

Introduction

General

- Evangelicals have sometimes picked up a bad reputation:
 - for many things maybe...!
 - but for being rugged individualists in particular - only interested in whether someone's soul has been saved...
 - accusation is that we have no doctrine of the church - in as much as that is true, we should certainly repent!
- For the Church is the glorious church of God, and biblically is at the centre of His historical and eternal purposes
 - why did Christ die? To forgive us?
 - yes.... but Titus 2:14:
 - *who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:14)*
 - died for us, not only to redeem us from all iniquity, but also to glorify for himself a **people** who are enthusiastic for good works
- So, the very existence & growth of the church is (one of) the reasons for the death of our Lord Jesus Christ!
- This is part of the prompt for this sermon series and our exploration of Ephesians
 - we are thinking about the church
 - and Ephesians has been described as the "**gospel of the church**"
 - it is almost impossible to study Ephesians without a new vision, a new dream of what God intends his church to be
 - Ephesians focuses on God's plan to create a new society, a new people/humanity, new human race, no longer divided as it is today, but a single, new reconciled human race

Specific

- Today's text is 1:1-14
 - Greek text 14 verses are one long, complicated sentence!
 - no pauses for breath, no punctuation!
 - commentators have competed with each other to come up with metaphors to describe what is happening as Paul's thought floods through them:
 - golden chain of many links, a kaleidoscope of shifting colours, like overture of an opera, or the soaring flight of an eagle...
 - my favourite is a snowball gathering momentum and volume as it rolls downhill
 - and the whole paragraph is shot through with praise - introduced with **v.3**, a key theme for today and for the whole book of Ephesians:
 - *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. (1:3)*
- Church is a God blessed community, a community that has inherited enormous blessings - and has more to come - the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham as given in Genesis 12:1-3:
 - *(Gen 12:1) The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. (Gen 12:2) "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (Gen 12:3) I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*
- Fulfilled in the Christian community - multicultural, multiracial community. So Paul blesses God for blessing us with inconceivable blessings!
- In particular, there are 4 aspects of this blessing to draw attention to:

1. God has blessed us according to his will

- First aspect of this blessing to emphasise is that it comes from **HIS** will (v.5)
 - God is the source of all these blessings - not down to us, our merit, our pleasure, our plan - all down to God's grace and plan

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- look at vs.5, v.7, v.9, v.11...
- can't miss the emphasis!
- So church is a God blessed community - and those blessings come from God, not us
 - this is, of course, the message, of whole bible - what we are is due to him, not us

2. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing

- Second emphasis is on the spiritual nature of these blessings
 - God has blessed us **in the heavenly realms** with every spiritual blessings
 - "in the heavenly realms" - interesting phrase, in NT 5 times, all in Ephesians
 - addition of this phrase to "every spiritual blessing" is Paul's way of reinforcing that these blessings are **spiritual** not material blessings
 - contrast with the Old Testament, where blessings are substantially material
 - see, eg, Deut 28:1ff - children, rain, harvests, crops, livestock, leadership of nations
- But in NT blessings are spiritual
 - indeed Trinitarian (see v.3) - we bless God the **Father** or our **Lord Jesus Christ** who has blessed us with every **spiritual** blessing
- True, we are not to be anxious about material things:
 - eg sermon on mount in Matthew
 - but those are necessities, not luxuries or prosperity - the prosperity gospel is a false gospel, need to be resisted

What are these spiritual blessings?

- So what are these spiritual blessings? Five:
 - **1. he chose us (v.4)** - before foundation of world. Doctrine of election and predestination an abiding mystery... but clearly biblical. It is an incentive for holiness, not an excuse for sin. We are chosen so that we may be holy and blameless. On other hand some see claim to be one of the chosen as immensely arrogant - but really it is a mark of true humility - our election is nothing about us, and all about God. Leaves no room for boasting
 - **2. he predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters** - enjoying full rights of the natural son in the family. Something to be rejoiced in!! What love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God.
 - **3. - redemption, forgiveness through his blood (v.7)** - redeemed from judgement, from guilt and condemnation, even forgiveness of our sins.
 - **4. united under Christ (vs.9,10)** - the mystery of God's will in the fullness of time, all things will be united under the headship of Christ: Jews and Gentiles, old creation (universe) and new creation (Christian community)
 - **5. sealed with Holy Spirit (v.15)** - sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Brands us and marks. Also, divine deposit, guaranteeing that the full inheritance will be ours on the last day.
- The church is a God blessed community indeed! We enjoy many of these privileges now, and more is to come in heaven/on the last day

3. God has blessed us in Christ

- Third major emphasis in these blessings is that God has blessed us **in Christ**
 - in other words, **the sphere in which God offers these blessings** and in which we may receive these blessings, is Christ
 - those in Christ are referred to here many times - in 1-14, Christ is mentioned by name, title or pronoun 15 times; and the little phrase "in Christ" occurs 11 times...
 - its a refrain that comes throughout our text - **v.4, v.6, v.7, v.9, v.11, v.13**
 - all these spiritual blessings are ours if we are in Christ
- Yes, but what does that mean, to be in Christ?
 - best definition given anywhere in the Bible of a Christian is that a person is "in Christ" - not inside Christ, spatially, like clothes in a wardrobe, but **united to Christ**

Ephesians 1:1-~~4~~ - Established by God's love for Christ Entry, 22/4/2007, pm

- eg limbs are in the body
- in Christ we are organically linked to Christ
- So when we are in Christ, when we are Christians, all God's blessings become ours
 - there is no extra condition that we have to fulfill - all these blessings are in Christ, and if we are in Christ then we inherit the same blessings

4. God has blessed us in order that we may live to the praise of his glory.

- Since the grace comes from him the glory goes to him
- The church is essentially a worshipping community
 - not just because we meet "to worship" on Sundays
 - but because our whole of life is worship - our work, our housework....
- Phrase comes three times - v.6, v.12, v.14
 - John Stott told story of curate who left All Souls and gave John Stott a paper knife as a "thank you" present
 - it was inscribed with the phrase "to the praise of his glory"
 - John Stott still has it - become a bit of a motto for him, and commends it as a motto for us!
 - don't want to live for our own praise and glory, not a boastful life - but for Christ's praise, for Christ's glory

Conclusion

- What have we learned about the blessing of God:
 - origin - in God
 - nature - every spiritual blessing
 - sphere - in Christ
 - goal - the praise of his glory
- This is the first characterisation of the glorious church of God, the new Christian community, that Paul presents us with here in Ephesians!! A God blessed community - it exists according to the pleasure of his will, and we live to the praise of his glory.