4-29-18

Ephesians 1:11-14

Last week we talked about what Paul referred to as a mystery. This was the plan that God had developed before time began, but that He kept hidden until after Christ had risen from the grave. Paul and the other apostles were shown this mystery; our merciful God revealed it to them so they could pass on the good news. This over arching plan of God is to bring all things into unity in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Ever since creation, everything has been working to the fulfilment of God’s plan; no matter how badly we mess things up; God has taken all that into account. Throughout history, God’s prophets and the workings of events in the world, have pointed to the coming of Christ. When the time was perfect, in the fullness of time, Jesus arrived on the earth. His arrival signaled the arrival of the spiritual Kingdom of God; His arrival also signaled the beginning of the last days. The spiritual Kingdom continues to grow and spread throughout the world, in spite of the appearance of chaos and the evil that grows ever more prevalent.

During these last days, we await another fulfilment of time; that moment when Jesus comes back to establish the physical Kingdom of God here on earth. When He comes back, two things will happen: His enemies will quickly be defeated, and He will establish order in the world. He will be able to do what no one has ever been able to do; bring unity to the earth. This is the peaceful time we read about in Isaiah 65 where the wolf and the lamb graze together. Mankind and all creation will be unified in Christ; this is God’s plan.

The fullness of time isn’t here yet but be assured that it is coming. In the meantime, Paul explains more about the unity for people. It is currently existent for those who are in Christ Jesus. There are three small but important words used in our text for today. They are: “we” in verses 11 and 12 who are the Jews, “you” in verse 13 who are the gentiles, and “our” in verse 14 who are both groups in Christ. Let’s consider these three groups and how they fit together.

Often times, Paul uses the word “we” when he refers to Christians; this way he is including himself in whatever it is he is telling them about. But in this case, he is referring to the Jews. *In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.* Obviously, the Old Testament is primarily about the nation of Israel, the chosen people of God.

Remember back in Genesis how God chose Abram. Abram was nothing special; he was simply going about life like everybody else was at that time. Now, in time, we know that Abram displayed exceptional faith which God credited to him as righteousness; but at the time God chose him, he had done nothing to deserve God’s notice. God chose Abram because that was God’s will. It’s important to grasp this because it applies to us: Abram did nothing to deserve being chosen by God; we do nothing to deserve being saved. It is all God’s grace. This choice God made passes on to the descendants of Abraham.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8a

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, **but because the Lord loved you** and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers.

Why did God choose Abraham? Because He loved him. Why did God choose the nation of Israel? Because He loved them. There is no other answer and no other answer is necessary. It is obvious when we read the Old Testament, and the New for that matter, that the nation of Israel continually proved that they were unworthy of God’s love. Yet God loves them and they remain His chosen people.

In verse 11 Paul says “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance”. God promised Abraham that He would make him a great nation. He promised him the land of Palestine and many descendants. These promises continued through to his descendants; the nation of Israel. Due to their unfaithfulness, the nation has only received part of the promises; but in the fullness of time, through Christ, they will receive all.

These promises can be considered an inheritance and when Jesus returns, the promises to Israel will be brought to pass because Israel will then follow their Messiah. But there is more: When they accept Christ, they will become children of God and therefore heirs of all that God has for them. Even more important, the passage from Deuteronomy will be fulfilled. They will be a holy people to the LORD and will be “*His own possession*”. What an inheritance, to be God’s own possession!

Back in Genesis 12, the very first time God spoke to Abram, He told him “And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed”. We know the fulfillment of that statement is Jesus. Jesus is a descendant of Abraham. By this we can see what Paul is saying when he states that the Jews have obtained an inheritance “having been predestined according to His purpose”. This is part of God’s mystery. God had already planned out, had already predestined, that Jesus would come from Abraham to enable the Jews to participate in receiving an inheritance from God.

Although the nation of Israel, as a whole, rejected their Saviour, not all of them did. First off there were the twelve apostles along with a number of disciples faithful to Jesus. On the day of Pentecost, their number swelled to 3000. As we read through the book of Acts, we see many Israelites coming to Christ. These are the people Paul speaks of in verse 12, who were the first to hope in Christ. Because of all these descendants of Abraham coming to faith in Christ Jesus, it was proven that God’s purpose was taking place; what He had predestined was coming to pass. And this was all “to the praise of His glory”.

This all demonstrated that He is in control; that things do work out according to His will. He sets things in motion thousands of years ahead of time that come out just as He said they would. All to His glory; He is God, He is far above anything any human-being is capable of. As His people, we must be in awe of these things and praise Him and worship Him as He deserves.

Many of His people turned to Him, but many more did not; God’s not done. His plan and purpose have yet to be fulfilled completely; But history is racing to its finish. God will complete His work on His people and the nation of Israel will turn to their Messiah.

In verse 13 we have “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise”. In this verse we come to the “you” in this section. The “you” is plural, and it is referring to the gentiles. The best news for us is that although Paul was writing to specific gentiles in Asia Minor, it applies to us. What we read about them, we can claim and believe for ourselves.

Paul is now speaking of non-Jewish Christians. These people have heard the Gospel of salvation, which Paul asserts is true. That Gospel is, of course, about Jesus. He is God; He became a man; He took the punishment for our sins and died; He rose again. Now all who believe on Him can look forward to eternal life with Him. These gentiles heard this message and because of the Holy Spirit working in their hearts, believed it. They accepted Christ’s work on the cross on their behalf and placed His easy yoke upon their shoulders.

Once belief takes place – whether for Jew or gentile – they are sealed by the Holy Spirit. The idea of a seal was very important during this time. When something was sealed, usually by wax and a personal symbol, it was not to be opened by anyone unless they were authorized. If it was opened, everybody knew it; the contract had been breached. It also had the idea of possession. Property could be sealed to show who owned it. The parallel breaks down some because mankind is not perfect and their seals can be broken or ignored. But God’s can’t. Once sealed by Him with the Holy Spirit, nothing will take His possession from Him.

Being sealed by the Holy Spirit is important. It means that we become God’s possession just like the Jews are. We become the spiritual descendants of Abraham, part of the spiritual Israel. We are in God’s hand, and no one will snatch us from Him. The seal of the Holy Spirit is an invisible seal as far as some sort of mark on our bodies. Yet, when we are sealed, it should be noticeable to all around us that we are different from the world. The Holy Spirit is a seal invisible yet noticeable.

As an aside, this calls to mind another seal we read of in the book of Revelation. It is the notorious mark of the beast: 666. Many will accept this seal; it will be visible. Those who accept this will demonstrate their allegiance to satan. This will also be an irrevocable seal and can never be worn along with the seal of the Holy Spirit. We cannot serve God and the world, it is either one or the other. As Jesus told us, “No man can serve two masters”.

Paul makes a special point of calling Him “the Holy Spirit of promise”. When we accept Christ, we are promised salvation and believe we have it. We are promised to be freed from sin and its curse, we are promised a life of true peace. When we accept Christ, these things belong to us, but we don’t have them yet in full. When we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, that is God’s guarantee that we will have these things in their entirety. This is why we call our hope “sure”.

We can go back to Abraham to see how this works. Although he was promised land and a multitude of descendants, he did not see it during his lifetime. The only part of the Promised Land that he ever owned was a part he purchased himself as a burial site. He saw his son of promise, Isaac, but he never saw Isaac’s children, Jacob and Esau. Further, although Israel entered the Promised Land, they never actually possessed all of it. Although Israel multiplied, because of judgement their numbers decreased and they were spread all over the world.

What we see here is how the promises we receive in Christ are to be fulfilled. They belong to us, but we don’t have them yet. Abraham didn’t get to see and touch what God promised Him; yet. When Jesus comes to set up His Kingdom here on earth, all the land promised to Israel will be theirs. Jesus will rule from Jerusalem and all the land from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates will be Israel’s. And Abraham will be there. He will have a glorified body and be able to walk about on the land God gave him and see all his offspring; both the physical offspring of Israel and the spiritual offspring of the gentiles who accept Christ.

Our promises will also be fulfilled during the time of Christ’s reign on earth, and then on into eternity when God creates the new heavens and the new earth. It’s worth waiting for, it’s worth being a Christian for. We know we will suffer now; but cling to what’s coming.

This is a glimpse into verse 14 where Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as one “who is given as a pledge of our inheritance”. With the word “our”, Paul shows that the division between the Jews and the gentiles is removed in Christ Jesus. This is actually part of God’s mystery that Paul discusses further in chapters two and three.

The Holy Spirit is not only a seal but is also a pledge. This is the same idea as earnest money that we would give with a contract when buying a house. The earnest money shows that the buyer is serious and acts as a seal on the contract. In addition, the earnest money goes toward the purchase price of the house. The seller actually receives some of the money they have been promised. It is the same with the Holy Spirit. We have lots more good things coming to us that God, in His grace, has promised to us. But when we receive the Holy Spirit, we have some of those things now.

We have peace where the rest of the world cannot. We have a sure hope that no one else can have. We have help and guidance from God, in this life. Psalm 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.” As we go through the Christian life we are being sanctified which means we are being made more and more like Christ. This will be completed when He returns. 1 John 3:2 “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

Long ago, God told Abram that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in him. That blessing is in Jesus Christ, which is what God has planned. It brought glory to God when those of His chosen people accepted Christ, proving what He had said about them. God is further being proved right in us. When we as gentiles accept Christ, we are proving that God’s words to Abram about all the nations were correct. This brings glory to God. Let us continue to seek God’s glory. That’s what we’re here for.

Prayer

Glorious God, things You set in motion long ago come to pass, showing that You are sovereign over all things. All that You plan comes to pass, Your will is done. We praise You for all the wonders You perform, we worship You because You are God.

LORD, when we accept Your Son, Jesus, according to the power of the Holy Spirit, we glorify You. You seal us then with the Holy Spirit further giving You glory because we are then Yours and no one can take us from You. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we then do good works that You have already planned for us, so that Your Kingdom is built; again, all for Your glory.

Thank You LORD, that You have chosen to use us. By Your strength, we have a part in Your great plan and we have a part in worshiping You. It is to our benefit to praise You with thanksgiving. All this is available only through Your Son Jesus. It is in Him that all these things are possible. We look forward to the unity to come through Him.

It is in the name of Jesus we pray

Amen