

Ephesians 1.11-14

The Blessing of Hope

In C. S. Lewis's fifth novel in the Chronicles of Narnia, *A Horse and His Boy*, Lewis introduces a young prince of Archenland named Cor, who doesn't know that he is a prince, and is called by the name Shasta, the name given to him by his adopted father, a Calormene fisherman named Arsheesh. Arsheesh was not a particularly cruel man, but no love was shared between father and son, and Arsheesh was content to use Shasta as a household slave, and congratulate himself for taking the boy in. Even though he didn't know he was from Archenland, Shasta felt like a foreigner in Calormene, and had an intense longing to escape from there to find a true home. His opportunity to flee is thrust upon him one night when he overhears Arsheesh talking to a Calormene nobleman about selling Shasta as a slave. The nobleman's horse, a talking horse from Narnia, was also a foreign slave looking for an escape. So together they flee for Narnia and the North. As Shasta encounters and experiences more of the Calormene culture, his feeling of "unbelonging" grows more painful. His longing for a home matures from a wish to a necessity. After many perilous adventures and a long journey (guided of course by Aslan, the lion), the story ends with Shasta, recognized by his true father, the King of Archenland, as Prince Cor, heir to the throne of Archenland. Finally, Prince Cor's hope for a true home, a place where he belonged, was satisfied beyond his wildest imaginations. Not only was his hope not disappointed, it was fulfilled beyond all expectation.

The Ephesian Christians would have experienced something of Shasta's loneliness and painful foreignness in their own city of Ephesus. After they became Christians, they were disinherited from the idolatrous guilds to which they would have belonged, since they would not swear allegiance to any god, but proclaimed that Jesus is Lord. They were cut off from civic privileges and festivities because they refused to participate in the emperor cult. While they had at one time felt quite at home in Ephesus, with its rampant idolatry and general immorality, they were now saints—set apart to God. Paul writes this opening blessing to remind the Ephesian believers of their glorious new identity in Christ, and to assure them, as Jesus had once assured His disciples, that "There is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life" (Luke 18.29-30). In the final section of this opening blessing, Paul directs the Ephesians attention to look away from their earthly losses, to their glorious gain in Christ. He points them to a hope that shows their present afflictions to be but light and momentary. He says, "That longing you have is God-given. And you can be assured that your hope will not be disappointed. You have a glorious inheritance as the children of God."

This is a message that we need to hear today. If we live as the elect sons of God in this world, we will surely find the world system a foreign place that looks on us as odd strangers, swimming against the current of self-aggrandizement and the fleeting pleasures of sin. The great temptation we face is to be shortsighted, and think that the best we can do for ourselves is to blend in with the world. Then we'll get along, and perhaps find the world a more comfortable home. The cure for this evil is the hope that Moses found released him from Egyptian bondage, "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than

to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.” As we look to our reward our hearts are guarded against the false promises of this world, and we can bear the reproach for being strange in the eyes of the world. ***We can praise God for the blessing of a glorious hope in Christ.*** This morning I want to highlight three truths about our hope in Christ that will guard your heart from settling for this world’s goods, and help you to be a happy “odd fellow” by understanding who you are and what you have in Christ: First, In Christ we are blessed with a definite future. Second, In Christ we are blessed with a present experience of the future. Third, In Christ we are blessed with a Divine future.

In Christ we are blessed with a definite future. How would it affect our resolve in Afghanistan if we knew where the country would be after 10 years of concerted effort? If we could say with certainty, they would be a free, self-governing people, with a healthy judicial system, equitable laws, and at peace with their neighbors, I don’t think too many would be opposed to staying the course. Well, how would it affect your resolve to live for the glory of God if you knew what the outcome would be? Not the outcome of your resolve, but the outcome of being in Christ. We aren’t saved by resolve. We are saved by Christ’s finished work upon the cross. But how would it affect your resolve if you knew for sure that you would inherit eternal life, the kingdom of God, heaven? Well, in Christ, we don’t have to wonder, because, we have a definite future in Him. *Hope is certain for the future because of the predestination of the Father according to His good pleasure (11).* Verse 11 says that we are God’s inheritance because we have been “predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” My future, and yours, if you are in Christ Jesus, is as sure as God’s choices. Our future is fixed, that’s what “predestined means, according to God’s purpose or good pleasure. As God contemplates our future with Him, He is delighted. Out of this delight He takes counsel within Himself. Out of His perfect counsel, He wills. It is according to the counsel of His will that He works. So, to summarize the second half of verse 11, out of His delight in a glorious future with us God wills and works all things. Don’t miss that important “all things.” There are a million things that happen that we are totally unaware of that cause ripples in the world around us that wind up touching us and affecting us both now and for eternity. Some of these things may happen thousands of miles and even thousands of years from where we are today. And all of them are “worked” by our sovereign God for our future good. The God who disposes of all things according to His own counsel, has predestined His people as His possession.

If that were not enough to give you certainty for your future, we find further that: *Hope is certain for the future because of our union with Christ through faith (13).* As we have seen so often throughout this passage, Paul speaks of our lives as being “in Him” “in Christ,” speaking of our covenantal union with Christ. That means that Christ becomes our head and representative before God the Father, so that the Father regards us as His beloved ones because He regards us in *the* Beloved One. Every Spiritual blessing accrues to us by virtue of our union with and identification with Christ. “I’m sorry sir, I can’t let you past this checkpoint, only authorized personnel,” says the obedient security officer. “It’s ok soldier, he’s with me,” says his commander. Jesus says, “He’s with Me. She’s with Me.” And we have clearance. How do we realize this union with Christ? Paul says here that we heard “the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him.” “Word of Truth” is a great way to describe the Word

of the God who cannot lie. Many “words” hit our ears every day. Like the Ephesians, we have the world telling us who we are, what we should be doing with our lives, how we should think about things that are going on around us, and how we should respond to various people and events. We need a trustworthy Word that speaks above the rest to give us true Truth, as Francis Schaeffer called the Bible. So, we are given the Word of Truth, the gospel of our salvation—the good news that not only announces our salvation, but is also the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. The evidence of our union with Christ is that when this Word, this gospel, comes to us, we believed in Him. If you trust in what Christ has done for you in the past when He died for your sins and rose again on the third day for your justification, then you can have confidence in your future. Your glorious future depends on your union with Christ, not your performance on earth.

Are you still in doubt about your future? Not only do we have certainty from the Father’s predestinating decree and the Son’s covenantal union with us, but: *Hope is certain for the future because of the sealing of the Holy Spirit (13)*. “A threefold cord is not quickly broken,” says the Preacher. In this case, it cannot be broken at all. “No one can snatch them from My hand,” said Jesus, then He continued, “My Father who gave them to Me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them from His Hands.” Now Paul tells us that it is not only the Father and the Son, but the Holy Spirit also, who keeps us, guarding us by the power of God for an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that never fades away. Paul says you “were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” That word “promised” is an important word that I hope we can return to in a later message from Ephesians. It points to the promise of the Spirit to Abraham and in the prophets, such as Ezekiel and Joel. It also points to the promise of Christ to send the Spirit. But for now, I want you to focus on the Holy Spirit as the seal of God upon us. He is a seal of ownership and preservation. As a seal of ownership, the Spirit marks us out as belonging to God. As a seal of preservation, He distinguishes us from everything else in this world which is passing away. As the seal of ownership, the Spirit is the Spiritual reality that circumcision and later baptism signified. In the OT, circumcision marked one out as the seed of Abraham. Now, baptism marks us out as the seed of Christ. It is the sign of the New Covenant, the sign of belonging to God. As the seal of preservation, He is the reality behind the picture drawn in Revelation 7.1-4 “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on the earth or on the sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’” This was a seal of protection, to distinguish God’s people, God’s possession, from the rest of creation, so that they would be preserved when He poured out the cup of His wrath.

Since I first went through Evangelism Explosion over fifteen years ago, I’ve asked many people this question: “Do you know for sure that when you die you will go to heaven?” Unfortunately, there are many non-believers who have a false assurance that they will go to heaven, because they believe everyone except murderers and pedofiles are going to heaven. But there are just as many Christians who lack real assurance because they are seeking their assurance from their performance. Now, I do believe that our assurance is strengthened by the evidences of grace in our lives, such as maturity in

holiness. But our salvation cannot be made any more secure by our performance than it already is by the threefold cord of the Father's predestination, the Son's covenantal union, and the Spirit's seal. Place your confidence completely in Christ, and you will not be disappointed. In Christ we are blessed with a definite future.

Secondly, In Christ we are blessed with a present experience of the future. Hope is present in the Holy Spirit who is a down payment, or first installment, of our inheritance (14). The ESV translates the word "arrabon" as guarantee, but if you look in the footnote, you will see an alternate translation of "down payment." We might combine both of these translations to get at the heart of what Paul is saying: The Holy Spirit is the down payment that guarantees our inheritance. A down payment is more than a pledge. A pledge is a tangible guarantee that you will get your money. I might give you something as collateral until I give you your money, but I want that collateral back after I pay you. That's a pledge. A down payment is a first installment with more of the same to follow. This is what the Holy Spirit is in our lives. He is now at work in us in a real way, so that we are brought under the New Covenant administration of Christ. He has delivered us from the dominion of sin, and is working to subdue the remnant of sin still in us. He has changed our stony hearts to hearts of flesh. But we still sin, and we still struggle with temptation, letting us know that we are not yet perfected. We don't know all that we can know of the glory of God because we still wrestle with sin. We don't possess our full inheritance, yet. But we do have the Holy Spirit. He is at work in us. This Christian life *is a real* life in distinction from our former lives in bondage to sin—actually dead in trespasses and sins. We are new creations, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5.17. And, as Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3, we are born again if we see the kingdom of God in Christ. This new life in the Spirit is a future reality that has become present by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and His gracious work in us. This first installment, or down payment, anticipates our final redemption, our resurrection and glorification, our full communion with God. For now we know in part, but then we shall know fully, even as we are fully known. Now we see through a glass darkly, then face to face. Our present experience is a first installment that guarantees our acquisition of our full inheritance. In Christ, we are blessed with a present experience of the future.

Thirdly, in Christ we are blessed with a Divine future. What will heaven be like? Well, if life in the ocean is defined by the atmosphere of water, and life on land is defined by the atmosphere of air, then life in heaven or the new heavens and new earth will be defined by the atmosphere of God's holy and gracious presence. The presence and character of God will be such that no unclean thing will be there. John, in Revelation 21.27, celebrates this, "But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."

How does Paul emphasize this Divine future? He does this in two ways. First, he says that *we are God's portion (11a)*. Secondly, he says that *God is our portion (12, 14)*. In verse 11 Paul uses the passive voice of the verb that means to cast a lot or to inherit. In the OT, God made known the allotments of the tribes of Israel in the Promised Land by casting lots. These were devices given to the high priest by God to discern God's will. It seems that the lot gave a yes or no answer. Proverbs 16.33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." Because of the lot's association with inheritance in the OT, the word comes to be used for giving an inheritance or allotment. So in the active voice it means to cast the lot or give an allotment or inheritance. So what does it mean in the passive voice. It

can mean “be allotted” or “be inherited.” So in verse 11, we would either read “In Him we have been allotted” or “In Him we have been inherited.” The first idea seems to be incomplete without a direct object. The question is “What have we been allotted?” This is why I lean toward the other translation “we have been inherited.” The NIV leans this direction, but obscures the idea of inheritance by saying, “we have been chosen.” The ESV retains the idea of inheritance, but makes it active voice, rather than the passive used in the Greek. I believe the point of verse 11a is that we have been inherited by God. This agrees with the concept of the sealing of the Holy Spirit in verse 13. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit because we are God’s possession, God’s inheritance. This idea is brought out again in verse 18, where Paul prays that the Ephesians would have revelation to perceive “God’s glorious inheritance in the saints.” This echoes God’s sentiment towards His people throughout the ages, as Moses said in Deuteronomy 32.8-9, “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when He divided mankind, He fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD’s portion is His people, Jacob His allotted heritage” (cf. Deut 4.20; 9.29; 106.40; 1 Kings 8.51). Again Psalm 33.12 celebrates, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage!” The church is that heritage of the Lord, as Paul says here, and as Peter says in 1 Peter 2.9, “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Paul also speaks of “our inheritance” in verse 14, where He says that the Holy Spirit is the first installment of our inheritance. So if the Holy Spirit is the first installment, implying that more of the same is to follow, then what lies ahead for our inheritance? More knowledge of God. More experience of God. God is our portion. Deuteronomy 10.9 speaks of the privilege of the Tribe of Levi, saying, “Therefore Levi has no portion or inheritance with his brothers. The LORD is his inheritance, as the LORD your God said to him.” The Psalmist exclaims in Psalm 73.26, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” As John Piper says, “God is the gospel.” Christ did not shed His blood so that we may merely have a guilt free conscience, healthier relationships with our spouse, our children, or our parents. Christ did not bear the agony of the cross and the torrent of God’s wrath so that we could have pie in the sky in the sweet by and by. Christ suffered and died in our place so that we would be reconciled to God. He died to give us an inheritance with all the saints in light (Col 1.12)—that God would be your portion forever.

The consummation of this inheritance is “the redemption of the purchased possession” (14). We were predestined “to the praise of His glory” (12). We will enjoy our inheritance “to the praise of His glory” (14).

In Christ we are blessed with a definite future. In Christ we are blessed with a present experience of the future. In Christ we are blessed with a Divine future. Are you longing for a home? Are you a stranger and alien in this world? Look to Christ! In Him is a glorious future at home with God.