

Promises, Promises: *Security for the Skeptical*
Ephesians 1:8-14

Introduction: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once said, “*Healthy skepticism is the basis of all accurate observation.*” The obvious irony of this statement is the fact that being a skeptic can be altogether *unhealthy* for an individual if that form of doubt is not discernment and rather a continued pessimism of all or any truth claims. But there is a part of all of us that is skeptical, and for good reason. We have all been burned by promises made at some point in our life. We’ve been lied to, and invariably we have lied to others. We hate the idea of being taken advantage of, but we also know that there are opportunities each day to have that happen (i.e. buying a car or any large purchase, especially when a salesperson is involved). In fact, what we have today is a growing skepticism of authority and government over us, knowing that lies about taxes, policies, and most other things are spoken by all levels and parties. The phrase “**Promises, Promises**” sums up our distrust of what is stated to us.

When it comes to trusting the promises of God, many (if not all) have a similar problem. Can we really trust what God says? Can we believe that He can save us, that we cannot contribute our own works, or that we can freely forgive those that ask for it? Can we really entrust our children to He who judges righteously and loves perfectly? Can I believe that there is something better in the future, that holiness is our greatness pathway to happiness, and denying ourselves is the path of following Jesus? If the call to follow Christ is an all-in, complete yielding by faith, what is the guarantee that we are not fools for trusting ourselves to Christ and message of the gospel? The answer to these questions is found in this last section of this opening eulogy of blessing God the Father.

A quick reminder that this is a message to the church, to those who are believers in Jesus Christ, who have yielded their lives in repentance to Jesus, who follow Him in not just obedience but as their greatest satisfaction and joy. We do not belong to the church through programs or feeling welcome (though we hope everyone feels welcome), but we are part of the church because we have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, forgiven of our sin, adopted as sons and daughters, and loved before the foundation of the world, all because of the glorious grace of God. This is the basis of belonging and the foundation of assurance. This is why we have confidence in the midst of an ever changing world, knowing that God is working out a plan He set in motion before the world began, with us as a central part of it!! Now, if you don’t know Jesus this morning in the way I just described, we are so glad you are here. Today is a day that you can deal with your sin before a holy God and find forgiveness in Jesus blood shed on the cross. What is required is a belief in Him, to entrust yourself to what He did on your behalf, and to ask for forgiveness, tunneling from your sin and following Him. We’d love for you to join us in worshipping Christ. So let’s look at these promises we can bank our very lives on together:

The Promise of a Mystery Revealed (v. 8-10)

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

But grace did not stop its lavish nature at the point of salvation. God overflowed in grace to us so that we would have **wisdom and insight** into the mystery of His will. This wisdom and insight has to do with spiritual insight, or by grace relieving **new lenses** to see life through the reality of God’s Word, sin, salvation, and God’s sovereignty in all of life. Without God instilling us with wisdom from above (James 3:16-17), we could not see with clarity, (like one of those old 3D images I could never see) but everything was a mystery to us. What is this mystery?

When we speak of mystery, we mean to keep things hidden, like the treasure that is sure to be found on Oak Island, a small island off the coast of Nova Scotia that holds the mystery of Templar gold and has been searched by people for centuries, including FDR. (Erin thinks

they'll never find it, but I believe it will yield up its secrets soon). When the NT speaks of mystery it means a truth that was previously concealed that is now made known. There are two main things that have been made known to us today that was hidden or concealed in the OT.

- 1) When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son...(Gal. 4:4) - The first and great mystery is how does a holy God welcome back sinful humanity back to Himself without compromising His glory or holiness? The answer:

“Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”
Romans 16:25-27

Christ is the revealed mystery, and the gospel is the instrument by which all nations come to obedience through faith. God's grace is what is needed to give wisdom and insight to anyone who could actually see Jesus and comprehend spiritual truth. This mystery also entails how non-Jews (or Gentiles) could be included in the kingdom with the Jewish nation (which we will cover at length in chapter 3) without being considered second-class citizens or becoming Jews themselves, and the answer is the same: Christ! **Christ is the REVELATION of God, the focal point of creation, and the culmination of redemption.**

- 2) There is a second mystery of the purpose of God's will in Christ, and that has to do with a different fullness of time, when He will unite or **summarize all things under Christ** - This is a point in the future where every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). This will be a time when Christ will reign Bodily on this earth, and that everything and everyone will be yielded to His headship and lordship. Right now, He is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:20), far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and He is head over all thing in the church (Eph. 1:22), which means that no schemes of our enemy will prevail nor the gates of hell itself. However, there will come a time in the future where all authority will bow to Him, and Christ will make all things right and bring justice. Jesus is the preeminent One (Col. 1:18), since all things were created by Him, through Him and for Him. What now Jesus is ruling over from afar He will draw near and gather all things to Himself. In other words, there is coming a day when all things and all people will be about Jesus! That mystery has been made known to us by grace, and it is the hope we hold in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

Colossians 1:26-27 sums up this two sided mystery revealed in Christ, *“To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* Christ in us, the glory of salvation and forgiveness of sin. Christ our future hope of glory, when He will reign as the head of the universe, putting all the chaos in order, uniting things in heaven and earth under His Lordship and rule.

The Promise of an Inheritance Redeemed (11-12)

*“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.”*

The idea of inheritance or heritage is less and less a high ideal in culture, especially as people move regularly. Inheritance would have been a regular occurrence in a rural setting, where

families would hand off land and property to successive generations. Children are not always assured of receiving land or transferred wealth from parents. But the idea of inheritance is huge in our relationship with God in Christ. In this promise of inheritance, there are two ways to understand what takes place, both tremendous in their implications.

The first is to see the verb “obtained” as a passive verb and see it through the lens that we are part of God’s inheritance or heritage. Now, to be honest, I don’t think this is such a great bargain, but there is precedent in Scripture for it.

John 6:37-40 - *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*

John 10:27-30 - *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, **who has given them to me**, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”*

John 17:2 - *“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, **to give eternal life to all whom you have given him**. And this is eternal life: **that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**”*

God gave the Son all believers as a gift and through His redemptive work on the cross, Jesus did not lose one, but gave us back to the Father as an inheritance. This explains the plan and purpose from before the world began, that we would be bought back in Christ to the praise of His glory. Even in the OT, God was redeeming a group “to be a people of His own inheritance, as you are this day.” (Deut 4:20; 9:29; 32:9) The goal and end of our life was not just salvation, it would instead be as a gift forever from Father and Son to be secured for eternity in an intimate family relationship. What a thought and what an undeserved reality.

The second possibility is how the ESV translated this idea, that the ones who obtained an inheritance is us. This is what Peter brought out in **1 Peter 1:3-5**, *“According to His great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an **inheritance** that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfolding, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*

Our inheritance is secure in Christ, is sourced in Christ, and because of His resurrection. Our inheritance is a place and a kingdom, but it is a person! The “first to hope in Christ” most likely are the Jewish believers (including Paul) but include all those who believe. Whether the primary usage is Christ’s inheritance or ours, the ideas certainly overlap. God wanted those who He redeemed, and salvation was secured so that we would be with Him forever. We are secure in that inheritance since Christ Himself secured it in His death and resurrection from the dead. And though that is about as rock solid of a security as there can be, there is something even greater that we receive as assurance.

Here is the truly remarkable reality of our inheritance in Christ. In this world, when our loved one DIES, we inherit their property or something of value, but we lose them. In Christ, when He died and rose again, we inherit HIM, both now (John 17:3) and forever. He secures our life in Him so that we will never be separated from Him again, either by sin or by distance. In a

time and place now where it feels like we are always saying “Good-bye”, it is a great comfort that God worked all things out for us to be with Him forever.

The Promise of a Seal Received (13-14)

“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.”

But what is the guarantee of that happening? We live in a world of insurances and warranty’s (how many have been called about their car warranty expiring!), prepping for the worst and expecting things to potentially go wrong. We can invest in low risk ventures, or put our money in securities that are backed by governmental promises in case of catastrophe, but truly in life there are very few true guarantees (outside of death and taxes!). But here, Paul ends his opening eulogy with a rock solid guarantee of our salvation and future assurance of inheritance.

First, he reviews ***what happened to each person who is a follower of Jesus***. It started with hearing the “word of truth”, or the whole of the gospel, and **believed**. **Belief is the foundation of our salvation, an exercise of faith in the Person and work of Jesus on our behalf**. We know belief is not mere mental ascent, since even the demons believe that God is one— and shudder (James 2:19). No, true belief is generated by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8), who allows us to see God’s holiness, our own sin, and the need to trust Jesus to ask for forgiveness, repenting of our sin and turning to follow Him. During the Reformation, where many often characterized faith as a causal acceptance of the truth, there was an explanation of three essential components to **faith**:

- 1) **Notitia** - This is believing the content of the gospel, namely Jesus Christ and His work, and is what people need to hear and understand about Him (Rom. 10:14-17)
- 2) **Assensus** - This is a convictional belief that what we hear is TRUE, affirming the truth of the content we heard.
- 3) **Fiducia** - This is ENTRUSTING ourselves into the hands of Christ, the object of faith and the Word of truth.

Many, many people have the level of belief that hears the content of the gospel, believes there is a God and even a Jesus, that He was born (we celebrate Christmas), died and rose again (we celebrate Easter!), but never affirm that it is true and place our trust and lives TO that truth. We often will ADD the truth of Jesus to our life, but only those who yield their lives completely to to Him will be saved.

Now, we get to the part of the guarantee of our salvation, and it has to do with the **sealing of the Holy Spirit**. The work of the Holy Spirit is often misunderstood in churches and even more often is misused out of that misunderstanding. Paul brings clarity to His Work:

What does “sealing” mean? A seal would have been a mark made in wax of a signet ring or another instrument that would go over a rolled scroll, tomb, or a lions den. A seal would signify **security** - like we saw in Daniel as he was thrown in the lion’s den (Dan. 6:17) or Jesus in the tomb (Matt. 27:66), or the binding of Satan someday (Rev. 20:3). If someone saw this seal, they would know it was secure at the highest level, and to break it was to violate the rule and authority of the king himself. It was also **authenticate the contents of a deed or letter** (Esther 8:10, Jer. 32:10-11) and show the **genuineness of it** (Esther 8:8). Finally, and importantly, it showed **both identification and ownership**. Again, on a deed of land (Jer. 32:44), or the 144,000 in Rev. 7:3-5, and on those of us who should believe (2 Cor. 1:22). The sealing of the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of our salvation and our future glorification.

What does the Holy Spirit do? When we believe by faith in Jesus, many things happen simultaneously. We are **in dwelt by the Holy Spirit**, with Him taking up residence in our life (Rom. 8:9). We are **baptized**, which means we are placed in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). We are **filled with the Spirit**, the way He has more and more control in our life (Eph. 5:18). And we are sealed, which seals or stamps us as His own, meaning He will protect us through the trials and testing of this life until we have the final possession of our inheritance. Since we are God's possession (1 Pet. 2:9), He secures us with Himself (2 Cor. 1:22). There is no second blessing, there are only continue along blessing s of being in Christ and having the Holy Spirit in us. This is why Jesus said it was to our advantage that He goes away and send to us the Holy Spirit of promise (John 16:7).

What is the guarantee? The Holy Spirit is the ***initial installment of our inheritance, the first portion that guarantees the rest will come.*** In our culture, we sometimes have to put down deposits that we lose if we don't go through with the purchase, but is applied to the rest. But maybe the best illustration is the idea of **an engagement ring**. Dating is fun and all, but it gets truly serious when he puts a ring on the finger! In fact, the engagement ring that Erin wears is more impressive (and costly) than her wedding band, but she wears both. Now, unfortunately in our broken world, engagements can be called off, rings returned, and even covenants turned from. But the guarantee of our future is a PERSON, the Holy Spirit, the One who guides us in truth and points us to Christ. He is the pledge that we enjoy today, but also that will deliver us to Christ forever, where we will enjoy a marriage Supper with the Lamb (Rev. 19:4) and be with our Bride forever.

“And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put His seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” 2 Cor. 1:22

Promises, promises! Talk is cheap in this world: promises broken, statements of love reversed, and too many times where trust was violated. How do we trust in a skeptical world? We trust in a God who not only followed through on His promises in Christ, but gives us His Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, to dwell in us, which will never be taken away and never leave us. When God tells us He loves us, He means it, from eternity past to eternity future. The question for us is this: *do we believe? Do we entrust ourselves to the One who cannot lie, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever?* Skepticism can easily breed cynicism, but God's grace breaks through both. All that God has promised has come to pass and will come to pass. WE simply need to believe and rest in that promise. This is the most accurate observation we can make!