

Sunday 18th October 2020
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Ephesians 1:1 – 8
Theme: “Count your *spiritual* blessings”
“Live your life giving thanks to God”

Online spot: “Count your blessings”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtV2wmdZoqo>

Introduction:

It's an old hymn and its opening words go like this:

**When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.**

Refrain:

**Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God has done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.**

In times of adversity, it is good to “count your blessings” and “name them one by one”....

How has God blessed you physically? With life, *each day is a gift from him*, health, *even if you health isn't so great in particular areas, in others it is good*, loved ones, family, friends, a roof over your head, enough to eat each day....

That's not the blessings from God that we are focusing on this morning, though, as wonderful as they are. This morning we are going to count our “spiritual blessings”, the blessings that are ours through Jesus, and which Paul speaks about in the opening of his letter to the Ephesians. And then are going to focus for a brief time on the ways in which we can say “Thank you” to God for all that He has done for us, and given to us.

Part 1: God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing”

I love the opening section of Paul’s letter to the Christians in Ephesus, which is our text for this morning. Let me read it to you:

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace and peace to you, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For in our union with Christ, he has blessed us by giving us very spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would holy and blameless before him.

Because of his love, God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his children (*lit. “for adoption as sons”*) – this was his pleasure and purpose.

Let us praise God for his glorious grace, for the free gift he gave us in his dear Son (*lit. “which he graced us with in the Beloved One”*). For by the death of Christ, we are set free (*lit. “have redemption”*) that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, which he gave to us in such large measure, *lit. “according to the riches of his grace, which he has showered on us with all wisdom and understanding” (Ephesians 1:1-8)*.

Do you hear Paul mention the different “spiritual blessings” that are ours through our baptism and our faith in Jesus as our Saviour? Let’s count them. Paul mentions that we are:

1) “Redeemed” (A slave set free)

The word “redeemed” means to be “set free” by the payment of a price. That what we has happened to us: God has paid the price to set us free from our slavery to sin and guilt. That price was the suffering and death of His Son on a cross for us.

A slave, though, didn't have to accept his liberation, his freedom. He could have rejected his freedom. Similarly, the liberation, the freedom that God has made possible for us has to be accepted by us. This freedom is ours as we are "in Christ", that is, as we are united to Christ by our baptism and our faith in Him as our Saviour.

2) **"Forgiven"** (*the Suffering Servant*)

Paul writes: "In Jesus, we have redemption through his blood, that is, the forgiveness of sins". Another way of talking about the fact that we are set free is to say that our sins are forgiven when we are "in Christ", *when we are linked to Jesus by our Baptism and our faith*. Jesus has taken the blame and the punishment on himself that we deserve, and as we cling to Jesus as our Saviour, we are forgiven (*Isaiah 53:4-12; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34*).

What glorious words!! *As we cling to Jesus as our Saviour*, God doesn't hold against me or against you what we have done to hurt Him and hurt others.

3) **"Saints", God's "holy" people**

Because we are receiving God's forgiveness, gained for us at huge cost of the suffering and death of God's Son, Paul describes us as "saints", God's "holy" people, and talks about us as being "holy and blameless before God".

God looks at us, and doesn't see a group of 'sinners anonymous', but rather he looks at us and sees instead a group of saints, people who are without blemish: all our blemishes have been washed away by the blood of Jesus, *so to speak*.

4) **Members of God's family ("adopted")**

Furthermore, God has adopted us into his family. God hasn't forgiven us, and left us to struggle on, on our own. He has adopted us into His family. He looks after now as a dear Father looks after His dear children.

These are just some of the wonderful “spiritual blessings” that we have as we cling to Jesus as our Saviour. Through Jesus, we are “redeemed” and “forgiven”, we are made God’s holy people, and members of His family.

Some people have a real gift so far as painting pictures in words to describe what God has done for us. I don’t think that I’m very good at doing this, but I know someone who is: and that’s Max Lucado. I mentioned one of his books last week.... Another one of his books is one entitled *The Great House of God*. In this book, he describes us *who are God’s people* as people who live in God’s house. He uses the Lord’s Prayer as a sort of floor-plan for this house. Listen to what he has to say:

“Our Father who is in heaven...”. With these words, Jesus escorts us into the Great House of God.... Walk behind him as he leads into God’s living room. Sit in the chair that was made for you, and warm your hands by the fire which never fades. Take time to look at the framed photos, and find yours. Be sure to pick up the scrapbook and find the story of your life....

The first two words of the Lord’s Prayer are...very significant. “Our Father” reminds us *that* we are welcome in God’s house because we have been adopted by the owner. When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, *but* he also adopts us....

We go from *being* condemned orphans with no hope, to adopted children with no fear.

Here is how it happens. You come before the judgement seat of God full of rebellion and mistakes. Because of his justice, he cannot dismiss your sin, but because of his love he cannot dismiss you. So, in an act which stunned the heavens, he punished himself on the cross for your sins. God’s justice and love are equally honored. And you, God’s creation, are forgiven....

It would be enough if God just set you free, but he does more. He takes you home. He takes you home to the Great House of God. Adoptive parents understand this more than anyone.

I certainly don't mean to offend any biological parents – I'm one myself. We biological parents know well the earnest longing to have a child. But in many cases our cribs were filled easily. We decided to have a child and a child came. In fact, sometimes the child came with no decision. I've heard of unplanned pregnancies, but I've never heard of unplanned adoption.

That's why adoptive parents understand God's passion to adopt us. They know what it means to feel an empty space inside. They know what it means to hunt, to set out on a mission, and to take responsibility for a child with a spotted past and a dubious future. If anyone understands God's ardor for his children, it's someone who has rescued an orphan from despair, for that is what God has done for us. God has adopted you. God sought you, found you, signed the papers, and took you home (p. 11-15).

And Max Lucado says, as you come into the living room of God's house, don't only look at the framed photo there of you, and the scrapbook that God keeps of your life, but also look up at the painting that God keeps on the wall over the fireplace. It is a painting of a father welcoming his prodigal son, his lost son, back home (*cf. Luke 15:11-24*). It is a painting which describes well the love that God, our Father has for us. *In fact, it describes well the love that God has for everyone of us, regardless of whether we are in His family as His forgiven children, or not.*

Max Lucado writes with regard to this picture above the fireplace in God's living room:

May I show you something? Look at the bottom of the painting. See the words etched in gold? The Apostle Paul penned them, but your Father inspired them.

“Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the world, will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

Your Father will never turn you away. The doors of this room are never closed. Learn to linger in the living room of God’s house. When the words of others hurt you or your own failures distress you, step in here. Gaze at this painting and be reminded of your God. (p. 20-21).

Do you know where I’d be, if it wasn’t for the love and forgiveness of God? I’d be in some pig-pen somewhere, living in squalor and filthy dirty, unable to clean myself. I’m speaking in pictures, I know. If it wasn’t for the love and the forgiveness of God, my life would be shot to pieces. I would be lonely and empty inside, weighed down by guilt, and terribly afraid of the future, especially dying and death....

But God has rescued me: He has set me free, and He has given me a wonderful new life as His forgiven child!

Isn’t what God has done for us just mind-boggling!! Think of where you would be, without God’s rescue of you!

Part 2: Saying Thanks to God

In the light of what God has done for me and you, how can we not live our lives trying to say thank you to God for all that He has done for us!!

I remember studying a couple of plays of Shakespeare at high school *a few years or so ago*. In one of those plays, the play *King Lear*, two of the kings’ three daughters plot against him as I remember it. Anyway, one of the major themes of the play was “filial ingratitude”, which is a longwinded way of saying that a major topic in the play was how unnatural it is for children not to love a parent and not to want to do things for a parent who has spent his or her life caring for them and doing things for them.

In the same way, it is unnatural for us not to love our Father and not to want to do things for Him in response to all that He has done for us.

God has done so much for us. He “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing”. Let’s respond to His goodness to us by giving of our time and our energy and our money, in service of others and in service of His Kingdom as God wants.

Let’s say, “Thank you” in as many different ways as we can think of: by trying to live a life of loving service of others as God wants us to live, by sharing our faith with others, by caring for the people whom God has placed around us, by visiting the sick and the lonely, by giving of our money for God’s Work and for the care of people in His world who lack even the basic needs of food and shelter.... The list goes on and on. In gratitude to God for His many spiritual blessings to us, let’s give of ourselves for God. Let’s follow Jesus, God’s Son, wherever he wants to lead us...

Conclusion:

May God bless each of us as we live our life in His Great House, serving Him *with our whole being and all that we have* in grateful thanks to Him for all that He has done for us!!