

## Reveling in Our Vast Resources in Christ

*Ephesians 1:1-3*

**Introduction:** Her name was Sylvia Bloom. She died at the age of 96 in 2016, having been widowed 14 years earlier. Making her home in New York City, she worked as a secretary at a Wall Street law firm for 67 years, taking the subway each morning and returning each night to a rent-controlled, modest apartment. Frugality was her middle name. During the attack on 9/11, Sylvia did not want to pay for a taxi in New York and instead insisted on walking across the Brooklyn bridge and then waiting for the subway. Having no children of her own, it came as an utter shock to her extended family that Mrs. Bloom had actually amassed a \$9 million fortune from “drafting” off of her bosses investments, buying a marginal amount of the stocks for herself that she was tasked to buy for him. *What did she do with this incredible fortune? Nothing.* It’s clear that even her husband did not know or comprehend the immensity of her wealth.<sup>1</sup> Now, after her death it was distributed to fund college scholarships for New York kids, which is admirable, but leaves us with many questions. Was it worth it? Why not use it while you’re alive? Why not give it away while you’re alive? Why would you live with savings that you never used, enjoyed, or stewarded?

If you were given or earned this type of fortune, what would you do with it? Perhaps some would be blessed with Dutch frugality (and generosity) and spend it wisely and carefully. Others may be concerned that in spending it so quickly it would go away with nothing to give generations after, while others might simply spend it all on frivolity (like the Prodigal son - or most child actors). The truth is, that no matter the fortune, it is still limited: limited in usefulness and perpetuation...when it’s gone, it’s gone.

This morning we are going to start into the book of Ephesians after considering its historic context last week. Ephesians is a book about **fullness**: the church being the FULLNESS of Him who fills all in all (1:23), and those who are believers in Christ being *filled with the FULLNESS of God* (3:19). God has given us new life in Him so that we could live not as paupers but those who are lavished with the riches of Christ. When referring to “riches” we aren’t speaking in terms of prosperity of wealth or *Your Best Life Now* kind of stuff, seeing God as some cosmic genie who doles out checks to those worthy. The riches available are those secured “in Christ” and are spiritual, allowing us to thrive in all ways regardless of circumstances, timing, or geography. If that kind of riches were truly available, now is the time to understand and take hold of them, since nothing around us seems secure at all. So this morning we will **revel** in the resources that are ours in Christ Jesus, to both **appreciate and appropriate**, to be both **thankful and effective**, rather than let all of these resources sit in some cosmic accountant, untouched and unused until we die.

### Reveling in Biblical Authority (1a)

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*

God has a way of taking the seemingly worst of circumstances and people and turning it into a story of grace, love, and beauty. Over the last months we saw how God brought the worst king of Israel (arguably) to repentance in Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:10-20), humbling one of the most prideful men. We saw how God worked on the heart of Nebuchadnezzar for decades, finally bringing him to an end of himself so he could declare “How great are His signs, how mighty are His works; His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endures from

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.inc.com/bill-murphy-jr/warning-do-not-imitate-this-woman-who-made-9-million-the-story-doesnt-end-well.html>

generation to generation” (Dan. 4:3) God’s grace is able to take the least likely and, for His glory, create followers and servants for Himself. Paul is one such case, perhaps the greatest case.

By self admission, Paul believed his works had earned a position with God. Not only that, he believed his works were better than anyone else. He had more confidence in himself and what he had done than anyone else, since he was a true man of Israel, circumcised properly, born of the tribe of Benjamin, a true Hebrew, a Pharisee who studied under the best, in his mind, perfectly righteous in terms of the law, and was zealous to see this new movement called the church to be wiped out (Phil. 3:4-6). In fact he was on his way to do just that in Damascus, armed with letters from the high priest to bring these followers of the Way to trial in Jerusalem (Acts 9::1-2). It was here that Jesus revealed Himself to Saul (later Paul) and commissioned him as a chosen instrument to carry the name of Christ before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). In this, Paul became a unique **Apostle, one on whom the message of the gospel was proclaimed and the church was formed and built up.**

It’s worth thinking through what an “Apostle” was in the New Testament (something we will cover more closely in Eph. 2:20 and 4:10-11). “Apostolos” means to send, or send forth. Besides Paul, there were 12 original Apostles, which we believe was a specific office for a specific time. These men were sent out by Jesus during His life (Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-14) and sent as witnesses to Christ’s resurrection in the New Testament (Acts 1:21-22). These were given **authority, from which we get Scripture, to perform miracles,** and in Paul’s case, to lay hands on people who would receive the Holy Spirit for the first time (Acts 19:1-7). Now, there were other “apostles”, those sent out on a mission with fully delegated authority by another. We see Barnabas, Apollos, James, Epaphroditus, as well as others. These were sent ones for a mission, but were specifically differentiated from the original 12 (see 1 Cor. 15:5, 7). These were the foundational people and gifts that helped the church start (Eph. 2:20), but now that we have a completed canon and the church visible, those offices (and perhaps gifting) are no longer needed.

*Why does this matter?* Paul did not write this letter by his own authority or desire, but by **the will of God.** It was God’s desire for this city, its church, surrounding churches, and we today to have this specific information. That means we can bank on every word, even the hard ones, in this letter.

*“For no prophecy was every produced by **the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**” (2 Pet. 1:21).*

In a day where people are seeking truth, we have Truth given specifically by God’s will and desire so that we will know! **Know what?** Know God in Christ Jesus, know peace through His grace, know security through His love, and know hope through His Spirit. The true question is: do we take hold of God’s Word, or better yet, do we let God’s Word take hold of us.

### **Reveling in Gospel Reality (1b-2)**

*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*

There is much debate as to the destination of this letter, which has also put its authorship under scrutiny. In some manuscripts, the word *Ephesus* is omitted. Combine this with the fact that there are no names or personal relationships named, it has left doubt in some minds. But we know that the earliest manuscripts do contain this, attesting to its credibility. Also, since it was a letter about the fullness of who we are Christ and not addressing a specific issue in a church, this was most likely a circular type letter, to be read in other churches as well. The fact that **Tychicus** was to bring the letter and encouragement lends credence to this idea, since he was also to do this with the letter of Colossians (Col. 4:7-9).

We said last week that Paul loved the church at Ephesus. After an initial visit in the Fall of 52 A.D., he spent 3 years with the church, from the Fall of 53 to Spring of 56. A year later, he sent for the elders to meet him at **Miletus**, a city just down from Ephesus (perhaps the harbor was out of operation from silt?). After his time with the elders, he went to Jerusalem, which caused a stir and led to his imprisonment (Acts 21:22-23:22). He was imprisoned in Caesarea for 2 years (AD. 57-59) where he appealed to Caesar (Acts 23:23-26:32) and travelled to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:16), where he was under house arrest in rented quarters under a soldier guard. Here he would write, receive visitors and send out his correspondence. Anticipating his release, he wrote Ephesians late in 61 or early 62 A.D. It was in Miletus that Paul summed up his ministry to the Ephesians church:

*“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all **humility** and with **tears** and with **trials** that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of **repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.**”*  
**Acts 20:18-21**

It was this message of repentance and faith that created the “faithful in Christ Jesus”. Faithful here, in context, means those who believed in Christ Jesus, rather than pointing to their own faithfulness. It was this turning from sin to God (repentance) and turning to trust the Lord Jesus Christ that caused them to be **saints**, “*hagios*”, or *holy ones*. Saints is not some reference to someone well known in the church or someone who did something extraordinary. It refers to the miraculous work that God does through Jesus Christ to bring sinful man back to Himself, which results in the **visible manifestation of the church**. In other words, the church is made up of those saints who believe in Christ Jesus, and that is true for every location for all time, whether it’s Paul’s day, ours, Simi Valley, or New Hampshire.

Here Paul gives the message of the gospel in a word: **GRACE**. What a word it is. Grace is the cause of our salvation. God’s **unmerited or undeserved favor in providing salvation for sinners through Jesus Christ**. Grace is given “to you”, or to all who believe. This grace is given at salvation, lavished on us richly in Jesus Christ. In other words, grace was given, is given, and will continue to be given to unworthy servants who have become united in Christ. If **grace was the cause, peace is the effect**, bringing us to peace with God and others. Under the curse of our father Adam (Romans 5:12, 19) we were rightfully destined to wrath because we are born into sin and thus continue to sin, living out our rebellious nature. But God, being rich in mercy and love, made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:4-5). We are now at peace with God, moving us from objects of wrath to children, calling Him not just **Father, but intimately as OUR Father**. And peace from and to Jesus Christ, who is now our **Lord and master** (1 Cor. 12:3). Believing in Jesus and repenting of our sin moves us from enemies to friends, from estrangement to unified, from objects of wrath to objects of mercy. But it does not end there! Our father has also given us resources in Jesus Christ, but just as the message of the gospel must be believed, so do the resources available in Christ must be appropriated by faith.

### **Reveling in Unlimited Blessing (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*

Have you ever known someone who was given every opportunity for success but continually made excuses as to why they wouldn’t or couldn’t do something? “I need more \_\_\_\_\_ (money, training, opportunity)” or who constantly blames others for their plight, or simply are

too lazy to move forward? It's frustrating, isn't it? Or perhaps maddening is a better word. This last week I visited Dr. Kosta to get my teeth cleaned (and my should examined!). Every exam I'm asked the same question: "How often do you floss?" And every appointment I give the same response: *twice a year* (at my bi-annual appointment). I get the well earned looks of disbelief and sadness, since I'm supplied with as much floss as I could use, but refuse to actually use it, to my detriment (although he says I have really nice teeth!)

Here we are given a sentence of blessing that is unmatched anywhere. This single sentence (from verses 3-14) is a 202 word expression of praise and thankfulness by Paul that seems to flow from deep wells of faith and overflows in fresh springs of truth. This is the type of sentence that brings songs of praise to our mouths and consternation to grammar teachers everywhere. But what we have is a eulogy of praise to God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, to the praise of His glory. I love the story that Josh Starkey told me of our dear friend Sharon Stull, who in the years before she died of cancer, studies this passage in their shepherding group, and said of this passage, "It's all about Jesus!" If you get this like Sharon, you get it all!

Paul starts with "Blessing God", which has the idea of someone deserving appreciation, honor, and praise. This type of blessing is seen all through the OT as God is praised for his benefits to humanity in his care (Ps. 68:19, 35; 72:18; 119:12; 144:1; Zach 11:5), His provision (Ruth 4:14), His response to prayer (1 Kings 8:15), and His deliverance from enemies (Ps. 41:13; 124:6) and from evil (1 Sam. 25:32). This word for "Blessed" is used eight times in the NT and it is never used of people but only of God. Paul extends this blessing, appropriately, to "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". He is OUR Father, but specifically blessed as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, God is blessed and has blessed us. Now, there are three distinct parts to the blessing: **1) They come out of our union with Christ** - Anyone who believes God's provision in Christ becomes united to a new head, new Lord, and new Master. These blessings cannot be obtained through effort, intellectual acquisition, or good living. They are given as we are united with, in, and for Christ, abiding in Him, and alive together with Him. In other words, if we are going to experience the blessings of Christ we must abide in Christ. In fact, there are 36 times that we see benefits in Ephesians that in IN CHRIST, or some derivation from those words. **2) In the heavenly places** - We remember that the people of Ephesus knew about deities, as the city's economy was based on the worship of Artemis, surrounding a sacred stone that fell from the sky (Acts 19:35). They worshipped a goddess bound in a city and temple. The blessings of God in Christ given to believers are sourced in the heavenlies, which benefit believers in the here and now. As believers, we operate in two realms: our life and bodies on earth and our enrichment, our seat, and our minds (Col. 3:1) set on things above. Because these blessings come from above, they are sure, not whimsical. **3) We receive EVERY SPIRITUAL blessing** - In the OT, the blessings of God were seen in land and material blessing primarily, but in the church we see these are Spirit produced blessings. Though these can lead to material, that is not the primary purpose. Notice here that the word is not "all" but "every", that we benefit from every kind of spiritual blessing from Christ.

*What are these blessings?* In asking this question, we always remember that the best way to answer a question about the Bible is to answer it with the Bible. In this 202 word sentence and beyond we see what these blessings are! Here is a sampling, and as you hear these, remember that these are ours, all of ours, right now in Christ. We don't have to graduate to these or wait until the next episode drops. We get them ALL right now, and as we use and access them, they will not diminish or go away!

- We were chosen in HIM to be holy and blameless (1:4)
- We were predestined for adoption through Christ (1:5)

- Blessed with **glorious grace in the Beloved** (1:6)
- We have **redemption through His blood** (1:7)
- We are **forgiven according to the riches of His grace** (1:7, 4:32)
- We know **the mysteries of His will set forth in Christ** (1:9)
- All things **united in Him**(1:10)
- We have **obtained an inheritance in Him** (1:11)
- We have a **fixed and sure hope in Christ** (1:12)
- We heard **the gospel in Him and believed in Him** (1:13)
- We experience the **immeasurable greatness of His power toward us in Christ** (1:19-20)
- We are **His church, the fullness of Him who fills all in all** (1:23)
- We are **made alive together with Christ** (2:5)
- We are **raised and seated with Him** (2:6)
- We are recipients of **immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness in Christ Jesus**(2:7)
- We are created for **good worlds, prepared beforehand, in Christ Jesus** (2:10)
- We are to know the **love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that we would be filled with the fullness of God** (3:19)
- We walk in love, **as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us** (5:2)

These and more are yours in Christ! But they don't just happen upon you, you must believe and abide in Christ, and then exercise these blessings. We can pray for patience, or recognize that patience is given to us in the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). We can pray that God would give us the ability to love, or be self-controlled, or we recognize that we are loved before the foundation of the world and thus can love, or that the penalty and power of sin are broken in Christ. It seems like far too many Christians are either ignorant or apathetic toward their resources in Christ, choosing instead to live a flaccid life instead of one of fullness. These resources have been given in abundance, but we must **appropriate or take hold of them**.

In Joshua 1:3, God told Joshua that every place that the sole of his foot would tread would be given to him, just as was promised to Moses. So Joshua believed, and set out to conquer the land, until the people met defeat at Ai. One of their own had sinned and taken riches that should have been destroyed. Not knowing this, Joshua cried out to God for seemingly going against them. Twice God answered him to say, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face"(Josh. 7:10, 13). Joshua did not need to pray more, he had to act on what was already promised! He had to deal with Achan's sin and then get back to the mission.

I think sometimes we think like Joshua. We're not sure why we are not growing , or experiencing joy, or engaged in whole-hearted worship. So we pray (maybe). God, help me get back on track. Help me know what to do. Give me a passion for you. Good prayers, but perhaps misplaced understanding. So many of the things we pray for are already given to us, we simply need to make use of them. That is how we live in the fullness of God: by making use of the spiritual blessings given to us in Christ.