



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 1: 13-14

Fall 2023

"Sealed With The Spirit"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and that's a good verse to introduce our passage this morning about the Holy Spirit—because that's what we will study in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 13 and 14,

¹³In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1: 13-14

Two brief verses—but two verses that are full of blessing for God's people. Let's bow in a word of prayer and ask the LORD to bless us as we consider this great text.

Father, what a privilege it is to be together with Your people. What a blessing it is to be able to read a text like this and consider its meaning in some depth—but certainly not in the full depth of which we could consider it. But we pray LORD, You'd bless us as we study about the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who's been sent forth, as Paul wrote in Galatians, (4:7), and He cries out, "Abba!, Father!" within our hearts, and thereby affirming to us who have put our faith in Christ that we are Your children, and that we have the Spirit of God and He ministers within us. He's within each and every

one of us who put our faith in Christ at this moment, and He will enlighten us as we yield to Him. And so we pray LORD, that the Spirit's ministry would go unhindered and that He would open our hearts to receive the ministry of this text, and that You'd give us understanding of it and all the blessings that You have given to us through Him.

So build us up in the faith, LORD, encourage us, strengthen us, help us to not only understand the meaning of this text but see how it applies to us. We all have the Spirit of God; wherever we are, and whatever our circumstance is, He is within us. He has "sealed" our hearts, as we will consider this morning. And so, we're never alone—and we're never without the Comforter.

And bless us now, LORD, as we continue this time together, this time of worship and study. Bless us, build us up in the faith, give us worshipful hearts as we approach this text. And we pray that all that we do will be to Your glory. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Thomas Ken is a name you may not know, but you all know his work. He was a 17th century Anglican bishop who wrote the simple hymn you sing every Sunday morning, *The Doxology*, four lines that praise the Trinity:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The tune is called *Old Hundredth*, and was composed a hundred years earlier by Louis Bourgeois, a Frenchman who fled to Geneva where he studied under John Calvin and where he put the Psalms to music. It's been said that this simple hymn has done more to teach the doctrine of the Trinity than all the theological books ever written. High praise.

But certainly not more than the doxology Paul wrote in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3-14. In fact it, no doubt, it inspired the hymn. It's here that Paul praises each Person of the Godhead for His work in our salvation. So far in our study, Paul has praised God the Father for His *plan* to *redeem* His elect and *adopt* them into His family. He praised God the Son for *accomplishing* the plan by redeeming His people. Now, in verses 13 and 14, Paul praises the third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, for *applying* the redemption to each of God's people when He 'sealed them in Christ'.

This idea of '*the seal*' is of first importance to Paul. In verse 13 he reminds the Ephesian saints that, 'They were sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit when they first believed the Gospel.' It happened at the moment of faith—and it's permanent.

He writes of other things: Of our inheritance in Christ and, again, of the Holy Spirit as 'the pledge' or 'earnest', the guarantee that we will inherit that glorious future that's ours. But first, Paul describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the saints as, 'The seal which God put on us.'

'Sealing' was practiced in antiquity and even into modern times. Basically, it was used to close documents and be a mark of ownership, (which was very important in an age when most people could not read). A person would use an instrument, a stamp or a signet ring, engraved with a unique mark that left a distinctive impression on an object when pressed into clay or wax. That 'mark' was that man's 'seal'.

Some years ago I was teaching for a few weeks in Germany, and we would have the weekends off—and one weekend I went to the city of Rothenburg. They have an interesting museum there called *The Medieval Crime Museum*. (How can you not go there?! *[Laughter]*) It has some strange things, among them instruments of torture, like an Iron Lady and thumb screws.

But it also has a large collection of old seals that were used on official documents. Most of the seals were made of wax, and they were attached to documents with a cord. Some were large, almost as large as your fist, and stamped with an official symbol, indicating the origin from a prince, or a city, or a council, or court. It was similar

to what took place in Paul's day. A seal was used to indicate ownership of an object, or used to authenticate a document—such as an imperial decree. So Caesar would make a decree; it would be written down, and his *imprimatur*, (his seal), would be placed upon it to verify that this is from the emperor.

It was also used to keep objects or documents secure. It couldn't be violated or opened without breaking the seal. So the purpose of a seal was to keep a letter closed and to protect its contents.

All of that suggests here, the significance of being 'sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit', that the Spirit is the seal upon us, and has these ideas: The ideas of ownership, and authenticity, and security. Certainly, from the immediate context, ownership is clearly meant. That fits well with verse 11, where Paul identified us as 'God's inheritance.' We belong to Him; but that in itself would also suggest security and protection. Since we are God's possession, with the Holy Spirit as the seal within us, on our hearts, on our souls, we're absolutely secure. —No one can violate that.

That is certainly the meaning later in chapter 4, verse 30, where Paul wrote that we "were sealed', (*with the Holy Spirit*), "for the day of redemption", when the LORD will claim us all. We can't be lost before that; we can't be lost—ever. We have the seal of God upon our soul; so, we are *owned* by the Father. He has stamped us with His seal, with the Holy Spirit—and that occurred, Paul said, at the moment of faith—when we heard the Gospel and believed it.

Now that is generally the way 'the sealing of the Holy Spirit' is understood. But some have explained it differently following the King James Version which translated verse 13, "...after ye believed, ye were sealed..." They explain the sealing of the Holy Spirit as, 'A special experience of assurance given sometime after conversion.'

Now The Authorized Version, the King James, doesn't require that interpretation but its translation would allow for it, and those who have given it that interpretation might cite examples of 'experiences' that some of the saints have had. One example is John Wesley's famous experience on Aldersgate Street in London. He was listening to a

Moravian read Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on the Book of Romans, and Wesley later wrote, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." Now that happened two months after his conversion—but that was when he wrote, "He was given the assurance that Christ had taken away his sins and saved him."

"Sealing" is sometimes explained as that kind of experience: It occurs subsequent to salvation as a kind of 'second blessing'; 'a very personal, life changing experience that gives assurance of salvation'. Or gives something more, some people have explained it as, 'a special equipping for service'; and 'it's the experience only of some believers, not all—but an experience that every believer should seek.' It's also been identified as, 'the baptism of the Spirit.'

Now, it is possible to translate the verse as the King James Version does; "...after ye believed, ye were sealed...". but that's very unusual. Charles Hodge called this translation, "An exposition rather than a translation." It's much better to translate it as the New International version does, 'When you believed you were marked with a seal', and understand the *sealing* as contemporaneous with believing—both occurring at the same moment.

To get a little technical, (*I don't like doing this, but I think it's important here*), both words, "believed" and "sealed", are in the *aorist tense*—which simply means, 'in the *past tense*.' The word, "believed" is a *participle*, and the word, "sealed" is a *verb*. Now that's significant because that grammatical construction often describes *simultaneous action*—events or experiences occurring at the same moment.

For example, Matthew 19, verse 27: 'Then Peter answered and said', it's the same grammatical construction and it means, 'When he answered he said'. The New American Standard Bible simply translates it, "Peter said". And the same is true here and reflected also in the New American Standard Bible, (which I am using), "...having also believed, you were sealed..." (vs13). Both happened at the same moment: There's no space in between them; there's no 'second blessing' that's referred to here. It's all at the same moment.

And it's not experienced by some. That's not the instruction that Paul is giving here. Just the opposite. The indication from this is clearly, that all of the Ephesian saints had been sealed. Paul is stating a fact here—and it is true of us. It is true of all believers in Jesus Christ; we *have been* sealed.

So Paul was not urging us, 'to seek a blessing.' We are blessed already—from the beginning. He's praising each person of the Godhead for the blessings that They have given to all of us who are in Christ. And the blessing of the Holy Spirit is *sealing*. From the moment of faith, we have been 'marked out' as God's possession, as His "inheritance". And that's how we interpreted verse 11, not '*we have obtained* an inheritance', but '*we have been allotted to or chosen* as God's inheritance.' Every believer belongs to God; we are His possession. That's a real blessing.

Satan cannot confuse his *possession* with God's *inheritance*. We have the seal of the Holy Spirit—and that means we have His protection. Paul calls Him "the Holy Spirit of promise", (vs13c), which means that the gift of the Holy Spirit is a hope that is now realized by all of the saints, a promise now possessed—so, a great blessing.

The prophets promised the Spirit as part of the New Covenant. In Ezekiel 36, God promised to give Israel, 'a new heart and put His Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in His statutes.' (vs26&27). This nation that is "stiff-necked", (as Moses said of them), will not be stiff-necked when this happens to them. They will receive the Spirit of God; and He will give them a new heart and they will walk in His statutes—His commandments.

All through the Gospels, Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit. We studied it not too long ago in the Gospel of John. In John 14, verses 16 and 17 He told the disciples that, 'He, (*the Father*), would give them another Helper.' Jesus' is going away but, 'let not your heart be troubled, I'm sending another Helper, equal to Me—the same kind of Helper as I am, a different Person but a member of the same Godhead; another Helper.' He called Him "the Spirit of Truth". (vs17).

In John 16, verse 13, He told them that the Spirit would guide them, "into all the truth." So the Holy Spirit is not inactive, like some inanimate seal on a document. He is a person. He is active. He is helping the saints. He's teaching us, informing us, and enabling us to *believe* and to *obey*. We can do nothing without the Spirit of God; and He's within us; He's sealed our hearts.

Paul spoke of the Spirit's ministry in Romans 8, where he explains that the Spirit of God 'leads the sons of God.' (vs14). It's a continual thing, not periodically, but He's always constantly leading us, guiding us, warning us, directing us. Verse 16 states He, "testifies with our spirit that we are children of God."

How are we assured of that? How are we assured of our salvation? Well, the Spirit gives us that assurance. We know that we are God's possession because the Spirit confirms it to us with an internal witness. It's not subjective, (like some wave of emotion). It is internal—within us, but it's objective. It's objective because it's the real testimony of the third Person of the Trinity communicating truth to us.

In 1 John chapter 3, verse 24b, John wrote that, "We know..." (God dwells in us), "...that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." It's not an audible testimony; we don't hear it—but we *know* it. He's never contrary to the truth; He is the Spirit of Truth. So His witness in our heart is consistent with the Gospel of Salvation; 'By faith alone in Christ alone', as the God-man and Savior, the second Person of the Trinity.

A person may be 'religious'; a member of a cult that denies the doctrine of the Trinity, or believes in a 'works type salvation', and may have a warm feeling about his or her beliefs. Mormons speak of a 'burning in the bosom.' Well they may have that, they may have some experience, but that's not of God.

The Spirit's witness is consistent with God's Word. He gives conviction that the Scripture is true—all the Scriptures are true. The Word of God is true; it's God breathed; and we believe it. And we have a settled conviction because of that—that we are God's possession and children. He testifies to that to us within our hearts. And He'll never leave us; we are sealed with the Spirit, permanently. So He is always there to testify with

our spirit that we are children of God. And we need that—we need that to function well as His people.

Christians struggle with doubts. I think it's true of all of us in one way, at one time, or another. It may be due to a failure; it may be due to a sin; or even due to a period of spiritual dryness which comes upon us every once in a while. Or Satan's fiery darts, (we'll study about those later in chapter 6), he has his ways of attacking us and sowing doubts.

Doubts...they occur; and it's the Spirit who overcomes them in the genuine child of God, to reassure us that we are genuine, that we are sealed with the Spirit and belong to God the Father as His inheritance. He came on the day of Pentecost and transformed the small group of Jesus' followers who were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem, so that they went out of that room, went out of that place of hiding, to preach the Gospel with boldness and clarity.

And He lives within us, in every believer in Christ, and is doing a great work within us. He has made us His temple and is transforming us into the likeness of Christ, “from glory to glory”—that's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18. He's doing that in your heart right now—in your life transforming you “from glory to glory.” Now that is reason for the greatest comfort and encouragement which He gives. It's a measure of God's love for us that He would send the Holy Spirit to be in us, and seal us, and keep us secure.

But that's not all. The Holy Spirit is not only God's seal of ownership, but also a foretaste of future blessing. In verse 14, Paul calls Him “a pledge”, “a pledge of our inheritance.” He is God's guarantee that He will bring us all safely into our inheritance in the future. Literally, He is the “*arrabón*”. In modern Greek, the word is *arrabón*—an ‘engagement ring’. It's a *pledge* of the wedding and marriage that it will come.

But in ancient Greek, this was a technical term referring to *a down payment*—part of the purchase price that was paid in advance; and the payment that secured a

legal claim on the item being purchased. 'Down payment', a 'first installment' of the amount to be paid. And it insured that the full amount would be paid out.

And so here, the pledge of the Holy Spirit is a deposit, or a 'first installment' of the full amount of our inheritance—and guarantee that we will have it all in the future. In the meantime, we have that down payment, which is the Spirit of God itself, the Spirit of God who dwells within us.

Donald Grey Barnhouse was a master of illustrations and he illustrated '*the down payment*' of the Holy Spirit of our inheritance to come, with a story that ... well, it's a bit dated and long. He preached to the previous generation, principally in the '40s and '50s, 1950s, so I'll update it a little bit—and abbreviate it:

He imagined that a man is sitting at home when the doorbell rings, and a lawyer introduces himself. He asked if the man were Mr. John Smith, and the man said, "Yes." "Did your mother come to this country from Scotland and have a brother who went to Australia?" "Yes," the man said, "and we've never heard from him since."

The lawyer said, "Ah, you're the man! Your uncle had a son to whom he left his fortune. The son died and left no heir. You're the next of kin. I'm happy to inform you, you have a large inheritance." [And the man thinks, "Ah, I can buy the Toyota Corolla I've been looking at."] [*Laughter*]

The lawyer then says, "It's a very large inheritance." And the man thinks, ["Well, maybe a BMW."] Next the lawyer said, "Of course, it has to go through the courts first, so you can't get anything very soon except *the down payment*." The man thinks, ["Oh, I guess it's the Toyota Corolla I'll get."]

Then lawyer said, "Your uncle owned thousands of acres of sheep ranches; and oil and gold have been discovered there. It's going to be three or four years before you get it all, but we have a *little down payment* for you ready now."

And the man wonders, "Well what's that little down payment? How much is that?" He hands the man a check for \$100,000,000. The man thinks, "Wow! If this is the little down payment, what must the whole thing be?!"

And Barnhouse added, "Not all the certified public accounts in the world could ever add up the glories of the inheritance reserved for us." And that's true.

While Paul indicated earlier, in verse 11, that 'we are God's inheritance', he indicates it again in verse 18—but here he states that, 'We, too, have an inheritance, and we cannot begin to imagine the glory of it, the riches of it!' But we also have a foretaste of it in the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual life that He gives us—the third Person of the Trinity. That's a small part of it. I hate to speak of the Spirit of God and the life He gives it as something 'small'—but what's to come is beyond our comprehension!

But we have now, the third Person of the Trinity dwelling within us—actually dwelling within us! If you're a believer in Christ, the Spirit of God is there. And through Him, we experience what Paul calls "the fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23, (*which is just on the next page over, if you got my edition of the New Testament*): "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..." Now that is a sound life; that is a stable and a fruitful life, a life money can't buy.

When the market crashes and people are jumping out of windows, the child of God is calm. Can be—should be, *knowing* that God is absolutely sovereign. And as we walk by the Spirit, as we live in obedience and seek to grow in Christ, the Spirit of God gives us assurance of our sonship—and we increase in our joy, the joy of our salvation, the joy of being a new creature in Christ.

But the greatest joy we could have in this life is only a foretaste of what lies ahead. The Holy Spirit is just "the first fruits", as Paul put it in Romans chapter 8, verse 23—the *arrabón*, the 'down payment', the guarantee. What is to come is heaven—and more: The resurrection of the body and more, 'the kingdom to come', and ultimately, 'the new heavens and the new earth', where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Those are promises given to us. We will someday enter into our inheritance. God is faithful to His promises. He will bless us greatly.

But our blessing is not the ultimate end of things. What's good for us and pleasant for us is not the ultimate end of things. And here, at the end of verse 14, Paul states the ultimate end, or goal, of these things: And that is, "the redemption of God's *own* possession." So, we are "sealed", protected, secure, "with a view to the redemption of God's possession." In other words, the Lord God will possess fully what He purchased at Calvary on the cross. We have been redeemed; we have been bought out of sin, and from the power of sin.

But in the future, when Christ comes for His saints, we will be saved from the very presence of sin—and we will be whole and we will be pure. Then God the Father will have us in perfection as His possession, "...having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing...", as Paul puts it later at chapter 5, verse 27. And all this will be, as Paul concludes, "...to the praise of His glory." (vs14b).

God has sealed every believer with the Holy Spirit until the day He redeems us. We are His possession and His inheritance. We are secure and have a glorious future...and that for the "praise" of God. He's to be praised for all of that—it's to "His glory".

Here then is the sum of Paul's statement in these 12 verses of his Doxology: Every believer is God's child because the Father chose us; the Son redeemed us; and the Spirit keeps us. We are 'right with God', have a secure present and a glorious future because of God's grace alone; His sovereign grace. 'Salvation is of the LORD'—meaning, 'Of the Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

Each is in harmony with the others. There's no inconsistency in God. The Father *designed* our redemption, the Son *accomplished* our redemption, and the Holy Spirit *applied* our redemption. It all occurred, and is occurring, according to the eternal plan of God. There is no confusion in the outworking of the plan of salvation; it is all to the glory of the Triune God.

And that ultimately is why we received His grace and blessing: So that we will manifest the glory of God; so that we will see it, see it in the Scriptures, see it with our

own eyes when we are in the presence of the LORD—and see it, but also manifest it, manifest the glory of God, which is His self-revelation as the good and gracious God as the sovereign Trinity.

Well that means that we are to live for that glory—now! We are to live for it in the present. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism famously put it, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

Well, how do we do that? Simply put, we glorify Him in our daily lives by worshiping Him in both our words and deeds—in our heart, our mind, and our actions. We reflect His character in every area of our life. We live out our life, the life of Christ, in this world. Now that's a challenge. It takes prayer, for these are not things we can do in our own strength. We have to look to the LORD for that, continually. "Pray without ceasing," Paul said, (1Th 5:17). And we need to pray without ceasing that this would be true in our lives.

That's how we appropriate the blessings of God, (that's one way.) I should say, we appropriate the blessings of God and the power of the Holy Spirit: We pray, we seek it, we look to God to supply us.

We can do nothing in our own strength that is good or pleasing to God. That sounds like a radical statement, I know. Men do 'good things', and we see it on a human level—and we appreciate 'a good thing' that's been done. That's God's common grace.

But in terms of God's goodness, we can do nothing in our own strength. We need God's constant provision. And we get that through prayer, but also, as we *reflect* on what is set forth in these 12 verses, (and all of the Word of God, for that matter), and all that the LORD has done for us, as we reflect upon that, that produces gratitude within us, and the result of that is obedience—obedience following from gratitude. There's no greater motivation for an obedient life than a heart that's thankful for what God has done. As Thomas Erskine said in the New Testament, "Religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude."

That's the challenge—to live daily for the LORD. But as we do, the world will see something very different from what it sees in itself, (and what it sees around it), which is

self-centeredness. Everything in the world is turned upside down. The natural man, fallen man in unbelief, lives for his own glory and his own appetite. God's people have been changed. We were once like that; we've been snatched out of that, transferred out of that domain into the kingdom of Christ.

Everything is reversed now. We live for God's glory and man's blessing. Again, that's the challenge, but we're equipped to do it—we are equipped to do that very thing. That's verse 3, (*Eph*), God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” What's that? —That's something beyond our comprehension: But our resources are infinite, so by God's grace, we will make use of the blessings that He's given in this new life that we have, and live for Him.

Well this is an amazing doxology of 12 verses. It is divinely inspired, and gives the fuller revelation of what we sing in those four stanzas of our *Doxology* on Sunday mornings. John Stott wrote that these verses, here in Ephesians 1, answer two questions: ‘*How* we became God's people’, and ‘*Why* we became God's people.’ We became God's people by God's good pleasure. It's that simple.

It's what Paul says, “according to the kind intention of His will.” (vs5). It's not because of something He saw in us; it's not because of something we've done; we haven't earned this place where He will smile upon us. It's “according to the kind intention of His will.” That's it—by His grace, which provided the saving sacrifice of His Son and that we receive through faith and faith alone. The ‘why’ is, that He be glorified in us, as His new creation and new society—which is what Paul unfolds in this great epistle to the Ephesians.

If you've not believed in Christ, come to Him. It's not complicated. I don't want to describe the Gospel as simplistic, but it can't be simpler than it is: Recognize your need, that your sins have separated you from God; but Christ has brought peace between God and man through His sacrifice. He suffered the penalty of sin and the broken law for all

who believe in Him. Through faith alone we join ourselves to God's Son, His sacrifice and life—through faith alone.

He doesn't ask us to do great works of penance, or anything of that kind. Simply receive the message of life in Christ. Trust in the Savior, and you will receive eternal life and forgiveness of sin. And at that moment, you're a child of God, and sealed with the Holy Spirit—permanently; and therefore you can live that holy life to which you've been called.

May God give us the grace to do that, to see the need and to walk in obedience to Him with joy, for all that He's done for us.

(Closing Prayer) Father, we've just been reminded from this hymn that the final day will come for all of us. This world, and this life in it, is temporal; we're like a vapor. And yet, what a glorious future we have; and we have it because the price has been paid. Christ did it all for us. He gained our salvation on the cross. And You sent Your Spirit, and the Son sent the Spirit into this world to apply that salvation to Your people. And we have received it through faith and faith alone. We thank You for that.

Bring conviction where it is needed, and give hope where it's needed. We thank You for the hope we have in Christ, what He's done for us, and the glorious future we have—and the very secure present we have *now*. We give You praise and thanks for that.

The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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