

"A YEAR-END INVENTORY"

I. Introduction

- A. One of the things that we associate with the coming of a new year is the idea of making resolutions about things we would like to change in our lives in the coming year.
1. There is nothing wrong with making resolutions.
 2. There have been notable examples of this sort of practice in church history.
 3. The most famous would probably be the example of Jonathan Edwards.
 4. When he was a young man, Edwards set down seventy resolutions that he used as a sort of personal mission statement.
 5. There can be value in exercises of this nature.
 6. You might want to make a resolution to read through the Bible in 2015, or to spend 15 minutes a day reading a good Christian book, or to do something else that would contribute to your growth or the edification of others.
 7. The only negative thing about resolutions is that they do not have any power in themselves to help us follow through with them.
- B. In this sermon, I want us to allow this text from Ephesians to guide us in a different kind of exercise as we prepare to head into a new year.
1. Instead of making resolutions about things we want to change, I want us to look at this text and take an inventory of what we already possess in Christ.

2. These verses set forth three of the spiritual blessings that God bestows upon those who believe in Jesus Christ.
3. We see this in the three statements that Paul makes in verses 7, 11, and 13, each of which begins with the phrase "In him."
4. These statements tell us what we have if we are in Christ.
5. There is great benefit in taking time to ponder such things.
6. While the making of resolutions doesn't have any innate power to produce change in our lives, meditating upon God's blessings does have that kind of power.
7. It stirs up gratitude in our hearts, and gratitude is the fuel that powers Christian obedience.

II. In Christ We Have Redemption

- A. We begin by looking at the statement in verse 7: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses."
 1. In the ancient world, the term "redemption" was used to describe what took place when someone was set free from slavery or captivity.
 2. This typically involved the payment of a ransom to set the person free.
 3. Paul says that we were redeemed through Christ's blood.
 4. This tells us that Jesus' atoning death was the ransom price that was paid to set us free from sin and its consequences.
 5. Paul explains that this redemption consists in "the forgiveness of our trespasses."

6. This reminds us that forgiveness only comes through faith in Christ.
 7. There is nothing that we can do to make up for our sins.
 8. There is no way we can ever find favor with God until our sins are wiped out.
 9. Only through the blood of Christ can we be released from our debts and adopted by God.
 10. This leads John Calvin to say, "let us learn to find all our righteousness in God's showing of himself merciful towards us of his own free goodness, and let us not presume to put before him any virtue of our own to put him in our debt, but let it be sufficient for us that he receives us freely into his love without any worthiness on our part, but only because the remembrance of our sins is buried out of his sight. And again, let us understand that the same cannot be done but by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is where we must wholly rest." [*Sermons on Ephesians*, 53]
- B. The word "redemption" brings to mind God's deliverance of the Israelites from their slavery in the land of Egypt.
1. Like Pharaoh, sin is a cruel taskmaster.
 2. Sin's deceitfulness even causes us to love our chains.
 3. Sin makes us think that we are seeking our own happiness when we are actually sowing seeds of destruction and despair.
 4. Worst of all, the bonds with which sin holds us captive are impossible for us to break.
 5. This is something that fallen man is never willing to admit.

6. We have a natural bent towards thinking that we can save ourselves and make the world a better place.
 7. But the world isn't getting any better, and we cannot make ourselves any better — at least not in any sense that would merit God's approval.
 8. Because we have been utterly ruined by our sin, we stand in need of a salvation that comes entirely from outside of us.
- C. There are many ways in which we are affected by the sins of others, but we need to understand that there is no such thing as an innocent victim when it comes to our standing before God.
1. In the most important sense, we are the cause of our own misery.
 2. We trespass against God's law again and again.
 3. Yet in the gospel God lavishes the riches of his grace upon us.
 4. He opens up our eyes so that we can see the glorious plan that has reached its climax in Jesus Christ.
 5. This is what Paul means in verse 9 when he speaks of "the mystery of [God's] will."
 6. In the New Testament, the term "mystery" is typically used to refer to something that was previously hidden that has now been made known.
 7. The best example of this is found in Romans 16, where Paul writes these words of doxology to God: "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" (vv. 25–26)

8. When the Spirit of God works faith in the hearts of the elect, he enables us to understand this great mystery.
 9. He shows us that Jesus is God's solution to all of the pain and sorrow that our sin has brought into this world.
- D. Paul also says that God's plan was "for the fullness of time, to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth."
1. Consider what this tells us about the scope of redemption.
 2. It tells us that redemption extends to the entire world.
 3. In the words of one commentator, "To be in Christ, therefore, is to be part of a program which is as broad as the universe, a movement which is rolling on toward a renewed cosmos where all is in harmony." [Lincoln, 44]
 4. In Christ, all that became disordered after the fall is being put back in order.
 5. This means history is moving towards a goal.
 6. There is a unifying purpose to everything that takes place in this world.
 7. God's goal for history is that everything should be brought under the visible dominion of Jesus Christ.
 8. There is still a great deal of division and discord in the world, but at God's appointed time all of this will come to an end and every knee will bow before our Lord.
 9. Some will do so in grateful love, while others will do so in hopeless resignation.

III. In Christ We Have an Inheritance

- A. This brings us to the second “In him” statement in our text: “In him we have obtained an inheritance.”
1. The term “inheritance” points us back to the reference to adoption in verse 5.
 2. If you have an older version of the ESV, as I do, your translation of the first part of verse 5 may read like this: “he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.”
 3. But if you are reading in one of the pew Bibles or a recent edition of the ESV, you will see that it reads this way: “he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.”
 4. The reason why the ESV editors decided to make this slight change in the later editions is because the term for adoption here describes the legal status that was conferred upon an adopted son in the ancient world, the status of being an heir.
 5. In the ancient world, daughters did not have inheritance rights.
 6. It was only the sons who were heirs.
 7. Paul is telling us that everyone who trusts in Christ has been made a son of God in the legal sense.
 8. Whether you are male or female, if you belong to Christ you have obtained the inheritance of a son.
 9. Just as each of Israel’s tribes received an allotment of land in the Promised Land, you hold title to a place in the kingdom of heaven.
 10. You can join the psalmist in saying, “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.” (Ps.

16:5-6)

- B. Paul is also careful to remind us that we have not obtained this inheritance by any effort of our own.
1. We obtained it because we were “predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”
 2. God’s purpose to save his people is connected both with the plan that he made before time began and with his providential control over everything that happens in this world.
 3. Think of how reassuring this is.
 4. It tells us that there is nothing in this world that can thwart God’s purposes of saving his elect.
 5. There is nothing in your life that will be able to prevent God from fulfilling his purpose of bringing your salvation to its completion.
 6. This brings to mind part of the answer to question 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism, where the believer expresses his confidence that God “also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. ” {Q. 1]
 7. This is true for you individually, and it is true for the church corporately.
 8. Because God rules over history in such a manner that everything is made to conform to the purpose of his will, his plan to save his elect cannot fail.
- C. In verse 12, Paul says that God’s purpose in causing us to hope in Christ was that we “might be to the praise of his glory.”

1. Paul's emphasis upon God's sovereignty in salvation leads him to declare that God alone receives the credit for it.
2. If you are a Christian, if your hope rests upon Christ for your salvation, then you only have God to thank for it.
3. You have not been saved because of anything that you did or because of something that anyone else did.
4. You have been saved because it was God's will to save you.
5. And God's purpose in saving you was so that you might praise him, that you might worship him.
6. We have to say, "To God be the glory!"

IV. In Christ We Have a Down Payment

- A. This brings us to the third "In him" statement in our passage: "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."
 1. When we believed in Christ, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit.
 2. In the Bible, God sets his seal upon his people in order to mark them out as his own and to preserve them from all spiritual harm.
 3. We see this in Ezekiel 9, where the prophet has a vision of God instructing an angel to place a mark upon the foreheads of a faithful remnant who would be kept spiritually safe during the fall of Jerusalem.
 4. We see it again in Revelation 7, where John has a vision in which the servants of God are sealed on their foreheads with the seal of God so that they will be protected from the coming judgment.
 5. This is what happens to us when we believe in Christ.

6. If you are a Christian, then God has placed his mark of ownership upon you.
 7. You have been sealed for the day of redemption.
 8. You belong to God now, and he will not allow anything to happen to you that would put your salvation in jeopardy.
 9. You will prevail over the world, over the sin that still dwells within you, and over Satan himself.
 10. As Paul says in Romans 8, nothing can separate you from the love of Christ.
 11. Because you have been sealed in him with the promised Holy Spirit, you are more than a conqueror.
- B. Another thing that Paul says about this sealing of the Spirit is that it took place when we heard the word of truth and believed in Christ.
1. This shows us that the Spirit brings people to saving faith through the proclamation of the gospel.
 2. The gospel is God's instrument for bringing us into a vital relationship with Christ.
 3. The gospel remains central to the Christian life even after our conversion.
 4. You will never outgrow the gospel.
 5. You need its good news each and every day of your life.
 6. This is why Calvin says that we should "learn to rest in such a way upon the doctrine of the gospel, that it may be as if God showed himself visibly to us, and that the heavens were opened to us."

7. No Christian should ever tire of hearing such gloriously good news.

C. As we come to verse 14, we see that Paul has something else to say about the Holy Spirit.

1. He says that the Spirit is “the guarantee of our inheritance.”

2. The term that the ESV translates as “guarantee” refers to a pledge or a down payment.

3. In modern Greek this term is used to refer to an engagement ring.

4. Paul is saying that the Spirit is the guarantee, the pledge, even the initial installment of the inheritance that already belongs to us as adopted sons.

5. The presence of the Spirit in a believer’s life is the link that connects us to the blessings of the age to come.

6. This does not mean that Christians will not have to deal with the difficulties that characterize life in this present age.

7. On the contrary, as Sinclair Ferguson explains, “the presence of the Spirit tends to maximize rather than minimize the sense of contrast between the present and the future.” [*The Holy Spirit*, 178]

8. The Spirit’s presence reminds us that we are a pilgrim people.

9. We are still waiting to enter into our true homeland.

10. We have a glorious inheritance, but we are not yet in full possession of it.

V. Conclusion

- A. As we conclude, I want to call your attention to the phrase with which this passage ends: “to the praise of his glory.”
- B. This is the third time that Paul uses this phrase in verses 3-14, which is one long sentence in the Greek.
- C. As Paul describes the blessings that God has poured out upon us in Christ, he cannot help but break forth in exuberant praise.
- D. This is the proper response to the gospel, because God’s supreme purpose in saving us is to display and magnify his glory.
- E. I encourage you to make it your practice to regularly meditate upon what you have in Jesus Christ.
- F. The more often you take this inventory, the more often will you take up these words of the psalmist and make them your own: “What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD... You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD.” (Psalm 116:12–13, 16-17)