



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Ephesians

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Sealed

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What a great privilege to see, as a church, how God in his sovereign grace does whatever necessary to bring us to that place where we realize he's our best option. In fact, he's really our only option that lasts. Amen? We're going to ask the ushers to come now and begin to receive our offering. This is just a part of the way we worship God as followers of Jesus and as children of God, so I want to encourage you to prepare to be giving here.

While you're doing that, I want you to open your Bibles to Ephesians, chapter 1, and then let me give you a little commercial here. While you're doing all that, a week from this coming Saturday is the Discover Canyon Hills membership class. I know for a lot of you, over the last several months, you have started to sense that this is where you want to put down your roots. This is the church you want to make your church family.

We want to help you take that step. We want you to be sure you know as much as you can about what Canyon Hills is all about: where we've come from, where we're going, and what it means to be a member at this church. That class is coming up. I always look forward to teaching it. It's one Saturday morning. Check your bulletin out and get signed up for that. You have to do it online or call the church office. I will look forward to seeing you there.

We're in Ephesians, chapter 1. We're going through this letter by the apostle Paul verse by verse together on Sunday mornings. If Ephesians was a breaking news story instead of a letter written in our New Testament, I think it may very well be the greatest news story there has ever been. Unlike most of our news today, which is grossly exaggerated and sensationalized, what Paul is reporting here, in the opening 14 verses of Ephesians is really God's plan of salvation that began in the mind of God, even before the beginning of the world.

Paul starts early in the chapter, saying, "**...before the foundation of the world...**" and he begins to tell us what God's plan is. It kind of reads like the script of a play or a drama. We saw several weeks ago that the first act is the sovereign work of God in which he has chosen to bless a special people with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. That's what he says. God's plan started with God's work in choosing a people for himself to bless.

The second act, which we saw the last couple of Sundays, is really all about God accomplishing that plan through the redeeming work of God's Son, the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross. These chosen people of God have forgiveness of sins, and they're reconciled to God, redeemed by God's grace through faith in his Son.

Today, we come to the third act. We're going to look at the work of the Holy Spirit in God's plan, the work of God's Holy Spirit to guarantee that the redeeming work of his Son on the cross in the hearts of his people is secure forever, to guarantee that God's plan cannot be undone. That's where the apostle Paul wants to take us today. That's where we find ourselves, in verses 11-14. If you're ready, let's stand for God's Word as we read it together.

"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

Father in heaven, we ask now in the name of your Son Jesus and in the power and presence of your very Holy Spirit that you would teach us, open our hearts even wider and greater, and open our minds to understanding this great plan of salvation of yours. God, may we understand it to the fullest and may it affect how we live every day. In Christ's name, amen.

Two times in these five verses, Paul refers to our inheritance: once in verse 11 and once in verse 14. Three times, if you include verse 18, which we haven't gotten to yet. That'll be next Sunday. This inheritance refers to our salvation, our eternal life which we received when we heard the gospel and believed in Jesus.

That's what he's saying here in verse 13. When we heard the Word of Truth, the gospel, the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the gospel of our salvation, and believed in him, that's the inheritance he's talking about. He's telling us this inheritance is sealed and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit.

Now, before we talk about what sealing and guaranteeing is all about, I want to make sure we're clear about what Paul means when he says we **"...were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit..."** if you'd notice here in verse 13. The key word there is *promised*. When is the Christian promised the Holy Spirit? I want to just kind of review some basic Christian doctrine for us so when we get to the main point of this passage, we're all on the same page.

In order to understand that, we can just simply turn to Jesus. Back in the gospel of John, chapter 7, Jesus stood up and began to preach to a crowd of Jewish people who were going through the motions of another Jewish religious feast by rote.

Here's what Jesus said. He stood up in this crowd and he said, in John, chapter 7, "**Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'** Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." John is writing here that Jesus had not yet been raised from the dead, so the promise Jesus is speaking about when he said this to the crowd had not yet happened.

Now, in John 14, Jesus, we find, is trying to comfort his disciples. He has told them three times, "I will be leaving you soon. I am going to be returning to the Father who has sent me." He senses they're discouraged and he says, in John 14, "Don't lose heart."

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you..." Referring to himself. **"...and will be in you."** Referring to when they will receive the Holy Spirit after he leaves.

Of course, we know this promise that Jesus is talking about in the gospel of John was inaugurated on the day of Pentecost. Looking back to that day of Pentecost, Paul writes these words in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12: **"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."** To be clear, Paul is saying there that the promised indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life takes place immediately, simultaneously at our salvation when we hear the gospel of Jesus and we believe.

God's Spirit erases all ethnic, racial, religious, and economic advantages and disadvantages, and forms the body of Christ, his church. We are the church, and what unifies us is that the Holy Spirit indwells the sons and daughters of God. With this understood, Paul gives us the eternal implications of God's Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

1. *Our faith in Jesus is sealed by the Holy Spirit.* I think the bottom line of these verses boils down to this one thought: *God wants you and me to feel secure in his love and in his power,* because so many other things in life, in this sin-broken world, can become unstable. It can be our health, family, jobs, politics, the culture, or the whole world becoming unstable.

Wouldn't you agree, sometimes living life here in this sin-broken world feels like we're walking on a frozen pond, where at any minute the ice can begin to crack and we fall through? That's what life in this world kind of feels like. You're just kind of tippy-toeing through it, hoping you can kind of get through it as undamaged or unbroken as possible.

The apostle Paul is confidently reminding us, in the whole first 14 verses of chapter 1 (if you've been here over the last several Sundays, you'll be reminded of this), is that God has chosen us before the foundation of the world, he has predestined us to be adopted as his children, he has redeemed us by the blood of his Son, he has forgiven us of all of our sins, and now, the crowning glory of God's grace in our lives, he has sent his own Holy Spirit to dwell in us, to seal and guarantee what he has done, all because he wants us to feel secure in God's love and power, all to the praise of his glorious grace, forever and ever.

So, what does it mean to be sealed? What does that actually mean? When you do a little word study on the word *sealed*, you'll notice this same Greek word is used to refer to three different things. I'm just going to give these to you quickly, and then we're going to apply them.

When you look up Matthew, chapter 27, verse 66, we see that the tomb of Jesus was secured by sealing it and then putting guards around it. In Revelation, chapter 20, verse 3, we read that God is going to throw Satan into a pit and seal it over so he can't escape. So, this word, *seal*, when we look it up in the New Testament and how it's used, one meaning is locking something up, closing it in. That's one meaning.

When you look at another way the same word is used in Romans 4:11, we see Abraham's circumcision is called the sign and seal of the righteousness he had been given by God by faith. In 1 Corinthians 9:2, Paul says his converts are the seal of his apostleship. So, the second way the word *seal* is used is to confirm that someone is genuine or authentic. They are who God says they are.

So, there's this stamp of authenticity. There's this locking something up or closing it in. Then, the third way this word is used in the New Testament is in Revelation 7:3, where the seal of God is put on the forehead of God's people to protect them from the wrath coming upon the world. So, we see the seal in this case is God's claim on us that we are his possession.

Locking something up, closing it in, making it authentic, and identifying it as God's possession. Now, how do these meanings connect us to Paul's words about the Holy Spirit sealing us, sealing believers in Jesus? Here's what I think we can glean from this.

A. *Our faith in Jesus is secure from loss.* Like the tomb that was sealed, the Holy Spirit seals shut and seals in our faith and guards us against all those things in the world that would try to rob us of our faith. This is what Paul is saying. When you receive the Holy Spirit, your faith is guarded and sealed by the Holy Spirit, sealed and guarded against the lies, false teachers, false religions, intimidation, fear, and whatever else in the world Satan might use to try to convince you that your faith isn't real.

In fact, we read in 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 that God "**...will sustain you [keep you strong] to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**" God is faithful. He will keep us strong to the end.

B. *Our faith in Jesus is authenticated by our works.* The powerful changes the Spirit of God is doing in you, in us, is God's seal that confirms that we are truly saved. Let me see if I can explain this. You know that in Galatians 5 we read that the fruit of the Spirit, the evidence of the Holy Spirit being in a person's life, is that they are changing and becoming more joyful, peaceful, loving, patient, kind, good, gentle, faithful, and self-controlled.

All those things developing in our lives and becoming more and more of who we are in the likeness of Jesus is God's seal, God's evidence that we are authentically who God says we are. It is this transforming of our thinking and our living into the likeness of Jesus that authenticates and confirms that we are truly Christians.

In Romans 8:16-17, Paul writes, "**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...**" So, when Paul says, in Ephesians 1, that you have been "**...sealed with the promised Holy Spirit...**" as the Holy Spirit produces in us good works in the way we think and live, it is God's seal of approval, his confirmation that he has indeed saved us.

C. Our faith in Jesus is protected from evil. The Holy Spirit in us is God's seal that marks us as his own possession. The seal of the Holy Spirit being in us indicates God's ownership, and neither Satan nor any of his demons can undo the redemption of our souls. That's what Paul wants to teach. The redemption of our souls that is accomplished by the shed blood of Jesus on the cross as the ransom payment for all of our sin cannot be undone.

The apostle Peter was so excited about this when he writes, "Don't you ever forget, Christians, believers sealed by the Holy Spirit, you are a chosen race." "**But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**"

There is the seal. We have been ransomed out of Satan's kingdom of darkness forever. No matter how we interpret believers being sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, it is a message of permanent safety and security in God's love and power. That is Paul's message. You are sealed in the permanent safety and security of God's love and power, but he's not done there yet. He continues in verse 14 to tell us that the Holy Spirit guarantees that...

2. Our salvation is already complete. It is as good as done. He says here, "**...you...were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance** [salvation, eternal life] **until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.**" The word *guarantee* there, in verse 14, is a great word. It's also translated as the word *deposit*. Some of your Bibles say, right now, as you're looking at the Scriptures, "**...the deposit...**" Some of your Bibles say "**...earnest...**" like earnest money.

I want you to think of it this way. Whenever we put down earnest money or a deposit in order to secure a loan or a purchase, we're indicating our commitment to return and finish the transaction, right? When you put a down payment on a house, you're telling the bank, "I am giving you this huge deposit, Mr. Bank, as a good faith gesture that I will complete my commitment, and the full amount will come." That's what we're saying when we give the bank a big deposit. "I'll be back to redeem the house according to the terms."

This is what Paul is encouraging us with. God has given you and me his down payment, his deposit, his guarantee that our eternal home has been paid in full by the blood of his very own Son, Jesus Christ. That's what he's telling us. His Holy Spirit is the promise of all of our future blessings. Until we take possession of eternal life, we have God's Holy Spirit in us as a seal, guarantee, and deposit, and God has never made a late payment. He has never defaulted on a loan. He has perfect credit. His credit score is perfect. He has never failed to keep his promise.

I think Paul's mantra, if you could reduce these verses 11-14 down to a little statement, would simply be what he wrote in Romans 8: **"If God is for us, who can be against us?"** That's what he's writing here. God wants you to rest in the unimpeachable security of his love and power. The undeniable love and power, this incredible thing, is already made evident.

God's love and power is already evident because God is choosing us before the foundation of the world. He's predestining us to be adopted as his sons and daughters. He's redeeming us by the blood of his Son for the forgiveness of his sins, and now he's putting his Spirit in us as a seal and guarantee that we will receive our inheritance of eternal life. Everything God is doing in these verses is done to increase the intensity with which we praise him for his glory.

Look at verse 14. **"...who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."** All of this, the choosing, redeeming, predestining, adopting, forgiving, and now the sealing and guaranteeing, is that we may praise the beauty of his holiness, power, strength, faithfulness, love, and forgiveness, that our worship of him would become more and more intense as we get closer and closer to receiving our inheritance.

Nowhere in this chapter or anywhere in the New Testament does Paul promise that this means we'll have an easy life. Nowhere. In fact, he says, in Acts 14:22, that we will all enter God's kingdom through the hallway of many trials and tribulations. I think this is where this whole message may hit close to home. In a room with this many people, there are bound to be many of you who are in that hallway of trial and tribulation, of difficulty, of sadness, of loss. You get it.

Paul never promised that we would somehow get a shortcut around the tears, sadness, and fear this crazy, unstable, sin-broken world presents. He never promises that it'll be easy. He is promising that this life isn't all there is. For some of you this morning, that may be the most encouraging news you've heard in a long time. This life isn't all there is.

As unstable as this world is, one thing is absolutely sure. We hear it from Jesus. **"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."** That's the encouragement. Now, remember this. Paul is writing this letter, not from a hotel suite on the top floor of a fancy resort; he's chained to a guard in a prison cell when he writes this. He knows.

How often we forget! See, we have this problem. We remember the things we should forget and we forget the things we should remember. Paul wants us to remember this life isn't all there is. You were sealed and guaranteed forever.

In fact, in another letter, called Romans, Paul wrote probably the greatest expression of this thought. Would you turn to the left and find Romans 8? We'll end here. For most of you, when you open to Romans, chapter 8, especially starting in verse 31, your Bible is probably underlined or highlighted. You've got stars in the margin. You've circled it and you have exclamation points. It's just covered there.

In fact, look at the Bible of the person next to you, if they have a real Bible with them today, and see if it's underlined. If it's not underlined, you should just say, "Shame on you." Just look at them and say, "Shame on you. Why isn't that underlined in your Bible?" Underline it right now. There's nothing spiritual or sacred about your Bible not having any marks in it. Feel the intensity of Paul's sense of peace that come from knowing that this life isn't all there is. Beginning in verse 31:

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?"

Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'" Paul is saying here, "Hey, we get it. We're going to go through a lot of stuff, but that stuff isn't going to separate us.

Verse 37: **"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Amen to that. Christian, you were sealed by the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing this life isn't all there is for you. Let's pray.

O God in heaven, I ask in the name of Jesus that every true, authentic believer in this room would be encouraged in the midst of an unstable life and in the midst of everything seeming like it's always on thin ice. In the midst of all that, may we find great peace in your power and in your love. God, help us to breathe. Help us to rejoice. Help us to see that horizon. Our inheritance is coming. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you are not a believer, you have never surrendered your heart to Jesus Christ, and you're thinking, "Wow, if God loves me that much, I want to know more about that. If Jesus did that for me, what's my response to be...?" If you want to know what it means to put your faith in Jesus Christ, the people standing up here right now would love to explain that to you and help you take that next step, whatever it is.

Please don't leave here without coming up to one of them and saying, "Hey, I'm not one of these Christians yet, but if I can be, how does that work?" They'll be glad to explain it to you. All right. God bless you. We'll look forward to seeing you next week.