

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: The article in *The Washington Post* this week began, *“The king folds her own laundry, chauffeurs herself around Washington in a 1992 Honda and answers her own phone. Her boss's phone, too.”* The article was about Peggelene Bartels who has been a secretary at the Ghanaian embassy in Washington for 30 years. She’s from Otuam, Ghana, a small city of about 7,000. Their 90-year-old king died awhile back and about 15 months ago Peggelene got a 4 a.m. phone call from home. The town elders had this ritual where they pray and pour schnapps on the ground while they read the names of the king’s 25 relatives. When steam rose from the schnapps on the ground, the name that they were reading at that moment would be the new king. So that’s what happened to Peggelene. She’s a *king*, not a queen, and when she goes back she has a driver and a chef and an eight-bedroom palace (though it needs repairs). She has power to resolve disputes, appoint elders and manage more than 1000 acres of family-owned land. *“I’m a big-time king, you know,”* she told the reporter. When she returned for her coronation, they carried her through the streets on a litter. She even had a heavy gold crown. **Paul Schwartzman**, the reporter, wrote, *“In the humdrum of ordinary life, people periodically yearn for something unexpected, some kind of gilded escape, delivered, perhaps, by an unanticipated inheritance or a winning lottery ticket.”* [9/16/09, “Secretary by Day, Royalty by Night”]
- B. We have received the “unanticipated inheritance”! The Bible says to very ordinary believers like you and me, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”* We’re blessed with great riches—*“spiritual blessings”*—that have elevated us to a different status altogether.
- C. Last week, we looked at the first two of those spiritual blessings on the Apostle Paul’s list. First, that **God chose us to be holy and blameless** in his sight which secures for us a great dignity and honor, and sets us free to be the good people we truly want to be. Second, that **God adopted us** as his beloved children, giving us his name, taking on personal responsibility for us, making us his heirs, and even giving us his own Spirit.
- D. Today I want to show you two more of our spiritual blessings in Christ. Jesus Christ stepped into our lives and changed our status in life completely. We may be secretaries, salesmen or students but in our homeland, we are royalty. Turn to Eph. 1:7-8...

I. SPIRITUAL BLESSING #3: WE’VE BEEN REDEEMED AND FORGIVEN (1:7-8)

- A. To say we were redeemed means a price was paid to release us from captivity. We were captives from birth. We were born in chains; born slaves. We could not help but sin; sin often and sin badly. Guilt dog-piled on us year after year, crushing us inside and distorting everything we see or do in life. Even if we were “good” and moral people, our goodness would go to our heads; we’d compound our guilt with pride and self-satisfaction. Our efforts to be good to others would be moldy with double motives. What’s more, day in and day out, despite our best intentions, we would insult and offend God by our willfulness and rebellion. We would not keep even the most basic of his commands—to love him. That was our captivity. All of life for us was a kind of prison where we died a little more every day.
- Then one day there was hearing in a great courtroom to consider our cases. A plea agreement was struck; someone else would pay your sentence by dying for you. Jesus would serve our sentences. The Judge gavelled the decision; your freedom was purchased. You were *redeemed*, and offered the opportunity to walk out free.
- B. We have “the forgiveness of sins.” It seems to be that *redemption* speaks more of price and transaction while *forgiveness* speaks, at least in part, of restoring our relationship with God. If redemption points to the courtroom, forgiveness points to the Father’s welcome-home, all-is-forgiven, tearful embrace of the prodigal. **Redemption opens prison doors. Forgiveness welcomes us home.**

- C. The text emphasizes the supersized measure of God's grace: "In accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us." God is, of course, rich in every way, but grace is God's most astonishing resource. God can multiply gold or emeralds with a mere thought; they cost him nothing. But **grace is costly even for God**. He buries his right to justice against us in the life of his own Son. Grace is, after all, a kind of injustice to oneself—a willing to lose our rights in order to set the sinner free.

Grace is a word that has grown mushy with over-handling and under-understanding. But in the Bible grace is a word that tells us that at the heart of the universe there is a heart; that God is Love, and that his love is the wellspring of all he does. God's grace comes and bends over the lowliest person with a smile of friendship and compassion. Grace comes with healing and help in its hands, with forgiveness for all the sins that have come hard against it. Grace comes with boundless wealth for the poorest, and as rich and infinite as the love of God is, so great is the measure of grace we may have, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- D. The phrase at the end of v.8, "with all wisdom and understanding," needs a home. Grammatically, it could go with the words before or the words after. It could mean that God gives *us* wisdom and understanding or that *he* demonstrates wisdom and understanding. Every option is true, but I opt for the meaning that when God lavished his grace on us *he* did it "with all wisdom and understanding." Grace can be exercised foolishly. Grace can actually do damage; it can be mistimed, misapplied. **God's grace is loving genius at work.** Think of the genius of salvation:

- God figured out how there could be a second Adam,
- how people born once could be born again,
- how God could become a man and how that man's death could redeem sinners,
- and how sinners could be drawn to salvation without violating their free will.
- He found a way to keep all his history-shaping promises to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and all the prophets.
- He found a way to become the devil's victim so he might be the devil's conqueror.
- And he found a way to make his enemies beloved saints, to make orphans his own beloved children, to set prisoners free, to make lame hearts leap, and to open death's front door.

- E. What a rich "spiritual blessing" God gave us when he redeemed and forgave us through Christ. When Paul finishes three chapters of counting our spiritual blessings he urges us "to live worthy of the calling we have received." What would it mean to live worthy of our redemption?

1. It means we must be grateful people—grateful for every freedom our redemption has purchased for us, chief among them the freedom to come boldly to our Father's throne.
2. It means that we must be humble people. We must never forget that we were "a sinner by choice and an alien by birth." It won't do for Christians to be proud.
3. It means we must be grace-giving people, extending again and again the forgiveness Christ gave us. Our words and hands can carry Christ's grace, like thirsty water to parched and weary people.
4. It means that we must have nothing to do with our old ways of life. We were bought with a price and we are to live now as children of light in this dark world.

Day in and day out we go back to our redemption, touching it to draw up into our souls God's lavish grace for all that we must be and do in the world.

Vv.9-10 sound complicated... Let's sum it up this way:

II. SPIRITUAL BLESSING #4: GOD HAS SHOWN US THAT EVERYTHING COMES TOGETHER IN CHRIST (1:9-10)

- A. Till the time of Christ God maintained a deep sacred mystery. Take our study of 1 Chronicles, for example. It was written around 500 BC to the Jewish remnant who returned from exile to a ruined nation. By pointing back to their glorious past—to King David, to the priests, to their great victories, and to the temple—God was promising them their future. **But how?** How could Israel ever be the source of blessing for the whole world, as God promised Abraham? How could there be a greater king

than David, a King who would put Israel at the center of the map? How could God write his laws on hearts, as he promised Jeremiah? How could God's mighty Messiah be "crushed for our iniquities"? How could there be a vast and enduring Temple? How could the tortured creation ever be Eden again? How could the mighty Satan ever be defeated when he holds the keys of death? How could the lion ever lie down with the lamb?

- B. These verses tell us that in Jesus Christ, all the pieces come together. God's great sacred mystery is revealed. Notice again the clauses here. "According to his good pleasure" emphasizes that things worked just as God wanted them to. "Which he purposed in Christ," signals that Jesus Christ is the agent of all God had planned, the One in whom God invested all his plans. "To be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment" tells us that God works on a very precise timetable stretching across the ages of history, and that Jesus' coming fit into history precisely as God wanted it to.
- C. The key phrase is translated here, "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." Another translation speaks of "the summing up of all things in Christ" [NASB]. And another puts it "to unite all things in him" [ESV]. The obvious implication is that things both in the heavens and on earth are out of synch; they seem to spin out of control. But God has always had a plan for unifying everything.

Illus.: I read an article recently titled, "The Race for the Secret of the Universe," and it focused on the Fermilab's 4-mile-round particle accelerator west of Chicago. Scientists there are searching for "the elusive **Higgs boson**, also known as 'the God particle.'" The article said, "Physicists believe that this special subatomic particle allows all of the other particles in the universe to have mass and come together to form, well, basically everything that is around us. Without so-called God particles, one Fermilab theorist tells me, 'atoms would have no integrity, so there would be no chemical bonding, no stable structures—no liquids or solids—and, of course, no physicists and no reporters.'" [Parade, 7/26/09, p.4]

That is a great analogy to what Paul is talking about here. The great mystery is how does everything in heaven and earth hold together? How can everything possible work out? **Jesus Christ is God's unifying answer.** All those Old Testament puzzles come clear once you know about Jesus. But he is not only the answer for those faithful Old Testament saints who puzzled over the mysteries of their faith. He is also the answer for our contemporaries who have no real idea how to make sense of the world. They suspect that **T. S. Eliot** was right: "This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper."

- D. Our great "spiritual blessing" is that God has shown us this mystery—that everything comes together in Christ. Here is our roadmap. Here is our guide. Here is our focus and future. Now we know how to order life, where to put our energies, how to keep our balance on the Tilt-a-Whirl of life. How do we live worthy of this aspect of our calling? **Run to the heart of our hope in Christ.** If Jesus is the sure center of history, if Jesus is the one in whom all things in heaven and earth come together, then...
- Live for Jesus! Put everything in your life into his hands *now*. Bring every decision to him, every affection, every problem. He will "work all things together for good for those who love him." Do you remember that little rhyme:
*Only one life, twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*
 - Look at life through this lens: Jesus Christ owns and changes everything. Whatever you face, remember that Jesus is bringing it under his control. He is the Lord of lords. Things will not always be what they seem to be now. This is why we pray with faith. This is why we worship. This is why we tackle impossible obstacles and face overwhelming odds. *Jesus is Lord!*
 - Rest assured that Jesus Christ will triumph and will bring us with him into his everlasting kingdom. This is what John saw in his vision: "But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets... The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which

said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.'" [Rev. 10:7; 11:15]

Now let us praise God for giving us these spiritual blessings—that he redeemed and forgave us, and that he has made known to us the mystery that everything will come together in Jesus Christ our Lord.