

The God who Gives

[Announce Text] Please open your Bibles to Ephesians 1:11-14

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship. If you are joining us online for the first time, we are in a series through the book of Ephesians which was written by the Apostle Paul to instruct Christians in some fundamental and important truths of the Christian faith.

[Read Text] Please read Ephesians 1:11-14 with me...

[Prayer for Illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Have you ever seen something that changed you? Maybe you've seen something horrific, and you've never been able to look at the world the same since. Or maybe you've seen something beautiful and inspiring that changed how you live. What we see can change us.

A very profound example in all of world history is in the New Testament. The Apostle Thomas was told that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but like a good skeptic, he said that unless *he* saw the mark of the nails, and place his hands on the wounds of Jesus he would never believe. But only eight days after saying this, the Risen Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Thomas and told Him to look at the scars on His hand and to touch the very wounds He'd received. And Thomas' response was to give Jesus the glory He deserved. He answered Jesus by saying, "My Lord and my God!" And Thomas' life was never the same. Seeing changed everything for him. Thomas willingly gave his life spreading the gospel to the east of Judea, with church history stating that he was eventually killed with spears in India for the gospel. What he saw, changed him.

In many ways, in Ephesians 1, the Apostle Paul is doing the same things that Jesus says to Thomas- to see and respond. But we now see with they eyes of faith. And the Apostle is telling us where to look. He's telling us to look at these Words and the truths they contain. He's saying that when we see properly, we'll understand God better and change how we respond. For the sake of this sermon, I would summarize our text and all of Ephesians 1:3-14 with this:

[Proposition] When you truly see what God gives you, you'll give God the glory He deserves.

Are you seeing with the eyes of faith this morning? Or are you complaining all the time? Are you feeling depressed- like I have been lately? Are you full of doubt, like Thomas? Are you feeling hopeless because of some of those horrific sights from your past? Or maybe you're not a Christian or a new Christian and you just don't know what to do. It's time for us to look in the right place and see. And when you truly see what God gives you, you'll give God the glory He deserves. Today we'll look at the two sides of that statement- To see what God gives you- where we'll spend the vast majority of our time. We'll finish by giving God the glory He deserves.

Let's examine the first half of that statement

[Main Point 1] See what God gives you

In an effort to be clear and helpful, I want you to imagine yourself on a scenic drive as we try to see what God gives you. It's a windy road, and it's easy to miss important things. So Paul the author has placed some of those waist-high, informational roadside signs next to scenic viewpoints. And he's calling us to pull over, get out, read, and then see what God gives you. In this passage I think there are at least five scenic view markers we need to stop at. We'll go through them roughly in order

[Subpoint 1] Scenic View #1- See that God predestined you in the past

Since we've looked at this in past sermons, this will be a quick stop for us. But let's not drive past it. Look with me at v. 11

In him (Christ) 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...

This first scenic view marker is a historical view marker. Like saying that you are standing exactly where Lewis and Clark stood 200 years ago, this verse is telling us to imagine life in eternity past. There, before we did anything whatsoever to merit salvation, God, in His grace predestined to give us salvation! Will we stop and see it? If you are a Christian, God knew all the ways that you'd ignore Him

and sin against Him and betray Him, and break your promises to Him, yet God predestined you to be His son or daughter! Do you see it- or will you look away? If you need more help in this don't be afraid to put it in reverse and listen to previous weeks' sermons again.

We're seeking to see what God gives you and at stop #1 we see that God predestined you. Now let's move on down the beautiful highway and make our way to

[Subpoint 2] Scenic View #2- See that God gives you an inheritance

Look with me at v. 11

In him we have obtained an inheritance...

v. 14 speaks of this as well, but the sign here is saying that you've pulled up to the most beautiful piece of property you've ever seen. And the sign tells you that there's gold just an inch below the surface. It's God saying that as far as the eye can see- it all belongs to you. What is this inheritance? In light of how this language is used in the Old Testament, I think that this is probably talking primarily about God Himself and the New Heavens and the New Earth- our inheritance. The generous gift God the Father gives to those who share the name of Christ. A place where diseases and social distancing won't exist- you'll be the closest you've ever been to anyone- there will be no obstacles, physical or, more importantly, the spiritual obstacles will be brought down. Do you see the inheritance God has given you? It's better than stock in Amazon or having a rich uncle. Will you slow down, pull over, stop and spend some time looking at it? Or do you want to just focus on whatever is on your phone or coming through your car stereo?

Two stops so far, one where we saw that God predestined you in the past, a second where we see that God has given you an inheritance. But after getting back on the road we come to

[Subpoint 3] Scenic View #3- See that God gives you the gospel

Let's read v. 12 and most of v. 13

...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...

When we look at this scenic overlook we realize that this sign has sound! God has given to us the message of salvation- the gospel! Throughout the Bible, there is a recurring theme that false gods, idols- can't speak. Yet from the very beginning, the true and living God has been speaking. Notice how generous God is to give this to us- the gospel comes to us and it's the message of Jesus Christ coming to save sinners. God created us in love, but we have resisted Him at every turn. Yet God sent Jesus to live a sinless life for us- in perfect obedience. Then died on the cross as our substitute to remove the wrath of God, and He was raised from the dead three days later and seen by people who didn't expect to see Him- like the apostle Thomas. And this passage says that this gospel is what brings our salvation, just by believing- not by performing good deeds or being good looking or living a life of perfect decisions. Notice how generous God is to give us this gospel, this word of truth. V. 13 says that we heard it. We didn't go looking for it, we didn't have to go groping through the dark caverns or caves and feel our way to it. We simply heard it the most passive of all our senses. Someone came and spoke to us the gospel that God gave us, and we happened to be within hearing distance- all because God is so generous to give and give and give.

Do you believe today? Your parents' faith isn't enough- it has to be your own. If you don't believe, then the gospel- which means good news, isn't good news at all. It means pain and Hell are coming. All of the beautiful things that God gives to Christians do not apply to you. You don't get them. But if you believe, even for the first time today, stop and look at what you get! You get the message of salvation through Jesus Christ! You get the greatest news ever! You get the Son of God Himself because He gave Himself to save you! Will you see what God gives you?

Hopefully you're with me on this trip as we try to see what God gives you. We've stopped three times and seen that God predestined you in the past, that He's giving you an inheritance, and that He gives you the gospel. Now let's pull over and see this amazing sight...

[Subpoint 4] Scenic View #4- See that God has given you the Holy Spirit for the present

Let's read v. 13 again-

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,

At the time when you first believed in Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit came and dwelled in you. He came, gave you your first true spiritual sight, and you believed the gospel. And He has stayed with you ever since. And this verse says that you've been sealed with the Him- as was promised in the Old Testament. In the ancient world seals were placed on documents and possessions and other things. Being sealed represents that something is **authentic** and legitimate, the way many licenses have a seal of the state or country on them. Being sealed represents **ownership**- similar to the brands given to cattle- they show who they belong to. Being sealed means **protection**- similar to the sealing process on mason jars of canned goods- nothing can get in from outside and we are safe inside. So God has given you the Holy Spirit who has sealed you to show that you are authentic- every true, authentic Christian has the Holy Spirit and will be doing good works consistent with the fruit of the Spirit. God has given you the Holy Spirit who has sealed you now to show His ownership of you- you belong to Him. So He'll exercise special care for you. God has given you the Holy Spirit who has sealed you- to protect you from catastrophic spiritual attacks and from condemnation on the Day of Judgment.

[Illustration] When I was in high school I had a sort of life-altering experience when I tasted my first Krispy Kreme donut. I've always been a donut lover, but this was different. I literally dreamed about the waterfall of icing they pass under on the conveyor. Later, a friend was doing a fund raiser for a college club where he was selling Krispy Kreme cards. It worked like this: if you bought a dozen donuts, you would get a second free dozen original glazed donuts. I'm sure I was the easiest sell he ever met.

So periodically, I would have my parents drive me from Chewelah to Krispy Kreme where I would buy two dozen donuts. One dozen chocolate glazed and a dozen maple glazed- which they don't even make anymore. I'd come out with 48 donuts. They were all mine. I did not get these donuts to give away, I bought them for myself. So after storing them on the kitchen counter and noticing that a couple went missing, I realized I needed to store them somewhere safer. Henceforth, I

stored them in my closet on that big shelf over my clothes. When I realized that I couldn't eat the donuts fast enough before some went stale, I recognized that I had to give some away. But I wouldn't give away the best ones. I'd save the best ones and give away the ones I didn't want. My heart was selfish. There was icing not only on the donuts but around my heart. I was possessed by pastries. These donuts became like demons and could have been called "Legion" for they were many. It meant that I kept the best for myself and gave away what I considered mediocre. It was a sort of begrudging generosity. I only gave donuts away based on limitations thrust on me by stomach capacity and food preservation.

[Application] If I weren't a Christian, I would think that God would be like my high school self- the donut hoarder. I would think that the Christian God is cheap. He's only willing to pay the entrance fee to Heaven for one group of people and refuses to share with others. But that would be because I wouldn't truly be seeing God as He is. God not only generously opens the doors of Heaven to all who will come to Him, He gives far more. Do you see what God gives you? God gives you His very best. God gives you...God. And He's done it twice! He gave you His eternal, precious Son of infinite value to save you. But He has also given you His Holy Spirit. And it's not just a little bit of the Holy Spirit, He's given Him to you completely! You have all of Him! He's not keeping His best hidden away on a shelf out of sight! The Father has given you Jesus even if it meant the agony of the cross. Together, the Father and the Son have sent the Holy Spirit to be with you!

Hopefully, as we get nearer our destination, God is growing. Perhaps like standing at the foot of a mountain that was once small and far away in the distance. The Apostle Paul continues to pull the car to the side of the road for so that you see what God gives you. He's shown that God has given us an inheritance and He's given us the gospel, He showed first that He's predestined you in the past, and given you the Holy Spirit for the present. One final stop will help pull all of history together

[Subpoint 5] Scenic Viewpoint #5- See that God's gift of the Holy Spirit guarantees our future

Look with me at v. 14- referring to the Holy Spirit

...who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

We can really ruin our present experience by worrying about the future- what's coming down the road. But the Holy Spirit guarantees our future. When someone is buying a home with the help of a loan, the lender requires that they make a down payment. The down payment is proof that they will continue to make their payments all the way to the end when the house is completely paid off. That's what that word translated "guarantee" means. It is used elsewhere in Greek to refer to a down payment. The Holy Spirit is the big massive upfront chunk of the inheritance that's coming to us in the future. If we've got the Holy Spirit, then we'll get everything else! It's a sure thing. God has given you Himself! He's not going to withhold other important but less valuable things like eternal life, Heaven, and His undying love.

[Application] If you're like me, frankly, there are times when we don't really feel like we've got the Holy Spirit. But let me give all you true believers a verse that's encouraging to me when I don't "feel" the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:3- Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

If you can really say that Jesus is Lord. Which means that you are imperfectly but consistently relying on Him to provide for you in body and soul. And you are seeking to bow to His rightful role as your Master- the Apostle Paul wants you to know that that is not possible without the Holy Spirit. And God didn't just give you a bit of His Spirit- He gave all of Him to you. And by seeing what God gives you, you'll stir the Spirit up in you to do even more.

Will you stop and see what God has given you? Will you look out the window or will you stare down at your phone? Will you pull over and get out or will you just turn up the radio of the world to distract yourself? Let's slow down, take a look around, and see what God gives us!

I summarized this passage with this one statement: **When you see what God gives you, you'll give God the glory He deserves.** Well, we've done the first half by seeing what God has given to you. Now notice that

[Main Point 2] You'll give God the glory He deserves.

Notice now verse 12 talking about our salvation

...so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

And the end of v. 14 when talking about the gift of the Holy Spirit

...to the praise of his glory.

God gives and gives and gives. He is constantly giving to you. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7 that everything that we have we've received from God who has given it to us. God deserves the credit. The reason why I've spent most of this morning talking about what God gives to us, is so that we'll see who God truly is. The more we see His generosity, the more we see how sovereign and powerful He is to rule all things, how wise He is to send His Son to come and save us. How He doesn't just let us sneak into the entryway through a cracked door but that He opens up His vault to give us a massive inheritance. How He has given us the Holy Spirit to make us like Him and keep us on the road to our inheritance. These are all things that God has given to us! They all come to us because He's a gracious God. And here's the thing-

Grace reveals glory.

If we had to work for these things, then we'd have reason to steal some glory. But when we see that God gives these things to us- then we have to give the glory to whom it's due to God.

[Application] Around 15 years ago I asked this question, "How do we glorify God?" I really didn't know how to answer. One catechism-type answer is that we must love Him and keep His commandments. And I don't disagree. But now, I think I would answer this way: Stare at God. Slow down. Pull over. Get out of your car. Ignore what everyone else is doing. And take a really long hard look at Him. Behold Him. You celebrate great paintings and architecture by staring at them. Great music by listening to it. We celebrate God in exactly the same way- we stare at Him and listen to Him through the Bible, especially as He reveals Himself at the cross. When we do He will get bigger and bigger and bigger. And more and more beautiful. And our hearts will grow and well up like Paul's does here rejoicing in the fact that everything about God deserves to be praised and every gift He gives reveals Who He is. And, therefore, we will respond with praise and give the glory to Him.

This takes time. And listen to me- you have the time to do this. If you wanted to take a half hour or an hour or two hours beholding God by staring at His Word, and then praying it back to Him. And spending some of that time marveling at His creation- even if it's just a potted plant in your room or the detail of the woodgrain on a chair- you've got it. We need to see it.

[Conclusion] Think about the way most of life works. It's often a form of manipulation to get gifts, even if we don't realize we're doing it. Relationships- if you do good works like making yourself beautiful or attractive in some way, then you might meet a person who will give you gifts of affection, or fancy dates, or a meaningful marriage. Jobs- if you do lots of good work then maybe you'll meet a person like the boss or CEO and he will reward you with gifts like promotions in status, or pay raises. Other religions say the same thing, do lots of good works to get to a person like God or many gods, and then you will be rewarded with a gift like Nirvana or virgins in Heaven. **Our lives tend to operate in this pattern- we use our works to get to a person and we use that person to get to gifts. Works-Person-Gifts.** But this passage flips the whole works-person-gifts order on its head. Instead, we're given gifts right up front- being predestined to an eternal inheritance, receiving an inheritance, and more, so that we pay attention to the person who is giving them to us. In fact, we get both the gifts and Person right up front- we get Jesus and the Holy Spirit! And then, when we already have everything we could ever ask for- gifts beyond our wildest dreams and a Person who loves and accepts us for His own sake rather than our performance when we see Him- then we do works by giving Him the glory He deserves. We just need to see who God is and what He gives us.