

# Sermon Outline

## THE YEAR IN OUR LORD, 2011-2012

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### CHRIST JESUS: EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING AN ADVENT MESSAGE (EPHESIANS 1:3)

#### I. Pastor Nikolaos and his God

#### II. The Perfect Giver and His Perfect Gift

- A. Ephesians 1:3 is a fitting passage to start our Advent and Christmas meditations because it calls our attention both to the Giver as well as the Gift behind the Christmas phenomenon.

#### III. Blessed Be the God and Father of Jesus Christ

- A. Ephesians 1:3 contains a pronouncement of blessing on God.
- B. Such a blessing or *berakah* was common in Jewish religious life.  
—For example, before drinking wine: “Blessed are you, O God, our Lord, King of the Universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.”
- C. But in Ephesians 1:3, Paul takes the traditional Jewish *berakah* and rephrases it in a new way:  
—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”
- D. For Paul, God the King is inseparable from the Lord Jesus Christ.
- E. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” communicates at least three truths.
1. God is the One who was worshiped by our Lord Jesus Christ.
  2. God is the One who was revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ.
  3. God is the One who shares the same substance and nature with Christ.
- F. What does it mean for God to be “blessed” (*eulogētos*)?
1. To bless someone is to speak well or to praise someone.
  2. To bless also can mean to *do* good to someone, to cause someone to prosper. Here are two examples:
    - a. Psalm 5:12: “For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield.”

- b. Psalm 67:6-7: “The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!”
- G. When Paul ascribes and proclaims blessing on God, Paul means that...
  - 1. God is and should be praised.
  - 2. God is and should be lavished with all our good deeds.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Paul modify the traditional Jewish prayer of blessing or *berakah*? (2) What meanings does “bless” have? (3) What does it mean for God to be blessed?

#### IV. God Has Blessed Us in Christ

- A. Why does God deserve our blessing?
  - 1. In a Jewish *berakah*, the person would pray, “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe,” and then state what God has done to deserve such blessings.
  - 2. Paul does not deviate from this formula.
    - Paul blesses God because God himself “has blessed us.”
- B. Where exactly has God given his blessing?
  - 1. This is an important question because it will determine where the focus of our lives ought to be.
    - Will our focus be on the non-permanent, mortal things of this present time? Will our desires and affections be on the transient things of this world?
  - 2. Paul answers that question very clearly.
    - The place where God has blessed us is in none other than a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is the *location* of God’s blessing.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) According to Paul, why does God deserve our blessing? (2) Where has God blessed us?

#### V. Every Spiritual Blessing in the Heavenly Places

- A. God blesses his people through the produce of the earth (Ps 67).
- B. But in Ephesians, Paul is talking about an entirely different order of blessings.
  - Paul is calling our attention to God’s benefits of a higher order.
- C. What are these higher or greater blessings?
  - 1. The quality that characterizes them is “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*).
  - 2. What does “spiritual” mean?

- a. It can mean “of the Holy Spirit,” or “related to the Holy Spirit.”
- b. It can mean related to the spirit realm (see also Eph 6:12).
- 3. Another clue that further sharpens our understanding of these blessings is that these blessings are said to be “in the heavenly places.”
  - a. According to Ephesians 1:20 and 2:6, the heavenly places are where our Lord Jesus Christ is now physically located.
  - b. They are where the throne of God is situated.
  - c. Heavenly places are associated with eternity and supremacy.
- D. Putting “spiritual” with “in the heavenly places,” we begin to see the nature of these blessings a bit more clearly.
 

—These blessings are of a far higher quality than the other blessings of God because they are *ultimate* and *indestructible*.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Paul describe these blessings? They are “\_\_\_\_\_” and “in the \_\_\_\_\_.” (2) What are the heavenly places? (3) Why are these spiritual blessings higher or better than God’s earthly blessings?

## VI. God Has (Already) Blessed Us with Every Spiritual Blessing

- A. Paul does not say that God *will* bless us, but that God *has* blessed us.
- B. As believers in the Lord Jesus, you and I now have in our possession all these spiritual and eternal blessings.
- C. Christians are never poor people (even if our bank accounts may run dry). We are astoundingly wealthy beyond our wildest comprehension.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) According to Paul, when did God bless us with these spiritual blessings? (2) “Christians are never poor people.” In what sense is this true? Do you believe it?

## VII. “In Christ Jesus”—Those Golden Words!

- A. For our purposes today, we need to return to that very important phrase: “in Christ.”
- B. “In Christ” means “in the person of Jesus Christ.”
- C. It communicates the idea that Christ is the representative of his people.
  - 1. Christ relates to God on behalf of his people.
  - 2. Christ receives God’s dealings on behalf of his people.

—Whatever God wants to do for or give to his people, he does and gives first to Christ.

- D. God is the all-generous and all-giving King who has revealed himself to the world through Jesus Christ.
- E. The greatest gift that you and I have received is the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom and through whom all of God’s spiritual blessings are found.
- F. The little Baby whose birth we celebrate on Christmas the future of all mankind.  
—Somehow, in Jesus, God is going to renew all things!

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does “in Christ” mean? (2) What ideas does “in Christ” communicate to us?

### **VIII. The Joy of Having the Lord Jesus Now**

**Because we have the Lord Jesus Christ now, we have been reconciled to God our heavenly Father, and can know deep contentment and joy in our lives—even when things are not going well.**

- A. The most important benefit that we have in the Lord Jesus is reconciliation with God.
  - 1. Why would a broken relationship with God lead to all the problems in the world? A broken relationship with God means that...
    - a. God has placed humanity under a curse (Gen 3:17).
    - b. We would substitute other things for him.  
—We will not be content and will fight with others for more goods, leading to war (Jas 4:1-4).
  - 2. How has Christ mended our relationship to God?
    - a. He lived a life of perfect obedience to God on our behalf, thus fulfilling all of God’s righteous demands upon us (Rom 5:18).
    - b. He died on the cross for our sins, thus absorbing and exhausting God’s wrath and punishment in our lives.
    - c. He rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, thus securing our position in the presence of God.
    - d. And from his throne in glory, Jesus begins exerted his control over our lives, conforming us to God’s holy righteousness.
- B. Because we have the Lord Jesus Christ, we can know deep and true joy and fulfillment in our lives—even when things are not always going well.
  - 1. Because of the curse on all humankind, Christians can and often experience times of frustration, sadness, grief, loss, depression, sickness, and all kinds of other ailments that trouble non-Christians.

2. What relevance does Christ have on our *present* sufferings?
  - a. Because we have Christ, a new possibility of handling suffering is open to us.
  - b. This is not pretending that the suffering will fully be gone in this life.
  - c. Rather, this is the possibility of contentment and fulfillment—in spite of our suffering.
3. Because we know that we already have every spiritual blessing in Christ, we can be joyful and content even when other earthly treasures and goods are lost.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What are two implications that come with having Christ Jesus (and every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places)? (2) Why is reconciliation with God the first and most important benefit? (3) How did Christ reconcile us to God? (4) What relevance does Christ have to our present struggles? (5) Do you experience this contentment in Christ even when things are not going well? If not, why?