

072521 Ephesians 1:3
In Christ series: "Heavenly Blessings"

Let's talk to you today about how we get into heaven, and then about how we don't have to wait until the afterlife to enjoy the blessings of heaven.

First, let me tell you an untrue but humorous story about a little old lady named Jane who passed away after a long illness. Jane arrived at the Gates of Heaven, and she peeked through the gates. She saw gorgeous mansions, streets of gold, beautiful banquet tables, and even her own parents and other people she had loved and who had passed away before her.

Then God came out to the gates, and Jane said to him, "This is such a wonderful place! How do I get in?" "You have to spell a word," God told her. "Which word?" Jane asked. "Love." Jane correctly spelled "l-o-v-e," and she was welcomed into heaven.

A few years later, God asked Jane to watch the Gates of Heaven for the day. While Jane was there, her husband Jim arrived. "It's good to see you," Jane said. "How have you been?" "Oh, I've been doing quite well since you passed," Jim said. "I married the beautiful young nurse who took care of you while you were ill. And then I won the lottery. I sold the little house you and I lived in and bought a big mansion. And my wife and I traveled all around the world. But now, here I am. How do I get in?" "You have to spell a word," Jane told him. "Which word?" Jim asked. "Czechoslovakia."

OK, that's not how you get in to heaven. Thankfully, the Bible tells us how. And there's no spelling test. There's just one requirement: a connection to Jesus Christ. A relationship, a bond, an association with Jesus Christ.

I pray you all have that. I pray you believe what the Good Book says, that you will get in to heaven through faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, who lived and died and rose again for you.

Do you have that faith? That's all you need to receive all the glories and treasures of heaven forever and ever! And, all joking aside, that is such an incredible, amazing assurance that we have. We can face all of this life's perils, problems, pains, and pandemics with the sure promise of heaven waiting for us. We can be certain of our salvation, because of our connection to Jesus Christ. What a gift that is! We don't deserve heaven. We're not worthy of it. But God, in his love and grace, gives it to you.

And even more. Not just the promise of heaven. Not just the blessings of eternal life somewhere down the road, when you pass away and leave this world behind. Our Bible reading makes it crystal-clear that, because of the special relationship you have with Christ Jesus, God has already shared with you incredible riches, spectacular gifts, heavenly blessings.

Ephesians 1:3, "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 ..."

That's one of the most remarkable, astonishing statements in the whole Bible. Paul wrote those words, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul's not just expressing a fond wish, or a desperate hope. This is not a mere goal, or something we have to spend out lives striving for. This is simply a statement of fact.

"God *has* blessed us in Christ," Paul writes – past tense, accomplished fact. "God has blessed us *in Christ* ..." and

those two words are crucial. Everything we have as Christians, the entire basis of our relationship with God – it's all *in Christ*. It's all because of him, dependent on him, flowing from him. God views you and me today – even though we are poor, miserable sinners – as his beloved, forgiven, saved, holy children. Why? Because we are *in Christ*. Only because we are *in Christ*. Because of our faith connection with Christ. Because we've been joined with Christ in our Baptisms. Because Christ has chosen us and made us his own. Because Christ has graciously brought us into his Church. All of this is summed up in those two words: *in Christ*. And Paul uses those words over and over again in this letter to the Ephesians.

“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 ...”

Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places? Mercy, grace, divine favor? Spiritual gifts, rock-solid promises? Unconditional love, indwelling Spirit, unquenchable hope? The list of spiritual blessings God has given us goes on and on and on.

I have two questions for you today. First, do you deserve all these blessings? I sure don't. None of us do. None of us are sinless. Our lives are all filled with sin, right? We confess that every week in worship. We need to admit that, before God, every day. We don't deserve any of these blessings. But they are ours, the Bible says – God promises – *in Christ*.

So here's my second question. Do you believe these blessings are truly yours? Already yours? Do you believe that?

Living in this world makes this promise hard to believe. Living as we do in sin every day, it's really hard to fathom this, to accept what God says about the heavenly blessings being already ours. And that's because our human minds are so often stuck on earthly things, right? Our attention, our focus, our priorities are physical things, worldly concerns, earthly interests. My to-do list is a mile long every single day. We all have piles of problems and issues that demand our immediate attention. Who has time to think about heavenly blessings? So easily these heavenly blessings God shares with us end up crowded out in our lives, ignored, unrealized.

And, yet, all the while, whether we're paying attention or not, God's promise stands. Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places has been given to those who are *in Christ*, given to you and me.

How very good it is, then, for us to be here. How very important it is for us to come here, to spend this time, to shift our focus away from the earthly concerns and the worldly priorities. How vital it is, friends, for us to celebrate the relationship of grace that we have *in Christ*. How essential is it to take this worship time weekly to rejoice in the special relationship that we have with God thanks to Christ our Savior. Here, today, in God's house, we receive anew God's heavenly blessings, and then we go forth and put them into use.

So I ask you again. Do you deserve God's heavenly blessings? We don't. We can't. But do you believe these blessings really, truly belong to you? They do. Thanks be to God for his heavenly blessings! Amen.