

The Promises of God in the Gospel (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Greeting and introduction

Good morning everyone! It's good to be here with all of you today.

For those of you who may not know me, my name is Paul Ortiz. My family has been attending Northwest for a few years now and in that time, my wife and I have served in teaching the younger kids here at the church and I have spent some time teaching the youth. It's a joy to serve the church and an honor to be invited up here to preach in front of you all today.

Let's pray together.....

So when I was approached about speaking to you today it did not initially occur to me that I needed to have something to talk about. I spoke with both Dave and Jeff about this issue early on. Being a one-off occurrence, I'm not continuing today with a previous sermon series or beginning a new one. I'm here for today only. Now, I'm super motivated about our faith. I love to talk about the scriptures and to teach the bible. I can think of a ton of stuff that I would love to share with you but all of it would extend far past the short time I have in front of you today, which brings me back to my dilemma. Here's the question I posed to myself. What do people need to hear if I only have one chance to speak with them? When I put it like that, the answer is the same for both the believer and non-believer alike, the gospel. The proclamation of the gospel is the means by which God saves people and expands His kingdom. For the Christian, we ought to regularly be reminded of that glorious, good news of Jesus and our salvation in Him. More than that, I want to encourage all of you today by highlighting the promises of God in the gospel message, off which we base our assurance.

I have selected one passage of scripture which I believe encapsulates many of the promises made to those of us who place our faith in Jesus. The excerpt is from the book of Ephesians, chapter 1, verses 13 and 14. Let's read it now. (Eph 1:13-14)

¹³And in Him, having heard and believed the word of truth—the gospel of your salvation—you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of His glory.

Before we dig in, let's get a little context. The apostle Paul is writing this letter while being held captive in Rome. He has much history with the church at Ephesus having first stopped there on his second missionary journey, stayed only a short while, and then later returned to spend years there. Acts 19 tells us all about Paul's time in Ephesus if you want to know more but for now, I want you to know that this is a church of believers and the truths Paul reveals to them are meant for us today as well.

I want to also highlight this morning the manner with which Paul writes. Paul's writings overflow with spiritual truth. His language, the very words he uses, are precise and intentional. Even the most casually placed terms in his letters allude to great biblical truths. If you just quickly read through Paul's writings, you can miss a lot of what is inherent in the worldview from which he writes; a worldview that we should all strive to possess ourselves. All that to say that it's a worthwhile exercise to sometimes slow down and thoughtfully consider all that is being said in these letters. I hope to demonstrate this for you today with all that is contained inside this one sentence. So, let's get to it.

THE PROMISES

Our Union with Christ

Early in our excerpt we encounter two important words, "In Him". If you're paying attention, these words are very common all throughout the New Testament epistles. Our being "in Him" or receiving things "through Him" is evidence of a fundamental truth, the believer's spiritual union with Christ. It's here that we encounter our first 2 promises. When a person believes in Jesus, they are transferred from one standing in the eyes of God, into a new one in Christ; given to Him to be kept. Our Lord himself speaks to this in John 17: 20-24.

²⁰I am not asking on behalf of them alone, but also on behalf of those who will believe in Me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You. May they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

²²I have given them the glory You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one— ²³I in them and You in Me—that they may be perfectly united, so that the world may know that You sent Me and have loved them just as You have loved Me.

²⁴Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, that they may see the glory You gave Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

Having been given to and joined with Christ, we are promised that we will be kept; He will not lose even one of us. This is the first promise. Jesus states this for us in John 6:37-40.

³⁷Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never drive away. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me.

³⁹And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of those He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰For it is My Father's will that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Furthermore, it is by our union with Christ that we receive the many other promises of God. We cannot receive them apart from Him. Paul makes this clear in 2 Corinthians 1:20 where we read,

²⁰For all the promises of God are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him, our "Amen" is spoken to the glory of God.

It is only by our union with Christ that we will come into possession of every good gift that Christ earned for us.

Our Inclusion in the Promises

Continuing in our passage, we read of our inclusion. Most versions include the words "you also". The apostle here alludes to the promise of our inclusion in God's covenant community. At one time it was thought that salvation was only available to ethnic Israel. Well, our Lord came into the world and made salvation available to the gentile nations also. Later in Ephesians Paul writes to make this point clear. Ephesians 3:4-6

⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶This mystery is that through the gospel the

Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus.

I highlight this promise of our inclusion because if you're only just beginning to explore God's truth and happen to be reading through the Bible from start to finish like I did, you'll encounter a lot that sounds like only Israel will be saved. Here's a spoiler for the end of the book, salvation has been made available to you as well.

You Will Be Saved

Returning to our primary passage, we next read, "having heard and believed the word of truth—the gospel of your salvation". It's here that we encounter that most glorious of promises. Now I could spend hours with you plumbing the depths of all that is being said here but I'll spare you and try to keep it brief. Still though, I can't help but camp out a bit on the gospel.

Note first that the apostle clearly defines the "word of truth" as the gospel of your salvation. Side Note: It's a worthwhile study to seek out the many references to the "Word" throughout the New Testament; the calls to believe it, obey it, and keep it. Strive always to recall this association here and fully understand the amazing proclamation of *what* was accomplished and by *whom* it was accomplished, our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

So what is the gospel? At it's most basic, the gospel is the announcement of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It goes much deeper than that though because this "good news", which is what the word gospel means, isn't received as "good" by everyone, as our experience in this world shows us. Follow me on this. For a thing to be labeled as good implies the necessity of the antithesis, which is to say that if we have good news, there must be bad news. If the "good" news is here defined as salvation, our being saved, then it follows that the bad news would be our not being saved. This begs the question, what are we being saved from? The short answer is the wrath of God. You see, every person born under Adam, which is all mankind, comes into this world spiritually dead with the wrath of God set against them. To better understand the idea of our being "under Adam", I'd encourage you to study Romans chapter 5. But Paul, in this same book of Ephesians, speaks to this truth in chapter 2. Ephesians 2:1-3

¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you used to walk when you conformed to the ways of this world and of the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the sons of disobedience. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, fulfilling the cravings of our flesh and indulging its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature children of wrath.

Being “dead”, as Paul describes as our natural state, we have no power to save ourselves. Just as Lazarus couldn’t get up and walk out of his tomb until Jesus called out to him, so it is with us. We need a savior, and Jesus is it. It is on this point that many will reject Gods good news. The prideful heart of the natural man leads men to insist that they can save themselves. While on the earth prior to His crucifixion, Jesus continually labored to guide men to realize their need for a savior and point them to Himself. In Luke 5:31-32, we read a familiar statement in His response to the Pharisees who were questioning why He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners. It says,

³¹Jesus answered, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³²I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

Our Lord here is likening a person who knows they are sick and in need of a doctor to one who is aware of their own sinfulness, realizing they have no merit of their own with which to stand before God, and so are in need of a savior. Conversely, the person that sees themselves as righteous by their own doing, able to set themselves apart from other men and stand before God on their own merit, sees no need for a savior and seeks after none.

So then, how is it that we are saved? Well God, in His infinite wisdom and astounding grace, sent His son into the world to become a man, not born under Adam, to live life as a man but without sin, earning the righteousness that we never could by His obedience, taking on himself the punishment due to us so that the righteousness He earned would be given to us, thereby redeeming all we whose faith rests in that finished work which Christ accomplished unto eternal life. Such Good News!

Here then is the promise of God in His gospel; Jesus paid it all. He didn’t pay most of it. You’re not responsible for the last 10 percent. Jesus paid it all. There is nothing for you to

contribute to this work of God....so stop trying. This is the faith which we cling to and what we should remind ourselves of always.

Going back to our passage, the version I'm using today says, "having heard and believed the word of truth—the gospel of your salvation". Your version might say after "the gospel of your salvation" something to the effect of "and believed in Him". "having also believed", "after believing", etc.. The point is that you "heard" and then "believed". Now I debated whether to include this portion today, but I feel it's worthwhile. The Greek word translated as "believe" is *pisteusantes*. It comes from the word *pistis* which means faith. *Pisteusantes* is the verb form of the noun *pistis*. In English, we do not have a verb form of the word faith. "Faithing" isn't a thing to us. Our English translation use the verb "believe" but, in our culture today, that word can have fluid connotations. It may be helpful to think of "exercising faith" as a way to understand the Greek word *pisteusantes*. Now, faith, the noun, always has an associated object. You exercise faith in your chair, the object, every time you sit on it. You exercise faith in your seatbelt, the object, every time you strap it on. Likewise, Christ is the object of our faith. As Christians, we exercise faith in Christ, which is to say "believe" in Christ, when we look to Him to be our righteousness. We reject the notion that we can stand before God on our own merit. We trust fully in what Christ has done. I hope this makes sense to everyone because it's very important.

The Holy Spirit

Getting back to it, it is upon first believing in Jesus that we encounter our next promise, the Holy Spirit. Continuing in our passage we next read, "you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit". Let's stop right here and talk about what this being "sealed" is all about. In the ancient world, a seal was a stamp or similar object used to make an impression. The impression would usually be attached to an object like a possession or a document. The seal was indicative of authenticity, ownership, and authority. Imagine a ruler of the ancient world sealing a document by placing his unique and identifying impression on it with some wax to which he presses his seal, marking the document as authentic in that it comes from him and is authoritative in its content as well, signified by the very presence of his seal. In the same way, you, upon first believing in Christ, have been sealed by God; marked as His possession, according to His own authority, by giving you the Holy Spirit to dwell within you. Our text, at least in my version,

says, “the promised Holy Spirit”. Depending on your version it may read, “the Holy Spirit of promise”. It’s curious because the Greek here isn’t clear. Is the Holy Spirit promised or is He “the” promise? I submit to you that both are true. God spoke long ago through His prophets of His intention to give His people His Spirit. Ezekiel 36:26-28 reads,

²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and to carefully observe My ordinances.

Jesus also promised the Holy Spirit would be sent. John 14:16-17, 26

*¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you forever—
¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you do know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you.*

And then further down in verse 26,

²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you.

So it’s clear then. The Holy Spirit was promised. Now not only was the Holy Spirit promised to come but He is also a promise for us, not only because He is the mark of our being sealed by God but, as stated by Paul in the continuation of our passage, the Holy Spirit is the one “who is the pledge of our inheritance..”. My version says “pledge” but yours may say “earnest”, “deposit guaranteeing”, “God’s guarantee”, “first installment”, or “down payment”. Let’s not miss what is being said here. God committed Himself to your salvation when He gave you the Holy Spirit when you first believed in Jesus. Who here has ever purchased a home? Many times, a mortgage lender may require a down payment, some of your own hard-earned money to be put at risk as evidence of your commitment to the home being financed and your promise to repay. In new home construction, you may have to pay earnest money. Similarly, this is a pledge, by you, signifying your intention to complete the home buying process. Now any analogy drawn from this world is flawed but with God, we will find perfect expression. He has made a payment,

a commitment, towards our redemption. That guarantee of final full redemption is made not by the giving of something as inconsequential as money but by the giving of the Holy Spirit, an equal person of the Godhead, fully deity, to dwell within us, making us a new creation in Christ. How amazing is that? And that's just the pledge part. I haven't even arrived at the inheritance, which is what Paul says the Holy Spirit is a pledge of. When you hear the word inheritance, what might come to mind is the image of someone receiving money or property upon the death of a relative or something like that. An inheritance is the receiving of something by an heir. Consider what is being alluded to here. We are heirs, adopted as children into God's family. In Johns Gospel we read, John 1:12-13

¹²But to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—¹³children born not of blood, nor of the desire or will of man, but born of God.

Paul really digs into this in Romans chapter 8. In verses 15 through 17 we read, Romans 8:15-17

¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery that returns you to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"¹⁶The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷And if we are children, then we are heirs: heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with Him, so that we may also be glorified with Him.

As heirs of God through Christ, we are promised the magnificent inheritance of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. This brings us to the next portion of our passage. We're still working our way through this one single sentence but we're getting close to the end. The next thing we read is, "until the redemption of those who are God's possession". Your version may say, "with a view to the redemption" instead "until the redemption". The point is that we're looking forward in time. The Holy Spirit who was given to us is just a down payment. That means there is more to come. His residing in us already makes us a new creation but when God takes possession of us at Christ's second coming, we will receive new and imperishable bodies as well. This promise of eternal life in glorified bodies is a very real future for all you who believe in Jesus. Paul speaks to this truth often in his writings. Consider one such instance in

Romans chapter 6 where Paul is highlighting that unity with Christ in His death is followed by unity with Him in His resurrection Romans 6:5

⁵For if we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection.

Death has no dominion over Jesus as it does all of natural mankind. Not being born under Adam and having lived a life of perfect obedience and achieving a righteous standing before God, death has no claim on Him. Romans 6:9 reads,

⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has dominion over Him.

His death was undeserved, but He laid down his life, of His own will, taking on Himself the wrath of God, which God was pleased to pour out on Him, so that in that greatest of all exchanges, we might have His righteousness accounted to us. So then having died for us and been resurrected, never again shall he taste death. And we, being found in Him, will share in that resurrection and eternal life.

Conclusion

Okay. We're at the very end of this one sentence. Having had each promise inherent in these verses illuminated, let's read it again in full, being mindful to consider what we just heard about everything being said. Eph 1:13-14

¹³And in Him, having heard and believed the word of truth—the gospel of your salvation—you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of His glory.

Amen! All praise, and glory, and honor to God! That is the only fitting response to what is being said here, which is why the sentence ends with it.

If you're not a believer, don't consider yourself to be a Christian, or maybe are just seeing what this is all about, well then hear now the call of God. Turn away from any notion that

you are, or can ever be, good enough to stand before the God of all creation and enter paradise. Place your faith in Jesus Christ for your salvation.

If you *are* a believer and are listening to this then I ask you, on what are you basing your assurance, that confidence you have of your salvation? If you base it on anything but the promises of God in the Gospel, in what Jesus has done, then you reside on a most unstable foundation and are probably tormented regularly. You will not find anything in and of yourself to give you peace. The enemy will always be there to convict you and shame you when you fall short. Don't let that drown out the Holy Spirit who is also there to remind you to trust in Christ; look to Christ. And when you take that deep breath, recalling that it's not about you, it never was, and that it's all about Him, allow that weight to come off you and praise God.