

Sermon – 13/01/2008 am

Spiritual Blessings

Study Text: Ephesians 1:1–3

A man receiving social welfare had his payments stopped. He went into the government office to ask why. He was told that the computer records showed he had died. Somewhat surprised he asked if they could do another check. But again the system came up with his name as a deceased person. Eventually it turned out that there was another man with the same name, and same date of birth. His name, even with date of birth, was not sufficient to uniquely identify this man.

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

When we went to India we started to learn the local language. India as you know is a land of many gods. It is difficult for Christians to know which word to use for God – the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To avoid any misunderstanding I often used the name of Jesus. I would say ‘Jesus bless you’ rather than ‘God bless you’.

It is getting to be the same in the west. Years ago people knew who you were referring to when you spoke of God. But today in our pluralistic society you have to be specific. Different religions have their different gods so when talking to someone from another religion they will think of their own god if you simply talk about God. Some find this convenient of course. When religious leaders have a joint meeting they can all pray to ‘god’ and no one is offended.

This is nothing new. In the Old Testament God referred to himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 3:6). At the time of Moses many gods were worshipped in Egypt. When we come to the New Testament we find Paul referring to God in a specific manner as *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1:3). We saw in the previous verse that he spoke of *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (1:2). Paul often spoke of God and Jesus in the one breath. He would not have prayed ‘Dear God...in your name amen’! He would have prayed ‘Our Father in heaven...in Jesus name Amen’.

As we look at these two verses note how God is ‘our Father’ and also the ‘Father of Jesus Christ’. If God is the Father of Jesus and also our Father what does this mean for our relationship to Jesus? If we have one Father we are all sons of God, and Jesus is our brother. Actually he is our half brother because Jesus is the only begotten Son and we are adopted children of God (1:5).

In addition to Father and Son there is also the Holy Spirit in the Godhead. He will be introduced in verse 13. All three persons of the Triune Godhead had an essential role to play in our salvation. These roles are outlined in verses 3-14: first the Father in 3-6, then Jesus Christ in 7-12 and finally the Holy Spirit in 13-14. You will notice how each of these sections concludes with *to the praise of his glory*.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This whole section (1:3-14) is actually a doxology. It is in fact one long sentence of praise to the Triune God. It begins with this word of blessing to God. It may seem strange to speak of blessing God but the word

blessing (*eulogia*) literally means a 'good word' or 'to speak well of'. To bless God is to praise and worship him.

When you look at the Psalms you will notice how often the Psalmist begins with a word of praise to God. Before he brings his request or complaint to God he remembers some attribute or a work of God, and begins the psalm with praise. Paul is doing the same thing in this letter with this doxology or word of praise to God.

Blessed Be Us

If we bless God, if we speak a good word of praise to God, how can we say God blesses us? *Who (God) has blessed us* (1:3). We can say that God speaks a 'good word' to us in that he has shown grace to us and we have found favour in his sight. God in his wonderful grace calls us his children (I John 3:1). In his grace he has blessed us *to the praise of the glory of his grace* (1:6).

By choosing us to be his children, by forgiving us our sin through the blood of Jesus Christ and sealing us by the Holy Spirit God is praised. Do you think God saved you for your benefit alone? Above all God saved you to the praise of his glory. Your salvation was a transaction made in heaven. You were transferred from the kingdom of darkness, from the kingdom of Satan, to the kingdom of his Son. 'There is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents' said Jesus.

The blessings we receive from God are spiritual blessings. They are blessings in the heavenlies or heavenly places. Under the Old Covenant God promised to bless his chosen people if they were faithful to the covenant. The blessings were largely temporal blessings – *blessings on your storehouses and in all to which you set your hands* (Deuteronomy 28:8). But in the New Testament he promises spiritual blessings.

Some people fail to understand this fundamental shift in the new covenant. They think that becoming a Christian means your barns will always be full, or in current thought you will have a big house, a new car and lots of money in the bank. They think Christians are guaranteed everything this world has to offer. The truth is we are guaranteed everything heaven has to offer in Christ. We are blessed, blessed even now, with every spiritual in Christ Jesus.

Are you seeking after earthly blessings or heavenly blessings in Christ? What did Jesus himself say? He said seek first the kingdom of God and these other things will be given to you. God knows what you need and he will supply your needs. Paul knew that the spiritual blessing were of much greater value. He looks to life eternal, not just a long healthy life here on earth. He looked to his heavenly home not a mansion by the water here on earth.

These spiritual blessings are all ours now in Christ Jesus, but we cannot comprehend the greatness of them all at once. God does not hold back anything when he blesses us in Christ. We deserve nothing from him. He does not bless us according to our own merit. Paul is writing to the saints, to all who believe in Jesus. These spiritual blessings are by grace. They are ours in Christ.

In Christ

Finally Paul says these blessings are *in Christ*. They are in the heavenly places in Christ. Jesus is the source of all these spiritual blessings. The nearer we draw to him, the more Christ like we become in our life, the clearer we will see these blessing that are ours in him.

The more our heart is directed toward Christ, the more we grow up into Christ, the less our heart will be concerned for the things of this world. The things of this world will grow dimmer the closer we get to Christ and bath in the light of his glory.

It is sometimes said of Christians that they are ‘too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good’ – although I don’t hear this said much these days. I wonder why? The observation is true to the extent that Christians are first and foremost focussed on spiritual matters. Christians want to please Jesus who is in heaven. The error is that being heavenly minded is of no earthly good.

In fact as we draw nearer to Christ we see more clearly the things of this world. We see how fleeting, how ephemeral, are the things of this world. In Christ we see to things which are eternal. In Christ we see and we possess blessing that are by nature eternal. We have spiritual blessing that cannot be taken from us. We see the fountain of all blessings, the fountain that never runs dry.

Life in this world is such a struggle. The more we have of the things of this world the more we want. We are never satisfied because our spirits are always restless. We want more and more of what this world offers. Because we cannot get all we want we quarrel and fight, we lie and steal, we live stressful and unhappy lives. Paul looked to spiritual blessings and tells us the great news is that every spiritual blessings is ours already in Christ. We do not want more because we already have all – when we come to Christ and live in him.

Your home, your family, your inheritance are all Jesus Christ. The closer you come to Christ the more you will realise this great truth; and the more contentment and joy you will have in your journey through life towards your heavenly home in Christ Jesus.

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