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Blessed, to be a Blessing
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, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ^[a] before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,^[b] having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this^[c] is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Wow.

Did you hear all that?

That's a lot of talk about ***blessing, riches, grace, lavishness!***

Paul is overwhelmed by the grace and blessings of God—

he is elated, filled with so much joy,

that he cannot wait to tell us about it!

If we were to read this in Greek,

it would be a long run-on sentence—***flowing, and almost poetic.***

There are times when ***English just cannot grasp*** what the original languages of the Bible expressed.

This is one of those times.

The **entire book** of Ephesians is filled with this kind of language, and great descriptions of the **grace and goodness** of God. It is a book of **encouragement** to the church as a whole, and to the people who make up the body of Christ.

As we travel through it for the next several Sunday mornings, I pray that we would come to a greater appreciation of the **blessings and grace of God!**

Have you ever experienced the overwhelming goodness of God—
By seeing something amazing in the world?
Maybe majestic mountains?
A roaring ocean?
Maybe a cruise on the other side of the world, or a trip overseas?

Sometimes we are so impressed by the lavishness, the abundance, the overwhelming gifts of God, right?
When have you seen it?
As I'm taking my parents dog on a walk through Brookside each morning, I'm seeing beauty even there, you know?

And all of it—all of that blessing and goodness---it's all a **free gift**.
We did nothing to deserve it.
Just grace.
Amazing.

But we **do not need to go anywhere** to experience this goodness of God, do we?

All we have to do is **be still and pay attention**.
I want you to do something.
Wiggle your toes.
Wiggle your fingers.
Wiggle your nose.
Now open and close your mouth.
And listen—just listen to the silence for a second.
Look at your hands,
did you know there are about 60,000 miles, miles, of veins in your body?
And 37.2 trillion—yes trillion—cells.

If you think of all that, it's **amazing**, isn't it?

Isn't God unbelievably good and gracious?
 Aren't we overwhelmed with blessings?
 Friends, just the fact that we are alive is a blessing and miracle!
 God put every hair on our heads!
 (and knows exactly how many, can you believe that?)

Our lives are full of blessing.

We are **surrounded** by blessing.

Psalm 19 puts it so well:

the heavens are telling the glory of God, and the earth proclaims his handiwork.

Psalm 139 says, O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 you discern my thoughts from far away.

³ You search out my path and my lying down,
 and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
 O Lord, you know it completely.

⁵⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Our creation, our bodies, and our hearts

It's all overflowing with blessing.

We are **lavished**—

with blessings and grace and mercy,

all from our Lord and Savior **Jesus** Christ.

It's ***not just what we see and experience,***

it's the **salvation** we've received.

For we have been saved by the **death** of Jesus on the cross,
 and given new life by his **resurrection**.

Our **sins are separated** from us, as far as East is from West.

We are **new creations** in Christ (2 Cor 5:17)—

no matter who we are, or what we've done—

we get a clean slate. Another chance.

God's **mercies** are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22)

Paul says about this in Ephesians 1:7-8:
*In Christ we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins,
 according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he **lavished** on us.*

God lavishes grace upon all of us.

We really cannot comprehend how good our God is,
 and the goodness that has been given to us, you know?

And the ***sad thing?***

The sad thing is that all too often
 we live in a mindset of ***scarcity***, even as Christians, ***instead of abundance.***

We ***don't think*** about the lavish riches of grace from God.

We don't meditate on it, choose to focus on it.

We think about what we don't have.

What we ***lack***, or think we lack.

We think about our ***hurts, our grievances, our past, and our problems.***

And we ***fail to see them through the lens*** of God's goodness.

Now, I'm not saying you should mind over matter your problems and faith.

And I'm not saying be a 'Pollyanna',

who says 'everything is fine all the time, no worries. It's all good'.

I'm talking about seeing that ***God can bring good*** out of all things,
 as Paul reminds us in Romans 8:28.

There's a ***difference.***

And that's the ***beauty of our lives***—you and I are ***broken***, sinful, fallen people.

We have received grace and salvation ***already***,

but we are ***not yet*** perfected with God in heaven.

So we come to worship in ***broken pieces*** if you will.

All of us, me too.

And we come with all our broken pieces,

believing and hoping in the good news of the Gospel—

that God ***can and will take those pieces***,

and make something beautiful and amazing.

We have a ***choice*** to make each and every day---we can see that possibility.

We can look at our circumstances,
whatever they are, and ***see them through the eyes of faith and grace.***
Or we can see them through the eyes of ***hurt, anger, guilt, or shame.***

Which will it be for us?

How can we see our current situation, through God's eyes?

How can we walk through the waters and fires of our lives on this day,
and ***see the abundant*** goodness, blessing, and grace of God?

Our ***Holy Book*** says we can do this.

God says we can.

Jesus says we can, and in fact, he has offered to help us live this way.

He promised the Holy Spirit—the Spirit have inside of us—to remind us of this truth.

And he told us to come—come to Him—and live a new way.

He says in ***Matthew 11:28***:²⁸ *“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

When we feel ***like we cannot see the blessing,***

we ***come to Jesus,***

and ***hand over*** our burdens.

We we feel like we ***cannot see*** the goodness,

we come to Jesus,

and ask the ***Holy Spirit to help us*** see it through the eyes of faith.

Will you do that?

I cannot even tell you what a ***difference*** it makes to do so.

Last week I mentioned walking through the waters and fires of life during my vacation—

my daughter in two hospitals, caring for my Dad, my Aunt near death,
not to mention dealing with some ongoing health concerns myself.

Today ***I continue to walk through*** those waters and fires.

They turned off my Aunt's life support yesterday,

and my Father and I were able to say goodbye.

She was surrounded by her family as she went to heaven.
 I continue to care for my Father until my mom returns on Tuesday.
 My daughter faces many challenges now that she is home.
 My sister is still facing horrible chronic pain.
 I am still juggling health concerns of my own.
The waters have not receded, the fires are not out.

And yet—***it is in this time that I really see the hand of God,***
 because I ask Jesus each morning to show me.
 I see the ***beauty*** of creation outside my Father's house.
 I see the grace of God, ***giving my Dad the ability to say goodbye*** to his sister,
 and the mercy of having pulled him through 114 days in the hospital himself,
 a decade ago.
 I see the hope that ***only God can bring for my child.***

And I see that ***all this goodness and blessing—it has a PURPOSE.***
 It's ***not just for me.***
 It's for ***all*** of us.

I tell you my ***story***, you tell me yours,
 and together ***we become stronger*** as the body of Christ, the church.
 And as we do that—
as we see the world through the eyes of faith,
 and the lens of goodness and blessing—
 we ***become a blessing*** to one another, and to our world.

Jesus said in John 13 at his Last Supper:
they will know you are my disciples if you love one another, as I have loved you.

Can the world see that, and say that about us?
 About First Presbyterian of Owasso?
 Isn't that what we should strive to do—
 in every program, every ministry, every mission.
 Because, it's not about us.
 It's about ***sharing—the love and goodness and blessing***
 of our generous and awesome God!

You know my Aunt was in ICU for two weeks.
 And having remembered my own Father being in ICU for 51 days,
 my sister and brother and I decided to create a **care package**
 for the family at the hospital, full of things we found so helpful.
 Gift cards for food, snacks, notepads, pens, Tylenol, phone chargers,
 water bottles, ice chest, etc.
 And finally a copy of the beloved devotional, ***Streams in the Desert***.

And you would not believe how ***God used all of that—all of it—***
 to bless the family,
 in ways we could not have imagined.
 The **notebook** recorded questions, concerns, and visitors.
Gift cards fed the family many times.
 The **baby wipes** helped clean the waiting room tables for meals.
 And the ***Streams?***

Well, we didn't realize that many of my cousins ***read that already***,
 and of course didn't have time in rushing to the hospital to bring it.
 My Uncle read it each day,
 and felt God speaking to him through it's words,
 and the scriptures it mentioned,
 eventually giving him the ***strength and peace to let her go***.

Friends, ***we are blessed, that we might become a blessing*** to others.
 This is the way ***Christian faith works***.
 For *Love is not selfish, it does not seek it's own way, it keeps no record of wrongs.*
 (I Cor 13).

You know, things ***weren't always good***
 between my Aunt and others in the family.
 And by the grace of God, ***none of that mattered*** these two weeks.
 Kind of how all my siblings and I grew so much closer,
 when Dad got sick.
Love covers a multitude of sins,
God's grace is bigger than all the hurts in the world.

We are blessed by God,
that we might bless one another,
in our own lives, and as a church family.

Blessed, to be a Blessing.

That is our ***Good News of the Gospel*** today.

May the Lord help us see our lives through that truth,
through those eyes of faith.

And to that, all God's people said, Amen.