

Text: Ephesians 1:3-14

Theme: Blessed to Be a Blessing

January 3, 2016

Back when my kids were in grade school, there was a gifted and talented program available for students who excelled in different areas of academics. That program may very well exist yet today, but whether it does or not, it was a reminder that some students were blessed with special abilities in math, reading, or science. In our text, Paul makes it clear that we are all gifted and talented, that we have all been blessed by our great God, blessed to be a blessing.

I. In the eyes of God, each of us is gifted, talented, and blessed. 1. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing. When I was a kid, I remember wanting to be good at something my brothers weren't good at. Unless I was an unusual child, I suspect some of you felt the same way. If Paul had been there, he would have said, "You are blessed, special, one of a kind because you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing." Every spiritual blessing. Could we be any more special than that? Whatever age and whatever thoughts you may have had in your younger years, Paul says, "You are blessed with every spiritual blessing and don't you ever forget that truth!"

2. We are also blessed because we are chosen. I don't know what games you played as kids, but whatever the game may have been, how many of you simply wanted to be chosen, to not be the last person standing after the captains had chosen teams? Because God is our life Coach, because He chose us for His team, we never need to fear that we will be left out, that we don't fit in, that everyone else belongs except us. As we remember that God chose us, that our Coach said, "\_\_\_\_, I want you on My team," we know that we are blessed, that we are on a special mission, that what we do for our God matters, that when we're playing on His team, we will always win.

3. We are blessed because we have been adopted. What does adoption imply? It implies that we weren't part of the family by birth. The imagery is so perfect for us! As we arrived, we had no interest in God. We didn't know God or care about being part of His family. In our lostness, God stepped in and said, "You don't deserve this; you have not and can not do anything to earn this, but, because I love you and for no other reason, I have decided to adopt you into the family of God." Imagine that! We were nobodies; we were lost, but out of love, God claimed us, adopted us, and made us part of the most incredible family on earth or in heaven.

4. Paul also says we are blessed because we are forgiven. Suppose for a moment that God decided no one sitting here this morning would be forgiven for the next 362 days. How heavy would our load of guilt be by January 1, 2017? Because of the cross, because the manger Baby fulfilled His mission in our place, we can stand before our God convinced that we are forgiven, that every stone has been overturned, that God has looked behind every door of our past, swept all those mistakes into a huge pile, burned them into a heap of ashes and said, "Gone. I have forgiven and destroyed the evidence. Now, enjoy life as one who has been blessed by Me!"

5. We are incredibly blessed by God because He has lavished us with His grace. What comes to mind when you hear the term, "lavished"? Since the Super Bowl is only weeks away, we can use football imagery to understand how blessed we are.

When a coach wins the Super Bowl, what does his team often do? They douse him with a cooler of ice water, right? That's what God has done for us with His grace. It may not be ice cold, but God has poured His grace all over us; He has soaked us in His grace, not because we won the game, but because He, as our Coach, chose to give us an abundance, more than we can comprehend. That's our gracious God who declares us blessed.

6. We are blessed because we have been promised an inheritance. Inheritances are a big deal today. Some have been waiting years to receive their share of an inheritance. But that's not the kind of inheritance Paul is talking about. He's talking about an eternal inheritance, an inheritance that makes any inheritance here look like a few pennies. Since we are blessed by God, we have been given the key to our inheritance in heaven. It won't enable you to buy your dream house, but who really cares about those things when we have an inheritance that's priceless! You are so blessed in this moment because, by faith, you hold the key to your mansion in heaven.

7. We are blessed because the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts. What if the Holy Spirit moved out of your heart today? Your unlimited spiritual blessings would vanish, your adoption papers would go up in smoke, forgiveness would be revoked, and your key to heaven would suddenly disappear. As Paul tells us, the Holy Spirit is the seal, the guarantee, the assurance that all those blessings remain in safe keeping, that no one can break in and rob your faith bank. Because the Holy Spirit lives within, He protects our faith, helps us grow in faith, and stands as our shield against any enemy that would attempt to strip us of our title, "blessed by God."

B. Since we are blessed, how do we bless others? 1. We bless others by sharing our spiritual blessings. As we realize how good God has been to us, we are eager to show and tell others that God has blessed them with more gifts than they realize. In our community, there are so many hurting, lost, misguided, wandering, lonely, empty, discouraged, forgotten people, so many people that need to know that they are special, gifted, talented. Because we know we are blessed, we can assure them that they, too, are blessed, and one day, when we least expect it, they will come up to us and say, "Thank you for what you did for me. It changed my life forever!"

2. We bless others by relying on the wisdom of God that resides within us. We may not be Solomon who was granted a special measure of wisdom, yet, as members of God's family, we possess wisdom and insight that others lack. As we realize that God is working through us, that God gives us insights and enables us to make decisions that are in keeping with His plan, we use that wisdom and insight to touch hearts and change lives. That nudge that tells us to do something for a friend or co-worker, that insight that motivates us to do what someone never expected, it's what we do because we are blessed, because God has given us His wisdom in full measure.

3. Whether you found yourself in a gifted and talented program or not, whether you excelled in academics or were an average student, God has news for you! God says to you and of you, "You are blessed by Me. Now, go and be a great blessing to others!" Amen.