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Rich in Grace
Ephesians 1:3-14

READ WITH ME IN YOUR BIBLES.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ^[a] before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his **children** through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the **praise of his glorious grace** that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the **forgiveness** of our trespasses, according to the **riches of his grace** ⁸ that he **lavished** on us.*

*With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ **as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things** in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

*¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an **inheritance**,^[b] having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might **live for the praise of his glory**. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this^[c] is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, **to the praise of his glory**.*

That's a lot of talk about **blessing, riches, and grace!**
Paul is overwhelmed by the grace and goodness of God—
And wants us to feel that too!

The **entire book** of Ephesians is filled with this kind of language.
It is a book of **ENCOURAGEMENT** to the whole church,
and to all Christians.

Can YOU hear the encouragement in it?

We have been...*blessed ...with every spiritual blessing*

There is a plan...*for the fullness of time*

And...*We have obtained an inheritance from God, to live for praise.*

Edwin Searcy, in his *Feasting on the World* commentary, suggests that we could break this down into three sections to really understand it.

The first section, in verses 3-8a, is about *spiritual blessings and grace*

The second section, verses 8-10, is about *God's plan* for the world

The final section, verses 11-14, is about *God's way of life for us*.

So first, Paul is saying we've been chosen, as God's own children, to receive these *spiritual blessings and the riches of God's grace*.

What does that MEAN?

Paul calls us blessed—and we sure see that *word 'blessed'* all around us these days, don't we?

You can find it on home décor, clothing and jewelry!

It has been a popular hashtag on social media, it has been co-opted by different authors and celebrities—to help us see ourselves as *special* and our *lives as good!*

But what does that *word 'blessed' mean to YOU?*

I have to admit, I can get a bit turned off when I see it everywhere.

I think it loses some meaning.

My guess is that Paul is talking about something *so much deeper*, than just being happy or having 'the good life'.

Paul says that we are blessed with every *SPIRITUAL blessing*...

In other words, this is about our *hearts*, and our *relationship with Christ*.

Being blessed spiritually means to be a chosen child of God, *rich with grace*—

What KIND of grace?

The *redemption and forgiveness* of Jesus.

This is *far more than just having the good life*,

This is about having **NEW LIFE** in Christ.

The forgiveness—is that *clean slate* when we've messed up, that *second chance* when we thought we had no more.

And this is *not cheap grace*—it was bought for us with a price—on the cross!

When we see *#BLESSED* it usually means *things are going well*.

Or at least we want everyone on Facebook to believe that things are going well.

But when Paul says blessed—the Greek word, eulogeo, (oolageeo) he is quite literally saying, *good word, good news*—

That blessing, or good news, is our *IDENTITY as Christians*— we are blessed as God’s own beloved, adopted children.

That is our real identity—not anything that we share on social media.

It’s a powerful identity—because we are made in *God’s image*, filled with the *Holy Spirit*,

and we are *loved* by God--beyond our wildest imagination! (Check out Ephesians 3 sometime for that!)

But is this how we LIVE?

Is this *what we really BELIEVE?*

I think most people have some *DIFFERENT messages* in their hearts and minds.

Negative ones, like, *I’m a failure, I’m not good enough....*

Even as a church we listen to the negative voices that say— you don’t have enough people, or money, or help....

Ever paid attention to one of those voices?

I know I have.

Truth is, we’ve all fallen short of what we should be.

(Which is why self-help books always sell)

But Paul’s talking about a *different kind of help*.

The real help found in *one person—Jesus Christ*.

And Paul says in Romans 8:1:

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Isn’t that great?

We can *IGNORE the negative voices*—

We can start over, and live as blessed children of God, rich with God’s grace, forgiveness and love.

What would our CHURCH be like if we truly believed

that we have everything we need, and a whole lot of grace to go around?

Isn’t that something to strive for?

The second part of today's passage is about **God's PLAN to bring all things together through Christ.**

*Paul says: ... he has made known to us the mystery of his will... as a **plan** for the fullness of time, to **gather up all things in him**, things in heaven and ..on earth.*

So--**God has a PLAN** for our lives, for the church, and for all of creation.

It's one of those "**already and not yet**" things—
God's working already, but things are not yet perfect.
We are living in the in-between time, that **liminal** space.
But--that is the space where wonderful things happen,
and **transformation** can occur, with God's help.

So how do we live knowing that Jesus has a PLAN for us?

Is everything a part of God's plan?

Does everything happen for a reason?

One of my favorite authors is **Kate Bowler**—she is a Duke Divinity Professor.
Her research has been about the **prosperity gospel**—
that brand of Christianity that proclaims health and wealth for good people,
if you just *name it and claim it!*

But here's the problem.

Life is not that simple, is it?

When Kate was in her mid-thirties

she was diagnosed with stage 4 terminal colon cancer.

She wrote a bestselling book about it,

entitled ***Everything Happens for a Reason and Other LIES I've Loved.***

5 years later, she is very much alive, and she continues to share her insights in her great podcast called ***Everything Happens.***

Has anyone ever told you that "***everything happens for a reason***",
while you are suffering?

Have you used that to comfort someone else?

It sounds like it ***SHOULD be comforting, but actually it's not.***

Kate Bowler reminds us that everything ***does NOT necessarily happen for a reason.*** It's an interpretation of **Romans 8:28:**

We know that all things work together for good^[u] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Paul is saying there that ***God can bring good OUT of all things,***
NOT that all things happen for a reason, or that all things are good!

There are some things that are ***not good, and not of God.***

There is ***evil and senseless suffering and brokenness*** in our fallen world—
 like the collapse of that building in Florida.

Even Jesus admitted this in Luke 13 when he said that suffering is not a direct
 result of sin, there's no formula. He said:

*those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you
 think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I
 tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”*

So if we don't say that everything happens for a reason,

Can we still say that God has a plan?

can we still affirm that ***Jesus is working to bring all things together*** in him?

Of course we can!

We may not understand it, but God IS all powerful.

Jesus brought ***LIFE out of death,***

So of course ***He can and will bring goodness out of evil and suffering!***

We can affirm that ***Jesus is always with us,***

and ***always working to bring something good, even out of the bad.***

FINALLY, Paul is telling us ***what kind of life we are called to lead,***

now that we know that we are blessed with grace,

and Christ has a great plan.

Paul says we have an ***inheritance from God.***

What ***do YOU HEAR when Paul says ‘an inheritance from God’?***

Paul is not talking about material wealth or even good circumstances.

This is a ***spiritual inheritance.***

He says we have inherited ***SALVATION.***

Much like you might inherit ***money or material things from a parent*** who dies,
 we inherited something in the death of Christ—God's grace.

Our ***salvation.***

Salvation is a very CHURCHY word.

To some it means you say a certain prayer, so you can go to heaven.

But Paul is talking about something more--

Like a *completely NEW WAY OF LIFE*.

Specifically, Paul says that we *live for the PRAISE of his glory*.

In other words, *we live for the glory of God*.

Colossians 3 talks a lot about this—about living in Christ, putting on Christ,
And letting go of the old way of life.

Colossians 3:17 says *whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*.

Now that's pretty straightforward.

As people who are saved, we are called to do everything, with Jesus in mind!

What if we really let that sink in?

It reminds me of a *modern parable* I read once,

about Jesus showing up unannounced at someone's house,

and the family taking a moment to 'tidy up' before letting Jesus in.

They were overwhelmed by all the things sitting around the house
that that they thought might offend Jesus....

so they made a *mad dash to hide things* before opening the door!

The point of the story is to get you thinking—

What would you do before letting Jesus in?

How might that change your everyday life?

The same question could be asked of *us as a CHURCH*—

if Jesus walked in, and sat on the front row here—

would we change anything about worship, or how we greet one another?

It's something to think about, right?

The other part of our *new life is to PRAISE God*—pure and simple.

We are called to *thank God, for every blessing, every gift*.

We are called to *notice where God is at work* and offer praise for that!

We can do that right now—if we stop and pay attention.

I want you to do something.

Wiggle your toes.

Wiggle your fingers.

Wiggle your nose.

Now open and close your mouth.

And listen—just listen to the silence for a second.

Now look at your hands,

did you know there are about 60,000 miles of veins in your body?

And over 37 trillion cells!

You are breathing and alive!

And God even knows every hair on your head!

That's a great reason to ***praise God!***

Now look around you---see the faces of other believers, that's your family.

We're here together, to worship and to serve!

Isn't that a reason to praise God?

Not to mention all the answered prayers,

all the experiences of peace and comfort,

all the divine strength and power to help us get through life?

So what starts as a long paragraph about blessings is so much more.

It's ***assurance of God's GRACE.***

It's a ***promise-- of God's PLAN.***

It's a ***reminder of how we are to LIVE!***

So today, let's ***leave here praising God for all of that,***

And now, let all God's people say together, Amen.