



A World of Blessing, Part 3: Sealed for Inheritance

Ephesians 1:11-14

Grace Church | 10.10.21

Recently I was presented with a particular quote that stuck with me. You know, those sentences that just lodge in your mind. Last year, just shy of his 100th birthday, George Schultz reflected on his fulfilled life. Most of you may not know who George Shultz was: he was an economist and diplomat, who served in three different presidential cabinets as Secretary of Labor, Secretary of the Treasury, and with Ronald Reagan as Secretary of State. His work brought him into rooms and tables with the most powerful people on Earth, into decisions that impacted millions of people. Schultz died earlier this year, right after turning 100. So his final words of advice were to sum up everything he learned in his life of relationships, an illustrious career spanning nearly the entire 20th century. Here is what he said:

Dec. 13 marks my turning 100 years young. I've learned much over that time, but looking back, I'm struck that there is one lesson I learned early and then relearned over and over: *Trust is the coin of the realm*. When trust was in the room, whatever room that was – the family room, the schoolroom, the locker room, the office room, the government room or the military room – good things happened. When trust was not in the room, good things did not happen. Everything else is details.¹

Trust is the coin of the realm. It's necessary for good things to happen. It needs to be in every room for flourishing and success. Everything else is just details.

Now, Schultz is not intending to make a spiritual point, and I am not aware he had a living faith in Christ, but I think he is right. For the last two weeks we have been examining the spiritual blessings outlined to us in Paul's worshipful sentence in Ephesians 1:3-14. Two weeks ago I challenged you to open yourself up to the wonder of God's free grace, and to get ready to have to pick your jaw up from the floor. Last week pastor Sam Parkison challenged us not to *do anything with* but simply to *rejoice in* these blessings. But all of this blessedness: being chosen by God, predestined for adoption by God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, invited into the mystery of God's eternal plan: all of these blessings are useless to us unless there is trust involved. Unless we *trust* God's promises will come to pass, how are we to enjoy them? How are we to flourish in them?

¹<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/12/11/10-most-important-things-ive-learned-about-trust-over-my-100-years/?arc404=true>



So may I ask this question today: is there trust in this room? Do we *really* act like God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing there is? When we are frustrated, disappointed, hurt, worn down, tired, anxious, afraid, or depressed—is there trust that what the preacher says is true, that when we open up the word of God there is really, actually, truly, mind boggling good news for us?

My prayer is we can leave here today saying: “there was trust in this room. We met with God, and we trust his promises. What he says has come and will come.” And the reason I believe we can run out of here joyful this morning with that kind of trust, that kind of assurance, is because of the truth we find in Ephesians 1:11-14. When we are prone to mistrust that the blessings of God are really for us, we have a guarantee from God himself. But here is even better news: that guarantee is God himself.

We are God's Inheritance, kept secure in the spirit, which we enjoy even now until forever.

We are God's Inheritance

Now bear with me, because we have to get a little technical here first. It's actually quite difficult to convey the grammar of **verse 11**. Remember that this is one long run-on sentence. In the ESV, the translation has been rendered for us: “In him we have obtained an inheritance.” The problem is this phrase “obtained an inheritance” is really just one word, and it occurs nowhere else in Scripture in this form. It's a verb that in classical Greek means: “to assign by lot”. The noun here is *kleros* (κληρος) which is a lot or an assigned portion. Being assigned a lot was a process of using dice or other means to assign different fate. Remember when Jesus was crucified, how did the guards decide who would keep his cloak? They cast lots to determine their lot or their portion, their *kleros*.

If we translated this literally it may read: “in Christ we have been cast as a lot” or “in Christ, we have been assigned as a portion.” So what is Paul saying? Not just that we have an inheritance, as if we have been assigned a lot. Rather that we *are* the inheritance, we are the portion. God has assigned us as his lot.

This concept was not foreign to the world of Ephesus. A good example is found in Homer's *Iliad*. The god Zeus is shown to balance his golden scales, with Achilles on one side and Hector on the other. Although Zeus favored Hector, this scale was a kind of casting of lots, and the fates determined that Hector was to die and Achilles would live.² The god Zeus cast the lot, and received Achilles as his inheritance, his lot. But notice here, Paul does not leave any of this up to Fate or “Lady Luck.” The mighty Zeus is cast his lot by fate, but God is cast his lot by his own will, and no other will. This is the point of the next part of **verse 11**. We have been cast into lot with God, we have become his inheritance, his portion, not because of fate, but because God predestined it according to his will which works all things to his counsel.

² Homer, *Iliad*, 22.207-13



This rendering of verse 11 also fits contextually and theologically with the story of Scripture. Again and again in the Old Testament, Israel is called God's "heritage" and his "portion". Consider this from Deuteronomy 32:8-9,

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

Now look at **verse 14**. Something similar is going on here behind the scenes. Where the ESV speaks of "our inheritance that we have possessed", the more natural reading is "the inheritance of us that have been possessed"! In other words, the grammar seems to imply the emphasis is not that we have an inheritance, but that we are an inheritance.

So now we have a question. Why do the translators of the ESV render this as a lot or inheritance that we have obtained, rather than, as the grammar and the Biblical context seems to imply, that we are God's inheritance or God's lot? I believe the reason is because either way, the theological effect is the same. Whether we read Paul to be saying "we have an inheritance from God" or "we are the inheritance of God", we arrive at the same conclusion. This is because the nature of the gospel is that when God takes possession of us, we take possession of God. The effect of God's predestining us to be his own portion and possession is that by his grace, when we become his, he becomes ours. Listen to how David puts it in Psalm 16:

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

The inheritance of the Christian is not just the things of God, it is God himself. You may as well read Ephesians 1:11 this way: "In Christ we have obtained God." This truly is the inheritance of all inheritance. This is what election is pointing to, this is what adoption is preparing us for, this is what redemption is accomplishing. We are God's chosen portion.

And lest you try to wriggle out of this one, lest you think back on your Sunday school days and rightly remember that Israel is God's chosen nation, that God's portion is the Israelites, not anyone else, that perhaps Israel will receive a great inheritance of God and we will all receive a lesser one, Ephesians comes right in with correction in **verse 12-13**. Paul's "we" is speaking of Israel and the apostles. All the first believers were part of God's chosen people. But it doesn't stop there. There are no second class kingdom citizens, for **verse 13**, the gospel of salvation has come to gentiles too. The great and glorious blessing of the gospel is this: no matter how far removed you are from God's blessing, no matter how unlikely it seems that you would be called his, no matter how wicked and foreign and alien and lost: you can be God's and God can be yours.

Alright, so that is the inheritance we are talking about. Our inheritance is to belong to God—that is our great and undeserved blessing in Christ. But how are we sure of it? Again, how can we trust this inheritance will come to pass? We are kept secure in the Spirit.



kept secure in the Spirit

Verse 13 is describing just how the blessings of belonging to God come to us. You could say that it is describing conversion. The process is simple: hear the gospel, believe the gospel, and then—see the tense here—you were sealed. Meaning the moment that the gospel is heard and truly believed, something happens. That something is this seal, that the very Spirit of God comes in and makes this salvation certain. I want to emphasize that from the moment of belief, the seal happens. There is no waiting period. In other words, there is never a time, after your true belief, where your salvation is unsure. There is never a point where you have to mistrust.

What is this “seal”? Well, the picture is actually quite simple. In ancient times, the seal was the authentication of property. Maybe it was put on a legal document, or worn on a item of clothing to symbolize the protection of some powerful noble. It also symbolized ownership. Perhaps the closest thing we have today is a cattle brand. A brand is a kind of signature, but it’s not just authenticating, it also implies protection: those cattle have an owner watching over them. This is what the Scripture is saying: God has given us a seal to prove that we belong to him, to show us beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are his and that he will protect us. This seal is the authentication from God.

And the beauty of this is that God’s triune wisdom cannot be matched. His seal is not just a physical marker, or even a spiritual marker alone. His seal, in order for us to know and trust beyond all doubt, that his blessings are secure, must not be anything created. It cannot be anything that could possibly fail us. It cannot be finite, it cannot be undone, it cannot be erased. So what does God seal us with? Himself. In his kindness, he says: I will put my Spirit within you. My own Spirit, that divine person that proceeds from the Father and the Son, the third person of the Trinity. He himself will seal you and mark you and protect you and authenticate you.

So what is the Christian’s assurance in every circumstance? It’s the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit proves to us and others we are in Christ by growing in us fruit of righteousness, the Spirit protects us from falling away by being our comfort and guide, and the Spirit proves that we are God’s people, his possession, his children, and his workmanship. What greater gift could be given, what greater seal? Than for God himself to indwell sinners?

One of my favorite puritans is a man named Richard Sibbes (1577-1635). Sibbes was well known for his comforting demeanor that came out most in his preaching. He was called the “Heavenly Doctor” and the “Sweet Dropper” of grace, because of the way in which all of his sermons led back to a love and intimacy with the person of Christ. One colleague said of Sibbes perhaps the most striking compliment I have ever heard: “Of this blest man, let this just praise be; heaven was in him before he was in heaven.”³

³ From Joel Beeke, *Meet The Puritans*



In other words, Sibbes had such an outward expression of the Spirit in his ministry that it was as if all the glories of heaven itself resided in him. And you know why it seemed that way? Because it was true. And if you are in Christ, it is also true of you: heaven is in you. The Holy Spirit of God has been sent to be with you—to never leave or forsake you—to seal up the promise of God that you would be his own. If you cannot trust anything else, trust that. There is no room that you can go into where trust isn't there, if you trust the Spirit of God within you.

which we enjoy even now until forever.

Here is my last point, and I will spend the rest of our time urging you to consider how to grasp the blessings of God. The Holy Spirit is called the “seal”. But notice also he is called the “guarantee”. That word “guarantee” is best translated as “down payment”. It's not just a promise, it's a particular kind of promise. When you purchase a house, you give a down payment, it's a promise that you will pay the rest of your debt upon the house until you own it outright. The down payment goes into the final cost, meaning it is not lost. And legally, you own the house. You tell all your friends: “I bought a house!” when in reality, you really only probably about 6, may 10% of your house. So you own a few walls and part of the roof and a couple of doors, but rightfully you get to enjoy all of the house, trusting that one day it will be your sole possession.

Such is the Holy Spirit now. By God's grace, we are his. He dwells with us, and we enjoy him even now. We live lives of hardship, yes, but ultimately our lives are filled with joy and peace and security. Why? Because the down payment has already been made—we get to live in the house. What does this mean? It means that you, Christian, are not left empty. You do not have to live in a constant state of despair. Your life does not have to be empty and meaningless. You do not have to live in a constant state of sinful indulgence. You have the very Spirit of God, not a JV spirit, not a less powerful spirit. You have the Spirit, God is yours and you are his.

But also, don't forget more is coming. As we learned last week, this world is only a shadow. The real thing is coming, the real inheritance. BUt the down payment is made, the mortgage is fixed, and it's never going to default. Because the down payment is God himself. Jesus Christ the Son bled and died on the Roman cross to send you his own Spirit. What down payment is more secure, more sure, than that? What guarantee is more trustworthy than the life of the Son of God spilled out and poured into your heart? No matter the state of your life now, you can trust that.

The pastor and hymn writer John Newton once was attempting to illustrate the realities of the blessings of God in Christ using a kind of parable. Here is what he said:

Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his [carriage] should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him ringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, “My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!”



How might you live into the glorious gifting of God? Not like a pauper, but as an heir? Might today be your day of abandon, to dive into the glorious grace of God? These promises, this blessedness, is yours in Christ. You may feel your carriage is broken. And it very well may be. You may feel like there is nothing left to trust. You are at the end of your rope. You've tried trusting in yourself. But do not forget this, hold on to this: there's just a mile left to go. Your inheritance is eternal rest in God. Doesn't that change your perspective? And not only is the path short, your legs are strong enough to carry you to the end of the path. Not because you are strong, but because God will carry you by his Spirit. That is his guarantee, and you can take it to the bank. Trust is in this room, and guess what? Good things are happening.

