

“Let’s praise with Paul!” Ephesians 1:3-14

“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 to himself 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.

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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

What is it that makes you so excited that you can’t keep it to yourself, that you have to share it, that you want others to participate in your experience, that you want to shout aloud your excitement? What are those things?

For some it may be the beauty of God’s creation; amazing, incredibly beautiful sunsets, sunrises, oceans, waterfalls, mountains and valleys, starry skies, swarming abundance of diversity of life, its amazing wonders, these are all good candidates – I think they all are more than capable of causing us to exclaim “wow!”

But the same is also true when we witness true greatness and excellence in human beings. Imagine musicians who can play or sing so beautifully that it feels like they are playing on the strings of our souls!

Imagine Olympic athletes, supreme in their speed, or strength, or skills, towering as legendary giants among mere mortals! Or powerful intellectuals, whose knowledge and insight and wisdom is so attractive that it compels us to listen to them!

We can only exclaim “wow!” Or think about great personalities, whose characters are not just outstanding, they are incredibly attractive. Think about someone, who is truly gracious and humble, about someone who is self-sacrificial in their care for others! About someone who is faithful and loyal far beyond what may be expected.

When we witness any of the above mentioned, it touches something deep in our hearts. It is not just the mind that is stirred up. It is our very being awakened by the presence of true greatness or true beauty.

How do we want to respond when something like that happens? Our very souls open up in shouts of praise and adoration. We are not only attracted to such it ourselves and overjoyed, we long to share such an experience with others: “Wow, look, come and see how glorious, how magnificent this is!”

All of that happens naturally, effortlessly, no one needs to tell us that we need to rejoice and be amazed and excited and keen to share this “wow, look!” experience with others. It just happens, this praise flows as streams of water after the storm.

But if this is how we react to beauty and greatness and virtue and goodness in this world, why don’t we react this same way, and even more, when we encounter the Triune God? Why are we not similarly excited? Why are we not similarly passionate to share His beauty and goodness with others? Why does that seem like some toil?

Perhaps it is because we don’t know Him well enough. Perhaps it is because we don’t perceive clearly His beauty and majesty, His goodness and kindness, His amazing power and wisdom. Perhaps it is because we, pastors, don’t preach clearly enough. Perhaps it is because our old sinful nature is too unwilling to rejoice in the true God. What is it?

Today I pray that our God would bless us, that when we encounter our God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that we would overflow with amazement and praise: “Wow, look, look!” And the words of Paul from his letter to our brothers and sisters in Ephesus can be a rich source of inspiration for us.

When you get home, take your Bible and read this first chapter from the letter to Ephesians and meditate upon it, and let the Holy Spirit wrap you in and fill you with this rich and joyful message so that you too can delight in this Good News.

This is not an ordinary beginning of a letter. Paul begins his address to Ephesians, but then he bursts out in his praise to this God, who has revealed Himself and His mysteries to Him, and also to us.

It is amazing, the reading that we read today is actually... just one sentence in the original Greek. It is like Paul opened his mouth to praise God and just couldn’t stop. He goes on and on. This is, as some suggest, the longest sentence in the Bible. 200+ words!

This joy filled praise to the Triune God. That’s right, to the Triune God. For as Paul bursts out in his praise, he glorifies God the Father and what He has prepared for us, and then he glorifies God the Son and what He has accomplished for us, and then he glorifies God the Spirit for everything that He has done and does for us.

His praise sounds even more beautiful and uplifted in the original. I pray that we could similarly delight in our God. For there is nothing more glorious and nothing more exciting than our God, the Holy Trinity, His character, and His care for us. For you!

Let’s marvel and delight together with Paul! **God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** He is the beginning of everything. He is the Holy and Eternal One. The Almighty ruler of His creation. And **“He has chosen us [He has chosen you!] in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”**

Which means, He knew about you, He was planning for you, He was leading the history of the world so that He may have you with Him. For **“in love he predestined us [He predestined you!] for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.”**

Our very existence sings praises and testifies about the love and grace of this God, whom we are undeservedly privileged to call our Father. Your Father! He has adopted us to be His own, as His sons and daughters. And **“He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”** In His very presence.

Sure, we can't even get our minds around what Paul, rejoicing in the Spirit, writes to us. These words and what they tell us are far too great for us, our small, selfish and darkened minds are too dim to comprehend this message clearly, and our hardened hearts are reluctant to embrace it... we struggle to rejoice as Paul did.

But, if only we could! Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy! Help us! Fill us with joy!

God the Son, our Brother Jesus Christ. **“In him we have redemption through his blood.”** Yes, He has purchased us, He has purchased you, not with gold or silver, but with His innocent sufferings and with His holy and precious blood. Why?

So that you may be His own! This is why we call Him our Lord and Master. For we belong to Him. You are His cherished treasure, stored in His very heart. He cares for you. He has granted you **“the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us.”**

By grace, by grace of His character alone Jesus did what He did. There was nothing in us that compelled Him to sacrifice His life for us. We all had turned away, we all had rejected Him, we all were His enemies.

That was His gracious heart that would not leave us separated from Him, captives of our own sinfulness, destined to receive what we justly deserve. So, Jesus entered our world, our history, our very nature, our flesh, and by doing so He made known to us **“in all wisdom and insight ... the mystery of the Father's will, according to his purpose.”**

That is in Jesus, where we can learn the truth about God. That is in Jesus, and nowhere else, where we can see the Father's heart, where His will and His ultimate purposes are revealed. Only in Jesus we meet God as our loving Father.

The Father who never abandons His children, who has prepared for us something, that for now we can't even comprehend. New Heavens and New Earth where you will dwell together with the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and with all God's people, and with all your loved ones who have died in faith.

Then, in the fullness of time He will unite all things in Jesus, things in heaven and things on earth. It is through Jesus, by Him making us His brothers and sisters, that we have obtained an inheritance. And what inheritance! The eternal one, imperishable.

Praise and eternal glory be to you, O Christ!

Then, **God our Helper, the Holy Spirit.** He is with you. He is in you. Yes, He is, otherwise you wouldn't be here. He unites you in the divine fellowship with the Father and the Son. **"When you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Jesus, then you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit."** Yes, He did it!

O wonderful mystery of our speaking God! He speaks and things change. He speaks to us His word of truth and His Gospel of our salvation, and when He speaks, He sends forth His Spirit. God's words are always accompanied by the Holy Spirit.

You listen, and He works with you. God's words not only inform us, they transform us, they change us, our very nature, they create and nourish in us true faith and trust in this God, who came to us as Jesus. And when we gladly receive this message, when we welcome God's invitation, we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

This is such a wonderful source of joy and assurance! Our Christian faith is not just a belief in historical truth, it is not just about having access to God's wisdom, those are great gifts on their own, but this is so much more. The God who speaks to us, also indwells in us. He unites you with Him and with all His people.

This bond is more durable than anything else, for heavens and earth may perish, but the bond of the Holy Spirit will remain forever. This is what is yours as you remain in Jesus, as you keep receiving His Gospel of salvation, as you keep learning His words of truth.

And while we live in this age, the presence of the Holy Spirit with us, is **"the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of the Father's glory."** Our God doesn't just say: "I promise you, trust me!"

No, He says: "Okay, to assure you of the faithfulness of my promises, I will remain with you, until they all are fulfilled, until you acquire possession of what I have prepared for you!" This is what sort of God we have.

As we reflect on what God we have, what His unique character is like, what amazing things He has done and prepared – for us, for you! – is it hard to see why Paul was so excited? Is it hard to see why He just couldn't stop praising and glorifying this God?

I pray today that our Father would be as gracious to you as He was to Paul, that He would reveal His mysteries to you more and more and grant you abundantly His Spirit.

So that you too could marvel about His great power and wisdom and beauty and grace and faithfulness and majesty and praise Him effortlessly – "wow, look, look!" – and delight and give thanks days and nights that you too are privileged to call Him – your Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ – your brother.

May we all be blessed to praise Him now and forever!

Amen.