

# Rev. Kenneth Ferguson-Sealed with the Holy Spirit

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 August 2018

Preacher: Guest Preacher

[ 0 : 00 ] Now with the Lord's help we pray, let us turn and consider words we have in this portion of scripture that we've read together.

The letter of Paul to the Ephesians 1 and reading again at verse 13, 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.

One or two words on these verses. Paul is writing this letter to the Ephesian church and before the gospel came to Ephesus it was not God fearing in any way.

They had their own devotions to their deities, but society was really very shallow so far as through godliness was concerned.

Ephesus was a fairly large city. Some people believe it had a population of about a quarter of a million during the first century AD and it was on a route from east to west and west to east along which most of the Roman Empire's trade was carried.

[ 2 : 09 ] So it became a very busy city and of course the focus of many people's attention was on the temple of Diana, being one of the wonders of the ancient world.

And in connection with the worship of the goddess Diana there was much uncleanness associated with that kind of worship.

Paul didn't shy away from going to a place such as that. It says throughout the ministry of the apostle that he spent three years in Ephesus, we have that recorded in Acts chapter 20.

And also the people of Ephesus had the privilege of having the ministry of Apollos among them. He was a man who was mighty in the scripture and they had the ministry of Apollos also in Ephesus. And the blessings that accompanied the ministry of Paul and Apollos we have recorded for us in the book of Acts. For example Acts chapter 19 and at verse 19 it says this, that people who had practised magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.

[ 3 : 38 ] And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Even in that place of Ephesus where sin had got such a grip of people's minds and lifestyles when the gospel came it had such an impact that they burned all their books.

I look to see what kind of value could be placed on the amount of books that were burnt there. It says 50,000 pieces of silver and in some people's estimation that's over 50,000 pounds in the present day currency.

And the impact of the gospel of course was clear enough to see in that way. And the apostle is concerned when he's lightened to the Ephesians he's lightened to our people who were outside of the commonwealth of Israel as it were.

They were the circumcision and they were looked down on by many of the Jewish people who themselves were circumcised and we thought in many ways that they were the people.

[ 5 : 03 ] And it's as if they grudged the Ephesians to have access to the gospel. And the apostle is careful in this epistle, in this particular chapter and elsewhere to make known that the Ephesians were a people who were on God's mind in order to bless them from all eternity.

The same as those who had been blessed among the Jewish community. And that's my first point, first of three points.

The background to the salvation that reached to these people in Ephesus. What is the background to it?

The second point is the experience they had in relation to the gospel and these are the words we have in verses 13 and onwards in him.

You also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation you believed and were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. That was their own gospel experience in time.

[ 6 : 15 ] And thirdly, the future prospects that the gospel brought before them. In verse 14, the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory.

It's as if he is saying to them, yes, you did receive a blessing in the gospel and through the gospel in time, but there is more awaiting you in eternity.

It's as if you have part of the inheritance already given you in a day of grace, but the day of glory awaits you.

And you will acquire possession of the inheritance in a deeper and a grander sense when you pass out of this world.

Only then these Ephesians are here told some of the background to the blessings that they received through the gospel under the preaching of Paul and Apollos.

[ 7 : 28 ] I'm just going to highlight two or three things. First of all in verse four of this chapter, Paul reminds them that they were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

You see our experience in time of gospel blessings, that isn't something that starts with us here and now.

When we hear the gospel and when it's blessed to us here in time, no, the roots of that experience are to be found in the heart of God in eternity.

Read it again. He chose us in him, in Christ, before the foundation of the world. Isn't that an amazing thought?

If you have tasted in time the power of the gospel, the love of God in your heart, it hasn't actually started there.

[ 8 : 41 ] It is something that can be traced all the way back into eternity to the mind and heart and purpose of God.

And if that doesn't humble us, I don't know what will. These Ephesians, although they were up to here in sins of all kinds, nevertheless from all eternity God had purposed that some of them would be saved.

And he purposed that the elect would be saved wherever they are, in whatever century they live, here, there and elsewhere.

Ever much they have been given over to sin, if they are elect in Christ before the foundation of the world, the devil will never have them in the end, because the power of God will be administered to them and the grace of God enjoyed by them.

That's the first thing. The background to your salvation is in eternity, because you were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

[ 9 : 57 ] Secondly in verse 5, we find that not only were the people chosen in Christ, elect in Christ, but they were also loved.

In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ. And I can imagine people who were down and out, people who were given over to sins of the most awful kind, nevertheless if God has loved them from all eternity, he has purposed to make them his sons or his daughters through adoption through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must always remember that the plan of God is an eternal plan, that the covenant of redemption is an eternal covenant, that the persons of the Trinity in eternity agreed on this way of saving sinners and that Christ agreed to come into the world in the fullness of time to bear the sins of his elect people and to make atonement for them.

And then of course also he predestined us to be sons and daughters of his.

Well that's just a little insight I hope into the eternal plan of God so far as the salvation of his people is concerned.

[ 11 : 48 ] But now coming to something that is set in time, verses 13 and 14, he's talking to the Ephesians and it says here, in him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, you believed in him and were sealed.

The gospel came through the ministry of the apostle and wherever the apostle was able to preach the word of God, that word that was given by the Lord himself was heard by these people.

They heard the word of truth just like we hear it ourselves. This is the truth of God, the word of God, the Bible is the truth of God.

And what does it tell us? What does it tell us about ourselves? It tells us the truth about ourselves and what does it say is true of us.

We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. It's one thing, it tells us, it tells us that all of our sins deserve the wrath and curse of God both in this life and throughout eternity.

[13:21] We are not righteous, none of us is righteous, no not one. It tells us these truths so clearly and where the gospel is being preached in faithfulness, these things have to come forth and people have to hear them because it is the truth of God about ourselves.

It tells us where we are, we are in a lost condition. It tells us for an ability to save ourselves, to get ourselves out of this jam in which sin has placed us.

We cannot work our way out of it. The Pharisees, they thought they lived a righteous life.

Saul of Tarsus before his conversion, he thought he was living a perfect life. According to the righteousness which is in the law, he says, I was blameless or he thought he was.

But what does Jesus say? Except you righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of God.

[14:34] It requires a more righteous life. It requires perfection in order to get into the kingdom of God and which one of us is able to live perfectly.

No man, no mere man since the fall is able perfectly to keep the commandments of God but daily breaks them in thought, in word and in action, as another from the Catechism.

You heard the word of truth and maybe you hear this morning are hearing this truth about yourself and I hope it's coming home to you and to me, how desperately in need of a savior that I am, that all my righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

However well I may preach, however well I may live, it cannot earn me passage into heaven.

So where does that leave us? Well there's something more told us in the scriptures and we hear the truth about Christ Jesus.

[15:50] It's as if over against my poor and bankrupt situation before God we have here a mighty and glorious savior and this is what the apostle would have taught them.

However your sins may have brought you down, Christ is able to raise you up. He is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him.

You heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, the good news of salvation for you. That's what the word gospel means, good news.

There's bad news about us in the Bible but there's good news for falling man in Christ Jesus and we see here that they heard the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation.

Isn't it amazing when you go back into the Old Testament and you read in the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 1 and Isaiah was preaching to people who just didn't want to hear what the Lord was saying.

[17:09] He says in Isaiah 53, who has believed our report? It's as if he was preaching there and nobody wanted to hear him.

But at the beginning of that prophecy chapter 1 it says, the Lord says, come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Isn't that a glorious gospel message giving you hope for eternity? Come as you are and come to the found and opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness. I was once thinking of that verse from Isaiah chapter 1, though your sins be as scarlet. And I think it means that scarlet is something that is so public, public sin.

And though your sins be as crimson, so deeply set and deeply rooted in your very life.

[18:30] Nevertheless, if you come just as you are, whatever your public sin, whatever your deep seated sins hidden away as they might be, the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse you from all sin.

We are required to come to confess our sin and by God's grace to forsake our sin because the Savior is able to cleanse all of our sins away.

The gospel of your salvation, the gospel of Jesus Christ. You have heard this gospel often and I'm sure there are some within these walls this morning who remember a time when the gospel was preached and as a result of the message you heard about yourself and about the glorious Savior

that your heart warmed to him.

And you sought to turn your back upon your sin and to flee to Christ that you might be saved. You came as you were because he says, come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest unto your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

[ 20 : 06 ] And you heard these words so encouraging and you were able by God's grace to come to him and to say, Lord, I commit myself to you.

Here I am, wash me, cleanse me. You believed in him. You trusted in Jesus Christ as the only Savior able to save you from your sins.

That's the essence of saving faith that you receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone as he is offered in the gospel.

That's the essence of saving faith. You cast yourself as you are upon him.

And then something happens when we believe. And it says here at the second part of verse 13, you believed in him, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise or the promised Holy Spirit.

[ 21 : 17 ] What does this mean? You were sealed. The sealing and the believing are two sides of the same coin.

They happen together. When you believe, you believe and are enabled to do so by the work of the Holy Spirit.

You cannot believe on your own. It is a saving grace that the Spirit dispenses to you. You are enabled to believe because the Spirit enables you to do so.

And at the same time, you are sealed by the same Holy Spirit. What does it mean to be sealed? Well, it's a mark of ownership, isn't it? When you seal something. I was thinking of this yesterday.

[ 22 : 19 ] The farmers in America, long ago, they used to brand their cattle. And they had this hot brand put on the cattle to mark ownership.

And here itself, people used to have the brand for putting their croft number into the horns of their sheep branding.

The same kind of thing is spoken about here. We were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit claims us as his own. He marks us as his own. Now, it's one thing talking about branding marking from the outside, which happens with sheep and with animals when you mark them in that way.

But this is actually something that happens on the inside. The Holy Spirit seals us in our hearts.

[ 23 : 33 ] He makes us to know spiritual realities. He marks us with his mark of holiness.

Holiness of thought, holiness of aspiration, holiness of longing, holiness seeking to delight ourselves in the word of God and in the ways of God.

These are marks that show themselves outwardly. But they actually arise because the sealing or the seal has been stamped upon us inwardly, in our hearts, in our souls.

Isn't it wonderful the way these people in Ephesus showed, I'm just going to mention a couple of texts here, in Acts chapter 20 and verse 17, for example, to show the sealing or the mark of ownership of the Holy Spirit upon them when they were obedient to apostolic authority.

Act 20:17. And it says there, from Meletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

[ 25 : 09 ] And when they came to him, he spoke to them. Now Paul was on a sea journey and he came off his ship at Meletus and he thought, well, it's a good idea to send for the elders of Ephesus to come and I'll talk to them.

I'll not see them anymore. And he sent word to Ephesus and Ephesus was about 60 miles from Meletus. And they went all the way from Ephesus to Meletus to hear what the apostle had to say. And I believe that that was a mark of grace upon them. They were submissive to his authority and it was a mark of love towards the man of God.

It's a mark of grace, I believe. And the other point I had was verse 37 in that same chapter.

There was much weeping on the part of them all as they were parting when they embraced Paul and kissed him because most of all he said to them that they wouldn't see him again and they accompanied him to the ship.

[ 26 : 18 ] When you think of these people in Ephesus before the gospel had touched their lives, would they have gone 60 miles to hear this man?

Of course they wouldn't. Would they have wept when he was leaving them? Of course they wouldn't. They wouldn't care about him. But now they had been sealed in their hearts and they had a love for the word of God, for the authority of the word of God, a love for the people of God. That's what left them walking all that way and weeping when the man was leaving them. You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

I came across one thing yesterday and he is talking about this in verse 14, that the Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance.

You see when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell, he's not leaving anymore. It's as if he has come to stay. Maybe we sometimes feel very unspiritual and worldly in our thinking, but the Holy Spirit he does not leave us because he is the guarantee of our inheritance.

[ 27 : 41 ] Now what does this mean? Well the word is very interesting, the word that's translated guarantee.

It's something that could be said, well it's a down payment. It was something that the Lord said, well this is a guarantee of what I'm going to give you in all its fullness later.

In the olden days if somebody were to buy a piece of land and the man who was selling it to him would cut a piece of turf from the land that he had agreed to sell to this man and he would give him the piece of turf and he says that's a guarantee that the whole land is yours.

And that's the kind of thing we have here. When the Lord comes and dwells within our hearts it's a guarantee of war to come.

In the Psalm 84 he gives grace and he will give glory and he will withhold no good from them who live uprightly.

[ 29 : 00 ] This is in a day of grace and it gives us the guarantee through his indwelling spirit that there is an inheritance awaiting us of which we have tasted in a day of grace.

We have tasted of the sweetness of God's fellowship through the gospel. We have tasted of the peace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

We have seen new things because the eyes of our understanding have been opened. We beheld the glory of Jesus as the Apostle said of him, we beheld his glory as the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.

There was a time when we didn't see any beauty in him. No attractiveness in the gospel. No attractiveness in the preaching of the gospel. It was boring to us.

There was someone working with me at one time years ago and she was being taken to church with her parents when I was a young girl and she wasn't enjoying the experience of having to sit through a sermon.

[ 30 : 19 ] But the minister for some reason had to go away for a number of months and when he came back of course she went to church with her parents as before and she couldn't get over the change in the minister.

She said to me, I thought he had been to a college or something while he was away. She thought the change had come on the minister whereas the change had come upon herself.

She was able to hear and understand and delight in the word of God as she hadn't before because the Holy Spirit had come into our life and that Holy Spirit had marked her for God, not for herself anymore, but for God and she has lived her life for him ever since.

And that Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance and that brings us to the third and last point, the future prospects for the Ephesians, for all Christians.

What future prospects are there? Well the Apostle John says in 1 John 3 verse 2, we don't know yet what we shall be, he's very honest.

[ 31 : 40 ] But then he says, but when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Isn't that amazing?

John doesn't know, the Apostle doesn't know when he's not writing this, doesn't yet know what it's going to be like, but he says when he does come in his second coming we shall be like him, body and soul, and we shall see him as he is.

And John in Revelation in chapter 7 says this, verses 15 to 17, the inheritance involves this, they shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more, the sun shall not light upon them, nor any heat for the lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, while what a prospect that is.

Those who have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who have the Lord's mark upon them, who have the Lord's blessing, the inheritance awaits them in all its fullness, they are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, no.

But a great day is coming when they shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted on the day of judgement, and shall be made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God through all eternity.

[ 33 : 35 ] Where are we this morning? Are we hearing the gospel, the truth of God about ourselves? Are we agreeing with what the Bible says about us, or are we just shaking that truth of God over backs and not willing to identify ourselves with what the Lord is saying of us?

Or we better ask the Lord to make us compliant with what he says about us, because what he says is right.

Not my opinion, but his opinion of us is that we are all unrighteous in need of salvation. And what about Jesus?

Ask that he be a personal saviour to you, that he would show you himself, that he would draw you to himself, just as the scripture says of others, that he drew them with cords of love.

And if he does that, and persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel, we will know what it is to be sealed and marked and claimed as God's property, and we will enjoy being God's belonging to him, living for him, serving him, seeking to please him rather than please ourselves.

[ 35 : 07 ] And then looking forward to the full realisation of the inheritance in heaven.

There is no night there in heaven, the Bible says, their sun shall no more go down, neither shall their moon withdraw itself.

The Lord himself shall be their light, and their days of sorrow will be ended. May each of us know that for ourselves.

Let us pray. Help us, O Lord, to be thankful for the gospel, that it is a gospel of hope in a world that lacks real hope.

It's a gospel of light in a world that is darkness. That it's a gospel of fellowship in a world that is so lacking in real friendship and love.

[ 36 : 14 ] Lord have mercy upon us, we pray, and give us to rejoice this day anew in our Lord Jesus Christ. Bless us and part us with your blessing in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.