

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 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.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Let's see your Lotto 6-49 Happy Dance. Or maybe you need Max, the Lotto Max dream coach to help you “bigify” your dreams when you win the Lotto Max grand prize. “Imagine”, says another lottery commercial, and we do imagine in some way, shape or form what it would be like to be so lucky, as to win more money in a single moment than we could earn in a lifetime.

We don't want to get caught up into the morality of buying lottery tickets this morning. (don't do it—it's a form of gambling, and that is not God's will for us). The lottery is all about chance, or what we more commonly think of as luck. Well, I don't believe in luck. There are no mysterious, mindless forces of good luck or bad luck in the universe. Many people think karma is the power behind good or bad, but karma isn't real—it doesn't exist. All things in heaven and earth are directed by the all-knowing, omnipotent and perfect will of God. Scripture declares: *The Lord of hosts has sworn: “As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand* (Isaiah 14:24 - ESV). That is why we have the confidence that Paul expresses when he reminds us: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* (Romans 8:28 - ESV)

We aren't lucky, but we are blessed in Christ. In fact, Paul says that God *has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*. Paul has a whole list of the blessings that God has so wondrously, so graciously bestowed upon us. He notes that *he chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him*. God knows all too well just how sinful, selfish, stubborn and how indifferent we are to His truth, yet He chose us as His own. Even though we deserve the consequences that sin brings—both the physical death of this world, and the eternal death of hell, God blesses us as He saves us. In the redemption that Christ has accomplished for us on the cross, God makes us blameless so that we can stand before Him. He lavishes us with the forgiveness we have in Christ. He gives us an inheritance that is ours in heaven. Chosen in Christ as God's beloved children, marked with the seal of grace that is given by the Holy Spirit in our Baptism and assured through His Word and the Lord's Supper, we have the blessed assurance that Christ, who died and rose for us, is the source of every good for us. He is our life and salvation. He is our guarantee of all that is to come. In the words of hymn writer Fanny Crosby, who was blind almost from birth, we can also say: *Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.* (Blessed Assurance, st. 1)

This assurance; this blessedness that is ours in not a matter of chance. It is ours through the gracious plan and purpose of God. It happens, Paul tells us, in accordance with *the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth*. Let's say it again: we are blessed in Christ. If you want a happy dance, dance in the assurance of God's love and mercy for you in Christ. If you want to “bigify” your dreams, realize that there is nothing greater than the boundless riches that are yours in Jesus Christ. Shout out your hallelujahs, because the Saviour of the World came to give Himself for you and for your salvation. Bow in humble repentance before His cross because you are a sinner—but jump for joy before His empty tomb, as you remember how blessed—how truly, wonderfully blessed you are—because of God's grace for you in Jesus Christ.

Lloyd Ogilvie served as the 61st chaplain of the US Senate. He was a noted speaker. At a luncheon in Darien, Connecticut, a woman stood up to introduce him. She said, “We have someone with us today who will change our lives. He will give us hope,

new self-esteem, and power to live a dynamic life.” Ogilvie was ready to crawl under the table, but she continued, “Meeting this person will be like having the rivers of your life stop and flow in another direction. You'll experience freedom, joy, and gusto in your life.” The woman paused, smiled, and said, “This person's name is Jesus Christ, and here is Lloyd Ogilvie to tell you about him.”

While that woman may have made Ogilvie squirm, what she said about Jesus Christ is true—what a difference He makes for those who trust in Him! Or do we need to say, “what a difference Christ *should make* in the lives of His people”? It often seems that we lose sight of what it means to be in Christ, covered with the forgiveness that only He can bring to our lives. Imagine that you received a letter from the attorney of a distant relative whom you have never met, and are told that you are the sole beneficiary of their estate—an estate which would make Warren Buffett jealous. What would that mean for you? Would it change your life? I'm sure it would. You wouldn't have any financial worries—unless you were wasteful and squandered all your newfound wealth. You would have the means to buy a new home or a new car. You could travel. You could do all the things those silly lottery commercials talk about. So why is it that this greatest of all treasures—this glorious life in Christ that is so freely given through the love and grace of our heavenly Father—so often seems to mean so little to us? Why do we seem so indifferent—or at the very least, rather reserved—about the life we have in Christ?

In another of his epistles, Paul writes: ***For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.*** (Philippians 1:21-22 - ESV) The life blessed by Christ is different. It is a dynamic life; a joyful life; a life of hope and peace, no matter what the circumstances. Jimmy Lai started as a street vendor in China, and, after fleeing to then-free Hong Kong, he became a billionaire. In Hong Kong he also became a Christian. Once Communist China took over Hong Kong, he began working with the pro-democracy movement. In retaliation, the Communists confiscated one of his businesses after another. He was subject to fire bombings, car attacks, and arrests. Recently, the pro-democracy newspaper he owned was shut down, his remaining assets were seized by the state, and he has been sent to prison. He is opposed to the Communist party because of his faith. Yet he says: "If you believe in the Lord, if you believe that all suffering has a reason, and the Lord is suffering with me, it will definitely define the person I am becoming so I am at peace with it." "I am what I am. I am what I believe. I cannot change it. And if I can't change it, I have to accept my fate with praise."

Jimmy Lai knows that the blessed life isn't about the things of this world. It is about the ***spiritual blessings*** we have in Christ. The life we have in Christ is the forgiven and free life. Sin no longer has sway over us when we walk in the Spirit. In Christ, we find how we can live as the people of God through faith. Yes, there are times when we falter. In those moments we fall back on the mercy of God, made known to us at the cross of Jesus. We find the forgiveness that raises us up and assures us that God is still our God; that He loves us and walks with us.

That forgiveness makes our life in Christ a meaningful life. Through God's Word, we see how clear and simple things truly are. Our relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ gives purpose to our lives.

In the verses after our text, Paul prays for Ephesians, asking ***that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,*** (Ephesians 1:17-20 - ESV) I pray that each and every member of our church family would have the eyes to see what we are in Christ. Oh, how I pray that each brother and sister in Christ would truly understand the joy and privilege of being chosen before the foundation of the world and blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. What a blessing it is to know the joy, the gusto, the freedom that is ours in Christ. Instead of having Christ as just one part of life, He is to be the centre, the focus, the heart of our life. And, alive in Christ we live to ***proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*** (1 Peter 2:9 - ESV)

You are richly blessed in Christ. He is your Lord, your Saviour, your Brother. He continues to rule over all things in heaven and on earth for your sake, and for the sake of His whole church. Now, knowing who you are and knowing all that Christ has done for you, let it be evident in the life you live. Don't settle for a Saviour hidden away in a drawer somewhere. Don't take your blessings and hide them under a bushel. Live as the people you are in Christ, and experience in Him the greater joy that each day in Him can bring! Amen.