

# Blessings for wherever you are.

8/28/2022

Message 2

Ephesians Series

How to Get the Most out of a sermon (SLIDES)

Introduction: Have you ever found yourself in a place that surprised you?

A. Sometimes, we find ourselves in surprisingly good places.

1. I love those moments where you look around and think, "this is amazing!"
2. Moments that you are thankful and joyous and simply amazed that you are where you are.

B. Sometimes, we find ourselves in surprisingly tough places.

1. Often, through no fault of our own, we arrive in challenging places.
2. Sickness, loss of a job, a wayward child, or unfair criticism and persecution are some of the tough places almost all of us find ourselves in.

C. Question: **Do you feel just as blessed in challenging places as in good places?**

1. When you are in a difficult season, can you still call yourself blessed?
2. The Apostle Paul, under arrest, is writing to a group of Christians in a hostile environment.

3. Yet, he cannot stop writing about all of the blessings that they all have in Jesus.

### Ephesians 1:3–6 (CSB)

<sup>3</sup> Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him. <sup>5</sup> He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.

#### 1. Paul writes this from a Roman prison or house arrest.

##### A. Paul is imprisoned in Rome.

1. We know this because of the timelines that Acts and church history provides.

2. We know Ephesians is one of several letters Paul wrote while awaiting trial before Caesar.

##### B. As I read this, I wonder, What would I write if I was in prison?

1. Many Christians, over the years, have written from prison.

a. The Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee, wrote from prison.

b. German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote many letters and prayers for fellow prisoners while awaiting execution in a Gestapo prison cell<sup>1</sup>.

c. The Puritan John Bunyan also wrote in an English prison, eventually writing the classic "Pilgrim's Progress."

2. The History of Jesus' Church is full of stories of people experiencing hardship, persecution, and even prison.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thebonhoefferproject.com/weeklycolumn/bonhoefferinprison>

a. I'm not talking about the people who did wrong and got caught.

b. But faithful saints who found themselves in difficult and trying places.

3. The furnace of affliction perfects our faith in these difficult and trying places.

a. **CIRCUMSTANCES DON'T CREATE OUR SPIRIT, THEY REVEAL IT!**

b. Paul refused to be a victim of circumstance.

c. Instead, he Blessed the saints in Ephesus and encouraged them to walk in that blessing regardless of their surroundings.

d. There is no middle ground in Ephesus.

1. And for Paul, there was no middle-ground in blessing:

2. **Either we are blessed, or we are cursed; there is no in-between.**

C. If I had been mistreated in a city like Paul had and was writing them a letter, what would the tone be? What would I say?

1. The truth is that I would not have written what Paul wrote.

2. For most of us, **it's hard to talk about glory and blessing when our surroundings look more like a prison than a palace.**

a. But that is what Paul does.

b. He blesses God while he is in chains.

c. He blesses the believers in a city that abused him, persecuted him, and rioted because of him. (Acts 19)

3. Paul lays claim to his adoption as a son through Jesus, even though he did not look or feel like a son at the moment.

D. Consider this: Paul, an adopted son of God through Jesus, was presently in prison.

1. Yet, Paul's circumstance could not touch his identity.
2. Whatever you are going through, please do not let your circumstances touch your identity.
3. Whatever your experience, please do not let your circumstances go to your heart.

## 2. Understanding "Blessing".

A. Blessing is a word we use A LOT in Christianity, but the definitions are often unclear.

1. What blessing is "not".
  - a. Blessing is not "good vibes" or thoughts.
  - b. Blessing is not a cute slogan on a T-shirt.
  - c. Blessing is also not conditional: if you have been given a check for a thousand dollars or a bill for \$10,000, your position of blessing has not changed.
2. Blessing in the NT "conveys the idea of being especially favored:" (Mounce)
  - a. In the OT, blessing denotes the pronouncement of good things on the recipient or the collection of those good things themselves.<sup>2</sup>
  - b. To Bless others is to express God's favor for them.
  - c. To be blessed is to receive the pronouncement of good made by God or through Jesus by others.
3. Blessing is serious business, and the OT and NT writers took this very seriously.

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<sup>2</sup> Mounce, William D. 2006. In [\*Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words\*](#), 70. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

B. The word "blessed" implies something that is spoken.

1. How do we bless and receive blessings?
2. It starts with something spoken, something verbal.
3. Paul, through the longest sentence in the Greek language, is conveying the blessing, the favored position, of the believers in Christ Jesus.
4. This blessing was already reality; Paul is simply reminding them of what Jesus has done.

C. When you "bless" someone, you are not creating a new condition.

1. When I bless you at the end of the service, I am simply stating what Jesus has already done for you.
2. Protection, provision, completeness, wholeness, peace, and grace: they don't come from me they come from Jesus.

3. Paul is adamant that blessing is only from God through Jesus.

A. The other day, I started reading a book called "The 5am Club".

1. Personally, I'm disciplining myself to start my day earlier so I can be more productive.
  - a. This book had great reviews and a title that intrigued me.
  - b. So I bought it, hoping I could glean a few things.
2. I knew it wasn't a Christian book, but that's ok.
  - a. But I noticed that there was a ton of spiritual language in it.
  - b. In fact, it used language that many of us might use in our personal life or at church.
  - c. But something was really missing.
3. Then it hit me:

a. This author was declaring peace, and blessing, and completion, and wholeness for his readers.

b. BUT, the difference was that, instead of these blessings coming from the Father through Jesus, they were coming either from "self" or from the "cosmos."

B. **There is No blessing APART from Christ.**

1. In fact, apart from Jesus, there is only the pronouncement of the Curse.

a. Even though a person may appear highly successful, healthy, productive, or wealthy, apart from Jesus, they are not a BLESSED person.

b. Additionally, a person may struggle financially, be surrounded by opposition, and endure struggle, and still be BLESSED.

2. **Blessing comes from Jesus, nothing else.**

a. Paul is thankful to God for the blessing of Jesus.

b. With Jesus comes every spiritual blessing.

c. And, first and foremost, these blessings are held for us in heavenly places.

3. Paul doesn't even describe all of the spiritual blessings in this.

a. For me, I want to know everything Paul has in mind here.

b. I also want to know more about them being in the "heavenly places."

c. But Paul moves past this pretty quickly.

4. Perhaps Paul moves quickly because the focus is never on the "what" and always on the "who".

a. These verses are ALL about Jesus.

b. And they are all about being IN Christ.

- c. If you are in Christ, everything else is a bonus.
  - 1. Christ is the prize, and everything else is a perk.
  - 2. The perks are amazing, but Jesus is the prize.

#### 4. What does it mean to be “chosen”?

<sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him., <sup>5</sup> He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.

##### A. An imperfect analogy:

- 1. A way I picture this is that every name of every person is on a list.
  - a. And God selects every name of every person to be on His team.
  - b. Unlike choosing teams in school, where we pick two team captains and they pick the best people for their team, with the best going first and leaving the worst to last.
  - c. Instead, God the best of the team captains, chooses everyone to be on His roster.
- 2. But then this imagery switches:
  - a. The people on the list, however, get to pick the team they want to be on.
  - b. Every person was picked, chosen, and predestined to be on God’s team, but not everyone chooses God.

##### B. This understanding is very important.

- 1. There are many doctrines out there relating to salvation, election, and the sinfulness of man.
  - a. And it’s all confusing, even for me.

- b. But this is vitally important for us to grasp.
2. An incomplete view of salvation, or misunderstanding of "election" is very dangerous and leads to excess.
- a. I've heard several of you mention you were taught "once saved, always saved".
    - 1. Actually, that isn't what anyone calls that doctrine.
    - 2. They will call it "Unconditional Election" and "Perseverance of the Saints" and "Supralapsarianism."<sup>3</sup>
  - b. Some people claim license to live however they choose, flaunting the grace and glory of God.
3. But Paul is not arguing for a God who random chooses some to save and others to damn.
- a. The Romans, at times, practiced "decimation."
  - b. Decimation was the choosing at random every 10<sup>th</sup> person and scourging them and executing them to punish an army for rebellion or defeat.
  - c. When a group or army rebelled or failed to perform well, the leaders would decimate them, hoping the 90% left would be scared to not fail again.
4. God is not practicing eternity like the Romans practiced "decimation".
- a. God is not marching through eternity, marking random people for destruction.
  - b. Yes, many people will be punished with eternal death.

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<sup>3</sup> The doctrine that God decreed both election and reprobation prior to creation and then allowed the fall of man as a means of carrying out his divine purposes.

c. But it is because of their sins that they receive eternal death, not God's active choice.

d. For God does not delight in the death of the wicked, but desires for everyone to come to a saving knowledge.

C. Notice that Paul does not say this choosing of love was a response to sin:

1. God chose to love us BEFORE he created humanity.

2. Before the Garden, before the Fall, before Abraham, before Jesus, God had chosen humanity as the subject of his greatest affection.

a. As much as God enjoys the rest of His creation, humankind is His favorite.

b. Anything that distracts from that love is dangerous.

c. It was humanity that God has chosen.

## 5. Being chosen by God is a good thing.

A. "The life of a Christian depends on a love that never began as well as a love that will never end."

1. Before you ever made your first dollar, said your first prayer, or anything else, God chose you as an object of His love and affection.

2. He chose you as someone to bless, with every spiritual blessing on the heavenly places.

B. Paul, writing from under arrest, is praising the name of Jesus for how great it is to be chosen by God,

1. Being chosen, in Christ Jesus, is greater than any earthly reward.

2. None of us watch award shows, but so often, nominees for the Emmy's or the Golden Globes will say:

a. It's an honor just to be nominated.

b. Better yet, in Jesus, you are not just nominated, but you are BLESSED and Adopted.

## 6. We are not nominated, we are adopted into the family.

VERSE 5: He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself

### 1. The Roman cultures loved adoption.

a. Adoption happened at every level, and many influential leaders were adopted when they were younger and given access and privilege that they would never have on their own.

b. The word for “adoption” (*hyiothesia*) means “sonship,” and it refers to the process in the Roman world by which a child was brought into a new family, receiving all the rights of a natural child and taking the name of the new family.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. In Paul’s world, the males received a greater inheritance.

a. But through Jesus, everyone receives the greater inheritance and portion.

1. My grandma use to tell the story of growing up as the youngest child during the depression.

2. One of my favorite stories her portion of the meal, her dinner, was nothing more than chicken feet.

a. The men and boys had been out working all day, so they were served first.

b. Then the adult women and older sisters were served.

c. She was the youngest, so by the time she got to eat, the only thing left was the chicken feet.

d. But these sort of things do not happen in God’s kingdom.

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<sup>4</sup> Osborne, Grant R. 2017. [\*Ephesians: Verse by Verse\*](#). Osborne New Testament Commentaries. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

b. Through Jesus, we receive the son's portion.

1. Not a girl's portion, not a step-child's portion, but the sons portion.
2. There are no step children in the Kingdom.
3. And God has chosen YOU, and has invited YOU to be adopted into the family, with all the benefits and blessings.

3. What are we chosen for?

a. We are chosen to be holy and blameless.

b. We are chosen to be set apart and to live by a different family dynamic.

1. Every family has certain behaviors that are encouraged or despised.
2. Perhaps there were certain actions or behaviors that you were punished for, but other families thought was fine.
  - a. My family did not belch out loud: ever.
  - b. My family also didn't encourage sports, even though I played baseball.
  - c. But my dad and mom would sacrifice greatly to make sure that I had books and access to instruments and music lessons.

c. In God's family, He calls us to a new family dynamic: one characterized by holiness and being blameless.

1. "The Christian life contains both privilege (the gift of salvation) and responsibility (the demand to live life God's way)."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Osborne, Grant R. 2017. *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*. Osborne New Testament Commentaries. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

2. When we accept adoption into Christ's family, we no longer live for ourselves but for God and the family.

3. But, this is no sacrifice: It is a blessing that includes every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

### Application: Where do I go from here?

A. For some here today, the place I have to start is with reminding you that Jesus loves you.

1. He doesn't love you because of what you have done, but in spite of it.

2. Jesus loves you because He loves you.

3. Maybe you have been beat down so much over the years that you don't know the height, the depth, or the width of God's love for you.

4. Would you take a moment this morning and tell yourself "Jesus loves me."

a. Forget about the buts.

b. Not Jesus loves me, but...

c. Simply: Jesus loves me.

d. I am loved.

e. I am chosen, and I am adopted into the family, and I am blessed.

B. Next: In light of that love and blessing, now choose to walk in that understanding.

1. You are not defined by what you used to do but who Jesus says you are.

a. You are a Saint, called to live a holy and blameless life.

b. Because God chose me to be part of His family, I will live like it.

## 2. Prayer.