

Introduction

I suspect that many of us here today will have received an inheritance at some time in the past or may expect to receive an inheritance in the not too distant future. An inheritance can be a great surprise and sometimes rather unexpected even though it comes with a tinge of sadness given that someone passed away to be able to provide that inheritance.

As we continue our studies in Ephesians this morning I want to us to look at **1:11-14** which lead up to thoughts of the inheritance that will come to all believers in Jesus Christ in the fullness of time. As I hope we will see this is a very special inheritance and does not become ours lightly.

If you look at these four verses very carefully I hope you will notice that Paul touches on the past, the present and the future and over the next few minutes we'll look at what the Apostle has to teach us on those periods of time.

In Christ/In Him

Before we look at the past, present and the future, I want to point out something very important for us to think about. Everything that Paul talks about in these four verses, and indeed throughout the Epistle, is “*in Christ*” or “*in Him*”. In these verses we see each of those phrases used twice although in essence they are interchangeable, in fact the ESV translation uses “*in Him*” three times and “*in Christ*” once.

All that Paul talks about here happens in and through Christ and it therefore applies to all those who believe in Him. It was God's plan that everything should happen because of and through Jesus and that means that to be part of God's plan we need to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; without Him we are nothing and we cannot be included in the inheritance that Paul tells us about.

Past

In **1:11** we read “*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will*”. The NIV that we use has a footnote for that word “*chosen*” which suggests that we “*were made heirs*”. If you think about it we could easily read that clause as saying that we “*were chosen to be heirs*”. If we are to receive an inheritance from God then it follows that we must be heirs, or co-heirs, with Christ since He is the One with the major inheritance. Notice too that Paul tells us that we were also predestined to come to faith in Christ. I regularly quote from sources such as commentaries, videos and sermons that I've heard. Well today I want to quote from one of my own sermons! In March (2022) I delivered a sermon titled *Chosen* in which I said, “All that Paul talks about here regarding our being chosen was planned by God. When talking about this Paul tells us in **1:5** that our being chosen was all ‘*in accordance with his [that is, God's] pleasure and will*.’ Paul continues in **1:11** by adding our being predestined was ‘*according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will*.’” I went on to add, “Not only have we been chosen but we were chosen before time began and although that may sound impossible to our finite minds and

extremely difficult for us to grasp, it is all part of God’s amazing plan for His kingdom and His family.” Not only was all this part of God’s plan but it was also in accordance with His will as Paul reminds us in **1:9** and **1:11**. Nothing happens without it being part of God’s will and you may recall we pray that His will may be done each time we come before the Lord in prayer and pray that special prayer that He taught us. Let me remind you that in that prayer we read in **Matthew 6:10**, “*your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” and if we truly believe in the power of prayer then we can be confident that God’s will will in fact be done. It surely follows that since God is in control of everything then He will carry out His plan according to His purpose and He will bring it all to completion in His time not ours.

The important thing about all this is that we never forget that we were chosen and predestined by God before time began and so for us it was very much in the past.

Present

It is when we come to the present time that we see another part of God’s plan being implemented and it is a plan that leads to a wonderful inheritance. Before we think about that however, we need to consider just who is included in this plan and who will be involved in this inheritance.

The most important “*qualification*” to receive this inheritance is that people are believers; that is, they have come to faith in Jesus Christ. Sadly for them, anyone who has yet to accept Christ as Saviour is excluded. Having said that it is important to understand that the offer of redemption through Jesus Christ is inclusive and not exclusive; it applies to everyone with no exclusions. In the Ephesian context it applied to Jews just as much as it applied to Gentiles. Let me remind you that Paul was writing to the church at Ephesus; a church that was made up mainly of Gentile believers but did include Jews in its fellowship. There was no discrimination or extra requirement on the Gentiles to accept any Jewish customs or regulations and Paul was always at pains to work against any attempt to introduce such thoughts.

God’s family today is also open to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ regardless of their race, colour, gender, sexual inclination or age. We hear a lot today about diversity especially from our politicians and the politically oriented pressure groups. Despite what they may say none of these organisations or groups is truly diverse, only God’s family can lay claim to being 100% diverse. I did mention sexual inclination and by that I meant anyone who may have homosexual leanings; God will accept them if they repent of their sins just as other sinners are expected to do, and if they remain celibate. It should follow that all those who do accept Christ as Saviour also need to accept God’s Word in full and to obey what He has to say.

As we read the passage we should note that Paul is writing to the whole church in Ephesus. However, look carefully and you will see that he uses “*we*” (**1:12**) to indicate that he is talking to and about the Jews and “*you also*” (**1:13**) when he includes the Gentiles in his comments.

There is no escaping the fact that we are all sinners as Paul reminds us in **Romans 3:23** when he says, “... *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” That verse doesn’t say just some of us have sinned but all of us; no one is excluded from that situation. To be forgiven and then redeemed we need to come before the Lord in repentance and accept that Jesus died for us on Calvary’s cross to pay the price for our sins. When we do that God in His grace and mercy will forgive us. All of this takes place in the present and means that we and many others have been and are being redeemed by coming to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Redemption can only come through Jesus Christ; nothing and no one else is needed and no one else is capable of providing such an amazing gift. I said in my sermon on *Redemption* in May (2022) that “Jesus shed His blood by dying on the cross of Calvary to pay the redemption price for our sins. He died willingly and obediently.” That is why Paul reminds us in **1:7** that, “*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace*”.

Redemption brings with it many benefits and gifts not least of which is the forgiveness of our sins by God. At the moment of redemption we become His children and are adopted into His family. That means that we become heirs of His and co-heirs with Christ which means of course that we will be part of an incredible inheritance when the time is right. In addition to all that we also receive the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit. He is with us every minute of every day and He will guide us, lead us, lift us up when necessary, teach us and simply be there for us when times get tough. His presence isn’t part-time or short-term since He will be with us until Christ returns. Paul helpfully tells us in **1:13a** that, “*Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit*”. This seal identifies us as belonging to Christ. It isn’t a physical sign such as the branding on cattle or paint marks on sheep but rather a spiritual sign known only to God. Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as being a “*seal*” although He could also be seen as an engagement ring such as that given by a man to a woman to signify their love and the fact that at some time in the future they will marry. Having talked of the Holy Spirit being an identifying seal Paul then adds that the He “*is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance*” (**1:14**). We all know about guarantees on items such as white goods don’t we; they tend to be short term and expire a day or so before the product gives up the ghost! That is not the case with this guarantee since it is a guarantee from God and not only does He always keep His promises but He never lets His children down.

Whilst that thought of a “*guarantee*” is good given we probably understand it quite clearly, the KJV uses the word “*earnest*” which is an old word that was used many years ago in connection with buying and selling transactions. It is a stronger word since it means that what is being given forms part of the final payment and is an absolute guarantee. An engagement between a man and a woman is the first step towards marriage, an arrangement that will be finalised or completed on the wedding day. That is how our redemption will be; the sealing or earnest of the Holy Spirit is given as a sign that we belong to God until we receive our full and final inheritance when God fully redeems us when the time is fulfilled and this will be “*to the praise of His glory*” (**1:14**). It is important to understand that it is the sealing of the Holy Spirit and His presence within us that provides the earnest or guarantee of “*the adoption, the redemption of our body*” (**Romans 8:23**).

We need to understand that marking us as belonging to Christ is not the only role of the Holy Spirit in our lives; He is also active in a number of other very important areas of our lives. I mentioned earlier that as children of God we become His heirs and therefore co-heirs with Christ. Paul reminds us of this in **Romans 8:16-17** where he tells us “*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*”

The Holy Spirit also works in our lives to bring about a major transformation in us as witnessed by Paul's comments in **Galatians 5:22-23** where he lists the fruit of the Spirit. In those verses Paul lists the very important fruit that comes from our being redeemed by Christ and filled by the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us, “... *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*” As we grow in our faith and the Holy Spirit works in our lives we develop and display this fruit. None of this would be possible without God's presence in us and with us in the form of the Holy Spirit.

It's worth noting though that this transformation in our lives is not instant but is an ongoing process throughout our Christian lives. Paul talks in **Romans 12:2** of this transformation when he tells us, “... *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*”. The tense in the original Greek indicates the present continuous, in other words we should “*keep on being transformed*”; it is not a single one-off process. As with our developing and displaying the fruit of the Spirit, the transformation of our entire lives begins with our redemption and will only end when Christ returns and we receive our resurrection bodies; until that glorious day we should continue to grow in our faith and display more and more fruits.

When we first come to faith in Christ, many of us know very little about Jesus, faith or the Bible and so another role of the Holy Spirit is to be our Teacher; to help us when we read Scripture so that it makes sense. Non-Christians tend to complain that the Bible is impenetrable and difficult to understand. When we come to faith we don't instantly receive supreme knowledge of the Bible, we have to work at it, and as we do that we have the Holy Spirit beside us guiding us to a better understanding of what the Bible is saying. The Apostle John tells us, “... *the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*” (**John 14:26**). Earlier in that chapter the Apostle refers to the Holy Spirit as being the “*Spirit of truth*” (**John 14:17**). In a world where truth seems to be negotiable having the Holy Spirit guide us towards the real truth is a joy beyond measure.

Future

Ordinarily we receive an inheritance when the person leaving it to us has passed away. However, in the case of the inheritance that Paul is talking about Jesus has not only died but He has also been resurrected and is alive today never to die again. Given that undeniable fact how on earth can we receive our inheritance?

In **1:14** we saw that the Holy Spirit will be with us as a guarantee of what is to come “*until the redemption of those who are God's possession*”. This redemption is not the same as the

redemption Paul discusses in **1:7**; that redemption is the moment when we accept Christ as Lord and Saviour and then receive forgiveness of our sins, our adoption as His children through Jesus Christ, and our being sealed or marked by the Holy Spirit as belonging to Christ.

At the end of **1:14** we read that the seal of the Holy Spirit is “*a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession*”. These fascinating few words at the end of the passage may appear straightforward and may well suggest that as God's adopted children we will receive our redemption bodies when Christ returns. Our inheritance is surely that since we belong to Jesus Christ and have been marked by the seal of the Holy Spirit we will be with Him for all eternity. David, writing in **Psalms 16**, supports that view when he writes, “*LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.*” (**Psalms 16:5-6**). Paul confirms that when he tells us in **Romans 8:23**, “*Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*” Peter describes this inheritance as being “*an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade*” and that it is “*kept in heaven for you*” (**1 Peter 1:4**).

When we come to faith in Christ our spirit comes alive in and through Him and we become changed and different people. However, our bodies, along with creation, are in “*bondage to decay*” (**Romans 8:21**). It is only when Christ returns that we will know “*the freedom of glory*” (**Romans 8:21**) and receive our new and glorious bodies to be like Christ. Paul reminds us of this in **Philippians 3:20-21** when he tells us “*... our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*” That will happen when we receive our final and full redemption and what a glorious day that will be.

I have mentioned the vital involvement of the Holy Spirit in all that Paul tells us about and I want to re-emphasise the role that the Spirit has. As an individual comes to faith the Holy Spirit is given as a seal to identify them as belonging to Christ. It is important to understand that this is not a second blessing; this sealing does not happen sometime later in our daily walk with Christ nor is it a separate event; it happens the moment we come to faith. The Holy Spirit is given as a guarantee of what is to come when Christ returns. In his second Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul had this to say: “*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*” (**2 Corinthians 1:21-22**). Later he told them: “*Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*” (**2 Corinthians 5:5**).

It is vital that we treat the Holy Spirit with the respect that He is due in His role as a member of the Holy Trinity. We can rely on Him to be with us and help us and we should be careful to do nothing to upset or grieve Him as we await our final redemption. Paul reminds us of this when he tells us “*... do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*” (**Ephesians 4:30**). I'll say again that it is the seal of the Holy Spirit that marks us as being God's possession. In **Deuteronomy 7:6** we read about the people of

Israel being God's possession. The verse says: "*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*" It is God's people, His possession, who He will claim when the time is fulfilled. In Old Testament times the chosen people were Israel but now the chosen people are all those who have accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour, regardless of whether or not they are Jews or Gentiles. Anyone who comes to faith in Christ is included as God's "*treasured possession*" and will receive this glorious inheritance.

Why does God do this? The answer comes at the end of **1:14** where Paul tells us we receive this inheritance "*to the praise of His glory*". Not only that but we read earlier in **1:5-6** that we were predestined for "*his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace*". In **1:9** we learn that God made known the mystery of His will for us "*according to his good pleasure*". And in **1:12** Paul again tells us that we were predestined so that we "*might be for the praise of his glory*".

Everything God does and has done is for His pleasure and so that we may praise Him; He is after all worthy of praise given that He is the Creator and the Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. To live to the praise of the glory of His grace is both to worship Him ourselves by our words and deeds as the gracious God He is, and to cause others to see Jesus in us and come to praise Him too. In other words, Christ should shine out of our lives, not just when we bring Him our worship but in all that we do and say each day.

Conclusion

These beautiful verses remind us of just why we have been redeemed. God doesn't redeem us and forgive us our sins for the sake of it but that we "*might be for the praise of His glory*" (**1:12**). God wants us to worship Him and let's face it He is most worthy of all the praise we can offer. We should also note the vital role of the Holy Spirit in our redemption. He not only marks us as belonging to God but works in us to produce fruit and teach us the truth.

This all leads us to receive God's inheritance when the time is fulfilled. Unfortunately this glorious future is not available to everyone; it is only open those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, been forgiven their sins and been redeemed. The Psalmist David reminds us of that when he says in **Psalm 34:22**, "*The LORD redeems his servants; no-one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.*" If you don't know Christ already then come to Him in repentance while you are able and then you too will receive God's inheritance.