

Vast, Unmeasured, Boundless, Free: Our Resources in Christ

The Spirit of Promise

Ephesians 1.10b-16

8.21.16

In Him ¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. ¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers.

We decided to look at this chapter...for a few weeks in a row because it's a focused presentation of THE basic idea of Christianity...it's a condensed emphasis on the Gospel or Good News ...and we ALL NEED an infusion of good news! Especially TODAY!

In the second half of this Ephesians Letter Paul will focus on what to DO ABOUT THE NEWS: chapters 4, 5 and 6 show us how to respond to the Good News but HERE the focus is on the News itself – “This is what God has done! Hear it! Receive it! Marvel at it and be filled with it! Here's the Good News.”

The order is all-important – you can't respond to the News until you hear the News and believe the News...and get astounded by it. Only THEN are you even able to live differently. FIRST, what God has done (Good News) THEN, here's how the News enables a new way of life... described in ch 4, 5 and 6.

Today, we think more of this kind of inventory of benefits that belong to everyone who receives the Good News...AND how receiving these infinitely valuable gifts matters...what difference it makes.

Today, we continue to think, “What really IS a Christian?” Simply put, how does what a Jewish Rabbi did 2000 years ago, how does that change my situation in the modern world? What happened THEN and how does it DO something to me NOW?

Let's look at #1) What are the benefits? #2) How are they conveyed/applied #3) How do you know they've been conveyed to YOU?

The benefit in this little section is INHERITANCE, the benefit of being numbered among and having a right to all the privileges of the children of God. And this benefit is really only appreciated when a person knows what it is to be without an inheritance...to be orphaned and alienated and excluded from a family.

And Paul introduces two types of alienated people who have now been claimed for inheritance... It's a kind of "US" and "YOU" distinction: two separate groups both now inherited into God's family. One group had a right to the inheritance but only if a condition could be met and the other group who were complete strangers to the family...but now both groups were inherited...adopted...included.

Verse 11 introduces the first group, "WE have obtained an inheritance ... WE who were the first to hope in Christ..." He means himself (Paul) and the very first believers in Jesus...Jewish believers in the Messiah.

The Jewish people were given a right to INCLUSION in God's family...but the inheritance had to be claimed for them by an attorney... a mediator, a representative who could claim the inheritance FOR them...that was God's condition...only the qualified attorney could claim the inheritance FOR them.

But the Jewish people often asserted their own qualifications, their own labors and morality or their genetics... They often believed, like Nicodemus, that they were qualified because they were born of the right kind of mother... and you'll remember, Jesus Christ TOLD Nicodemus... it's NOT the first birth that gets you a place at God's table...an inheritance...God must become your Father...by a second birth!

And then Paul mentions a second group who were excluded and alienated from God. In v. 13 "YOU ALSO..." These were the Gentiles who were doubly excluded and alienated; they didn't even know about Abraham and the promises.

"But NOW", says Paul, "you Ephesians, both we Jewish people and YOU ALSO, Gentile people have been claimed and included...and we have been made God's own possession, His own family...those who are included and given a place at His table."

And what becomes the basis for this inclusion is this very short but incredibly powerful and frequently used phrase, "IN Christ." Paul uses it about 15 times in this chapter alone. It occurs on virtually every page...maybe even every paragraph in Paul's writings, "IN Christ", "In Christ Jesus", "In the Lord" "In Him", "In the Beloved"...a mediator for both groups.

It's Paul's way of saying that all humanity is fallen and alienated from God IN Adam. Our first representative disobeyed IN OUR PLACE...and IN ADAM our race is excluded but now... a New Adam has come.

God Himself took on the obligations of His people and God became a Man. He, Jesus Christ, the New and Better Adam, He will become the Progenitor of a new race, a new humanity, a new creation.

"In HIM we have obtained an inheritance...according to His plan who works all things after the counsel of His will." It's either IN Adam or IN Christ.

God put me IN Christ...under the representation of a New Leader...He represented us. We are IN Christ.

When Jesus Christ lived obedient to the Father's will...when the Lawgiver, kept His own Law...I was IN Christ. It was as if I myself obeyed personally because in God's way of doing things, I was in UNION WITH Christ...IN Christ.

And when He lived the life the first Adam failed to live and when he prays in the Upper Room, "All you have given Me to do, I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED" (John 17.4) HE PRAYS THAT PRAYER ON MY BEHALF because I was IN Christ...when He prayed it!

And when, in the Garden, He prayed like the First Representative, Adam failed to pray, when Jesus Christ, the Beloved Son prayed, "NOT My will but Thine be done" it was as IF I MYSELF was THAT obedient...I was IN Christ!

And when He pays the price for my crimes and utters the words of a Man under justice, a Man under the pain/penalty of Hell...when He prayed from the Cross, "It is finished!", He prays that prayer for ME because I was IN Christ...in union and represented by Him...as if I myself had paid for all my sin.

That's how what a Man DID who lived 2000 years ago changes my status in the here and now and changes the status, obtains the inheritance for ALL God's chosen people who ever lived...IN Christ we have obtained an inheritance and are included/claimed.

And the way that is conveyed or communicated or applied to Jewish people OR to Gentile people Paul puts it in these words (13), "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation -- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise."

After listening, having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

For you it may have been in a Third Grade Sunday-School Class...when the teacher told “the Old, Old Story of Jesus and His love”. It could have been at the dinner table...or on a Middle School retreat.

It may have been your roommate at college who invited you to church and you shocked even yourself when you agreed to go and THERE you listened to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation... It may have been in a bar...on a street corner...in a pew...on the job...for me it was a hospital room.

You may have heard the words many times before... but THIS time...maybe dramatic...maybe unnoticed ...somehow the words were recognized as the voice of God...the message of truth, the Good News of your salvation... “After listening...you also believed and you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”

The very Heart of God gained access to you... convinced you inwardly that this message of truth is TRUE. This is for YOU...Christ is for YOU... Christ came into the world to represent YOU and you were IN Christ.

And the Holy Spirit still has you convinced. You may waver and you may doubt...but He strives with you and He is the down-payment and guarantee that this is real...Jesus Christ has indeed claimed you and you have obtained a belonging with God that can never be taken from you...even now, you are IN Christ...He represents you in heaven ...in some sense you're already there.

Now, how do you know that you ARE in Christ and that He, the Last Adam, did indeed represent you?

Well, there was a time when I had NO assurance of that ...because I didn't know the Good News; I hadn't listened to the message of truth and I hadn't believed. If you don't believe then you have no real assurance that you are IN Christ and that He represented YOU.

For others...there may be a kind of knowledge... maybe you remember stories from your childhood... maybe you even think of yourself as a Christian... maybe you ARE.

For Paul...while he knew people have a wide variety of stories... unique from person to person...some believe on a playground...some at a stadium...some after reading an email at her desk...but for Paul...he recognized that when the Holy Spirit convinces people that THIS is TRUE...this is the message of your salvation... the Spirit liberates a person to believe... and then...certain shared evidences begin to appear...the presence and power of the Holy Spirit does begin to show up.

When it came to the Ephesians (and this was pretty typical of all St Paul's writings as well) Paul recognized that this wasn't just a religious or spiritual experience or resolution or a new leaf...THIS IS God taking possession... the Spirit of God claims us.

And the tip-off for Paul, the sign that he always hoped to see was, (v. 15) "having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints": faith leading to love.

For Paul...the presence of the Spirit (our seal or guarantee or down payment) the Spirit resides in a person and He begins to show HIS CHARACTER... And in a word, His character is LOVE... the evidence or fruit of the Spirit is love.

At some points Paul sort of crystalized everything in these terms...faith in Jesus Christ showing up in love for other people who share that faith... LOVE for our new family: it's one indispensable evidence that a person has caught the real disease and is IN Christ.

Paul told the Galatians (5.6): "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (NIV) People had different views on the ritual of circumcision but on THIS there is total agreement... the way we get the Good News...is by Spirit-inspired faith and the way you know that it's real faith is affinity for other believers in Jesus Christ, faith expressing itself by love...faith in Jesus Christ...and your love for all the saints. (see also 1 John 3.14)

Now, just two little clarifications and we're done: 1) You may THINK you have faith in Jesus Christ but you really have no love for the saints (i.e. for the Church) and now that bothers you... so...you're gonna try harder to get involved here at St. Andrews and try harder to love other Christians...gonna prove you GOT it.

Well, I'm not opposed to moral exertion (there's a whole group of moral exertion verbs in the NT) but the order of Ephesians is important, remember? Focus on the Gospel...focus on God's love for you in Jesus Christ...believe the Good News and see if love doesn't grow organically...faith expressing itself by love.

Second, that verse, Galatians 5.6 "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." The verse before it says, "For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. (end quote)... So, even while we DO indeed get the Guarantee...the Holy Spirit ...to strive in us...we remain messed up...and by faith we're looking for His work... a n d ...waiting for that day when love is perfected...meantime we keep believing and repenting...hoping...wanting the Holy Spirit to show Himself BY LOVE.... Paul prays for them...we do too.