

If Only I Was Rich! — You Are!

Text: Eph 1:1-13

Suggested Hymns:

359, 335, 324, 286, 330

- 1) We Are God's Chosen
- 2) We Are Standing In Grace
- 3) All Is Ours
- 4) We Are Heirs Of Heaven

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 1:1–13, ¹ *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:* ² *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,* ⁴ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,* ⁵ *having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,* ⁶ *to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.*

⁷ *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace* ⁸ *which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,* ⁹ *having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,* ¹⁰ *that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him.*

¹¹ *In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,* ¹² *that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.*

¹³ *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In today's Gospel we heard the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus.¹ The rich man was materially rich, but spiritually poor. Lazarus was materially poor, but spiritually rich.

The parable tells us what happened to the rich man and yet people still say "*If only I was rich!*" How often we hear such exclamations or something similar! Listen!

Let us take note that as a believer in Christ Jesus you are rich, amazingly rich. This is Paul's assertion in our text.

Most of the Ephesians were poor. Many of them were slaves. Yet Paul insists that they are the rich of Ephesus, possessing as they did a wealth which cannot be measured by human standards.

In Ephesus stood one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Diana. The Ephesians loved to boast of this magnificent building, which gave prestige to their city. From all parts of the Roman world travellers came to see, to gaze and wonder, and to spend.

Among them were kings and senators, governors and generals, noblemen and successful traders of the day. All this made this Asian city famous and important. Merchants favoured the goddess because she attracted the tourist trade. Others liked the city for the opportunity she gave them to become socialites by entertaining kings and queens, governors, senators, and generals of the army. Therefore the Diana cult was promoted and favoured by all who counted in Ephesus.

To this famous city came Paul to preach Christ crucified as the one and only Hope and Saviour of the world. He insisted that goddesses, like Diana, were mere creations of the imagination. Naturally the prominent merchants discredited his message, mainly because it hurt their business.

The elite frowned upon it, because it took away from their prestige. They avoided the church. Therefore converts came from the lower strata of society and from among the slaves. These humble Christians could not fail to feel that wealth and prestige looked with disfavour upon the Cross, whereas the Diana worshipers enjoyed many comforts and pleasures denied to the poor Christians.

Realising this, Paul wrote this letter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and told these people of low estate that after all they are the rich of Ephesus. To this day we believers in Christ Jesus are the highly favoured of God. The theme for today is, *We are rich — spiritually rich*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. We Are God's Chosen

We are rich because we are the chosen of God. We belong to a society of people who are one in Christ and whose hearts have been made temples of the Holy Spirit. By faith in Christ Jesus, who has redeemed us through His cross, we have come in full possession of a sonship in the family of God.

Already before the foundation of the world God's good pleasure and grace decided to redeem us through His only Son, who would come in the fullness of time to dwell among the children of men and give His life on the uplifted cross to free us from the shackles of sin and the clutches of Satan.

We are accepted by the Father as His own dear children, reconciled to Him through the cross of Jesus. Therefore God has a full claim on us, and faith in Jesus, our Saviour, has separated us from those who by unbelief are still held in bondage and are spiritually dead in their sins.

God has gathered us as believers in Christ into the holy Christian Church, the whole number of all believers, and made us one great family with the saints in heaven. In this church Jesus Christ is the Head and Bishop who rules and guides us in His grace into the paths of righteousness.

Of this we are certain because God's love and good pleasure has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. God's grace has called us to faith, just as the repentant thief on the cross, and the centurion beneath the cross, on that Friday of the crucifixion.

By the grace of God the persecuting Saul became Paul, a Christian missionary to the Gentiles, and faltering Simon became the confessing Peter. This same grace God is showering on us without any worthiness or accomplishment on our part. "*Just as I am ... I come*"² and we find healing in His wings and salvation throughout eternity.

2. We Are Standing In Grace

Living in this grace we are enriched with the spiritual blessings of the Cross. Through faith we enjoy the full and complete forgiveness of all our sins. No sin remains to accuse us. Our text says, “*you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.*” Our names are written in the book of life.

The socialites of Ephesus most likely had a list of ‘the four hundred’ similar to our much-publicised ‘Who’s Who.’ In that Ephesian list were the names of those who entertained kings, governors, and barons of wealth. None of the Christians of that great city found their way into this “blue book.”

However, their names are recorded in the book of life. Clothed in garments washed white in the blood of the Crucified, they are honoured throughout eternity at the throne of the Lamb.

We have no record of the men and women who so lavishly entertained at Ephesus. Today no one knows who they were. The humble Christians, however, who lived out a meagre existence, many of them slaves, are known to the Lord Eternal in heaven and are with angels and the saints of the ages praising God and the Lamb slain for our redemption.

Even the richest merchants and the first of society at Ephesus had their troubles, disappointments, and reverses. Sickness and death cut short their lives and shook all that is earthly out of their hands. But the believer is not frightened by death. We know that on the other shore the Saviour awaits us to welcome us home. If our Christian faith offered us nothing else than this freedom from the fear of death, it would be eminently worthwhile.

Truly, the believer in Christ is rich. He has treasures which do not perish. Even though from day to day we may be facing pain, hunger and want, disappointments and failures, we know that we cannot perish. We stand beneath the cross confident that in Christ Jesus “*we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*” as our text says.

3. All Is Ours

Belonging to God’s family, we have all that is God’s. This makes us the richest people on earth. This is Paul’s assertion. The believer possesses all that God possesses, and God is the Owner of heaven and earth. This applies to the

physical universe: the land, the sea, and the sky. All has been created for us to enjoy and to share with others. God opens His hands and satisfies our needs. That is the assurance we have as we stand in His grace.

If this is true, why then do some Christians go hungry? The Ephesian Christians were poor, judged by human standards. How could Paul say that they were rich? It was because they had all the spiritual blessings in Christ, which neither thieves nor storms nor floods could destroy. They had securities which guaranteed them the forgiveness of all sins, and the assurance of heaven as their eternal home, where hunger and want, pain and heartache, are unknown.

Our text says *having made known to us the mystery of His will*. This means that as believers we have complete knowledge of God's will. We have the Ten Commandments. This revelation opens our eyes to the pitfalls of sin and unbelief. We have the Law and the Gospel.

Living in grace we hear continually the reassuring good news that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No matter what accusation is made against us, God acquits us in His courts because Another has made full payment for each and every sin debt. Jesus left nothing undone.

Therefore we are clothed in the garment of Christ's holiness, which hides all our failings from the eyes of God. Because God looks at us through the Cross, we are "*without blame before Him in love*" as our text says.

Living in grace we can go through the day unworried. God will supply us with the necessities of life and protect us from sin's temptations. He keeps us in the faith that saves. Trustingly we can live one day at a time, certain that God moves in His own way to uphold us.

Whenever He places a burden on us, He puts underneath His everlasting arms and gives us the needed strength and faith to stand up under the burden.

No matter what happens to us in this world, we cannot perish as we stand in grace beneath the cross. No matter what we have done, God cannot and will not condemn us so long as we by faith hide in the Rock of Ages, Christ Jesus, our Saviour. *Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling.*³

Tragically, however, too often our earthly blessings blind us to the material riches of life. Material treasures too often undermine our health and break down the morale of our lives and rob us of our faith.

However, through faith in Christ Jesus we enjoy daily and continuously the forgiveness of the Cross, the peace of heart and mind, the hope which permits us to look with confidence beyond the portals of the grave and know for certain that our eternal salvation is underwritten by the resurrection of Jesus. This puts our mind at ease throughout the day.

As Christians, then, we have a guaranteed security which gives our outlook on life a hopeful hue and lifts us above the gloom which can lead to despair. This does something to us. We can sing wherever we are. God's loving-kindness brightens every lonely hour. God's presence serves as a real antidote to worry.

We can rise above the irritations and aggravations of the day and learn to adjust ourselves to our problems with patience. Each and every day we shall find some blessing, appreciate it, and praise God, who always pours out upon us His benedictions. All this makes us the richest people on earth, says Paul.

4. We Are Heirs Of Heaven

However, the best is yet to come in the glory of heaven. This makes every trial and failure of life appear less significant, a mere inconvenience of the journey to a fuller and richer life, perfect for the endless years of eternity.

All this is "*sealed*"⁴ to us "*according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself.*"⁵ This heaven is ours so that "*we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.*"⁶

Therefore realising that all is ours by grace, without merit or worthiness of our own, we can say with grateful hearts,

Salvation unto us has come
By God's free grace and favour;
Good works cannot avert our doom,
They help and save us never.
In faith we look to Christ alone,
Who did for all the world atone;
He is our one Redeemer.⁷

“*If I was rich!*” You are — as a believer in Christ Jesus. The treasures which Christ Jesus gives us cannot be taken from us by bandit or by adversity. We are numbered among the citizens of heaven; our name is recorded in the book of life and is never to be deleted.

“For I am persuaded,” says St. Paul, in Romans 8:38–39, ³⁸ ***that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,*** ³⁹ ***nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

Even now we have that peace which passes all understanding and that inner contentment which cannot be taken from us by the turmoil of this present life.

“*If I was rich!*” You are, truly and really, by the grace of God. Use your riches to make your pilgrimage of life less cumbersome and more carefree. In and with Christ, each day is richer and fuller.

Share your spiritual riches with those who travel with you on the Jericho road of life by telling them of the hope in your heart. Enjoy your riches, counting day after day your blessings, and acknowledge them with thanksgiving to your Lord and God. Then you shall be able to live the more abundant life in this world and find fullness of joy in the glories of heaven, with saints and angels, world without end. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 16:19-31

² Hymn 335

³ Hymn 330

⁴ v. 13

⁵ v. 9

⁶ v. 12

⁷ Hymn 324 v1