

July 15, 2012, Seventh Sunday Following Pentecost

Liturgical Color: Green

Romans 8: 12-17

Ephesians 1:3-14

Living to Praise God's Glory

Paul writes to the Ephesian church--- "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."

Blesses us in the heavenly realms with EVERY spiritual blessing!

The beginning of this passage sounds something like the Doxology---

-“Praise God from whom ALL BLESSINGS flow!”

We sing the Doxology every week, but do we ever really stop to consider just what those words mean?

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above!

God is good, ALL THE TIME! All the time, GOD IS GOOD!!

Do we really believe that? Or do we believe that God is sometimes bad or capricious or just messing with us. Do we maybe believe that God blesses other people more than us?

Do we believe that God sometimes withholds blessings from us?

Do we believe in a stingy, punitive, restrictive God? Or is our God generous and merciful, who has given us freedom in Christ?

Let's look at what Paul is really saying in this morning's passage---

The words can be hard to decipher, just like a number of other passages from Paul.

Here, the language is so over-the-top, so repetitive in some ways, so extravagant in others, that it becomes hard to follow.

It begins--- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

Already we have blessed God and we have been blessed with every blessing, which would seem somewhat redundant. God is blessed and we are blessed with blessings!

We are not judged. We are blessed. God blessed us first and we bless God in return.

Continuing reading---

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

This is what our founder, John Wesley, called prevenient grace—that is, the grace that God offers to us before we even know we need it. God chose us, not only before we asked for forgiveness, not just from our birth, but **BEFORE THE CREATION, BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD!!**

Chosen to be holy and blameless---this does not mean that we do not sin or that we are perfect. It means that God chose us to be set free from sin through Christ. God chose us to be made holy and blameless in the name of Christ before the world was made.

The passage continues--- “In love God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

We are not just another one of God's creatures. We have been destined for adoption as God's children. It is God's intention and through grace that we are able to call God "our Father".

This is an amazing blessing with which God has blessed us! We are God's adopted children! Praise God! Hallelujah!

Paul goes on---

"In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us."

We are made holy and blameless through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are forgiven for all of our sins by God's grace alone! And that grace is not given out little by little or slowly or pinch by pinch!

It is LAVISHED on us! Poured out abundantly!

The passage continues---

“With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan to go into effect at the proper time —to gather up all things in heaven and on earth through Christ.

“In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, so that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption of God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.”

Our inheritance is to be God's own people!

And it is all to the praise of God's glory!

So how do we live to the praise of God's glory?

As someone has said, "It's not what you do when you're in worship.

It's what you do after you leave the church parking lot."

It's not about what you do on Sunday. It's about what you do Monday through Saturday!

God loves you. God blesses you with every blessing! God has chosen you to be his adopted child!

How can we bless and praise God for all that he has done for us?

Let me turn back to our first scripture lesson for today---

Romans 8:12-15, because Paul gives us an answer there.

“So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh---for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.”

So the way to claim our adoption, the way to bless and praise God and not deny that we are in fact God’s children, is to live up to that adoption!

To live as children of God, which, in truth, we are!



If we do not act any differently from anyone else, this does not acknowledge the many blessings that God has lavished upon us. It denies what God has done for us in Christ---Christ who is God's grace given to us!

If we go on acting as if we are the same as other people who do not know Christ, then we are no different because of Christ. All of the blessings of God will not have changed us. Our adoption as God's beloved children will have made no difference.

Can that be possible? Can the children of the most Holy God behave the same as everyone else?

I don't think so. If we do, then the flesh is winning in our lives, and not the Holy Spirit.

We need to have the integrity and the commitment and the courage to live differently so that others will notice that we are different, and then maybe they will want to hear just what it is that Christ has done for us.

They might just be interested to find out that God is still active in the world today, and they might just want to know more about what we believe.

And then, the transformation of those around us will begin.

We sing God's praise in church every week, but do we praise God with our words and actions outside of church?

Do we give God the glory? Or do we embarrass God and make him grieve?

Do we really believe that God has given us every blessing? Do we really believe God has chosen us since before the foundations of the world to be his sons and daughters?

What difference does that make in the way we live? Because if we know that we are so loved by God, it will show in our lives.

Maybe we need more practice in praising God here, and then we can praise God better outside of this place!

Hallelu, Praise ye the Lord or other song....