A birth right by grace

Text: Ephesians 1:11-14

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**Scriptures:** Ephesians 1:1-14

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 24, 445, 505, 262, 345, 531+532

Series: Ephesians (Sermon #5)

Occasion: Adult baptisms

Theme: Paul writes to the Ephesians about the inheritance which God has purposed for His adopted children that both Jewish and Gentile believers have in Christ which is authenticated and guaranteed by the indwelling Holy Spirit

Proposition: Brothers and Sisters, praise the Lord for His glorious grace in causing the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, to be the confirmation and guarantee of our joint inheritance in Christ

**Introduction**

An inheritance is money, land or possessions which are ordinarily received from someone after that person has died. An inheritance is of benefit to the beneficiary who receives a portion of an estate. Our text today is all about the benefits which come to God’s adopted children because they share in the treasures of God’s Kingdom.

You may recall from the second sermon in this series through the letter to the Ephesians that the Apostle Paul bursts forth in an overflowing stream of praise to God for his glorious grace beginning in verse 3 through to verse 14. These 11 verses form a single continuous sequence of rich words which in the original language is just one very long sentence. It’s very difficult to match that in English whilst keeping the words readable together, so our translations break this surge of praise into multiple sentences.

This preaching series has focussed on these 11 verses in parts:

1. From verses 3-4 we considered the God’s choice of particular people so that they would be holy and blameless before Him.
2. From verses 5-6 we marvelled at God’s grace in adopting ‘aliens’ into His family and blessing them in Christ.
3. From verses 7-10 we saw God’s wide mercy in redemption, forgiveness and the restoration of everything together in Christ.

You may have noticed that the first part of this long sentence of praise focusses on the work of **God the Father**, who has predestined His children for adoption in Christ. The second part of the sentence unfolds the work of **God the Son** in salvation through His sacrificial death on behalf of others and His Lordship over all Creation. This third and final part from verses 11-14 brings the 3rd person of the Trinity into view: the **Holy Spirit** who confirms and guarantees the joint inheritance of God’s adopted children in Christ.

We’re going to look at verses 11-14 of Ephesians chapter 1 under four points:

1. A purposeful inheritance

2. A joint inheritance

3. An authentic inheritance

4. A guaranteed inheritance

1. **A purposeful inheritance**

As we’ve heard, an inheritance comes to those who are part of a family and therefore beneficiaries of the estate, ordinarily when the death of a family member occurs. When a person is adopted into a family, they become an heir of the family estate, just as the natural born child or children are. Paul writes to the Ephesian believers about their ‘birth right’ as those who have been brought into God’s family: “*In him we have obtained an inheritance*”.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, we have an inheritance in Christ as God’s adopted children, this is a spiritual ‘birth right’ which comes to us not by ‘right’. We do not obtain this ‘birthright’ because we are deserving of favour from our Heavenly Father. Paul has already given the reason why God adopts the particular people He does when he wrote in verse 5: “*He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*”. Our spiritual ‘birthright’ is a purposeful work of God’s grace.

Later in his letter, Paul will write of the ‘*unsearchable riches of Christ*’ (Eph 3:8). The Lord Jesus has already come into the glorious wealth which has been bestowed upon Him by God the Father who has ‘*exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name*’ (Eph 2:9).

In the Old Testament, the Lord promised an inheritance to His chosen people Israel which was represented by the promised land of Canaan. The New Testament Scriptures further expand on the riches which believers inherit in Christ:

1. The kingdom of God (Mt 25:34; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Jam 2:5).
2. The earth – Matt 5:5 (‘blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’)
3. Salvation (Heb 1:14)
4. A blessing (1 Pet 3:9)
5. Glory (Rom 8:17-18)
6. Incorruptibility (1 Cor 15:50)

This wealth does not come to everyone. These riches are not bestowed upon the best of people, the most attractive, the most faithful, the most obedient or godly. They do not come to a particular ethnic group. For example only to Africans, Europeans, South Americans or Asians, but to people of ‘*every tribe and language and people and nation*’ (Rev 5:9). Which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **A joint inheritance**

The Afrikaans word ‘apartheid’ means ‘separateness’. ‘Apartheid’ was a system of institutionalised racial segregation that existed in South Africa and South West Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s. Apartheid embodied racism; the favouring of one ethnic group over others. It is a form of favouritism or ‘partiality’ where one person is treated as better than another.

James wisely calls ‘a spade a spade’ when he says: “*If you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors*” (James 2:9). The sin of racism is all too common in the world and, at times, in the church; as it was also in the 1st century when Paul wrote to the Ephesians. The Jews prided themselves on being God’s people who possessed the law; irrespective of whether or not they honoured that law. The Jews despised all who were outside the commonwealth of Israel. The Greeks had a great heritage of philosophy. They were proud of their learned heroes like Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. To them the Jews were uneducated barbarians.

In reality, the Jew is not superior to the Greek, nor the Greek to the Jew. They are all equal in coming short of the glory of God (Rom 3:9-23). For believing Jews and Greeks, they are equal in having been predestined to adoption as sons before the foundation of the world. When he writes in v12 ‘*we who were the first to hope in Christ*’ Paul refers to himself and other Jewish believers. They are like ‘foundation members’ of the New Israel – the ‘first fruits’ of the people of God in the age which was brought into being by Christ’s death and resurrection. “*You also*” in v13 refers to Gentile believers. (note that not all commentators hold to this view).

Paul writes about the glorious racial, social and gender equality of the gospel when he reminds the Galatians that: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*’ (Gal 3:28). One of the great themes of this letter to the Ephesians is the union of Jews and gentiles together in Christ. Paul will speak in chapter two of this letter to the Ephesians about the ‘*dividing wall of hostility*’ between Jews and Greeks which has been broken down by Christ (Eph 2:14) in order to bring peace. This would have been a great encouragement to the Greek believers who were the main first recipients of this letter and it is likewise very good news for us today.

Brothers and sisters, we are all absolutely equal in our inheritance in Christ, being ‘*fellow heirs, joint heirs with Christ*’ (Rom 8.17). Today John and Esther publicly confirmed the reality that they are joint heirs with Christ, Andrew is a son and Eileen a daughter of God! Be careful to receive them well into this local church as equals in our Lord. Encourage John and Esther in their faith and help them both in doing the work of the Lord. It may require a little more patience to converse with John and Esther because their command of the English language is not as good as most people here. However, their proficiency in the complex Chinese language far exceeds mine (which is non-existent) and that of almost everyone here! Their presence as members of this church, together with many others here from different ethnic backgrounds, is a visible testimony to the reality of the glorious racial equality of the gospel and of our joint inheritance together in Christ. This is a reality which is confirmed by the Holy Spirit:

1. **An authentic inheritance**

John and Esther, like the believers to whom Paul first wrote, have “*heard the word of truth, the gospel of (their) salvation, and believed in him, (and) were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*” (Eph 1.13). A seal is engraved object used to make a mark to indicate ownership, approval, or to secure a document or an entranceway. Pontius Pilate had the tomb in which the body of Jesus was laid sealed (Matt 27:66). Signet rings were often used as seals by those in authority in Bible times. (Remember that Pharaoh gave Joseph his ring (Gen 41:42)).

After Jesus had miraculously fed 5,000 people He promised to provide ‘food that endures to eternal life’ and pointed to the miracle of his provision of physical bread as being evidence that God the Father had ‘set his seal’ on the Son (John 6:27). Jesus had God’s ‘stamp of authority’ as being the authentic Messiah who had come in fulfilment of God’s previous promises.

Those who come to saving faith in Christ have God’s ‘stamp of authority’ as being authentic inheritors of the riches of the Kingdom of God. This seal is not a physical mark, it is a spiritual indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Triune God, whom Jesus promised would come after he had ascended into heaven. “*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you*” (John 14:26).

Satan, the Father of Lies, accuses believers like you and me, speaking into our minds thoughts like these: “How pathetic you are. You say that you are a Christian, yet you fail again and again to practice the things you say are right. Do you really think you will inherit anything of God’s Kingdom, why would He give you anything of value? Enjoy what the world can offer you now, rather than firstly delighting in a God you cannot even see”. To which lies the child of God says. “Get behind me Satan”. “You are partly right. I don’t deserve anything from God, yet because of His glorious grace which He has decided to grant to me according to the counsel of His will, I am genuinely a joint inheritor of the riches of Christ”. This is what God’s true Word says: “*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*” (Rom 8:16-17).

Perhaps you are wondering – how do I know if I have the Holy Spirit as God’s ‘seal’ to give me certainty that I am indeed a child of God? Let me ask you the same question I asked John and Esther: “Do you humble yourself before God and repent of your sins, and do you joyfully trust in and love Jesus Christ, the son of God, as your Lord and Saviour?” If you can answer “yes” from your innermost being to that question then you must be born again by the Spirit (John 3:3), you have been sealed, you are the ‘genuine article’. You have obtained an inheritance in Christ, a ‘birth right’ by grace. This is guaranteed to all God’s children, which brings us to our last point:

1. **A guaranteed inheritance**

Sometimes adult children can get angry because they see their aging, retired parents spending what they see as ‘their inheritance’ on things like overseas travel, a motor home or even privately funded medical treatments. Such children may not know that there is a principle in civil law called ‘testamentary freedom’. With some exceptions a parent may ‘cut’ any of his or her children out of their will. There is no absolute automatic right of entitlement to a deceased person’s estate. Ordinarily inheritance is bequeathed to beneficiaries according to a person’s ‘last will and testament’.

So how can God’s adopted children be sure that they will receive an inheritance in Christ? The answer is given in our text: because the Holy Spirit is “*the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory*” (Eph 1.14). The Greek word translated ‘guarantee’ was used in 1st century AD business transactions to refer to a pledge. An object would be handed over by a buyer to a seller until the purchase price was paid in full.

The use of pledges has a long history. For example, Tamar asked Judah for his signet ring, cord and staff as security for the promise of a young goat from his flock if she would let him ‘go into her’ (Gen 38:17). We would call this a ‘down payment’ or ‘deposit’ today.

The presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells within the believer is a guarantee or pledge from God that none of His children will ever be ‘cut out’ of their inheritance in Christ. He has declared in the Bible “His last will and testament’ to grant this inheritance and He will not change His mind. Born-again by the Spirit brothers and sisters in Christ, we can be absolutely confident that what God has promised to give to us will become ours.

When we live with our God and Saviour in the New Heavens and New Earth, we will not live as impoverished beggars who have been cut out of our Father’s estate, no we will receive all the riches of our inheritance in Christ. There is nothing more certain than this. Praise God for His glorious grace.

Are you sure of coming into a great inheritance today? Are you a joint heir with Christ, the only begotten Son of God? Come to Christ today. Come as you are. Humble yourself before God and repent of your sins, joyfully trust in and love Jesus Christ, the son of God, as your Lord and Saviour.

God’s gracious gift of this great inheritance in Christ is purposeful – given to all who repent and believe in His Son as their Lord and Saviour. This rich inheritance is shared by all God’s adopted children, from every tribe, tongue and nation. It is a genuine inheritance, confirmed by the ‘seal’ of the indwelling Holy Spirit who guarantees that what God has promised will be given in full.

Praise God for His glorious grace.

AMEN.