

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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Editorial

SOONER OR LATER the day of trouble comes to every life. When it comes we can react in different ways. We can let it overwhelm us and be filled with self pity or we can rebel and become bitter. On the other hand we can accept it, trusting that God will make clear tomorrow what is hard to understand today.

It has been rightly said that it takes trouble to understand trouble; it takes sorrow to sympathise with sorrow — deep calling unto deep, to use the Psalmist's phrase.

What a mercy that we may pray in the day of trouble! What an encouragement to read in Psalm 20, "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble . . .". No trouble can prevent the Lord from hearing us. Though troubles roar like thunder the believer's voice will be heard above the storm. The verse continues, "the name of the God of Jacob defend thee". Jacob had his day of trouble, his life was somewhat chequered, but he wrestled and was heard.

It is not only promised that the Lord will be with us in trouble, but that He will help us, sending "help from the sanctuary". In every situation of need in which we find ourselves, the Lord is willing and ready to be our helper. At the throne of grace we find grace to help in time of need. Another scripture assures us that, "the Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me".

Our needs are different from those of other people, but His help and grace are always appropriate. God is sovereign, He is in control when trouble comes and God's grace is close at hand. In all things that may happen we can be assured that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

A Sermon by the Editor

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3)

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS is noted for its wealth of language and its depth of thought. It is a marvellous Epistle and it is certainly noted for its marvellous diction, its depth of feeling and its comprehensiveness of view.

Paul's custom is generally to begin his Letter with a note of thanksgiving. That occurs time and time again and in that, of course, he sets us a wonderful example, but he was accustomed to draw the theme of his thanksgiving from the spiritual condition and attainments of those to whom he was writing, and so, writing to the Ephesians, he thanks God for the great theme of the Gospel and of what it meant to those believers in Ephesus, so he begins with a doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." This is characteristic of the Apostle to begin with a **Doxology** and to **plunge at once** into the very heart of his theme. Oh what an intense outburst of praise we have here! Here is the utterance of a full heart — "Blessed be God," he says, "who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing." He blesses God who has so highly blessed men, but, whereas God blesses men with *deeds*, men can only bless God with *words*. So then you find here joyful gratitude, delightful wonder and swelling praise. It thrills his heart as he thinks of what God has done for **man in Christ**. "Every conceivable blessing has been poured out upon us," he says, "in the Lord Jesus Christ."

He takes up much the same theme when he is writing to the Corinthian Christians: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Paul was absolutely overwhelmed. He said it was all of God, it is all of grace, it is not of our own deserving or of our own doing; no wonder, then, that Paul blesses God with such fervour of language.

Now what were the blessings that the Apostle had chiefly in mind? That is what we want to look at now.

1. HE THANKS GOD FOR AN ELECTION WHICH CANNOT BE ANNULLED

"According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." How very wonderful that God should have chosen us to be His very own. Will you notice why He chose us, and when He chose us. "He chose us,"

says the Apostle, "before the foundation of the world", and His purpose in choosing us, "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

You remember our Lord Jesus Christ said to the disciples: "Ye have not chosen me, but *I have chosen you.*" Oh the marvel, then, of sovereign grace! Our salvation was no afterthought in the mind of God. In laying His plan for the world God had the purpose of redeeming grace in view, so we can see that salvation lies deeper than creation. And you remember in the Book of Revelation where Christ is spoken of there as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. No, it was no afterthought. The provision of salvation is eternal. Now the relationship of foreknowledge and human responsibility the Apostle does not explain, but he says in verse 5 it is "according to the good pleasure of his will". So that we have to say that what pleases Him must content us. An election that cannot be annulled. It is a startling fact, a staggering truth, "chosen in him". We should find in this something very uplifting, for sometimes our lives seem drab and ordinary and may be depressing and desponding, but we must remember this. What an uplift it is, that our salvation is the sovereign act of the living God. It is not by chance or by accident, so, when you feel discouraged and ready to drop out of the fight, what an immense and powerful reinforcement to hear this word from heaven: "Chosen in him before the foundation of the world." Now when you look out on the world today the situation is very depressing, and if you look just on the human factors, it is extremely depressing, but the Christian, looking out on the darkened scene, believes in the divine initiative and recognises the saving purpose of sovereign grace that God, who has chosen us, will not abandon us but will keep us to the very end.

2. A RELATIONSHIP WHICH CANNOT BE SEVERED

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." The adoption of children — that is a relationship that cannot be severed. Believers have been given the full status and privilege of sonship. Remember how John in his First Epistle says: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God."

Now, Christians are given various titles in the New Testament. They are spoken of as disciples, as followers, as soldiers, or even as friends, but here is something more wonderful — sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. We have been given His name. We have been adopted into His family. Now when a child is adopted by earthly parents, when all the formalities and forms of procedure have been gone through, that child is legally registered as theirs. The child takes the name of the adopted parent. That is a dim picture of what God confers upon His people. God has brought us into His family. He has given us the status of children, the privilege of bearing His name, and so in Ephesians 3:14

Paul says, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named". You would find it interesting to look through the word "name" in the New Testament; for instance, the Apostle Paul, immediately after his conversion on the Damascus road, how Ananias was sent to minister to him and this was the message to Ananias concerning Saul of Tarsus: "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Or you remember when the first outburst of persecution had been unleashed in the early Church, we find that John and Peter, "departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name". Oh what dignity is ours! And is it any wonder that God says, "Since thou wast *precious* in my sight thou hast been honourable."

3. AN ACCEPTANCE THAT CANNOT BE GAINSAID

"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (verse 6). "Accepted in the beloved" — this is an acceptance that cannot be gainsaid.

Whereas God could never accept us in our sinful condition as we are by nature, we are *accepted in the righteousness of Christ*. This leaves no room for pride or boasting, because it is all of grace. By nature we are quite unacceptable. Remember how the prophet Isaiah says, "We are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags". There is **nothing** that we can do to make ourselves acceptable to God other than by trusting in Christ, but here is an acceptance that cannot be gainsaid. We are accepted in the **Beloved**. I was interested in reading the account of the Annunciation — as it is called — the message of the angel to Mary concerning the birth of Jesus. It says in the Authorised Version, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee"; the marginal rendering says, "Hail, thou that art graciously accepted, the Lord is with thee". "Thou that art graciously accepted" — and that **is the case** with all believers, "accepted in the beloved". "The beloved", of course, is one of those very wonderful titles of Christ. Twice over at the baptism and at the transfiguration a voice was heard from heaven saying of Christ, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased", and — wonder of wonders — we are accepted in Him.

4. A REDEMPTION THAT CANNOT BE CHALLENGED

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (verse 7).

This, of course, is the great theme of the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments, and the Apostle Peter was inspired to write: "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

What does it mean to be redeemed? It means to “buy back” or to “release by ransom”. We can take up Paul’s word, “sold under sin”, but we have been “bought with a price” says the same Apostle. Christ Himself said, “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many”, and, says Peter, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree”. We have been made the objects of grace — the life blood of Christ was the price paid for our redemption. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law.”

“There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.”

If He had not intervened then our trespasses would have issued in eternal ruin.

5. AN INHERITANCE THAT CANNOT FADE AWAY

“In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (verse 11). And in verse 14 the Apostle returns to the same theme: “Which is the earnest of our inheritance.” The word “inheritance” speaks of riches and wealth and possessions. Our present possessions, however great they may be, are just as nothing compared with what awaits the believer. Look in 1 Peter 1 at what the Apostle Peter has to say on this very theme of inheritance: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (verses 3 and 4). What a wonderful phrase that is — “reserved in heaven for you”. This is his theme in the New Testament. In Romans 8 Paul says, “We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”, or again, “Who delivered Him up for us all, how shall he not, with him, freely give us all things?”. There is a verse of a hymn that I am fond of which says,

“Oh child of God, oh glory’s heir,
How rich a lot is thine!”

Yes, how rich we are in Christ, yet how few realise their true wealth and possess their possessions, but in Christ God has made over to the believer great spiritual wealth. Without Christ and apart from Him we are nothing and we have nothing. But God has made Christ the Repository of all spiritual blessing. Out of Him there is nothing. With Him there is an abundance, both for time and for eternity, an abundance that can never be exhausted. “He hath abounded toward us” (verse 8), and what God gives He gives amply — He does not give with a niggardly hand. Says the much beloved 23rd Psalm, “My cup runneth over”.

Such are the blessings that God gives and, of course, we cannot separate Him from His gifts, for John says, "Of his fulness have all we received and grace for grace". Eternity alone will reveal the unsearchable riches of our inheritance in Christ. Is it any wonder that Paul's heart was full and overflowing in adoring gratitude as he thought of the believers' excellent portion. "Blessed," he says, "with all spiritual blessings in Christ." He is full to the very depth of his being and he bursts forth with an ascription of praise for such grace and for such a glorious inheritance and for an accomplished redemption. Yes, he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Here are five tremendous blessings

If you are a believer you have entered into the fulness of them all. Let me remind you of them again. Look them up, maybe underline them in your Bible, certainly store them in your mind. Here they are again, the five of them: 1. An election which cannot be annulled — "chosen in him". 2. A relationship that cannot be severed — "adopted into his family". 3. An acceptance that cannot be gain-said — "accepted in the beloved". 4. A redemption that cannot be challenged — "in whom we have redemption through his blood". 5. An inheritance that cannot fade away — "whereas we have also obtained an inheritance".

"Yes," says the Apostle, with all this in mind, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", and if the Apostle, how much more should we. To bless God is to adore Him, to acknowledge His excellencies and to render to Him the homage of our hearts. Perhaps the Apostle had in mind the text in the 103rd Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Here are five priceless benefits

. . . and, as we review them, we too will bless God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We take up the words of the Psalms and say, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth". Or again in Psalm 63, "I will bless thee while I live and will lift up mine hands in thy name", and, says another Psalm, "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord".

That is the only adequate response to the blessings that are ours in Christ, to bless the sacred Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May we do indeed just that. Amen.

M.H.

A PERSONAL WORD FROM THE EDITOR

I am most grateful to the many praying friends who have been upholding us during the trying time through which we have been passing. Thank you too for the letters and cards we have received.

We feel sustained by the support of the Lord's people and ask for your continued prayerful remembrances.