

Introduction

Since this is one long sentence, and we are at the end of it this morning, lets read it all again to see the entire context together.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. **In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. **In him** we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire

possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:2–14, ESV)

This morning, we get to the third main thing that Paul is saying is true about the blessings we have been given by God. This section is about our inheritance. In him we have obtained an inheritance. What do you think about first when you hear the word “inheritance”?

I am guessing most of us think about money. Or some sort of house, cabin, car, or other object that represents wealth. We hear the word inheritance, and we think first and foremost about something that is coming to us. Something we will get. That is the stuff we see in movies, right? The long-lost great aunt who never had children but was a millionaire and has left their niece or nephew all their money and it comes at just the right moment and changes their entire life.

That *is* the right understanding of the word. The word inheritance in the Greek has in it the idea of obtaining something, but it can also have the idea of being chosen. We have that same spectrum when we think about the words inheritance and heir. The heir obtains something and is chosen. An inheritance is what you obtain. Choosing and obtaining often go hand-in-hand.

Ephesians 1:11

That range of meanings can make this very first phrase in Ephesians 1:11 difficult to interpret, especially because Paul

uses the passive voice. I only had to learn English well when I learned other languages, so it is okay if you forgot what it means to have a passive voice.

He loves me. (Active)

I am loved. (Passive)

I am loved by him. (Passive and clearer)

The simplest way to say something is with the active voice. “He loves me.” But we can also say it with the passive voice “I am loved.” But that means we need to supply some other words to make a complete thought. I am loved by whom? “I am loved by him.” That finally makes complete sense. It gets even worse when we use the past tense and a passive voice.

He loved me (Active)

I have been loved. (Passive)

I have been loved by him. (Passive and clearer)

Now we have had to add multiple words to convey the past tense. And the real problem in the passive voice is who is receiving the action and who is doing the action. Who loved me? That is why we tend to avoid when possible—it just makes language confusing. But Paul likes the passive! Here is what he says here literally here in Ephesians 1:11:

“In him we (past passive of to inherit, obtain, or to be chosen”

So when we try to translate that we get so many options:

“In him we have inherited”

“In him we have been inherited”

“In him we have been chosen”

“In him we have been made an inheritance”

“In him we have been made chosen (a possession)”

It could be any of these since the word can mean all of them and in the passive voice we have to provide extra words to make the context clear, and depending on if “we” is the object or subject, the result is very different. You can see how different English interpretations try to make a choice in there translations if we look at the ESV and NET:

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,
(Ephesians 1:11, ESV)

In Christ we too have been claimed as God’s own possession, since we were predestined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:11, NET)

The way each translation translates that one word makes a huge difference in the sentence. The second half is translate almost identical in every translation but the first phrase is very different. I had a professor who would exclaim during

these moments in language classes, “They are both gloriously true!” So often that is the case. The difference here doesn’t change our theology, but it just points to different glorious truths about God. Truths that we can find affirmed throughout the Bible in different places.

I want to give you an encouragement about what could seem like language problems in the Bible. Often people want to use Biblical languages to make it seem like you need special training or you are missing a lot when you don’t know the languages. Praise God for people who know them well to help us decipher if a translation is faithful to the original or not. But, I heard a crazy statistic once that said approximately 99.999% of any language problems in the Bible do not change any meaningful theology or part of the Biblical narrative. And almost all of that 0.001% comes from the very debated ending of Mark and the question of whether it belongs in the Bible at all (not that the ending of Mark gives us particularly bad theology). Our Bibles are amazingly well preserved by God, through time, that we might know rightly who he is and his very nature and character.

Chosen vs Inherit

I bring all this up to admit that different preachers could preach amazingly different but God glorifying sermons on this passage that would go in two very different directions. On the one hand, we could take this to mean that, in Christ, we have been made God’s possession, an inheritance for God. This goes well with what we have already seen about

God choosing us. What has he chosen us for? To be his inheritance!

We see this in places like Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 14:2 and 26:18, and a really good example in Malachi 3:17:

They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. (Malachi 3:17, ESV)

Or as we see in the New Testament in 1 Peter 2:9:

But you are a chosen race, 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. (1 Peter 2:9, ESV)

Part of God choosing us, predestining us, was not to just set us apart from others but rather bringing us to himself that he may have us! Yet on the other hand, we could take this to mean that we have been given an inheritance. Jesus talks about it this way:

“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:29, ESV)

Here, he says it is eternal life that we will inherit. Or when speaking of the final days, he says:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”
(Matthew 25:34, ESV)

Here we are inheriting a kingdom with Christ! In this sense, our inheritance always looks forward to the same “heavenly blessings” that Paul has mentioned early. In our future with Christ where we are promised all good things, and a true inheritance as his people.

These two images—us inheriting something (eternal life and a part in kingdom of God) and us being God’s possession (his inheritance) play out again and again throughout Scripture in different ways. If I had to pick which direction I think Paul was trying to express here, I think he was talking about our inheritance, as the ESV translates it. We have seen how throughout this long sentence of Ephesians Paul is using the phrase “in him” or in Christ to designate each new idea. In him we were chosen and in him we were redeemed. In him we have obtained an inheritance would seem to work easiest translation and would keep us, God’s people, as the subject of the sentence and not God. Additionally, if we look down to the end of this section, here is what Paul says:

[you] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13–14, ESV)

Here the language isn't as muddled or open to possibilities. It is saying "our inheritance," which would make it very consistent that the first phrase was also about our inheritance.

It is tempting to only pick one or just say that both ideas can be gloriously true and focus on either side. Rather, I want to say that both these ideas are always included in this statement about one another. It is much like when we say to love God or love others. To love God necessarily means we will love others. And when we are loving others, we only love them rightly and well if we love God well. To think about our inheritance means we must also think about being God's possession. To think about being God's possession means to think about our inheritance. These two are two-sides of the same coin and something we should always think about together. And I think that is true because that is what the grand story of God has shown us!

The Story

I find this reality amazing. We have a God who has chosen to reveal himself to me and you in the most magnificent way—through many millennia of a story. He didn't write a handbook with a slick glossary of every possible human

predicament or worry and how to solve it and handle it, but rather he showed us himself through his story. And think about how well this story lines up with what Paul has been showing us here in Ephesians 1.

Let's start the story with God's people in Egypt. We are told they have been there for 400 years. Do you know how long 400 years is? In history, this is when the Dutch West-Indies company was beginning a new settlement in the New World that was called New Netherlands—which would eventually include New York, Connecticut, Long Island, and New Jersey. The Virginia Trading company had their land taken back by King James 1 and this became the Virginia colony. This is pre-pre-Revolutionary war. Before the colonies were even established. Do you know much about your own family from 400 years ago? If you do, they are likely just names with barely any stories. A shadow of what had come before.

It is to these people, 400 years removed from God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis 12–50 that God comes to save. This is a people that God chose before they were even a people. This was a plan he set in motion and guaranteed before they were even alive. When they were just one man, Abraham (in Genesis 15). God had chosen them for his own possession that they might bring him glory. He chose them aside from anything they had done.

So, what does God do? He saves them, he redeems them. Through the blood of the Passover lamb, sprinkled on their doorposts, God passes over his people in his wrath and then leads them out into a promised new land for THEIR possession. He promises he will give them a new place as their inheritance. He leads them out through water—the image of a new birth and baptism—and leads them to Mount Sinai where he gives them not only a renewal of the promise but also his very self. In everything he says, we see His character, embodied in his laws and covenants. Israel was being given a place AND a person. These two are inseparable, because their inheritance and his inheritance are intertwined. Here is what he says about them:

I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (Exodus 6:7, ESV)

As I mentioned last week, this is the image of the garden being remade! Israel will receive a land with God dwelling together again. His very presence—in the Old Testament as the pillar of smoke by day and fire by night—with them as they moved to this promised land and settled in it.

When Paul mentions here in Ephesians 1:11 that in Christ we have obtained an inheritance, I believe he is thinking of both of these aspects because they are inseparable. He is thinking both about this promised place we will be where we

have a future with God, and the very person of that place, our God, who will be there to keep us as his possession.

Application

Have you thought about what both of these statements mean for you? If you are God's possession, his people he has chosen for himself as his own inheritance, and if you have received God and his future promises of a new heavens and a new earth as your inheritance, your salvation continues to be shown as on a foundation that depends on God, not on you. A God, as Romans 5 tells us, who chose us when we were still sinners. And as heirs, we are receiving an inheritance we couldn't demand. No one *deserves* an inheritance...what an awful selfish attitude that would be. But God has given us one.

Both of those things—his choosing us for his own possession and him giving us a future inheritance of his very presence and eternal life in his new kingdom in the new heavens and new earth are all his glorious doing. We do not have to worry and strive anymore, as he has done it all for us and is holding us as his own that it might stay true.

We

I think both these images are in Paul's mind because he switches his use of the word "we" here. Previously when Paul has been saying "we" he has been talking about the Ephesians and himself and all of Christianity when he has

been talking about what God has done for us in Christ. We all have been chosen in Christ. We all have been redeemed in Christ. Yet in this phrase Paul is switching to a different we. He is talking about we as Jews, as opposed to “you” later in this passage:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, (Ephesians 1:13, ESV)

He is separating his thoughts here into one idea for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. Why do I think this changes something here? Why would Paul’s switch to the Jewish people be significant? Because I think Paul is going back to the big story. The big story of God through his people and the promises of this new land and the very presence of God and his revealing of himself to his people through his law and covenant.

What we see at that point in the story is failure. God’s people never fully walk into this promise. They make it to the land for sure, but after forty years of wandering in the desert where a whole generation who doubted God die off. And when they enter the land, they don’t root out all the inhabitants as they were commanded to. They don’t tear down all the idols and instead worship them. They intermarry and are drawn off into idolatrous worship.

From the time of the judges to the kings to the end where there are only prophets left proclaiming what God is doing, it

is one big downward cycle. There are moments of pause as God's people come back to him and worship him, repent of their idolatrous ways, yet the next generation moves away from God and the cycle continues. It continues until their exile.

And God knew this would happen! Look at Deuteronomy 30:

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. **If your outcasts** are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deuteronomy 30:1–6, ESV)

Paul, as every Jewish person, living under occupied Roman rule, wondered how God was going to bring his promises to pass. How would they truly see themselves in the place of God again with God in his pleasure. Yet, if they had paid attention, they would have known they had a problem—a problem we will look at more in-depth as we go through Ephesians. They needed their hearts changed!

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

What the law wasn't sufficient to do God would do by changing hearts and bringing people to himself. And Paul was seeing this happen finally! Paul was seeing this in Pentecost, in his own life, and in the lives of many who were encountering the true God, the God-Man Jesus Christ—people whose hearts had been changed.

First, Paul saw this in the Jews, those whom Christ came to that he might make this promise good and true. That is what Paul is seeing here—the promise of being given the presence of God and an inheritance of being with him in his place—as coming true:

In him [Jesus Christ] we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his

will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

In seeing this mass conversion of Jewish people to faith in Jesus Christ, Paul sees God fulfilling his promises in his ways and his timing that were not how Paul imagined it would happen. Paul sees, in the coming of faith to the Jewish people, an inheritance that is so certain he can say “we have obtained” in the past tense. Done, over with, nothing to wonder about. And he can say that even while Rome rules Israel. Because Paul sees it isn’t about THAT land! The promise isn’t being fulfilled, in Paul’s mind, through the physical land of Israel. That was just a picture, an image. A living story that showed the steadfast love of God, the weakness of the law, the human plight that needs God to change hearts, minds, and ears more than just give us a handbook of life. And it was always pointing forward to something more important and more real—an inheritance with God as his people in eternity future.

Paul saw in his own life and the life of his Jewish brothers and sisters the same story played out on a personal level. Individuals who needed God to choose them, to awaken faith, that they might be redeemed by the blood of the lamb. A people who needed a changed heart and mind that they might not wander in the wilderness and continue to serve idols. And he sees this happening in faith in the crucified God-Man Jesus. As the writer of Hebrews says, Paul was seeing the new mediator of a new covenant:

Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. (Hebrews 9:15, ESV)

Christ's mediation is not just a temporary inheritance for this life, but an eternal inheritance in the life to come, in the New Heavens and the New Earth, where we not only inherit a forever place (much better than the physical land of Israel) but we are brought into a perfect forever relationship with our God as his very possession and his people.

I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (Exodus 6:7, ESV)

All of this, Paul says, has been according to God:

according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will

Our God who is over all things, our God who has counseled himself and come up with this amazing plan to reveal himself through a story and in the story of our lives, will make this happen for his people!

You Also

And in seeing the amazing work of God to make good on his promise and point forward to a more real inheritance that the Jewish people have in Jesus Christ, a future in the New Heavens and the New Earth, Paul sees this same truth happening for the Gentiles.

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13–14, ESV)

In Christ you also, meaning “you also obtained an inheritance” and all the rest that Christ has done for all believers. Paul looks at the Gentiles and sees them being brought into the same story, because the story, in one sense, is the same for them. They too have rebelled against God, needed choosing, needed redeeming, and needed the God of the great story to change their hearts that they might truly believe and be saved. And Paul sees God doing this! And he sees this when they:

were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit

While God had to fulfill his specific promises to the Jewish people to make them his possession in his future place, Paul sees God as doing that to the Gentiles as well through faith

and the presence of God's Holy Spirit with them, with us. The story has merged, and there is no distinction now. As Paul will say to the Galatians:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.
(Galatians 3:28–29, ESV)

This passage is about our salvation. All are now heirs! All are heirs now in Jesus Christ, sealed with his Holy Spirit. All receive the same promise—a future place, land, and possession as those who are possessed by God!

It is particularly through the Holy Spirit in our lives that we know this is true. We can count the future inheritance we have as being part of the kingdom of God and his possession as assured because of the Holy Spirit!

Application

Do you see the amazing unity of our faith here! How all believers had the same great need. How all believers are part of the same great story with the same great progression and the same great God who has stepped into the story to love us. His Holy Spirit is the seal of HIS work on me and you, that we might begin to have a taste of that future right now! That we may walk with God today as a glimpse of what is promised to come. You, me, believing Jews and Christians

around the world are all united in faith through the same God who has done it all for us and we are all sealed together with one spirit!

Conclusion

Friends, we live in a grand story! A story where God has revealed himself to all his people, the Jews first and then the Gentiles, that the bigger story might play out in our personal lives in the exact same way. That we would see that we needed a God to choose us both despite our sins and because our sins needed covering, a God who would redeem us through his own blood in a once-for-all sacrifice, and a God who would both give us an inheritance in his place and give us his own self, and a God who would take us as his people to own and keep.

This picture is played out in our lives, in the people of Israel from Genesis to Jesus, and we see it modeled and portrayed in our families and our church life (we will talk more on that through Ephesians as well).

In Christ we have been chosen by a God who predestined us. In Christ we have been redeemed by a God who died our sinners' death on the cross even though he walked in perfect righteousness which allowed him to pick up his life again and ascend to heaven and rule at the right hand of the Father. And we have a God who has given us an inheritance—a future place with him and every blessing in the heavenlies in the new earth and the new heavens—and a

God who himself has taken us as his portion, his inheritance, that he might receive glory!

That is what we see two times in just this section:

so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory

AND

to the praise of his glory.

When we zoom out that phrase bookends this passage:

Blessed [Praise] be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, **to the praise of his glorious grace**, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In

him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ **might be to the praise of his glory**. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, **to the praise of his glory.**" (Ephesians 1:2–14)

God's praise is the goal of our being chosen, redeemed, and being given an inheritance and being an inheritance. That is part of why we gather this morning...to remember this grand living story of God and remember what he has done for us. And then praise him!

When we think about our inheritance, we should think about the grace that God lavished on us in overflowing, abundant ways in Jesus Christ, and we should think about a future where we are with God and have God as our friend. We should think about a place, a person, and grace.

Place

Person

Grace

To think about our inheritance without any of those would be to miss our inheritance. Which aspect of this is hardest for

you to imagine this morning? Do you long for the place where you are with God continuously and know only his grace? I hope so, for we are told the moment we leave this body we are “with the Lord” and know only his joy. Do you long for his very person? Do you realize that, in Jesus, your identity is being known as his and knowing him (as we talked about last week)? And when you think about all of this, do you see it as grace? We are so lucky to be on this side of God’s glory in revealing his love in Jesus Christ that we can know exactly how we have this inheritance and are made his inheritance.

We have the place of God promised to us as our inheritance (the New Heavens and the New Earth). We have the very person of God, seen most clearly in the God-Man Jesus Christ, promised as our inheritance and the one who has taken hold of us. And we have a foundation of Grace that makes all this possible.

Pray

Call

This section is a beautiful call to faith for all of us, rooted in the larger story of God that plays itself out again and again in each person’s life.

Modeling for believers...

Communion

Benediction

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev. 1:5b-6)