

ABSOLUTE ASSURANCE EPHESIANS 1:11-14

Let's read our text starting in verse 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, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

They say the odds of you dying are pretty good. "One out of every one person dies." It reminds me of the clever undertaker. He always signed his letters, "Eventually Yours..." He knows we can't avoid him.

One day your ashes will be sprinkled, or your body will be buried, and a tombstone put over your head...

Which reminds me of some interesting tombstones...

Here's one... "I Have Nothing Further To Say."

Ever wondered... "Where's Waldo?"

I like this tombstone. "Here lies an atheist. All dressed up and nowhere to go." *Or so he thought...*

How about this one, "Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake. He stepped on the gas instead of the brake."

There's more to this story... Lawrence Cook, 1934-2004... It reads, "Ma loves Pa - Pa loves women. Ma caught Pa, with 2 in swimmin. Here lies Pa."

How about this tombstone, "Here lies Lester Moore. Four slugs from a 44. No Less. No More."

If you like brevity here's a great tombstone, "Bye."

And last but not least, the tombstone of Mel Blanc, longtime voice of cartoon character, Porky Pig. I wish I could say it like Mel, but it reads, "That's All Folks."

But that's not all! That message might make for a cute tombstone, but it's not true in regards to death.

Death is not all... it's just the beginning.

For those outside of Christ there's a real, quite literal, fire-breathing hell staring at them... But for those of us who are "*in Christ*" there awaits an inheritance - stored up in heaven - to be ours at our glorious homecoming.

Paul assures us in Ephesians 1:11, "*In Him (in Christ) 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...*"

In the ancient world there were limited opportunities for education, entrepreneurship, and advancement, thus the primary way to accumulate wealth was by an inheritance. Frugal families built a nest egg for future generations. An inheritance insured a family's survival.

A man looked forward to the day of his inheritance.

And the same is true for us. We too have stored up riches - paid for *by Christ* - received *in Christ*. When I die don't anyone say, "That's all folks." Joy, and ease, and pleasure are just beginning for this weary traveler.

Spiritually speaking, like the Romans of old, on our own, you and I have little chance of advancement.

But in Christ, Jesus has done the work for us. He satisfied God's justice and earned His righteousness.

When we step out of this life and into eternity we enter a glorious inheritance purposed *by God - for us*.

1 Corinthians 2:9 tells us, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." Your mind can't grasp - nor your wallet hold - the vastness and value of your inheritance in Christ.

Patrick Henry was the American Patriot who said the famous words, "Give me liberty or give me death."

But when he died the following words appeared in his will and were read to his heirs, "I have now disposed of all my property to my family. There is one thing more I wish I could give them and that is faith in Jesus Christ. If they had that and I had not given them one shilling, they'd be rich: and if they had not that, and I'd given them all the world, they'd be poor indeed."

2 Corinthians 4:17 compares our current sufferings with *our future blessings*. Paul writes, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Heaven’s treasures aren’t just referred to as “*glory*,” but as an “*eternal weight of glory*.” Heaven is heavy!

In contrast to what you’ve endured in the past, today’s trials may seem taxing and never-ending.

Your battle with cancer... the chronic pain... the nagging debt... the broken relationship... the rejection... the betrayal... the ache inside that won’t go away...

These are all **really heaven burdens** to bear.

But in contrast to the glories of heaven, Paul refers to these afflictions as “*lightweight*” and “*but for a moment*.” Blessings that are weighty and eternal make our present trials *trivial* and *temporary* in comparison.

And never forget where this inheritance is found!

Notice again the first two words of verse 11 - “*In Him*.” All God’s inheritance is distributed “*in Christ*.”

Once, an old man had a valuable art collection worth tens of millions of dollars. This fellow also had a sickly son that he loved with all his heart. In fact, when the son died, his father died just a few weeks later.

The old man died of a broken heart.

According to the father’s will, his art was put on the auction block. And the first piece to be sold was a portrait of his son. Of course, no one was interested.

The painting had little value to anyone but the father. Everyone waited to start the bidding for the real art.

There was one man though - a friend of the family - he had also been fond of the man's son, so he bid a meager \$5... At once, the auctioneer stopped the bidding, and awarded the entire collection to the friend.

It was in the father's will that all his wealth go to the person who loved his Son enough to buy his portrait.

This is what God has done. He gives His wealth to the person who loves Jesus. Love His Son above life itself, and everything else of value comes with Him.

In verse 11 we're made heirs!... "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, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory."

People who've worked hard to accumulate wealth put lots of forethought into their *last will and testament*.

Who receives their money and how it's allocated - is a big deal. In fact, there're attorneys who've gone to law school to specialized in "*estate planning*."

But God didn't seek the help of an attorney. He purposed beforehand through "*the counsel of His will*."

All three members of *the Godhead*, put *their heads* together. The *Father who rules*, the *Son who saves*, the *Spirit who gives* all deliberated together on a plan.

*And guess who God chose as the beneficiary of His will and infinite wealth? **Not the workers** who try to prove their worth through their own good works. **Not the martyrs** who make great sacrifices to show how deserving they are - but **the humble** who confess their sin, rely solely on God's mercy, by *"trusting in Christ."**

The Father wrote His will before time began. **The Son** died and rose again to activate His will. **The Spirit** is the executor. He distributes all of God's blessings.

And **the beneficiaries** are those who believe in Jesus!... Here's salvation's ultimate aim - that our inheritance *"should be to the praise of His glory."*

Some men flaunt their riches and wealth by indulging themselves. They invest in luxurious surroundings, endless pleasure, expensive toys. They're fashionistas.

Their wealth is all about them and their lifestyle.

A recent study done by a network of non-profit charities found that families with an annual income below \$30,000 donate 4.2% of their money. Whereas, rich-folk give away only 2.7% - **the richer, the stingier**.

But not God! From the beginning of time, the Godhead deliberated together, and chose to bestow His wealth on those who *"trusted in Christ."*

God shows off His riches, and brings praise to His glory, not by indulging Himself, but by lavishing on us.

God glorifies Himself by sharing His infinite wealth.

And what the Father gave to those who *"first trusted in Christ"* - the early Jewish disciples - He has also promised to give to believing Gentiles who came later.

Verse 13, “In Him **you also** trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed...” This was revolutionary news!

For a first century reader here’s a stunning headline, “**Jews and Gentiles** are co-heirs of God’s inheritance.”

Recently I ran across of list of the most shocking and stunning newspaper headlines of all time...

“Titanic Sinks Four Hours After Hitting Iceberg...”

“Men Walk On Moon”

“Dewey Defeats Truman” - Of course the headline was wrong. Truman surged in the final counts and won.

“War On America” - The day after 9-11.

“Assassin Kills Kennedy”

“King Elvis Dead” - Notice the Sun’s byline, “He Was 42 And Alone.” What a terrible way to die - *all alone*.

“Martin King Shot To Death” - an infamous headline.

In contrast, a headline from 1945, announcing the end of the Second World War, “PEACE! It’s Over”

But here’s a headline that eclipses all the above! “In Him **YOU ALSO trusted...**” Not only did God bestow His grace on the Jewish disciples that first followed Jesus - *koshered Jews*. But the Ephesians - *pig-eating Gentiles* - received the same pardon and blessing!

Under the Old Covenant, or God’s previous last will and testament, He agreed to bless the family of Israel.

But God issued a **new will and testament** with the coming of Jesus - a New Covenant. *"In Christ"* He has agreed to forgive and favor anyone, Jew or otherwise, who trusts in His Son! *This is stunning news, indeed!*

Salvation had been poured out in two waves...

The disciples who walked and talked with Jesus were obviously accepted, and loved, and forgiven. *But those who came later would they be any less blessed?*

And the answer is *"no!"* We've also received all the blessings given to those who first trusted in Christ.

People tend to measure one man's salvation up against the circumstances of another's experience.

He was saved at an old age - she came to Christ as a little girl... She was led to Christ by a friend - he was saved at the point of desperation... His was a jailhouse conversion - living for Jesus is all she's every known....

He was saved on his death bed with a final breath.

Which reminds me of baseball legend, Ty Cobb.

The **"Georgia Peach"** was anything but sweet. Mean, ornery, he was a pain to be around. He was known for his dirty tactics on the field and rowdy behavior off it...

Yet just before he died he gave his life to Jesus.

Ty Cobb was quoted, **"Tell the boys I'm sorry it was the last part of the ninth that I came to know Christ. I wish it had taken place in the first half of the first."**

My point being, not everyone gets saved under the same situation. God uses different circumstances.

Each of us has our own experience with God.

The Ephesians came to faith through Paul's teaching in a lecture hall in Ephesus. Paul came to faith by a bright light on the Damascus freeway - but both had similarities... In fact, there were **two commonalities**...

First, they *"heard the word of truth."* Second, they *"trusted in Christ."* *And this is true of every conversion.*

Step One... you've got to *"hear the word of truth."*

Notice, Paul doesn't say *"truths"* - plural. There are many truths or facts - but only one *"word of truth."*

This is the knowledge required for folks to know God.

There is a irreducible minimum of information that a person must possess to be saved. You can have *good intentions*, and *a record of good behavior*, and even *amazing spiritual experiences* - but without *"the word of truth"* a person is condemned and on the way to Hell.

Today, we navigate a pluralistic landscape where religions come in conflict... As followers of Jesus we can be civil. We can discuss. If need be, we can agree to disagree. But as Christians, we can never give in on the Gospel. No one is saved without *"the word of truth."*

And this is why we've been commissioned to share the Gospel of Jesus. Without the truth that He died, and rose, and lives today - a person is lost in their sins.

And it's not just hearing *"the word of truth"* that saves us. Paul says of the Ephesians they *"trusted in Christ."*

They staked their lives on the validity of His claims. They leaned in to Jesus, and began to rely on Him.

And this doesn't happen by osmosis. At some point along the way you make a decision. I speak to folks all the time who fail to understand this basic truth...

I'll ask them, *"Are you a Christian?"* And they reply, *"Oh, yes, I'm a Catholic."* Or *"I go to the Baptist Church."* Or *"Sure, I've been a Christian all my life."* Or *"Of course I'm a Christian. I live in America, don't I!"*

But to become a Christian the Ephesians and Paul had to *"hear the word of truth"* - then *"trust in Christ."* They had to decide *to step away from their sin, believe Jesus will forgive their sin, and start to live for Him.*

This is why it's dangerous to say, *"Yes, I was born a Christian."* No one is born a Christian. In John 3 Jesus told Nicodemus, *"You must be born again."* A person has *to decide* to trust in Christ, or they're not forgiven.

And once a person believes, something wonderful happens next. Paul reminds the Ephesians in verse 13, *"you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise..."*

Once you *"hear the word truth"* and *"trust in Christ"* God goes to work in you! The Spirit of God invades your heart, and melts your stubborn will, and ends your rebellious nature. The Holy Spirit births in us *a love for God, and a love for others.* 2 Corinthians 5:17 says it best, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."*

This is stunning. Do you realize that as a Christian you're a new species of human being - who prior to the ascension of Jesus, had never walked this planet?

A born again human is something special!

The Bible tells us that real Christianity eventually makes us better - *but the changes happen over time.*

Character develops, and sensitivities form, and habits grow over years of walking with Jesus. In the beginning, you may not behave much better than a non-Christian, **but you're immediately different!**

We're alive, whereas seconds earlier we were dead.

Christian author, John Phillips, writes, "A Christian is not different **in degree** from a non-Christian, he is different **in kind**, just as the difference between a diamond and a cabbage is not one of degree, but kind.

The one is polished, the other crude, but the one is dead while the other is alive, therefore the one has what the other has not in any degree whatsoever - *life!*"

It's better to be a live cabbage than it is a shining, sparkling - yet dead diamond. The gift of spiritual life is the direct action of God. It's not something we generate. *I hear - and I trust - then God sparks life.*

But God does more! Having *changed us by His Spirit*, He seals us with the Spirit. Verse 13 tells us that believers are "*sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.*"

The Greek word translated "*seal*" is a term with two meanings. It's like the word "bear" - "bear" can mean "to carry" - or it can refer to "a furry animal that every now and then appears in an Atlanta suburb." Beware!

Likewise, the term "*seal*" has two possible meanings.

On the one hand, the word speaks of securing the lid on a jar. Or you think of *the seal* around a gasket that prevents leaks. It contains fluids under high pressure.

And in many ways the Holy Spirit does seal us in this sense. He secures us, and preserves us in Christ. He keeps us from *flipping our lid* and *blowing a gasket*.

But that's not what this particular word implies.

The Greek word that's translated "*seal*" refers to "a stamp, a brand, a trademark." To "*seal*" an item was to stamp it with your own individual mark of ownership.

Think of the Holy Spirit as "*God's coat of arms*."

The "*seal*" was usually applied with some *string*, *hot wax*, and a *signet ring*. You wrapped the string around the package, buried both ends of the string in the melted wax, then pressed the image on your ring into the soft wax leaving behind your own personal insignia.

Ephesus was a shipping center, so it was common to see merchants on the docks placing their seal on cargo they purchased. The "*seal*" was a "*proof of purchase*."

Of course, the shipments were then loaded onto boats destined for foreign ports. They were transported across stormy seas - and eventually delivered to their appropriate destinations. That's where they were again identified by the waiting owners by his personal seal.

And this is a picture of what God does with us. He "*seals*" us with His mark of ownership. God's *proof of purchase* is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit!

He sets out on the voyage called life, and brings us to the heavenly dock. And there again God identifies us as belonging to Him, by the seal of the Holy Spirit!

This is how you and others know that we're a child of God - *the activity of the Spirit is evident in our lives!*

God authenticates His redemption of us by the activity of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit of God blesses me with *the wisdom I need*, or *a surge of power in a moment of weakness*, or *peace in turbulent times* - it's a needed reminder that I belong to Jesus. It's spiritual evidence that I'm under new ownership.

Often a person's "sealing ring" - or "signet ring" - was imprinted with his portrait. The king's seal bore his own face. What belonged to him bore His own image.

And this is how God marks what belongs to Him. In multiple ways, God's Spirit makes us more like Jesus.

"Christ in us" - *His love and patience and kindness and purity and passion* - means we belong to God.

More specifically, the sealing of an item was not a part of the actual transaction. The commodity was sealed **after** the deal was done. Whatever was bought, belonged to the purchaser - sealed or not. But all new owners were quick to mark their cargo with their seal.

Paul points to this subtlety in Romans 4 as he discusses the Jewish practice of circumcision.

It wasn't the act of circumcision that made Abraham pleasing to God. It was his faith. Circumcision was the mark of ownership that came after he believed. It didn't earn or add to his salvation. It just **sealed the deal**.

Likewise the seal of the Spirit comes after salvation.

We're saved by faith and faith alone. But once we belong to God He acts quickly to mark us as His own. He wants there to be no doubt to Whom we belong.

Realize, it's the seal of the Holy Spirit that brings us assurance. If you wonder and doubt whether you really belong to God you need to ask the Father to seal you with His Spirit... Afterwards *you'll know that you know!*

Once you're sealed with the Spirit there's no more doubts - no more worries - only **absolute assurance!**

It's interesting, Jesus Himself was sealed. John 6:27 reads, "God the Father has set His seal on Him."

Obviously, whenever it was that the Father put His seal on Jesus, that seal didn't make Him God's Son.

Jesus was God's Son from eternity past. But when the Father sealed Jesus, the Father was identifying Him as His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased.

And when did this happen? I believe it occurred at Jesus' baptism. John dunked Him in the Jordan, then the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

And here's my point... *when is a person sealed with the Holy Spirit?* I believe it's when they are baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit. This is not salvation. It comes after the deal is done - after you already belong to Him.

That's when God marks you as His own - *by pouring out His power into your life.* This filling is God's seal.

When you're saved the Spirit comes to dwell in you.

He warms the wax of your heart, and wraps you in the string of His will - *but then He presses with His ring!*

This is a separate and subsequent experience. The Holy Spirit impresses and leaves behind His image.

From that moment onward you're bolder, less fearful, much more loving... In short, you're more like Jesus!

Realize from the instant you're saved you're *chosen by God - adopted as His child - holy, and blameless, and redeemed by the blood of Jesus - all your sins have been forgiven - you're accepted by God in Christ.*

As we've been studying in Ephesians 1 you have *all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus!*

Nothing else has to occur to make any of this more real than it already is. Your salvation is a done deal!

But when God applies the seal of His Spirit, suddenly what was *believed* becomes *felt*. It's all more tangible. In the words of Peter, it's "*joy inexpressible and full of glory.*" Now you know, that you know, that you know...

When a person is filled with the Holy Spirit doubts and insecurities flee like birds scattered by an intruder.

The baptism of the Spirit is a point in time experience like water baptism - where something happens to you. *It's spiritual not liquid - but you're dripping afterwards.*

Adelaide Pollard describes this experience in her hymn, "*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Hold o'er my being absolute sway! Fill with Thy Spirit, till all shall see, Christ only, always, living in me.*"

Ephesians 4:30 tells us the sealing of the Holy Spirit can last a lifetime. Paul writes, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” When you’re filled with the Holy Spirit it’s intended to be evident until you reach Heaven’s shore.

But we also know from Revelation that seals can be broken - or tampered with... and you can grieve the Holy Spirit if we don’t continue in your faith and trust.

Thus, sometimes we have to be *re-sealed* - or *re-filled* with the Holy Spirit. And we learn from the book of Acts that this can happen. The same people who were filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 are refilled in Acts 4.

Once RA Torrey was asked if he believed in the second blessing. **The first blessing**, we’re saved by the saved, and **the second blessing** is we’re filled by the Spirit. Torrey replied, “Yes, and the third blessing, and the fourth, and the fifth, and a hundred besides.”

This morning I’m going to pray for those who want to be filled - or even refilled - with the Holy Spirit.

It’s interesting that the NT Church relied on the baptism of the Holy Spirit - first experience at the feast of Pentecost - as the litmus test for true Christianity.

In Acts 10 Peter converted the Gentiles at Cornelius’ house. Later when he defended his ministry before the Church in Jerusalem he said the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentiles in the same way He came upon the Jews at Pentecost. Obviously, in his mind, the baptism of the Spirit was the seal - the proof of God’s purchase.

The same was true in Acts 19 when Paul first came to Ephesus. There were believers in Jesus at Ephesus, who hadn't even heard of the Holy Spirit, let alone been filled. Paul quickly remedied the problem. He prayed for them and they were filled to overflowing.

I believe every true believer in Jesus has the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. But it's a different experience to have the Spirit come upon you. To fill you with His love and boldness - to mark you as His own - to place His seal on your spirit that you are truly a child of God.

The OT was full of passages predicting the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Thus in Luke 24:49 Jesus names this experience, "the promise of the Father."

And here again Paul uses similar terminology. He says, "*sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.*" Our Heavenly Father doesn't want us unsure of our relationship with Him. *He wants us to see ourselves as He sees us.* And to secure our confidence He seal us.

If you've never been baptized with the Holy Spirit it doesn't mean you're not saved. *It's not the seal that makes the deal.* It only authenticates what's already happened. Paul told us we were already saved when we "*heard the word of truth*" and "*trusted in Christ.*"

But if you want to get rid of the doubts - *know that you know.* And live in a way that world knows too... then you should ask for the impress of the Holy Spirit!

Today, we'll ask God to stamp us as His own!

And Paul makes one more wonderful statement about the gift of the Holy Spirit in verse 14, “who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

The Holy Spirit isn't just God's seal of ownership, He's also “*the guarantee of our inheritance.*”

I like how the OKJ puts it, He's “*the earnest of our inheritance.*” An even better alternative word would be “*downpayment*” or “*installment*” or “*earnest money.*”

Put a contract on a house-for-sale, and its owner will ask you for some *upfront money*. When you close the sale, the earnest becomes part of the purchase price. But you pay it in advance as a token of your intentions.

And this is God's intent in giving us the Holy Spirit.

He promises us Heaven - but we get the Spirit as *an upfront blessing - a downpayment* on our future inheritance. The Spirit is proof God's intent is legit.

When the kids were little, and Kathy was planning a late supper she'd give the kids what she called “*a T.O.*” It was short for “*tied-me-over.*” It was an advance nibble of what was cooking, and would be served up shortly. It was just enough to get them through the wait.

And this is how you should think of the Holy Spirit.

Fanny Crosby wrote one of my favorites hymns. It's called “*Blessed Assurance.*” There's a line that refers to the Holy Spirit... “*Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.*”

The Spirit is God's downpayment on our inheritance.

As we read earlier, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” Heaven is full of wonders, and amazements, and eternal delights.

But Paul writes in the next verse, 1 Corinthians 2:10, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.”

And the closest we can get to comprehending - *to a little taste of Heaven on Earth* - is the joy, peace, love, and power we receive with the Spirit. He is our *T.O.*

The Greek word translated “*guarantee*” is “*arrabon*.” It’s still used in modern Greek as “*engagement ring*.”

The Holy Spirit is the promise - the pledge - that Jesus gives His Bride that He’ll be back with all she’ll ever need. The Holy Spirit is **the absolute assurance** of the future inheritance we’ve been promised in Christ.

Recently, on **NPR, National Public Radio**, the program “**This American Life**” hosted a episode called “*The Devil Inside Me*.” Listeners were invited to call in and talk about “*the voice inside their head*.” Did they ever have problems managing unwanted thoughts?

The show’s host couldn’t believe the response.

He stated later, “**It was like people had been waiting all their lives for somebody to ask them this question.**”

One female caller said, “**The voice is totally out of control. It’s got this life of its own, and I can’t tame it.**”

Oftentimes, new Christians are tormented by this inner voice - it speaks doubts about our salvation.

It's a ploy of Satan to interject such thoughts, "You're not really saved? After all you've done how could God ever forgive the likes of you? Who are you kidding!"

Christians who struggle with assurance live in limbo between doubt and hope. A life of faith that's bombarded with uncertainty never gets off the ground.

One of the NPR callers was asked, "Do you feel like the voice is winning?" A woman replied, "Right now, yeah. I think I'm in serious trouble, to be honest."

How do you silence the voices in your head that want you to doubt God's grace and mercy - and love for you? How do you *know that you know* that you're a child of God?.. There're a number of steps to take...

Remember your salvation experience. Write down the date and time and stick the paper in your Bible...

Keep your eyes on Jesus and the price He paid.

Look up reassuring verses and put them to memory.

Hang with Christian friends that reinforce your faith.

Stop listening to feelings and learn to walk by faith.

But ultimately, the best way to gain **absolute assurance** of the redemption God has promised us is to ask God to *seal you* and *fill you* with the Holy Spirit!

This is the light that drives away the darkness.

The baptism of the Spirit is tangible evidence that you belong to Jesus. It drives away all doubts.

Nibble from time to time at God's glory and you'll look forward to what's on the horizon. Savor a foretaste of Heaven and you'll never doubt it exists. Real assurance is not impossible... *be sealed with the Spirit!*