

## Sermon – 02/03/2008 am

### Sealed for Secure Deliverance

Study Text: Ephesians 1:13-14

We come today to the closing verses of this great doxology written by the apostle Paul as he opens his letter to the Ephesians. This doxology began with a blessing – Paul blesses or praises God for all the blessings we have been given in Christ – *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*.

Paul goes on to describe these blessings – God’s choosing us and adopting us as his sons by Christ Jesus, and then Jesus who redeemed us by his own blood and whom God raised from the dead to be supreme over all creation. Finally he praises God because of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the holy Trinity. He describes the work of the Holy Spirit as sealing, and as being the guarantee or down payment of our inheritance.

### Sealing

In ancient times slaves were sealed with the mark of their owner, much like cattle are branded today. The seal was a mark of ownership. No matter where the slave went he would be recognised as belonging to a particular master. That seal also afforded the slave protection and security. If he was lost or harmed his owner would come to his rescue.

Such ideas lie behind the word ‘sealed’ that we find in this passage. The Jews were well acquainted with the seal of circumcision. When God made a covenant with Abraham he told him to circumcise himself and all males in his household. *This will be a sign of the covenant between me and you* (Genesis 17:11). Circumcision was a seal, a permanent mark in the flesh, of the covenant, the covenant which declared ‘I will be your God and you will be my people’; the covenant which promised the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.

In the gospel of Jesus Christ this sign or seal of circumcision has been superseded. Circumcision is only an outward sign and is no longer valid. *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that is outward in the flesh...but circumcision is of the heart, in the Spirit* (Romans 2:28-29). The Holy Spirit is the seal of the new covenant, the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ.

*Having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise* (1:13). Later in 4:30 we read *do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*. In II Corinthians 1:22 also we read *God also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee*.

The gift of the Holy Spirit was promised way back in the Old Testament. The prophet Ezekiel spoke of a time when *I will give you a new heart and put my Spirit in you; I will take your heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh* (Ezekiel 36:26). Note the focus upon the heart rather than the flesh. Joel also prophesied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, an outpouring which occurred at Pentecost. Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for this very event – the giving of the Holy Spirit.

In the light of the words of the prophets, and of Jesus, we would see the word ‘promise’ in our passage as referring to the fulfilment of God’s promise. Some however, take it to mean a promise yet to be fulfilled, a promise about our future. It is true that the presence of the Holy Spirit carries the promise of good things to come. This thought lies behind the next verse.

In some ways verse 13 should be divided in half – although this whole doxology is one long sentence. We have already looked at the first half when preaching on the previous verse; *we who first hoped in Christ...in him you also*. Yet there is a flow of thought in verse 13 as it stands, a flow from heard, to believed, to sealed. Hearing the gospel is vital because by hearing alone comes the knowledge of the truth. ‘But hearing is in vain unless it leads to faith, the means by which, on man’s side, God’s blessing can be received’. *Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17).

What about this sealing? *Having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit*. Although we have believed, we also know that it was the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We were dead in our sin before the Holy Spirit made us alive in Christ. Without this active work of the Holy Spirit we would not have believed. No man can be a Christian unless the Holy Spirit is in him, for *no one can say Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit* (I Corinthians 12:3). It is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin. It is only as we have Him in us as the new life that we can believe at all! *If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he is not His* (Romans 8:9).

However, Lloyd-Jones and others go on to say such statements do not refer to the sealing with the Spirit which is something quite separate and distinct. He did not always believe this – he once believed like most evangelicals that the Holy Spirit is a person who when given is given. What happened to make him change his position he does not say, but he became adamant that the sealing comes later, maybe much later, in the life of the Christian. He writes that you can be a Christian and not be sealed with the Holy Spirit, a position quite foreign to the text before us.

This text states ‘*having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit*’. There is no suggestion here of years or months, or even days later. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force or power; the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. He is not given in parts or received in amounts. Imagine Paul saying ‘you are partly filled with the Holy Spirit’. He began this doxology giving thanks that God had blessed us with, not some, but **every** spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ!

I was asked a similar question in class recently. Many get confused by references in the book of Acts to some who had not received the Holy Spirit when they believed (Acts 19:2). But they did not answer Paul ‘no we are praying for a second blessing’ or ‘we are still hoping to be sealed by the Holy Spirit’. They said ‘we have not even heard there is a Holy Spirit’. If you have believed and been baptised you will have heard of the Holy Spirit – unless you were only baptised in the name of the Father and the Son. *Having believed* or when you believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit. Do not quench the work of the Holy Spirit nor grieve him, asking for what you already have.

The book of Acts tells of the great moment when the Holy Spirit was given to Cornelius and his household. Peter was sent to this Gentile home to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He told them that whoever believes in Jesus will receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43). While he was still speaking the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. Peter was amazed and

baptised them in the name of the Lord. Did they receive the Holy Spirit or not? Did they receive the Holy Spirit in part or in full? Did they need a later sealing with the Holy Spirit?

## **Guarantee**

In Modern Greek the word translated here as ‘guarantee’ is used of an engagement ring. This ring is a pledge to marry the recipient. Engagement rings can be very expensive. To break an engagement not only brings great financial loss but great damage to the heart.

Paul goes on in the next verse to speak of the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed as being the down payment or pledge of our inheritance. ‘The Christians experience of the Spirit now is a foretaste and pledge of what will be his when he finally possesses his God-given inheritance’ (see II Corinthians 1:22). He goes on further to describe this inheritance as the redemption of the purchased possession or the obtaining in full of our divine possession.

Remember the word redemption is linked with the payment of a ransom. Christ has redeemed us by his blood. Here we see the same truth from another angle, that of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee, the down payment towards our final and complete redemption, including the redemption of the body (Romans 8:23). We have been given the Holy Spirit but still live in our earthly body. We cannot fully appreciate our spiritual blessings in Christ until we receive our new spiritual bodies. But the redemption we have in our spirits by the Holy Spirit is the divine guarantee that our bodies will also be redeemed.

We are sealed for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). What is this day? It is the day of Christ’s return, the day when he calls us out of the grave and gives us new spiritual bodies. It is the day we have been waiting for, the day when we will stand before Jesus in our glorious new bodies and worship him day and night for ever and ever (Philippians 3:4).

Paul ends this section and this whole doxology with another cry ‘to the praise of his glory’. What wonderful truths he has revealed to us in the opening verses of this letter. He had reminded us of God the Father who chose us and adopted us, of God the Son who gave his own life for the forgiveness of our sins, and of God the Holy Spirit who has been given to you who believe. With the Holy Spirit you are sealed and will be delivered up on the last day to be God’s own precious possession forever and ever, amen.

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