head of the church. And God the Holy Spirit. The one who led prophets and apostles to speak and to write the word of God infallibly.

Who were carried along as though moved by the Spirit of God. Christ's human nature is conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, miraculously, by this gracious Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fills and anoints our Lord Jesus for his ministry.

And in his more subjective work, he applies salvation to the elect. He's the one who gives us new birth. He regenerates.

He indwells believers. He sanctifies. It's in his strength and his power that we're able to mortify the deeds of the body.

He illumines our minds. He helps us understand the word. He helps us in prayer.

He revives the church. He empowers preachers in the proclamation of the word. He can visit believers in varying degrees of power and influence.

And here he's described as the Holy Spirit of promise at the end of verse 13. He's pointed to in Ezekiel 36 and 37, Isaiah chapters 40 to 66. Joel chapter 2. Our Lord promises the comforter in John chapters 14, 15, and 16.

And we're living as believers, as a Christian church, in this age of the Spirit, the plenitude of the Holy Spirit. God, the Holy Spirit, applying salvation and being resident in the church. It's glorious.

Who are the ones being sealed in verse 13? Only Christians. There are no pagan saints. There are no anonymous Christians in other religions.

Only those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. What's the function of the seal? Well, there's an amazing amount of agreement between commentators on this. Agreeing on the original function of the seal, at least.

That one purpose of the seal was to authenticate and to confirm as being genuine. So the seal, the stamp of the king, would indicate that that letter, that document, was genuine. There are still some rare occasions when, as a college, we have to set the college seal on a letter.

To make sure it's not a counterfeit. That someone isn't trying to take my signature and to say things that we don't intend. And so the Holy Spirit confirms and authenticates to individual Christians that we are his people.

He does so by producing in our lives the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5.22. The apostle lists that fruit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Love to God. I'm able to love awkward Christians. Can I say it that way? Difficult Christians.

Christians who rub us up the wrong way. I'm given love by and through the Spirit to love them, to forgive. I can know joy in the most difficult, the most sad situation.

It's the fruit of the Spirit. I can know peace. And the world can be amazed at times.

Remember the hymn writer having news of the drowning of his wife and daughters. And writing the words of the hymn, When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll. Peace.

It doesn't make sense in the world. But the Spirit of God is authenticating, confirming that we are his people. He's producing fruit in our lives.

There's patience. That irritability, that quick temper. We're struggling with it.

But the Spirit of God is producing long-suffering and patience. It's a battle. But we're growing in grace.

We're being conformed slowly to the image and the likeness of Christ. The seal also indicates ownership. You put the seal on an envelope, a parcel, or a deposit.

It's yours. No one else should open it. And I believe it's the Holy Spirit indicating to us in this way that we belong to him.

We are his children. We're forgiven. He has assurance.

Spirit testifying with our own spirit that we are his. Now, in verse 14, the apostle confirms this. In relation to our future inheritance.

Because he reminds us that the completion of our salvation is yet to come. And so the Holy Spirit in us, not only seals us, but he is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession. We're still looking forward.

We're still waiting. But the Spirit in us is a guarantee that this is certain to happen to us. The Christian cannot be lost.

It's impossible to fall out of grace. We're safe in the hands of God. And the Spirit is the guarantee of the earnest of our inheritance.

If you like, very simply, he is a deposit put down. And as you put a deposit on a car or for a house, it's a first installment. It's a confirmation that you're going to buy this car or this house.

And you are agreeing then that you'll pay the rest of the money. You're committed to doing it. And so God has given us the Holy Spirit.

Here is the earnest. Here is the first installment. It's definite.

It's confirmed. Your place is booked. It's guaranteed.

Your place in heaven is reserved for you. And all we experience here is a first word. It's a foretaste of what is to come.

And we're going to arrive there. In application, as I close, I'm aware of all the controversy. And I've been, on occasions, involved in the controversy concerning verse 13.

The translation of the verse. Significance of the concurrent heiress having believed. But I do believe that we have, to some extent, played down the significance of the sealing of the Spirit.

And this aspect of assurance and witness is integral to the work of the Spirit in sealing us. Yes, He authenticates. He confirms us genuine through the fruit of the Spirit.

But the sealing has to be experimental. After all, we are reconciled as sinners to a living God. God is a person.

It's not just a name. It's not just a word in a Bible. God is living.

And we've been reconciled to this living God through Jesus Christ. But we've also been adopted into His family. And we can cry, Abba, Father.

We're in intimate spiritual union with Christ. He is in us. We're the branches.

He is the vine. We're drawing on His life. The Spirit of God within us is not static.

He is working. He is sanctifying us. It's in His strength that we were able to sanctify ourselves.

As we read the Scriptures, we hear the Word preached. As we pray, the Spirit is assisting us. And there are varying degrees of the influence, of the power and the energy of the Spirit exercised.

So our assurance is based on the Bible, the objective Word of God. There are tests that we can apply in our lives. Are we obeying God? Do we love the Brethren? Do we believe the doctrine? There's the inner witness of the Spirit.

Witnessing with our spirit that we are the sons of God. Remember the words of the hymnist, Tell me, thou art mine, O Saviour. Grant me an assurance clear.

Banish all my dark misgivings. Still my doubting. Calm my fear.

Don't be afraid of the experimental. God wants us to know Him. Our duty is to glorify God and to enjoy Him.

Enjoy His presence. Enjoy His love, His favour. Enjoy the intimacy of that fellowship.

Enjoy the truths of the Word of God as they are illumined in your mind. Seek to know Him better. Spend time in His presence.

And through the Word, allow the Holy Spirit to work even more deeply, to draw your heart out after Him in love. Let us pray. As we thank Thee, O Lord, for this part of Scripture, we again submit ourselves to the authority of Thy Word.

We thank Thee for the headship of Christ over us by His Word and by the Spirit. Teach us and illumine our minds. Work in us that which is well-pleasing in Thy sight.

And draw our hearts after Thee, that we may truly love Thee and know Thee and know greater degrees of those influences of Thy Spirit upon us. For Thy name's sake. Amen.

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