

YOU ARE RANSOMED IN CHRIST**EPHESIANS 1:7-14**

Identity theft. I was a victim of that several years ago. I still don't know how the thief got my personal information, but he used a fake driver's license to open several charge accounts at several stores in my name and then "purchased" several hundreds of dollars worth of merchandise. He also got access to my checking account and made several large cash withdrawals. Fortunately, I didn't end up losing any money – my checking account balance was restored and the fraudulent charge accounts were closed. But it was a considerable hassle and a big expenditure of time to get it fixed.

We've started a new series of messages on the New Testament book of Ephesians. The title of the series is "Child of the One True King: Discovering Who You Are In Christ." Christians are, by definition, people who have taken on someone else's identity. When you start to follow Jesus your identity goes through an amazing transformation. Now you're called "Christian" because you've taken on the identity of someone else: Jesus Christ. Not only have you been given an identity that you weren't born with and that you didn't earn the right to use, but you're invited to enjoy an inheritance and use all the benefits this identity brings! This isn't identity theft. This is an identity gift!

Ephesians was written by the great Christian leader, Paul, in the middle of the first century towards the end of his life while he was in prison in Rome for speaking about Jesus. Last week, we looked at the first six verses of this letter. You might recall that I explained that v. 3-14 is one very long, complicated sentence in the original Greek language. Every English translation has broken it down into several sentences for the purposes of clarity. Right away Paul begins to tell us about the wonderful blessings God has given to us in Christ. We only had time to reflect on the first of three blessings Paul identifies in v. 3-14. That's the blessing that God has chosen you. You are chosen in Christ. That means you have great value, you have a great purpose and you are greatly loved.

This morning we want to consider the second and third blessings mentioned in v. 7-14. Let's read those verses just now. Many of you know that the belief that God is a Trinity of three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is basic Christianity. You may also know that the word "Trinity" never appears in the Bible. Instead of being an explicit doctrine taught in the Bible, the doctrine of God as a Trinity is derived from several passages in the New Testament. The passage we just read is just one example that points to God being a Trinity.

Notice how cool this is in v. 3-14! The first blessing you receive as a child of the one true King is election. God chose you to belong to Him. It happened in the past – before the creation of the world. Which member of the Trinity was the prime provider of this blessing? God the Father. The second blessing is salvation. It happened in the past, but it continues to have a powerful impact in the present. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of

sins....” (Eph 1:7 NIV). Notice the present tense! Who provides this blessing in a primary sense? God the Son who is Jesus Christ. The third blessing is receiving our full inheritance – all that God intends to give us. It’s primarily in the future – what you will receive one day as a child of the one true King. Who is the primary provider of this third blessing? God the Holy Spirit. There you have it. The first blessing: election... in the past... by God the Father. The second blessing: salvation... in the present... by God the Son. The third blessing: your full inheritance... in the future... by God the Holy Spirit. Let’s dive more deeply into the meaning of the second and third blessings described in 1:7-14 and see how they powerfully affect your daily life and mine. First of all, these verses tell us about...

A SECRET REVEALED.

In v. 9 we read, “he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure....” (Eph 1:9 NIV) That word “mystery” can mean different things to different people. I love to read mystery novels and I enjoy “who done it” movies and TV shows. But often when we use that word “mystery” or “mysterious”, it can refer to something beyond our understanding – something incomprehensible. That’s not what Paul means here which is why I prefer the word “secret”. A secret is something you can understand. It’s just that it’s hidden from you unless someone reveals it to you. That’s Paul’s point here.

God kept a secret hidden deep in His own heart which was then revealed in Jesus and what Jesus did at the cross and empty tomb. There it is in v. 10 – “to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” (Eph 1:10 NIV) God’s secret purpose was to unite all things into one harmonious whole under the Lordship of His Son, Jesus. By “all things” I think Paul is talking primarily about human beings all over the world who have become God’s children. That’s you, me, anyone and everyone who puts his or her faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

This was an “out there”, revolutionary concept to the first readers of this letter. Jewish people couldn’t staff non-Jewish people or Gentiles. They considered them dirty, immoral trash deserving only of God’s judgment and damnation. But non-Jews had no use for Jewish people, either. They considered them to be self-righteous “holier than thous” who thought they had a corner on God. Paul is saying here that God has brought believing Jews and non-Jews together through the cross of Jesus. He’s not saying everyone is going to become a follower of Jesus. Instead, Paul is implying that people from any and every culture, ethnicity, country and socio-economic background can come to Jesus and find salvation. The only barrier to God’s plan is unbelief. That’s incredibly good news! You and I aren’t left out! God loved you before the creation of the world. God loved you and chose you despite your personal sin. None of us knew about this love. Only God knew this secret, but now He’s revealed it fully and openly.

What makes this secret now revealed such a sure thing? What Jesus did at the cross and offers you through His shed blood. “He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.” (Eph 1:7 NLT) When you redeem or ransom something, you buy it back. In the first century, it usually referred to buying a person out of either slavery or imprisonment. The Bible says that you and I start out life slaves to our own sinful nature. A person without Jesus – which is how each of us began our lives – lives out his or her life in a spiritual prison usually with little awareness of that fact. What gets us out of that prison or that enslaved condition? Not education. Not trying hard to be good. What, then? Blood. Only blood. Only the blood of God the Son, Jesus shed on the cross. “He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.” (Eph 1:7 NLT) Now, as a result, you are spiritually free. You are free from sin’s guilt. You are free from sin’s condemnation. You are free from sin’s domination of your daily life. Now you are free to love and know God. Now you are free to enjoy His grace. Now you are free to serve and live for the King.

On November 26, 2008, a gang of terrorists stormed the Taj Mahal Palace hotel in Mumbai, India. After the attack had left 200 people dead, a reporter interviewed one guest who had been at the hotel for dinner that night. The guest described how he and his friends were eating dinner when they heard gunshots. Someone grabbed him and pulled him under the table. The terrorists came striding through the restaurant, shooting at will, until everyone (or so they thought) had been killed. Miraculously, this man survived. When the reporter asked him how he had survived when everyone else at his table had been killed, he said, “I suppose because I was covered in someone else's blood, and they took me for dead.” That’s essentially what happened at the cross. Because Jesus paid the penalty for our sin—because we are covered in the blood of his sacrifice- we may have eternal life now and forever.

Are you free this morning? Are you free of sin’s guilt, condemnation and domination? You can only ever be free spiritually when you are in Christ. You can only be in Christ if you have consciously and personally put your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. But most of us here are followers of Jesus, right? Christian, are you free? Here’s a great tragedy. As a follower of Jesus, you can willingly become a slave to sin all over again. You commit sin and you don’t confess it and ask for God’s forgiveness. Or, you commit sin and you might confess it, but then you return to your sin the next day. You don’t truly repent and so you’re right back again in spiritual bondage. You need to reclaim your freedom in Christ and live it out every day. Are you free this morning? Now, secondly, these verses tell us about...

A MARK GIVEN.

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a

seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” (Eph 1:13 NIV) A seal was a big deal back in the first century. A seal was a mark, a tattoo or an imprint of some kind that expressed ownership and identification of a piece of property. Sometimes a seal was a mark of some kind pressed into a clump of soft clay and then allowed to harden so that it could be attached to an object. Seals were attached to packages, letters, livestock and even human slaves. It’s pretty similar to the present day practice of branding cattle. When you want to make sure everyone knows that this certain cow belongs to the Circle R ranch, you burn a brand into its hide as a mark of ownership and identification.

What is the seal or the mark that you belong to God? Not circumcision. That’s what the Jews thought and many Jews still do! Not water baptism. That’s what many Christians think, but they’re wrong. It’s not the act of coming forward, or receiving Communion or getting confirmed. It’s not church membership or holding an office in a church. It’s not knowing lots of Bible verses, having a holy walk or being able to flash a Jesus smile! What is it then? “... When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” (Eph 1:13 NIV) The presence of the Holy Spirit in your life is the mark that God owns you and you belong to Him. The Holy Spirit Himself is the tattoo, the branding, the mark that identifies you as a child of the one, true King.

When was the Holy Spirit given to you? “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” (Eph 1:13 NIV) “Hearing” in the Bible always means more than just letting sounds enter your ears. It means realizing the significance of what you hear and then acting upon it – that’s belief or faith. There it is in the same verse – “when you believed.” The verb tenses in that verse lead me to conclude that believing the good news about Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit happen at the same time. “When you believed, you were marked.” The moment you put your faith in Jesus, God gave you the Holy Spirit. He is the mark that you belong to God.

Why is that important? First, because God has marked you, you can’t lose your standing with God. You will forever be a child of God. You are His property for time and eternity. You are owned and marked. If your child disobeys or dishonors you, is he or she any less your child? So, yes, I can sin and do things that seemingly contradict the fact that I belong to God, but God doesn’t kick me out of His family. I can’t begin to tell you what a difference that realization has made in my own life. There is nothing more pitiful than a child of God who lives everyday in fear and dread that God is going to find some reason to withdraw His grace and love from your life. You’ve been marked... forever!

Second, because God has marked you, He can make any demand of you at any time for any reason. It means you are now today and will be forever God’s property. You are now God’s slave. You’ve been bought with a price and you are not your own master anymore. There are appropriate levels of accountability

among human beings. I am accountable to you, to Cheryl and to the United States government in different ways. But not in the ultimate sense. You are not ultimately accountable to your parents, your spouse, or to me or to the Ministry Council. All of us are ultimately accountable to God, because He owns us. We belong to Him. When He says jump, you had better jump and say “How high?” God is not there to be defied and disobeyed. Best learn that!

Third, because God has marked you, you now have the capacity to serve Him in a supernatural way. He has marked you with His Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit living in you enables you to do things you could never do in your own strength. You now have the capacity to do things that have eternal value and significance because the eternal God Himself enables you through His Spirit. So, then, how are you serving the King of the Universe? There are at least two different kinds of wells. There is a surface well that you have to pump and then the water starts coming. As long as you pump, water will come, but when you stop pumping, the water stops. Often, you have to leave a little water in a jar to prime the pump to get it going the next time. Then there is what’s called an artesian well. When you want to get water out of that kind of well, you just connect up to it. It flows and flows until you turn off the spigot. There are two ways to serve the Lord. You can be like a surface well. You have to be primed, pumped, pleaded and begged to do much of anything for the King of the Universe. Or, you can be like an artesian well. Filled with the Holy Spirit of God, you can always be on the lookout for places to serve and to share. You’re ready and willing to reach out anytime and anywhere to do anything that the King wants you to do. So, how are you serving Him today? What’s your view of it? Are you serving Him in a supernatural, Holy Spirit filled way? A secret revealed. A mark given. These verses also tell us about...

A DOWN PAYMENT MADE.

“...When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.” (Eph 1:13-14 NIV) Anyone in debt out there? Most of us owe on something – a house, a car, student loans, Christmas gifts, your last vacation! It’s interesting that Paul would use language about debt here to describe our relationship with God. It’s pretty obvious that we owe a whole lot to God, right? We are certainly in His debt, right? But, ironically, that’s not Paul’s point here as true as it might be. In fact, it’s actually just the opposite. The presence of the Holy Spirit in your life is a sign that God owes you something: your full inheritance!

Paul’s word is “deposit” there which is the same as a down payment. When you buy something that costs a lot of money – a house or a car, for instance – you are usually required to make a sizeable down payment. It’s part of the purchase price. It indicates that you’re willing to pay the full amount eventually. It seals the contract. So, Paul is saying that God made you a down payment not that you

made Him a down payment! God owes you! God's down payment is the Holy Spirit. Like a down payment, the Holy Spirit is part of your full inheritance that God has given you. Like a down payment, the Holy Spirit is God's first and greatest installment of everything else God will give you. Like a down payment, the Holy Spirit's presence in you seals the deal between God and you.

When you make a down payment on a car or a house, it indicates your obligation to buy the whole thing eventually. When God gave you His Holy Spirit, He obligated Himself to complete this whole salvation thing fully one day. The Holy Spirit is the first and best installment of a whole lot more coming your way. Isn't it incredible to think that by giving you His Spirit, God has voluntarily and graciously put Himself in your debt? God actually owes you something! I'm told that the biblical Greek word for down payment here – "arrabon" – has survived into modern Greek. It's actually the word for a woman's engagement ring. In Greece today, it's called the "arrabon." An engagement ring is a down payment. The man is telling the woman that he loves her and can count on his love and provision for the rest of her life. But he wants her to have a foretaste of that love now. That's rather like what the Holy Spirit does in and for you. He is the Foretaste of everything else God is going to give you. He is God's engagement ring, so to speak, that points to a whole lot more to come!

My friends, one day you'll die to find out that you're living forever. One day you'll experience the fullness of your salvation – no more sin, no more sadness, no more pain, no more train wrecks. How do you know that? Already, the Holy Spirit lets you taste something of the joy of knowing God as your Father. Already, the Holy Spirit enlightens your mind, changes your desires, alters your behavior and transforms your attitudes. Already, the Holy Spirit assures you that you are a child of the one, true King and you sense His presence and power in your heart. God has put Himself in your debt. He promises to honor the contract. The down payment is Himself – the Holy Spirit.

When Princess Diana died in 1997, she left a sizeable inheritance for her two sons, William and Harry, in the amount of \$20.4 million. With investments and interest, that amount grew during their teens and twenties to \$31.4 million. But the provision was such that William and Harry were only able to inherit this considerable estate after their 30th birthdays. In June 2012, William turned 30 and inherited his portion. Harry will inherit his portion on his 30th birthday as well. The estate is theirs. It is has been promised to them. It is in *their* names, and it has been set aside for *them*. In the same way, as a follower of Jesus, you have been given an inheritance. Based on Jesus' promise, it is yours. It's in your name, and it's set aside for you. The down payment on that inheritance is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your life right now today. At the right time, you too will receive your inheritance in full. You have been given the gift of new identity. You are a new creation in Christ. You are a child of the one true King.