

1 : 3 ‘Bless you’

For our ‘ALL-IN’ Services this term (1st Sunday of the month), we will be looking at this wonderful chapter that Paul wrote to Christians in Ephesus. It tells us a lot about who we are in Christ and the blessings we will receive.

We say ‘Bless you’ either when we wish someone well as a fellow believer or when someone sneezes (that has its origins in the time of the Bubonic Plague – it was one of the symptoms so you wished someone well if they sneezed). But what does it mean to be blessed?

Ephesians 1:3 says

***‘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’***

1. Talk about the ways in which you have been blessed in your own lives.

Have you always been blessed by good things or have some bad things also been a blessing?

The God who acted in Christ should be blessed by us just as he gives his blessings to us. The beginning of 1:3 could be translated ‘Blessed be God’. You can find numerous examples of ‘Blessed be God’ in Old and New Testaments – e.g. ‘Bless the Lord. O my soul’ Psalm 103:1 Paul was using a double meaning to emphasise that we praise (bless) God because God has showered on us blessings that we don’t deserve.

1. Take some time to think of things that we can praise God for – start with creation and see how far you can get.

But we should note that every spiritual blessing is ‘in Christ’. Whilst we are all the recipients of many blessings God gives to all the people he has created, these are ‘spiritual blessings’ which can only be experienced ‘in Christ’. You might like to try to list a few. Here’s some for starters

* Election (being chosen by God)
* Adoption (we are children of God)
* Grace (The riches of a loving God)
* Forgiveness (Our sin is dealt with by the cross)
* Revelation (we can know God’s truth)
* The gospel (the truth about God’s good news for mankind)
* The Holy Spirit who lives in each of us day by day
* ……………………………..

1. Think of some other blessings God has given you.

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for his blessings.

A phrase that causes some difficulty is ‘in the heavenly realms’. Does Paul mean that spiritual blessings can only be enjoyed once we get to heaven? That contradicts the whole thrust of this first chapter which is about enjoying God’s blessings right now. The phrase is literally ‘in the heavenlies’ and it is not meant to be a physical location. It is a spiritual reality that exists in a world where followers of Jesus can be persecuted or mocked. We can have a ‘present reality’ relationship with Jesus. If you are a believer eternal life has already started and, one day, will shift to the reality of heaven.

1. Is it sometimes hard to believe that our ‘life in Christ’ has already started?

Does it sometimes feel that God is distant and you are not being blessed?

We sometimes connect being blessed with ‘feeling good’. So, if something goes right like getting promotion or achieving some goal, you might say that God is blessing you.

1. Does that imply that God is NOT blessing you when life is a struggle?

Have we confused ‘spiritual blessings’ with ‘wellbeing’?

Sometimes bad things hit us. We wish they hadn’t happened or we wish they’d go away. Maybe a family crisis or an illness or even the loss of a job.

1. Is there any way that such events can be a blessing? (Maybe we see them with hindsight)