

Series on the Book of Ephesians
Ephesians 1:2-3
Sermon #2
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PRAYER AND PRAISE
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I want to encourage you to be reading the Book of Ephesians as often as you can. We have some booklets that have been prepared with just the Epistle to the Ephesians in it so that you can carry that in your purse or in your pocket and pull it out and read it when you have spare minutes during the day. I hope that you will be thinking about your reading as you go through this. Notice the divisions that Paul himself has made. We are studying, as Dr. Lockwood has mentioned, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Sunday School. You know, the Holy Spirit is mentioned in each one of the six chapters in Ephesians so this is a good companion for our Sunday School studies. Think about the book and meditate on it and let us pray that the Lord will give us a wonderful time as we go through this epistle again.

I checked back in some of my notes and usually when I teach the Book of Ephesians I like to mention what Dwight Moody said on one occasion. I could not find that I had mentioned this the last time, but undoubtedly some of you have heard this. He was asked on one occasion, what was the greatest spiritual experience of his entire life? He, as I think most of you know, was greatly used of God in the last century in the ministry of evangelism. He saw many, many people turning to the Lord Jesus Christ, not only in our country, but overseas as well. These were the days before we had all of the high-tec equipment that we have today where the Gospel could be spread by radio and television. When this man of God was asked that question he gave a most amazing answer. This was his answer: he said that the greatest spiritual experience of his life was the month that he read the Book of Ephesians through 47 times. That is a blessing all of us could get in on. You would think that seeing multitudes of people come and listen to the Gospel and see the response of so many would have been the answer that he would have given. But, as much joy as those certainly brought to him, he said that nothing had brought greater blessing to him than this little epistle.

A. T. Robertson, who taught at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville for many years and is recognized as one of the greatest Greek scholars that we have ever had in the United States said, "Paul has written nothing more profound than Ephesians 1, 2, and 3." Another commentator by the name of Stalker, who is known for his commentary on the Book of Romans says that "this Book of Ephesians is the profoundest thing ever written. So we have a spiritual feast ahead of us. Let us pray for eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to comprehend these wonderful truths. If you will faithfully read it and pray over it, I am sure that it is going to be in your heart so much that by the time we are through you are going to be able to quote this book from memory.

I have not said much about the outline of the book. I think it is good for us to recognize the divisions. The outline of Ephesians can be very, very simple because in a broad general sense there are just two divisions to it. You can see the transition when you come to the beginning of chapter 4 where he begins to beseech and exhort. So many have recognized, and perhaps you have already seen this, that in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 the emphasis as is characteristic of Paul is upon doctrine. In chapters 4, 5, and 6 the emphasis, we gather from all of the exhortations, is on the practical influence that the doctrine of chapters 1, 2, and 3 is to have on our lives. The last three chapters (4, 5, and 6) really merit, I think, another division. When we get into that fourth chapter we are going to see that Paul says as much, and I think if my memory serves me correctly, more about our walk using that word "walk" which is an expression which speaks of our conduct or our manner of life day by day. He mentions that more here in Ephesians than he does any other epistle. For example, if you have your Bible open to chapter 4 you notice that he says there, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." Then, if you let your eye

run down to the seventeenth verse he says, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind." Chapter 5 verses 1 and 2, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us . . ." Chapter 5 verse 8: "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." The, also, in the fifteenth and sixteenth verses of that same chapter, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." So there is a special emphasis on the way we are to live. Yet, when we get down to the sixth chapter and the tenth verse, then Paul begins to speak about our conflict with principalities and powers and specifically our conflict with the devil himself.

One lady it is who has actually written on the Book of Ephesians has come up with this outline and I think it is very hard to improve upon it. She says: in chapters 1 - 3 we have the wealth of the Christian, the blessings that we have in Christ which we are going to be talking about starting this morning; then, in chapter 4, 5 and down through the ninth verse of chapter 6 we have the walk of the Christian; and then we can complete it beginning with chapter 6 verse 10 with the warfare of the Christian. Or, if you want another series of words that all begin with the letter "C" and these help us to remember them, you have the creed in chapters 1, 2, and 3; you have our conduct in chapters 4, 5, and down through 6; and then you finally have the conflict starting with chapter 6 verse 10.

That is enough for the outline for the present. I just give you that hoping that it will be more of an incentive for you to read it and to perhaps emphasize for you the main themes in those different chapters.

This morning we come to verse 2 and verse 3 of chapter one. Read these two verses with me, will you? Just those two verses. "Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

My subject this morning I have taken as simply "Prayer and Praise." Verse 2 is a prayer, an intercessory prayer, when he says, "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Verse 3 is the beginning of a prayer, but different from intercession. This prayer goes down to the end of our Scripture reading this morning through verses 14. This is a prayer of praise to God. Verse 2 expresses what everyone of us as the people of God needs every day. We need grace and we need peace. Verse 3 expresses what every child of God, not only needs to do every day (that is, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ) and hopefully this will be the result of our time this morning--you will go out, if you are a Christian, blessing God, praising Him for what He has already done for you. While verse 2 tells us what we need to receive from God on a daily basis, verse 3 tells us what we can offer to God because of what He has already given to us because as you go down from verse 3 on to the fourteenth verse those are spiritual blessings that every child of God already has. We have been blessed with these in heavenly places in Christ.

Let us look at the prayer first in verse 2. This is such a familiar verse because Paul in his epistles characteristically uses this kind of a greeting. Perhaps this was the greeting that believers would use with each other when they met each other during the day. Instead of "good morning, how are you," they would say, "Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find this specific prayer in one form or another some fifteen times in the New Testament, that includes the Pauline Epistles. Several times you have grace by itself. Other times you have peace by itself. Sometimes you have both of them with the addition of mercy. In fact, turn over to the end of this epistle and notice how Paul concludes this epistle in the last two verses of chapter 6: "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen." You can see that he begins this with a prayer for grace and peace and he ends with a prayer for grace and peace. This ought to show

us how extremely important this is.

Grace and peace are not only two of the most used words in the Bible, but they are two of the richest and most meaningful for those of us who are the children of God regardless of who we are, how old we are, how mature or immature we may be in the faith regardless of what our circumstances may be. We all stand in need this very day of God's grace and God's peace.

Grace is a word which describes the basis on which we have been saved, does it not? When we get to chapter 2 we come to those familiar verses: "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Grace means that God, instead of giving us what we deserve has given us what we could never deserve, what we could never pay for, what we could never earn in any way. We deserve hell. We deserve to be separated from Him forever. But He has given us forgiveness. He has given us eternal life. He has given us the promise, the certain promise, that someday we are going to be in heaven. This is what it means to be saved by grace. Grace also expresses our continuing need for the help of God, that undeserved but much needed help. Every day we need God's help in our lives, do we not? We need it in so many, many ways. We need God's grace to strengthen us when we are weak. We need God's grace to keep us faithful when we are ready to give up. We need God's grace to encourage us when we are depressed. We need God's grace to keep us content when we are tempted by the things of the world. We need God's grace to give us victory when we are tried by Satan. We need God's grace to make us obedient when we are inclined to be rebellious and hard. We need God's grace to give us patience when we are suffering. We need God's grace to give forgiveness when we have sinned. We need God's grace to enable us to die as the people of God when the hour of death comes.

I am sure that I must have missed something, and maybe I have missed your own particular need at this particular time, but God does all of this and more by His grace, His enabling grace, His strengthening grace. Grace is a word with power, the power of God being manifested in our lives. When Paul writes to them, whether at the beginning of the epistle or at the end of the epistle or in the middle of the epistle someplace, he is praying that the grace of God would be given to them. He does not know what their needs are, but he knows that God is the One Who is sufficient for them and they must look to Him for grace, for strength, in their time of need.

Peace results from grace, does it not? You cannot have peace unless, first of all, you have experienced the grace of God. Peace, as we all know, is inner quietness of heart. It means rest where previously there has been turmoil. In most instances the peace of God is like Paul says it is in Philippians 4:6-7, it is the peace which passes understanding because we have peace when according to our circumstances there may be no reason why we should have peace. None of us goes very far in our day before something happens to upset us and we are reminded that we need the peace of God. We all need grace and we all need peace. This is the reason that you find this so dominant in Paul's writings, and not only Paul, but Peter and the Apostle John in the Book of the Revelation, you find him referring to these needed qualities in all of our lives.

Where does this grace and this peace come from? Our verse says, and most of the verses where Paul or the other writers mention it say, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

There is so much that I could say this morning about these two phrases that we could really spend the rest of the time just thinking about the fact that this comes from God our Father and it comes from the Lord Jesus Christ; but because our time is limited let me restrain myself and just point out two things.

If our needed grace and peace come from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, then we never need to worry about the source drying up. Our Bibles tell us of the trials and testings of the people of God right back to the very beginning of time. I think most of us know enough about

church history to know that what we find in the Bible has been duplicated for the hundreds of years since the Lord Jesus Christ was here. People of God have been facing the trials of daily life, the testings, the burdens, often the opposition. They have been drawing upon the resources of God's grace and God's peace. They have been doing this day by day from the very beginning of time. Yet, since this grace and this peace comes from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ we know that this means that our source can never dry up and that regardless of what trials and testings and problems we may face, there is always going to be enough to be found in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to supply every single one of us. As I have said many, many times, if all the people of the world were suddenly to turn to God and to Christ and to cry to Him for help, it would be nothing for God to meet the need of every single one in a great abundance. So the supply is inexhaustible. That is good to know, is it not?

Will you notice in this expression that Paul says, "God our Father. Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

If He is our Father, then as Paul is going to bring out in this passage this obviously means that we are His children. If we are His children, then this means that we are the special objects of His love, and because we are the special objects of His love He takes special delight in meeting our needs. He does not always immediately lift the burden or change the circumstances, but He gives us grace so that we can endure them and He gives us peace of heart so that we can be at rest in the midst of all of the difficult circumstances. That is a wonderful claim on God, is it not? You see, only those who have been born into the family of God can have the right to call God their Father. Paul was writing to these people he has described in verse 1 as "the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus" and he says that this grace and peace that you and I need so much comes from our Father. Do you remember, those of you who memorized the Sermon on the Mount, those words in which the Lord Jesus was encouraging prayer with His disciples? He said this (words that are familiar to most of us, I am sure), "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Then He says, "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if (and the implication here is if a son ask) he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" Then the Lord concluded those remarks by saying this, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:7-11). You know, you cannot ask for anything that is better than for grace and peace. With the grace of God and the peace of God you can go through the worst kind of trials straight on to glory with great peace and tranquility in your heart. Is it any wonder that again and again and again in these epistles you have this simple prayer? If you want to know how to pray for me, you pray this prayer. I can assure you this is what I am praying for you: That God would minister His grace and His peace to us out of His own inexhaustible resources. He is our Father and we can come in the assurance that when we seek grace and peace He is going to pour it out upon our lives in abundant measure.

Moving from that, the Apostle gives us this word concerning praise. If you want to know how to praise God, this is a good passage to learn from. There are lots of passages in the Bible that would help us. "Whoso offereth praise," the Lord says, "glorifieth me." We are in everything to give thanks. Praise is to be one of the trademarks of a Christian, one of the characteristics of a Christian. Our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are continually giving us blessings, not just spiritually, but materially and physically. So what can we give to them in return for these blessings? We are utterly dependent upon them; but they certainly are not dependent upon us and they are not dependent upon anyone else. One of the things that we learned about God is that He is self-existent. He said in His Word, "If I am hungry, I am not going to tell you." The cattle on a thousand hills are his. He is the God of heaven and earth. He blesses us with gifts, all kinds of gifts; and we bless Him with our word. You see, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us . . ." It is the same root word that he uses here. God blesses us with all spiritual blessings that we have in Christ; and in return, we bless Him with our lips, we bless Him with our words, we bless Him

with our praises, and, as we are going to see as we go through this epistle, we bless him by living lives that are pleasing and acceptable in His sight.

Verse 2, the prayer, has already given us two reasons for praising God. We praise Him for His grace and we praise Him for His peace. As we move from verse three down through verse fourteen (and that is a section), we are going to see many, many other reasons why we need to be praising God. But here in the third verse we have what I could call the grand general reason for this. Not because of what they will do for us are we to praise God, but it is because of what they already have done. You see, when you read through the blessings of verses 4, 5, 6, down through verse 14 you are not going to find one thing that you do not have as a child of God. They are things that only those of us who know God as our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour can thank them for, these spiritual blessings which we now have in heavenly places in Christ. He has blessed us. These are our present possessions. I pointed out to you a moment ago that in verse 2 he speaks of God as our Father. Now look at verse 3 where he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." So God is not only ours, but the Lord Jesus Christ is ours; and the blessings that we have, all of these spiritual blessings, are ours because of our relationship to Him.

Now, the questions could certainly be raised, and ought to be raised: "Why are they called spiritual blessings and why did the Apostle Paul say in heavenly places and why does he say in Christ? Here He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

Let me try to answer these questions, if I may.

Why are they called spiritual blessings. You will notice that he says that he has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings." We are going to be learning a great deal about the Holy Spirit in our Sunday School lessons. John has mentioned this morning, and I am sure that it was mentioned in the other classes, that there is a great deal of misunderstanding as far as the work of the Holy Spirit is concerned. There are those sincere Christians, true Christians, who spend their lives really seeking for themselves and encouraging others to seek blessings that they feel that they do not have. To me, one of the first lessons that every Christian needs to learn, and I hope that you know it this morning, is that when you receive Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, you receive every spiritual blessing that you will ever have and you received it in the Lord Jesus Christ. This does not mean that you are going to enjoy those blessings or that you will appreciate them, but the point that Paul wants to make here, apparently, with these believers is that we are not running to this meeting, or running to this person or running to get ahold of some book to find out about something that other Christians have which we do not have; but we need to realize that when we are saved we have all these blessings bestowed upon us, every single blessing that we will ever have in Christ. So the Christian life is not a life in which we are seeking to get more from God, but we are seeking to learn and to enjoy and appropriate the blessings that we already have in Christ. I hope that that is clear to all of us this morning. When I say that I am not minimizing the blessings of God in the least; but I am trying to get you to see how wonderful it is, how amazing to be a child of God. If God is our Father and Jesus Christ is our Lord Jesus Christ and we have been brought into a living relationship with them, what more could God possibly do for us than He has already done for us in Christ.

These are called spiritual blessings because, in the first place, they are ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. If it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit, we would not have any of them. It is the Holy Spirit Who makes this work of redemption effective in our lives. It is very, very appropriate that they should be called spiritual blessings. This is one reason Paul gives attention to the work of the Spirit in this epistle. They are called spiritual blessings also because they have to do with our salvation. We are not talking for the moment about material blessings that we can see--your bank account or your home or your car, these blessings that certainly come to us from God as well; we are not talking about the physical blessings that God has been pleased to give to us, the health that we enjoy--but we need to recognize that he is talking about these blessings that have to do with our

salvation. Pity the person who is happy that he has so much going for him physically and materially, but who does not have anything spiritually. Pity that person. He is the poorest person on the face of the earth though he might have millions in his bank account and though he might have perfect health. Paul here was rejoicing in the fact that God has blessed us with all of these spiritual blessings--the fullness of salvation. It has come from God. It is ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. You may not be able to see them but you can see the effect that they have in the lives of people who have been redeemed.

He said that we have been blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places . . ." This is an expression, if you are faithful in reading Ephesians you are going to be impressed with the fact that Paul mentions these "heavenly places" not just once, but he mentions these "heavenly places" or "in the heavenlies" a total of 5 times. You find it once again in chapter 1. I am not going to tell you where it is, you can look for it, in chapter 2, chapter 3, and chapter 6. You find it in all of these. Expositors and commentators have expressed themselves in many different ways concerning the meaning of this expression, but probably none of us really understands fully what it means. Let me express, at least in part, what I believe it means. It speaks of the nature of these blessings. They originated in heaven. They did not originate on earth. By their very nature they are heavenly blessings, not earthly blessings. It also means that they are secured for us in heaven. One Old Testament verse which I think expresses the idea that is in this little phrase is that verse in Psalm 119:89 where the Psalmist says, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." You know, the Bible has had lots of enemies. There have been times throughout history when people would come into a meeting like this and would gather up all of the Bibles and take them outside and burn them. There are undoubtedly lots of people in the world today who would do anything if they could destroy any Bible that exists on the face of the earth. They hate this book. But God says in His Word that His Word is for ever settled in heaven. If it were possible (now God is not going to let this happen) for every Bible on the face of the earth in every language to be destroyed, the Word of God as such would not even be touched because its security is not on earth. It is settled in heaven.

When you talk about our salvation, the same is true about our salvation. You never can really tell what a Christian is going to do. Christians can disappoint you. We disappoint ourselves. We are continually failing. If our salvation were dependent upon our behaviour why it would not be secure at all. We would be in and out of salvation like some people teach that it is possible for us to be. You see, these spiritual blessings that we have in Christ are secured in heaven. Though I may fail, the promises are not going to fail. God is not going to fail. God's plan of redeeming men is not going to fail. It is absolutely secure. When Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places . . ." he is saying that He has given us blessings that we can never, never, never lose. They are yours and they are mine eternally. They are settled in heaven. Nothing that ever happens on earth can possibly change what you and I have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Your bank account is not that secure. Your health is not that secure. Your family is not that secure. There is not anything that has to do with this life that is that secure, but these spiritual blessings that we have in Christ are just exactly that secure. This, therefore, speaks of the position that we have in God right now. I do not like to give away one of these verses, but I will. In the second chapter and the sixth and seventh verses you notice that Paul, talking about what has happened

to us, says, "And (He) hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." You see, our salvation is so certain that God already sees us seated with His son in the heavenly places where He has prepared for all eternity to continue to manifest to us the results of the blessings that He bestowed upon us when we came to know Jesus Christ as our Saviour. That is wonderful, is it not?

He has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (finally) in Christ." In heavenly places and in Christ go together, do they not? We would not have a single one of these spiritual blessings if it were not for Christ. It is not that Christ is just for me or with me, but I am in Him.

You are in Him. He took your place. He took my place. He died in our stead. He bore our sins. The victory that was His over sin and death and hell by grace is our victory too. We are in Christ. I cannot fully explain to you what that means, but we have been so joined to Christ (this expression means) that we will never, never, never be separated from Him. How anybody could ever understand even the third verse of Ephesians chapter 1 and talk about losing their salvation is more than I can understand, because here the security that we have in Christ, our salvation in heavenly places. We have been joined to the Saviour. It is a work that God has done. It is not something that we have done for ourselves. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us, unworthy as we are, with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places and He has joined us to Christ to make sure that we will never lose what we have in Him. That is the kind of salvation that we have. When you begin to see this, you understand, do you not, why Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." You know, I am going to feel that I have failed in teaching this book if by the grace of God, and I am not looking to myself or my explanations, you can go through this book and come out of it without this same note of praise and thanksgiving in your heart. Do you feel that this morning? If you were asked, "What is the greatest blessing, What are you most thankful for in all of your life?" Would it be this? or would it be something else? God has so richly blessed us in Christ and we pour out our praises and our thanksgiving to Him because there is not one of these blessings that you and I in any way deserve. It is all because of Christ and His work in our behalf.

So, as we come to the Lord's Table, the Lord said, "This do in remembrance of me." Remember this morning as you take the bread and as you drink from the cup that you are joined to Christ and you can never be separated from Him, that you have the security of this salvation in heavenly places, that He has given you all these blessings--all of these blessings--nothing can be added. Our lives together as Christians just discovering the riches and the fullness and the wonder and the glory of all that we already have, why we are infinitely rich in these spiritual blessings that God has been pleased to bestow upon us.

If this does not touch a keynote of response in your own hearts this morning, perhaps you need to ask yourself, "Am I really in Christ? Is Jesus Christ my Saviour? Has He done this for me? Am I trusting Him as the Author and the Finisher of my faith and the One Who has provided my salvation? Is this what gives me the greatest delight? If Jesus Christ is not your Saviour, I trust that the Lord will grant you repentance before you leave this place this morning, that you might go from this place with your faith in Christ, believing that Jesus Christ by His death on the Cross accomplished everything that is necessary to bring any sinner into a place of perfect acceptance with God, that God in His wonderful grace will bestow upon you all of these wonderful blessings of salvation.