

Ephesians 1:1-14

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] And turn if you will to Ephesians chapter 1. And we're going to look at verses 11 to 14. You might think it's a bit strange to just jump into a chapter and look at those three verses in the middle of Ephesians 1.

And it is. The reason is I'm speaking at a conference in June. I wanted a dry run before it. And so, Ephesians 1, 11, 14.

It turns out that the little church in Ephesus were a little bit discouraged. They had heard they had been told they believed that Jesus was the Lord of the universe.

And what Jesus was going to do was absolutely huge. He was going to make the whole world new. And now they'd heard that the Apostle Paul was in prison.

Just flick over the page to chapter 3 and verse 13. And Paul says to them, And so this little church in Ephesus is thinking, how come Paul, Jesus' apostle, the great preacher of Jesus, is in prison?

[1 : 14] It doesn't look good, does it? The world around them was starting to feel very, very big. It was not just the Roman authorities that seemed so big. They put Paul in prison.

But there were these pagan gods that seemed enormous. And so if you were a member of the little IPC church in Ephesus, every morning on your way to work, you would pass this huge temple to the goddess Artemis.

You'd actually be jostled by the crowds of people who every day made their way to this temple to worship. And day by day you would see this enormous building, crowds of people, and then you think of your little tiny church gathering, 15 of you squashed into someone's front room, drinking instant coffee, eating custard creams.

It just feels that the gods around you, that you used to worship, were somehow much, much bigger than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who you worship now.

And those gods seem to have more of a hold on people's imagination. The world felt big to the church in Ephesus, and they felt very small. And it's interesting, isn't it, when Paul prays in his letters for them, verse 19, he prays a load of things, but the prayer kind of comes to a climax, and he prays, I think really interestingly, which unlocks the book of Ephesians, is that they would know his incomparably great power, for us who believe.

[2 : 46] Because that power is like the working of his mighty strength. And so he goes, I want you to know that the God who's at work in you, there is great power. And I take it he says that, and he prays that, because they were feeling powerless, kind of weak.

And he ends the letter, doesn't he, famously, by saying, stay strong, keep fighting. And I take it that he says that, because they didn't feel strong, and they didn't feel like fighting.

And I'm guessing it's not just the church in Ephesus, isn't it? For us, the world feels big. It's not just hostile media. It's not just friends and colleagues who can't believe that we take the Bible seriously, they think it's a joke.

It can be work where it's unhappy. It can be a marriage that's difficult. It can be a long-term illness, or the long-term illness of a family member. And those things loom large.

Or maybe it's just that life is hard. Or for you, it may be that life is lovely. And the world around you is so attractive, and you can feel it pulling you in, and your career is going well, your family is happy and healthy, you are making money, and you would quite like to make more money, and get more power.

[4 : 13] It's great. You've got a good social life in London, and it makes you want more and more, and you feel those things are just very, very big.

And they've got something of a hold on your heart, and they seem more powerful in your life than God. And more grip on your imagination than God.

And the world feels big, and we're quite small. And when we think of our prayer lives, they're weak. And maybe you sit here, and you're not as excited about Jesus as you used to be, and you're painfully aware of your failings.

The plan climaxes, doesn't it, in verse 10, where Paul talks about Jesus bringing all things in heaven on earth together under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Big, big plan.

And we don't doubt the plan, but we doubt ourselves. We wonder, I'm just not sure I've got the strength to stick with the plan. And do you feel that?

[5 : 18] I feel that sometimes. These are great verses in verses 11 to 14. Because what Paul is rejoicing in, in these verses, is that the plan of salvation does not depend on us with all our frailties.

It depends on him. It all depends on God. And so, yes, we are very small. And yes, the world is big. But God is bigger still. So, four reasons tonight for you to be confident. The first is that God has chosen us to be his. God has chosen us to be his.

Paul is saying that God, in Christ, has unfolded, has revealed his great plan of salvation. And one day, Jesus will make all things new. And on that day, we will be there, he says, because, verse 11, in him, in Christ, we were also chosen.

In him, we are going to be part of this big thing. And the word he uses there is a little bit different from the word he uses in verse 4. It has the idea of being chosen to be an inheritance.

[6 : 40] So, if I was writing up my will, I might say, I've chosen to give this watch to Noah. Which means that one day, when I die, it will be Noah's.

And the language that you find here is also the language of the Old Testament, which is used when the promised land was divided up. When the people of Israel went into the promised land, do you remember, the land was divided up amongst the tribes of Israel.

And you read there that the territory of Edom is chosen for Judah to inherit. See, what that means is one day, that plot of land will be theirs.

And more incredibly, it's language that God uses of his people Israel. They are described as people chosen to be his inheritance. He looks at his people and he says, one day you'll be mine.

See what he's saying? God has chosen us as his inheritance. One day we will be his. Do you see the wonder of that? We want to be wanted.

[7 : 49] We want to be included. We want to be part of the gang. We want to be invited. There are times, aren't there, where there are things going on socially and we tag along.

But we don't know whether the other people actually really wanted us there or whether they intended us to be there. But here is the God of the universe. I want you for myself forever, he says. My precious possession. Mine. And do you see how Paul reassures his readers that they're part of that? They may be thinking, okay, Paul, you're an apostle, of course.

You're from a Jewish background. You were one of the elite of the elite. But what about us? We're not part of the Jewish elite. We have got a pagan background.

We're from the wrong side of the sticks. We have a shaky faith. Has he chosen us like he chose you? And just look at verse 13. There's a slight change in the wording.

[8 : 55] He adds in a you also. In him, you also. The sort of overview is we've been chosen.

And they're thinking, Paul, that's fine. That's fine for you. But verse 13, he makes it explicitly clear. He says, in him, you also. When you hear the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, when you're included in this, he says, when you hear the word of truth, when you hear what God had done for you in the Lord Jesus, that God is calling you to be part of his plan, and when you believed and when you came to put your trust in him, you were given an inheritance.

Left to your own devices, you would never have done that. And so Paul says to you tonight, if you are trusting him tonight, it is not because you're kind of tagging along that you've kind of invited yourself and you're hoping he won't mind, if you're trusting him tonight, it's because of his work in you.

He has chosen you like he has chosen us. And we are all in this as his people. That is what we share. He wants us for himself.

You might feel tonight that no one wants you. But Ephesians 1 tells you that God wants you. Of course, in some of our minds, there will be a little bit of a worry, won't there, about this language of God choosing people.

[10 : 28] It raises so, so many questions. Why does God choose some people and not others? And we can be tempted, can't we, to say, well, let's say, it's not God that chooses us.

Let's say we choose God. That's much easier to stomach, isn't it? There's a kind of democracy about that. But it raises a whole set of different problems and questions. Because if we are saying it is not God choosing, it is us who chose God, well, think of the sort of God you end up with.

we end up with a God who doesn't want us very much. You end up with a God who puts a notice in the church email, says, I'm organising a trip to the West End to see a play and if you want to come, sign up, sign up on the link.

Sign up by the end of the month. How bothered is he if I come on the trip or not? He's leaving it down to me. If you fancy, sign up to the end of the offer.

If you don't fancy, don't sign up. It's your choice. And if no one signs up, well, the new creation is empty. That's how it goes.

[11 : 44] Nobody fancied it. But God, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, is very bothered. And he is not just leaving it up to you whether you fancy it or not.

in his love, God comes to you in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and he gives you a personal invitation. He gives you an offer you can't refuse.

And through the gospel, he is calling us to come and be part of what he's doing. And he does love us and he wants us to be in on the trip. He wants us to be his forever.

And if it is all about our choosing God, you end up with a God who doesn't want us very much. And I get a salvation which is not very safe.

Look at verse 11. 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.

[12 : 46] And so my place in God's plan turns on his will. And the point is, he is working everything, everything, everything out in conformity with his will.

In other words, God wills what happens and nothing can stop it from happening. If my salvation depended on my will, well, my will is pretty flaky and so is yours.

I resolve to give up chocolate. How long does that resolve last for? Well, about two and a half days is the average. If my place in God's will hinges on my resolve and my power to see it through, that is terrifying.

And I think this is why the Ephesians are feeling so daunted. I think it's why they're so daunted because the world feels so big and we feel so small and we are not sure whether we can hold on.

But what Paul wants you to see and wants you to know and wants you actually to feel is it's not about how we hold on to him, but it's about how he holds on to us. when I walk with Phoebe down Greenford Avenue, it's quite a main road, and she will say, hold my hand.

[14 : 17] And I do this little maneuver like you do if you're a parent or you're walking with a small child. She puts her hand in mine and then I twist my hand and I hold her arm because Phoebe's hand is not very big, is it?

Phoebe's fingers are not very strong. And if she tripped, she would go flying if she was just holding on to me, but because I am holding on to her, she doesn't go flying.

And that is the first reason why we can be confident because God has chosen us to be his and he has got hold of us.

And when we think of our weaknesses, we often think naturally that the answer is get a grip. Get a grip. But the answer is to remember that he has got his grip on us.

And when I trip, he will not let me fall. He will hold me fast. And so how do I know he won't let me go? And there's a second reason for us to be confident because he's got hold of us and here it is to the praise of his glory.

[15 : 28] That's the reason. To the praise of his glory. Do you see the goal of it all? Why is he working out his plan of salvation? Why has he got hold of us? Can you see it at the end of verse 12? To the praise of his glory.

The end of verse 14, to the praise of his glory. If I can put it like this, God is committed to showing the world how brilliant he is.

And the world is meant to look at his salvation. It is meant to look at his church and his people and say, wow, God is brilliant. And that is not because God is some kind of show-off.

If you're praying for someone that you love, somebody who's not a Christian believer, what is the best thing that could ever happen to them? The best thing that could ever happen to them is that they would come to see how brilliant God is.

Because for as long as they think that God is not much good, they won't give him the time of day. And they are missing out.

[16:36] No, God is committed to his glory. And the world seeing how brilliant he is. And that is what gives us such confidence in his plan. Once you see what is at stake, his glory is at stake.

And so he will keep you. You see, he will never let his plan depend on people like me. And the reason God will not leave his salvation down to people like us is because the stakes are too high. His glory is at stake. God is not going to let his glory depend on weak, feeble people like us. And that is why he will not let us go.

The third reason to be confident is that the Holy Spirit is a seal. Look at verse 13. The plan is for the praise of his glory. So why doesn't he leave it down to us?

That is why he gives us his Holy Spirit. Verse 13. Look at verse 13. In him also, 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.

[17:50] When you heard the gospel, and believed, you were marked as being in Christ by a seal. There was a mark of ownership. And you're driving along the road, and you see cattle, and branded into the sign of the cattle is a seal to show you who the cattle belonged to.

In school, having a school uniform, do you remember that? And your mum or your dad, before you went to the first day of school, would sew those little labels onto your school uniform.

Do you remember those labels? And they were kind of sealed, weren't they? Those labels were a seal to show it was yours. And so if you find a pair of shorts that says Paul Levy on it, you would know it is Paul Levy's shorts.

It belongs to him. But the language has biblical connotations as well. In the Old Testament, the high priest was marked with a seal. So we read of how the high priest wore a seal on his forehead. a plate with it made of gold. A plate made with gold and on it the plate said holy to the Lord.

[19:05] It was a mark of ownership. The priest belongs to God. But the wonderful promise in the Old Testament is that one day all of God's people would be sealed.

all of God's people would know that they belong to God. Let's do one cross reference. Come with me to Isaiah chapter 44.

It's worth it. Isaiah chapter 44. Keep a finger in Ephesians chapter 1. Isaiah 44. And Isaiah 44 and verse 3.

The end of verse 2. Isaiah 44. In verse 2 it says fear not. The Lord says fear not.

And then in verse 3 into that fear he says for I will pour water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground and I will pour my spirit upon your offspring and my blessing on your descendants.

[20:09] They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams and this one will say I'm the Lord's. and another will call on the name of Jacob and another will write on his hand the Lord's and name himself by the name of Israel.

It's prophesying there that everyone will one day be able to say I belong to the Lord not because of some gold plate on their head but because of the spirit. The spirit in their hearts that God will pour out on his people.

Do you see what the apostle Paul is saying in Ephesians 1? let's go back there. He's saying this the Lord does not want you to say tonight I hope that I am his.

He does not want you to say I hope that I am his. The Lord wants us to be people who say I know I am his. I belong to him.

You might be thinking how do I know that I belong to him? That I am his and I am in Christ.

[21:25] Paul says God has marked you by his spirit. Do you remember Toy Story? Have you watched the film Toy Story?

Have you watched that one? It's good isn't it? Alright. Do you remember the story Toy Story? And so do you remember Woody? Woody was the cowboy wasn't he? And Woody had a pair of boots on and what was written on the bottom of Woody's boots?

Okay. Pardon? Andy. Who was Andy? Do you remember? Yeah.

The boy who owned Woody wasn't it? And when Woody was unsure or when Woody was frightened he would look at his boot and remember I belong to Andy. In fact I think wasn't it if I remember rightly in Toy Story 2 Andy is about to be sent to Japan is that right?

By some evil toy dealer and there's a moment in the film where Woody looks at his boot and he remembers I belong to Andy.

[22 : 37] He's marked sealed and what Paul is saying is that God has marked us by his Holy Spirit and every time we see the mark of the Spirit in our lives we ought to say I belong to God.

So the question in our mind is this what are the marks of the Spirit of God? What is the sign of the Holy Spirit working in our lives? Well do you trust and rest and rely and depend on the Lord Jesus tonight?

Do you say before God what is my only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own but belong body and soul to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is my only hope and if that is what you believe that is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work in you. You would never say that. What do you pray?

What do you call God? Do you pray my Father, our Father, that God is not just a God to you but you marvel that he is your Father who is in heaven?

[23 : 50] That is a sign of the Spirit being at work in you and the Spirit gives us a love for the Lord Jesus that we didn't have before. There was a time when we weren't interested in reading the Bible but now we've got an appetite, we're hungry to know more of Jesus.

That is a sign that you belong to him, a sign that the Spirit is at work. The Spirit gives us a love for God's people that we never had before.

He longed to be with God's people and to belong to the church. That's a sign of God's Spirit being at work.

God's we fight with sin, we didn't have that before, we didn't used to fight, we just used to go with the flow, we still struggle, we still fail, but now we fight, and every time we fight, if you are fighting tonight, you might feel you're losing, but you're fighting, that is a sign that you belong to him, and when you mess up, like you often do, you don't shrug your shoulders, and think well that's the way it is, it hurts, and there's times when it breaks your heart, and it never used to, and there's a sorrow over your sin, which shows that you have the spirit, and that you belong to him, Spurgeon, the great kind of Baptist preacher, he described the Christian life, as feeling like a young bird, fighting to get out of an eggshell, he says, I wasn't yet flying, but I'm fighting, and the fact that he felt constrained, and he longed for something better, showed that he was alive, and he had the spirit, the mark of having the spirit, is not perfection is it, it's certainly not perfection, but it is progress, I'm not what I will be, but I'm not what I used to be, the Ephesians are afraid, and discouraged, and losing heart, and they look at the culture around them, and the spiritual forces around them, that it's a negative world, and it seems to have so much of a grip on them, and Paul says, look at the Holy Spirit in your lives, the spirit, he is God's seal, and God is saying, fear not, and I think it's the kind of temperature in our culture, kind of rises a little bit, we're getting slightly tempted to fear, and God says to us, fear not, you are mine, and you do not belong to any other God, or force, or power, or authority, you are my precious possession, and if you know you are his, then you are safe, of course you're weak, of course you're frail, but the Lord says you are mine, and I've got hold of you, and I'm never going to lose you, the fourth and the final reason we can be confident, is that the Holy Spirit is a deposit, it's a deposit, the promised Holy Spirit, so verse 14, who is the guarantee, the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession, to the praise of his glory, and last year,

[27 : 31] I bought a car, with the help of John Silver's car services, and we went around different, kind of random, Japanese and American importers, looking at cars, and then we found one that, John said he thought was good, and I just agreed and bought it, and to buy it, I had to put down a deposit, I can't remember what it was, I think it was 20%, and so, I put a deposit on the car, at that point, John stopped sending me adverts, on auto trader, by WhatsApp, incessantly, I wasn't searching anymore, I wasn't thinking about it anymore, because I'd paid the deposit, and it guarantees it, and so that when I ring up, and say is it ready, they'd say well it's ready for you, I wouldn't say well, actually I've changed my mind, and they would say well tough, you're committed now,

I'd paid the deposit, it belongs to us, and one day, I would complete the deal, I can't remember, was it four weeks later, I went back with the rest of the cash, and I completed the deal, and I took it home, and so God has put down a deposit, look at verse 14, and I think the footnote helps as well, look at the footnote, if it's I haven't got the same Bible as you, he is the guarantee of our inheritance, or he is the down payment, he is the deposit, guarantee our inheritance, so I want to say this, I think one of the big problems, we worry about whether we are gods or not, is because we forget, that the Holy Spirit is described as a deposit, he's a down payment, we forget don't we, that

