

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1

“11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

''A Taste of Heaven''

As we finish up this grand introduction we need to lastly consider why the Apostle says that we are sealed by the Spirit and also that He is our guarantee or earnest of our future inheritance.

We considered at length two weeks ago the truth that we are sealed by the Spirit, and that He assures us of our salvation so that we cry out Abba Father.

- That is the assurance, comfort and experience that we are to live in all the days of our earthly lives.**
- But being chosen in Christ is NOT just what we have in the here and now, but includes a glorious inheritance waiting for us to enjoy for all eternity.**

The Spirit not only teaches us about this truth, but reminds us that He is the down-payment or guarantee or earnest of that inheritance.

Today earnest is not a word that we tend to use in this regard: Today, we use that word to describe a serious attitude about getting something done:

Johnny was very earnest in his attempt to hit a homerun. It is the only definition given in the modern Webster's dictionary:

I know that the language changes and that is not a problem, but there is a teachable moment here... If we turn back to the good old Webster's 1828 dictionary of the English language we find a further definition of earnest as a noun which is the way that the Apostle Paul uses it here in verse 14: 1. First fruits; that which is in advance, and gives promise of something to come. Early fruit may be an earnest of fruit to follow.

The first success in arms may be an earnest of future success.

The Christian's peace of mind in this life is an earnest of future peace and happiness. Hence earnest or earnest-money is a first payment or deposit giving promise or assurance of full payment. Hence the practice of giving an earnest to ratify a bargain. This sense of the word is primary, denoting that which goes before, or in advance. Thus the earnest of the spirit is given to saints, as a pledge or assurance of their future enjoyment of God's presence and favor.

- Yes, even the dictionary we use in instructing our children can make a difference.**
- It also reminds us about how things have changed over the past 200 years! You will not find the Christian sense even under the definition of the modern words we use like guarantee or down-payment.**

The Apostle carefully links sealing and our earnest or guarantee:

- We know that we are saved, that God is our Father AND we have proof that we are saved because the Spirit is with us here and now.**

As Pastor Lloyd-Jones reminds us, “Because the Spirit is in me I know that my body is destined to be delivered finally from sin's presence.”

Paul also combines these truths about sealing & earnest in writing his second letter to those troubled Saints at Corinth...

II Corinthians 1:21: “20 For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

Later in that same letter the Apostle presents more detail about these grand truths and how they work out very practically in our lives... [like we will see in Ephesians]

II Corinthians 5: “5 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.”

That last point is very important for our age where Gnostic thinking is so prevalent that it has even infiltrated many churches... Most would not use that term, but when you see how they treat the material world you can see how they fit the usual definition: Gnosticism. : the thought and practice especially of various cults of late pre-Christian and early Christian centuries distinguished by the conviction that matter is evil and that emancipation comes through gnosis [or knowledge]

We must ALWAYS remember that in God’s Creation the material stuff is never the problem, but rather sin...

- The moral choices made by moral creatures made in God’s image.

To bring it down to something our children can understand, we are not looking for God to throw our bodies away and make us some sort of pure spiritual being: Rather we are looking to God to fix our material bodies, as well as our spiritual state, which is why the Apostle said in verse four:

“4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.” [remember Ben & Joda in Star Wars]

As Christians, we are to look forward to that glorious day when we are resurrected with glorified bodies and that is why the Spirit has been given which Paul points out in verse 5: “Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee [or earnest].

6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Now, think about that for a moment! We are to be judged not just by what we know, but by what we have done! AND not just with what we do with our minds but with our bodies!

This is why we have warnings like this at I Corinthians 6: “15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.””

Or this broader warning from the Apostle that always makes those of us who affirm salvation by faith alone a bit nervous:

I Corinthians 3: “5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? [there is salvation by faith alone!]

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. *[God uses means, and yes they are often material means]*

8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. *[notice that the reward is according to their labors & not their thinking!]*

9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

- Here we should notice a clear contrast with the foundation analogy that Jesus uses at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: Those who build on sand are lost no matter how great a house they build there: Here the Apostle is speaking about those who build on the solid rock... Not everyone who builds there uses the same types of materials.

12 "Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

- There are real rewards and loses, but everyone chosen by God is on the solid rock of Jesus so even one who does very poorly is saved in the end!

At verse 17, the Apostle Paul comes back to the present day reality that we know because the Spirit has been given... 17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Here is how Pastor Martin Lloyd-Jones stressed the importance of the matter, "It is only as we understand this type of doctrine that we can be truly established. The Whole purpose of doctrine is not merely to give us intellectual understanding or satisfaction, but to establish us, to make us firm, to make us solid Christians, to make us unmovable, to give us such a foundation that nothing can shake us. And surely this is our greatest need at the present time [again in the 1950's]. As Christian people we need to be established, and to learn to think of ourselves not so much in terms of particular experiences as in terms of our whole position and the greatness of that which God has planned and intended for us."

At bottom we have through the Spirit been given a foretaste of heaven...

We should see this in our corporate worship.

We should see this in the richness of our relationships!

This is why we will see the Apostle spend so much time here in Ephesians teaching us about church relationships, the marriage relationship, family relationships and even employer and employee relationships.

How we approach each of them should be influenced by these grand truths AND they should all reflect that day when God will bring all things together in Christ!

None can be perfect today, but all should point to the day of perfection.

We have been given the first fruit and look forward to the full harvest!

Pastor Martin leaves us with this admonition, “Receive, then, the doctrine conveyed by the term ‘earnest’. Through the Holy Spirit within us as an earnest we are to begin enjoying heaven even here. ‘Celestial fruits on earthly ground from faith and hope may grow.’ We do not see it all, but God in His infinite grace and kindness and compassion has given us a foretaste. Are we enjoying it? Do you know Him? Are you seeing Him with an open face as in a glass? Has His glory ever been revealed to you? Do you know something of His love, and do you love Him? Do you know the joy of holiness and of purity and of sanctification, and are you enjoying ‘the peace of God which passes all understanding’? Who is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.”

Next week, Lord willing, we move on from the introduction into some amazing lessons about prayer when the Apostle says, “15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the Saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers”

We see that important word ‘therefore’ right at the beginning so let me close this week by quickly reviewing what the Apostle has presented in his glorious introduction:

“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, *[we are blessed with spiritual blessings in heavenly place which we celebrate each week here in corporate worship]* 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, *[we can know that we have ALWAYS been a part of God’s grand plan!]* that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, *[we have right standing before God!]* 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. *[it is all according to the will of our loving and gracious Father]* 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, *[our sins are forgiven, separated as far as east is from west, buried in the deepest part of the sea, remembered no more by God!]* according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, *[we enjoy the riches of God’s Grace as treasure that surpasses any earthly treasure or reward.]* 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, *[God has made known to us all the glories of His plan of redemption]* 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. *[truly it is ALL about Jesus!]* 11 In Him [Jesus] also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.” *[again our inheritance and place in God’s plans are worked out according to the good pleasure of His will!]* 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Yes, our inheritance is sure, we know this because of the witness of the Holy Spirit and God’s Word and He has been given to us as the down payment! ALL of this is what the Apostle Paul has in mind when he begins verse 15 with ‘therefore’ and we will learn some important lessons about how to pray one for another as he does so. For this morning as we take all of this in, we should know that for all eternity our cry will surely be, “Christ has Triumphed, hallelujah!”

Communion Meditation: Rev 5

“8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.””