

The Wealthy Church

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[0 : 00] We're going to read together from the New Testament, from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter one, the first seventeen verses.

And this is God's word. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Christ to you in peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.

In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will to the praise of His glorious grace with which He has blessed us in the beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him, things in heaven, and things on earth.

[1 : 24] In Him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory.

In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in Him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

This is God's word, Tom. Thank you, Corey. Let's spend a little while thinking about this passage that Corey just read.

So this is a short sermon at the end of our service tonight. With what resources do you live as a Christian, and with what resources do we plant churches or maintain existing churches?

[2 : 48] If you get a bunch of church planters in a room and you listen in on their conversations, one of the things that you'll probably hear the most is chat about resources.

How are we going to do what we're going to do? Where are we going to get the money from? Have you managed to get a building yet? And these are the kind of things that are very real, and we keep talking about them because they matter.

But if you think about yourself as a Christian, a human being, or somebody who's thinking of becoming a Christian, what is it that will help you follow Jesus?

Is it something that you have, something that you're able to do? Corey was already speaking to the young ones about the fact that the difference which is all the difference in the world is not that we get some kind of counsel to just lift our levels a little bit to make us better in the eyes of other people in the church, or in terms of how God sees us, but that we believe in and proclaim, tell what He has done.

So that's the foundation of what it means to be a Christian is to recognize it not by myself, but by the Lord Jesus Christ, can I be saved? But I want to say that what we see in Ephesians 1 here is that the resources, the strength, the capacity that we need to go on and be a church that proclaims that gospel is still the gospel.

[4 : 28] The gospel is the thing that makes the difference in the first instance, the moment you see Jesus for who He is and come to believe in Him, but it continues to be and never stops being the resource that the church has, because the gospel bottom line is that we have Jesus Himself.

So when you become a Christian, it's not like God just ticks you off and says, okay, sin's forgiven. That's incredible that He does that, that He forgives our sins and washes clean our account as it were.

But not only that, He draws you to Himself with incredible love to the extent that as we see in this passage, He calls you an inheritor in His kingdom.

That's the kind of truth that is life-changing that stays with you all your days and gives you all you need in spiritual terms, which feeds into practical terms to resource us as we go about the business of living for Jesus and maintaining established churches and planting new churches.

So a few things from the passage that we can see specifically. There's a whole bunch of well-known verses in this passage that Corey just read, but let me just pick out one in particular as the sort of hinge that I want to base what I'm going to say around.

[5 : 56] Verse 3, bless be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. I think that kind of encapsulates what I want to say, and I think it ties as well with what Corey was saying.

He has done it. So we're not still waiting for God to do something which will make all this worthwhile. His Son Jesus laid down his life on the cross and took it up again and is now exalted at the right hand of the Father, watching over his world and orchestrating his gospel, the expansion of his kingdom.

So however you feel about that right now, it's encouraging, isn't it, coming together. It's a delight for me to be here tonight, to see, as was said earlier, old friends, old faces, or maybe to make new acquaintances tonight.

However we feel about being a Christian or working for Jesus, maybe doing the same things you've been doing for five or 20 years, or planting churches and doing something quite new, we have the astonishing commitment of Jesus and what He has already done and continues to do and will not stop overseeing and doing until the day when He comes again.

Here are a few specifics in the passage. You just illustrate these spiritual blessings and I'm just going to touch on them, as I said in this short time. Just now, first thing is in verse one, God gives spiritual leaders to His church, Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

[7 : 34] Paul didn't do what he did in the days that he did it and he didn't write what he's written here for us because he had a bright idea, or because he's a super guy with loads of capacity.

I mean, he must have had loads of capacity because he dealt with an awful lot of things, but he never lost sight, I don't think, certainly not in the way his writings come across to us of the fact that he's been put exactly where he is by God.

Now if that's true for an apostle, do you think it's true for you as well? I think it has to be because I think although, and we've just come this afternoon in Est Valley from our afternoon service looking at the call of Samuel, again a particular person in a particular place called by God for a particular role, but we were making the point and I think it's true of Paul and of us also that God oversees the lives and the situations of all of his people, and that includes you and I as well.

But Paul is a leader and he's there by the will of God under Jesus. So Paul's remit was to lead the early church to see Jesus for who he was is to be convinced of his worthiness so that more and more people will put their faith in him and follow him and that churches will be planted, that's what Paul was about, in the character of Jesus and to see him for who he was.

Healthy, healthy churches which still happens to be, if you like, the mission statement of the free church, the denomination to which we belong. We want to plant healthy churches and see healthy churches grow in communities all across the world.

[9 : 26] Now that's a good thing. It's good for the church that God puts leaders in place to look after his church and to shepherd them under Jesus.

That's what's true here, that was Paul's remit and he wasn't astray for that, that's to be true of leaders in the church now. And just by way of a kind of immediate application, can I ask you to pray for those who are in particular leadership, others who are planting, maybe right at the start of the process, pray for your leaders here.

Also pray because the free church needs you to pray for more workers in God's harvest field, that's a prayer that we were given, isn't it? Pray for workers to go out into the harvest field because the free church needs more ministers, people who will faithfully hear God's word and pass it on.

That's a prayer that you can make, that's a part you can play in this big picture that we're all engaged in seeking to serve God. But also think about the call that you've been given.

Leadership is influence, is something I've been thinking about recently, so you may have a particular role formally in leadership in the church. But if leadership has to do with influence, then a class in a shop in Del Quith with a bunch of mums who've never met each other before and a bunch of Christians who just want to get to know them and lead them to Jesus, God may, we pray, do great things.

[11 : 01] And the same may also be true in all the places that you find yourselves, the ordinary places of life, if you like. So pray for leaders in the church and pray that God would help you with whatever capacity or responsibility you have to lead others to Jesus.

Okay, so spiritual leaders. But he doesn't just designate people or delegate people to go off while he looks the other way.

Some people have an idea of God, but he's a bit like that. I wonder if maybe you do tonight or you know somebody who does. What's the argument against that? Like God made the world, he kind of said it in motion, and now he's not really that interested.

Well, Paul's already said that Paul is an apostle by the will of God. He then goes on to say that what we have from God, and you see that in verse two in particular, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When you hear words like that, sometimes they're so familiar because they're just part of the familiar introductions that somebody like Paul writes in his letters that we skip over them.

[12 : 09] But if you just stop for a minute to think about what Paul is saying there, he's saying that through the apostleship that he has because of the will of God, in other words, the authority that he has under the Lord Jesus to speak to the church, what God would have him say, what he will say to them is that in Christ as they put their faith in Jesus, hanging on to God's coattails, as Derek said, because it can feel like that in life sometimes, can't it?

You have grace and peace. The undeserved favor of God, before you did anything for yourself to make yourself worthy, God acted in abundant grace to redeem you and to save you.

And what that means is that you can stand in His presence with whatever baggage you feel you carry and maybe the sins that you're conscious of that are maybe quite fresh, brutally fresh in your mind from the week just passed, and you can receive grace and mercy and peace because you're forgiven.

And being forgiven, you're welcome into His presence, into His heart. So that's what you need to hear from your leaders.

Pray that the gospel would be clear in those who speak the gospel. May it be clear in your mind and in your heart, pray that it would be fresh in your vision on a Monday morning, on a Wednesday when you're exhausted, and whatever else is going on.

[13 : 48] Grace and peace is yours. How will you make it through as a Christian? With what resources will you go on day by day when you're the only Christian in the office or in your street or whatever it is?

Well hear His voice. I was speaking about hearing the voice of Jesus earlier, so it's fresh in my mind. He says, grace and peace to you. You need to take hold of that and believe it and live in it as well.

So Paul has this wonderful message and already we've seen something of the abundant resources, the life that we have in the gospel, that is the most life-giving foundation, the basis for why we do anything.

So God gives spiritual leaders, God gives us Himself. The final thing I want to say about the fact that God gives us Himself is He gives us leaders, He gives us Himself.

And that means that when you follow Jesus, because He gives you grace and peace, because He sees you with all that you've done and all of the debt that you owe and He in His grace pardons you, He is safe to follow.

[15 : 06] I think we have, I think we struggle, don't we, with those we follow in society nowadays. Political leaders, business leaders, people in positions of authority, not just because we're anti-institutions, which is a bit of a theme of today, but maybe because we see people struggling to live up to the positions that they've been given, because after all, they're like us, only human.

Well, we don't excuse them, we struggle to follow. We wonder what will happen to us if we sit under their leadership, if we go where they go.

But Jesus, He is a good leader, His mission, His purpose, His character and His provision is all good for you.

So it is safe to follow Jesus, though it feel like it may cost you quite a lot, because after all the business of following Jesus, the business of looking after an established church, the business of planting churches is difficult and costly.

Paul knew that. He spoke about it quite often in fact. He spoke about the fact that we are hard pressed on every side. He spoke about the fact that the gospel that we have, we have as it were in jars of clay, because we feel like so fragile sometimes.

[16 : 31] But Jesus has gone before us. He gave us His life. You know, He held nothing back. There's nothing good that Jesus could have given that He held back from you. He gave everything and we follow Him and that's a privilege.

So let that fill you up. And I want to say thirdly that He makes you rich. Church planters talking about resources.

We need resources. We need money. We need buildings. We need people. All of that's real. You need resources for life. And these are the practical things of life that we take to God and we ask for His help with.

We ask for them in measure. We say give us today our daily bread. But you know, underneath the resources and before we get to thinking about the resources has to be the way in which He blesses our hearts and our souls with the provision that He gives us, which brings us to the verse 3 that I read earlier.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.

[17 : 47] It's an interesting way of thinking about it, isn't it? He's already given you every spiritual blessing that He could. And part of that has to do with the surety of the deposit, you know, the hope for the future that we have in Christ.

We prayed earlier, Corey prayed, come Lord Jesus. We believe that. We believe that He's coming again. And when you see Him when He comes again, because your hope is in Jesus and because you know His declaration of grace and peace, you will see Him and you will rejoice.

Do we have the surety of that hope, live in that hope, remembering that He is coming again? But there are also some other things, and these things could be talked about for a long time.

I'll mention some of the other things in this passage. He knows you personally. I'll put it the other way around. You are personally known.

So this isn't some kind of philosophy that's thrown out there that has adherents who drop in and out. This is about God calling to His heart His people who He knows by name.

[18 : 54] He's blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. This is a long-term, totally comprehensive God project, sounds too trite, doesn't it?

But it's the mission of God to call His people and to save them and care for them for all of their lives.

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be wholly and blameless before Him. You have an identity and a standing that transcends any other identity you could either wish for or be given in this world.

It means that in the highest core of the universe, you have full approval because you're loved when you follow Jesus. I mean, you're His treasure.

There's a passage in the Old Testament that speaks of the way in which God sings over in His delight, His people. And that's been the theme of His joy in His salvation from eternity past and will be the theme for all eternity.

[20 : 09] And it's one that we're brought into. Be caught up in that song of praise and of wonder. It's hard, isn't it, on Monday morning and on Wednesday afternoon when you're exhausted.

But that's the resource. That's the key. The gospel is the thing that we believe which saves us. And the gospel is the thing where we see the way in which we get not only a status, but we get Jesus.

And the status that He gives us is to be called sons. It becomes so amazing. We are to the praise of His glorious grace in verse 6, which He has blessed us in the beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us. So again, God hasn't held anything back.

Now, let me just say in particular, if you're struggling because you're struggling, because life is hard, or if you're struggling because of sin, let's say, or of distraction, or of something that makes your heart grow cold.

[21 : 15] And maybe you've got to the point where you're thinking, He won't want me around anymore. That can be a human way to think. It's maybe even understandable.

But He lavished His grace and His love upon us. And Jesus told the story of a prodigal son, a son who had behaved quite disgracefully, who went away when he returned, the Father ran to him through his arms around him and embraced him.

So remember His commitment to you, and return to Him and seek again the present knowledge of His love for you. So you're personally known, you are approved of, you have an identity or a standing, but you couldn't get anywhere else, and that actually transcends anything else that you could hope for, and also, and often, you have an inheritance.

Now I mentioned this already. We have the hope of the Lord Jesus coming again. But it speaks in this remarkable passage of the way in which we are called inheritors, we are called sons.

And as we look forward to that, we see at the end of just verse 10 there, it speaks of, this is a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and on earth.

[22 : 34] Many of our plans, we can only half conceive of them, and even when we've made them, we'd don't know if they're going to work. But in God's plan, He holds the whole world in His hands, He holds you in His hands, and He knows exactly the day when the Lord Jesus will come again, and we will see if you like the realization of that reworking, that amazing promise of the new heavens and the new earth with His people gathered before Him, celebrating the reality of eternal perfection.

What resources do we have to make our way forward in the Christian life? Well, the gospel, it's multifaceted. It speaks to us so much about who God is and what He's done. It bears, I think, tangibly on our lives in the niche moments where you feel sad or alone or poor, all the things that are very real to us.

We need friends, and we need somebody to give us a loan sometimes, so we need practical help, and we should be good at that as those who have been loved in loving one another.

But go quickly to a passage like this, and read again and hear God speaking to you and saying what He has done for you. It starts with the personal individual, so as to be able to inform and grow into the collective body of Christ gathered in the established church and in the different startups, core groups, church plants, wherever they meet, the resources that we have are remarkable.

And they're the things, actually, that will help us with the practical resources when it feels like we need to give of ourselves again when you're tired, when you need to give you finances.

[24 : 25] And that means sacrifice, that means you can't buy something because you're called to give something that you can to the church, the resources that you need for that practical step, even for the call in the first instance to leave the safety of the mother church and travel into the outlands to plant a new church.

That all comes from the gospel and from the love of God and from the momentum of the mission of God, because He's not done yet with His world. He can't be because Jesus doesn't come again.

He will do, but until the day He comes again, we seek to show the love of Christ to the world. So remember first the love of Christ to you, and that will help you to take at least one step forward.

We pray by God's grace tomorrow morning, whenever you get out of bed. I'm going to finish and pray, and then I think we'll come back up.

We rejoice, Lord, in all that you have done for us, you are so kind and faithful. Please Lord, fill our minds and fill our hearts.

[25 : 43] Thank you for the words of Paul here, but Holy Spirit, would you take them and fill us with them and apply them to us during the week? When we struggle to believe them, would you, Spirit, be the advocate who counsels us and who presses on our minds and our understanding who we are in Jesus, so that we can do what we need to do, what you call us to do, taking steps forward, seeking the glory of God?

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.