

Ephesians 1:13-14
Blessed to Be Sealed

Main idea: When we receive Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit who seals us as His own.

When he was just 6 years old, Alex Malarkey was in a car crash that left him in a coma. When he emerged from his coma 2 months later, Alex said that he had died and visited heaven. A few years later, when he was around 12 years old, Alex co-authored a book with his dad about his experience. The book was called “The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven,” and it sold more than a million copies.¹

[Picture of The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven]



Have any of you read it?

Well, within a year of the book being published, Alex started making comments online seeming to contradict his book, stating that it was all a lie. And then a few years after that, when he was 17 years old, he made it absolutely clear that it was all entirely fabricated as an attention-getting ploy. Here's what he wrote:

I did not die. I did not go to Heaven. I said I went to Heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. -Alex Malarkey

Ironically, even though Alex now says that it was not true that he died and went to heaven, he also says that should not at all decrease our confidence about heaven. Our confidence about heaven doesn't come from his story or any story about a near death experience. Our confidence about heaven comes from the Bible itself, and the Bible itself is enough.²

Many believers, whether they're new believers, or even sometimes have been believers for a long time, often wonder how they can be sure they will go to heaven after this life is over. It's one thing to have the hope of heaven and eternal life through faith in Jesus, and it's another thing to know it for sure.³

Well, part of the good news of the gospel is that we don't have to guess about where we'll go after we die. Because we have forgiveness of our sins through Jesus, we can know with certainty that we're going to have eternal life and we're going to be with Jesus forever in the life to come.⁴

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Boy_Who_Came_Back_from_Heaven

² John 14:2, Philippians 3:20

³ Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 5:8

⁴ Acts 16:31, Romans 10:9-10

So even while we look forward to that in future, we're blessed today with the sure promise of the inheritance that we have in Jesus.

Ephesians 1:13-14.

In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Father, we confess that we often have so many wonders and doubts in our lives. We wonder about what's going to happen in the course of our lives. We wonder about the afterlife. But help us never to doubt Your promises or gifts. Help us to trust You on Your word, that we will inherit what You promised by grace, which we receive through our Savior Jesus. So thank You for Jesus. In Jesus's name, Amen.

[Picture of Isapo Muxika]



A museum in Toronto, Canada tells us the story of a man who lived in the nineteenth-century named Isapo Muxika, who was more commonly known as Crowfoot.⁵ He was the chief of the Siksika Indian tribe, and he was known for his peaceful relations with Canada during a time of great violence.

When the Canadian Pacific Railroad was being built and they needed to build part of it on his land, the Canadian government approached Crowfoot with an offer. They said, "If you will give us the land we need for the railroad, you can ride it whenever and wherever you want."

So they made a deal. They finished the Canadian Pacific Railroad and Crowfoot received a lifetime pass.

[Picture of Crowfoot's lifetime train pass]



Crowfoot put the pass on a chain and is said to have worn it around his neck for the rest of his life. It entitled him to go wherever he wanted where the railroad could take him.

⁵ <https://wardmuseum.ca/myarchive/oiselibrary/rose/>

But the surprising thing is that Crowfoot never actually stepped foot on the train. He had the right to travel anywhere he wanted, but he never availed himself of that right. Maybe he was afraid of trains because all he ever knew was horses, or maybe he just never saw the need. Either way, even though he still carried around the guarantee of his deal with the railroad, he never actually used it.

There are a lot of Christians like Crowfoot. They possess God's promises, they quote them, they frame them; they hang them on their walls, they even post them on social media, but they never actually make use of them.⁶

Charles Spurgeon once said:

God never gives us a promise he does not intend for us to use. -Charles Spurgeon

So when we read all of the promises and blessings that God gives us in the Bible, don't just read them and get to know them, but also see how they apply to your current condition, and live today according to the blessings that you have in Jesus.⁷

As we've been studying Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, we've been talking about how incredibly blessed we are in Jesus.⁸ In Him we are holy and blameless, we're adopted as God's children, we're redeemed, we're united, we're given an inheritance, and this week we're going to see how we're sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, so that we not only know that we have God's blessings, but how this causes us to also begin to live in the reality of God's blessings even today.

The beginning of verse 13 says, "In him you were sealed."

[Strong's Concordance for "seal"]

Strong's Concordance

sphragizó: to seal

Original Word: σφραγίζω

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: sphragizó

Phonetic Spelling: (sfrag-id'-zo)

Definition: to seal

Usage: I seal, set a seal upon.

The Greek word σφραγίζω means "to set a seal upon."⁹ It's what a king did with his signet ring to show that a letter he wrote was authentic. So when God set His seal on us, He was not only assuring us of the blessings that we have in Christ, but He was swearing by His own name that it was true.¹⁰ In other words, because God is true, and God doesn't lie, we can be confident that we are truly blessed in Christ, because He set His seal upon us, which cannot be revoked.¹¹

⁶ We receive the desires of our hearts not just when we memorize the verse, but when we actually delight in the Lord.

Psalm 37:4

⁷ John 5:39-40

⁸ Ephesians 1:3-14

⁹ Strong's #4972

¹⁰ Isaiah 45:23

¹¹ Romans 11:29

To be sealed means that God not only gives us all these blessings, but He makes it so that we can't lose them. It's a done deal.¹²

And Paul wrote that the way that God sealed us was with the promised Holy Spirit. During Jesus's ministry on the earth, He taught His disciples about the Holy Spirit who would come and be with us forever. Jesus said in John 14:16:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. (John 14:16)

But the promise of the Holy Spirit actually came long before that as well. It says in Proverbs 1:23:

If you respond to my warning, then I will pour out my spirit on you and teach you my words. (Proverbs 1:23)

Isaiah 44:3 says:

I will pour out my Spirit on your descendants and my blessing on your offspring. (Isaiah 44:3)

And then also in Joel 2:28, God says:

After this I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions. (Joel 2:28)

And so in the Old Testament, we see that God actually promised many times that His Spirit would dwell in us, not just occasionally as happened in the Old Testament, but all time, enabling us to obey God as we ought, and causing old men to dream dreams and young men to see visions. And we also see how the Holy Spirit would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. That's what we read just a few verses later in Joel 2:31:

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. (Joel 2:31)

And when we read those prophecies, we often think that they're talking about the end times, when Jesus comes again.

But when you read Acts 2, Peter was clear that the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled when the Holy Spirit first descended on the first believers.¹³ In other words, we don't have to just hope for God to fulfill all His blessings toward us some day in the future. We have them now, and the proof is that we have the Holy Spirit.

As it says at the beginning of Ephesians 1:14:

The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession. (Ephesians 1:14a)

Let that really sink in. Because I think if we really grasp what it's saying, it will make a huge difference in the hope and joy that we experience in life. We can sometimes erroneously think that the Christian life and all its blessings depend on us, like going to church, or being faithful to God's word, and certainly God wants us to be

¹² John 10:28

¹³ In fact, Peter quotes Joel 2 as says that it was fulfilled that day. Acts 2:14-21

faithful, but that's not ultimately why God blesses us. God blesses us because God loves to show His grace.¹⁴ God blesses us because God is love.¹⁵ And before we could do anything to earn anything from God, God blesses us first with Jesus and His Spirit.¹⁶

And then all of the rest of our inheritance in Christ, all of the stuff to come – heaven, eternal life, becoming like Jesus – we can be sure of it because we have the Holy Spirit as the down payment.

Think of it this way: God Himself comes to dwell in us to assure us that He will never leave us nor forsake us.¹⁷

It's a very sad thing that many children have been abandoned by their parents. But God will never abandon you.¹⁸ It doesn't seem like it should be possible that an adopted child could be abandoned by their adopted parents, but it happens far too often in our broken world. But God will never leave us, whom He not only adopted into His family, but also came to live inside of, so that we are not only His sons and daughters, but His home!¹⁹

Thousands of years ago, when the Jews thought about God's home, they would have thought about the tabernacle, or later the temple, and they would have felt extremely blessed to know that God made His home among them, where they could go to worship Him and sacrifice to Him.²⁰ But now that Jesus has died for our sins as our sacrifice, once for all time,²¹ and we're completely forgiven in Him by grace through faith, God makes His home no longer in a building like a church, but inside of us. We are the temple of God.

1 Corinthians 6 says:

Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

So while we absolutely should come together to worship God, just as Jesus gave us that example, and Hebrews tells us not to forsake gathering,²² being the church means having the Holy Spirit with us wherever we go, and beginning to live in a way that shows the world how good and glorious God is.²³

And just like last week, we see that this is to the praise of God's glory.²⁴ It glorifies God for Him to give Himself to us. God the Father gave His heart to us when He gave us His Son.²⁵ God the Son, Jesus, gave us Himself when He died on the cross for our sins.²⁶ And now we see that God the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, gave us Himself when He came to dwell in us, to be with us, to seal us for eternal life, and all of this not only benefits us immensely, but also glorifies God because it magnifies His goodness toward us.

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:8-10

¹⁵ 1 John 4:8

¹⁶ Romans 9:11

¹⁷ Matthew 1:23

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 31:8

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 9:19-20

²⁰ Exodus 25:22

²¹ Romans 6:10

²² Hebrews 10:25

²³ John 13:35

²⁴ Ephesians 1:12

²⁵ John 3:16

²⁶ John 10:18

But this isn't automatic. We're not born with the Holy Spirit in us.²⁷ Paul tells us exactly when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives. Look at verse 13 again.

In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. (Ephesians 1:13)

We receive the Holy Spirit, and therefore the assurance of all of God's blessings toward us, when we hear the truth, which is the gospel, and believe the truth.

And the gospel in four words is simply this: we sinned, Jesus saves.

To become a Christian, receiving the Holy Spirit, receiving God's salvation from sin and hell and receiving all of the promises and blessings of God, you simply believe the gospel that although you've sinned, Jesus saves.²⁸

Paul describes this here as the word of truth. There are a ton of false things that we could believe that are so prevalent in our world today. We could believe that we need to make something of ourselves. We could believe that we have to measure up by doing good things. That we have to get everything just right in order to please God and earn our way. But the gospel is called the word of truth because there is only one truth, and all of these other things are lies that will only lead to disappointment.

Jesus said:

I am the way and the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

Jesus is the truth. There is no other. Jesus is the way. There is no other. So when we think we can make our lives have meaning apart from primarily resting in Jesus, we've believed a lie.

But when we find our lives in Jesus, because Jesus is the life, we've begun to live according to the truth. And by living according to the truth, we begin to see just how blessed we are in Christ.

As we started studying Ephesians, I mentioned that verses 3-14 in the original language appear to be one long sentence about how incredibly blessed we are in Jesus. And I think Paul wrote it that way because the blessings that we have in Christ are not just blessings that we have in Christ, but they are who we are in Christ. You're not just blessed with holiness and blamelessness; you are holy and blameless. That's who you are in Christ. You're not just blessed to have been adopted by God; You are His child. And we could keep on going, talking about all the blessings we have in God. You are redeemed. You are united in Christ with all other believers, both today and throughout history.²⁹ You are absolutely and unconditionally loved and forgiven, and you are all these things because God is love and God loves you.³⁰

Our identity as Christians is rooted in Jesus.³¹ We might be tempted to find our identity in any number of other things: identifying with a political party, or in our gender or sexuality, or in our occupation, but when we receive Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit who seals us as His own. We're God's, which means that our identity is found in Him.³²

²⁷ Numbers 11:29

²⁸ Acts 16:30-31

²⁹ Ephesians 1:3-14

³⁰ John 3:16, 1 John 4:8

³¹ Galatians 3:27-28

³² 2 Corinthians 5:17

I read a cool illustration of what this means. If you were to buy a bottle of water at a grocery store, it might cost somewhere between \$0.50 and \$1. If you were to buy a bottle of water at a restaurant, it might cost you between \$2 and \$4. And if you were to buy a bottle of water at a baseball game or an airport, it might cost around \$6. For each of these prices, the water is roughly the same, the only difference was where you purchased it.

Have you ever felt your own value fluctuate depending on where you were? Maybe at times in your life, you felt like you had a lot of worth because you accomplished a lot, but at other times, you felt close to worthless because things weren't going well for you.

But in the Bible, we find that we are infinitely valuable to God, because our value isn't found in our circumstances or feelings, but in the fact that we're made in the image of God,³³ and in the fact that even though we've all sinned against God,³⁴ God still loved us, and Jesus died for us, forgiving us of all our sin, so that we can find our worth and identity once again where we should have found it all along: in God our Savior.³⁵

And that's one big package deal. We don't get to choose the parts of Christianity that we like, and discard or reinterpret the parts of the Bible that we don't like. That's typically what we want to do. We like forgiveness. We like joy. We like hope. So we receive Jesus as our Savior, thinking that we can just have those things.

But God wants us to be totally transformed.³⁶ So He gives us His Spirit, to live in us, to transform us, to empower us to not just squeeze Jesus into our already busy lives, but to truly see Jesus as our life, because He is the way, the truth, and the life.

And if you've tasted and seen just how good God is, then surely you desire to have Jesus not just as your Savior, but as your Lord. In contrast to all the other things in our lives that promise joy and don't fulfill, Jesus gives us real hope and joy as we rest and rejoice in Him.

³³ Genesis 1:26-27

³⁴ Romans 3:23

³⁵ Romans 5:8

³⁶ Romans 12:1-2