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Sermon Series: *Now, Wait Just a Minute, No. 4*

All We Need

May 15, 2022

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 (NIV)

I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way – with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge – ⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

We're in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church this morning – 1 Corinthians, Chapter 1, if you'd turn back there with me.

Last week, we talked about how the whole world, including we who follow Jesus – all creation – is now in these days, *waiting* for the many tremendous things that will happen when Jesus returns. Not only are followers of Jesus waiting for this, but even nature itself is waiting, often in suffering, but always in confidence and hope, for Jesus' return.

We're waiting for the redemption – the full restoration – that Jesus' return will bring.

So, last week, we talked about the *great things to come*.

This week, though, I'd like us to consider the great things *that are already here* – things that we don't have to wait for, according to the Apostle Paul: the blessings we already have, what we already understand, what we already know, what God has already given to us.

Now, we're still waiting for the completion. Paul says right away there in verse 7: Christ followers, His church, all nature is waiting eagerly for Jesus to return. And, again, we look forward to all the benefits and blessings that come with that.

But, even as we wait, we should realize, Paul says, that we already enjoy many, many remarkable blessings from God.

There in verse 5, Paul says we have already been *"enriched in every way."* The tense of the word he uses there means it's already happened. God's people already possess great spiritual wealth.

If you're a follower of Christ here this morning, do you feel spiritually wealthy? Paul says we should. Let's take a look at why we should.

As you probably know, most people in the apostle Paul's day would begin their letters with some form of greeting, more than we typically do today.

Today we might say, "Dear whoever."

In e-mails and texts, we don't even do that.

But in Paul's day, letters almost always opened with some sort of introductory remarks, greetings or kind words, before getting to the gist of the letter – its purpose.

Paul, here, as he usually does opens with some word of thanksgiving, and as is also usually the case, the way Paul writes his greetings gives an indication of the main purposes of the rest of the letter.

Usually, if you read Paul's introductory comments, you'll know the direction the letter is heading. That is true here, *although* what's interesting about this letter to the Corinthians is that the things Paul expresses gratitude for in the introduction wind up being the very things that the Corinthian believers are struggling with, according to the rest of the letter.

For example, Paul's first point of thankfulness is for the grace of God. You see that right away in verse 4 there, Paul writes, *"I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus."* *Charis* is the Greek term there that means "undeserved kindness."

So, Paul is thankful to God for the grace – this undeserved grace of salvation that God has given to the Corinthian Christians.

As the letter unfolds, however, we discover that the Corinthian believers, or at least a group of them, were not themselves being in any way gracious to one another. God had shown grace to them, but they were not passing that grace – that undeserved kindness – along to others, and especially not to other Christ-followers.

That's a problem, you see? A serious spiritual problem, which Paul very clearly points out.

"To whom much has been given, much is required."

That's a basic Christian principle, according to Jesus, that the Corinthian believers were simply not practicing.¹

A second thing Paul mentions right away for which he is grateful is the fact that God, in His grace, has given the Corinthian believers tremendous spiritual gifts: gracious gifts – *charisma* (again, the Greek term).

These are special abilities freely given by the Holy Spirit to Christ-followers for the good of, and for use in, the Church – the Christian community. Paul writes there in verse 5 that God had given them, *"all kinds of speech and knowledge,"* and then, on down in verse 7, Paul says that they – the believers there – do not lack *"any spiritual gift."*

And Paul is thankful to God for this – he expresses thanks that God has poured out these extraordinary, undeserved abilities and blessings on his Corinthian brothers and sisters.

And yet, what we find as we read the rest of this letter is that those very divinely gifted persons were actually using those very gifts to *judge* and even *abuse* others within the church – their own Christian family. They were belittling those among them that did not share their certain ability. They were exalting themselves,

¹ Luke 12:48

demanding the respect of others, and claiming special authority over others due to their possession of these abilities.

So, can you see why Paul was upset?

God freely gives an undeserving person a valuable gift to be used specifically for the benefit and good of others, and then the person who receives that gift turns around and uses it to harm and diminish the very people they were supposed to bless with it.

Paul was upset by this because he knew how behavior like that upsets God.

The third thing Paul is thankful for is how God had called those Corinthian believers into divine fellowship, as it says there in verse 9: the faithful God, *“who has called you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Now, the word “fellowship” gets batted around a lot in Christian circles.

But what does it really mean?

Here’s what it means: God has taken people who were no one special, with nothing remarkable to offer, with no special abilities and no special lineage, you see, and not only has He shown them grace by welcoming them to Himself, not only has He graciously given them divine gifts and abilities that they would never have apart from Him, but even beyond these things God has also given them a family—a name, and *not* just *any* family or name, but *His very own!*

God’s own name—God’s own family.

Koinonia is the Greek word here, and “fellowship” is about the best translation we can offer.

It’s an intimate, deep, familial connection, remarkably with Jesus Himself, and with all who follow Him.

This is the third thing for which Paul is thankful: this remarkable, divine provision that God has made for these believers there at Corinth to be *part of His very family.*

And again, not some distant, limited, partial connection.

God offers *full* connection, as close as possible.

In other places Paul uses the word, “adoption.”² That’s what God is offering: a full connection with the God who made all things—and with Jesus, the perfect savior and sacrifice for sin.

So, it’s no wonder that Paul is thankful for this, you see?

God has given these random people—spiritual orphans—true fellowship; He’s given them a name, a family, and a tremendous inheritance.

And yet, these very ones, even while they are enjoying this gracious gift of intimate connection and completely undeserved inclusion in God’s own family—even while they are enjoying this tremendous, undeserved blessing—are working as hard as they can to push away from their fellowship those whom they deem less than they are: less important, less blessed, less gifted, less able, less insightful.

They are marginalizing others, looking down upon others and judging others—other people whom God Himself has adopted, just as He has adopted them.

It’s rather breathtaking, really, what was going on there in Corinth.

These undeserving yet tremendously blessed and gifted people were using God’s gifts and blessings to accomplish exactly the opposite of their intended purposes.

What is that like? To what might we liken that?

They were using a crutch, given to them to help others, to beat others instead.

They were using insight and knowledge, not to enlighten others but to insult and belittle and critique and judge others.

They were using strengths intended to lift the burdens of others to, instead, squash and crush others.

That’s why Paul writes this letter: there was a group of believers at Corinth who were abusing the much that had been given to them.

But, that doesn’t change the fact that much had been given to them, you see?

Just as much has been given to us and to all who follow Jesus today. We have all of these same blessings as those in Corinth did all those years ago—the grace, the gifts, the family.

The question is, do we realize all that God has given us?

Even as we wait for Jesus’ return, do we realize *all that we already possess* in Him?

You know, there are so many things going on in our world today that could suggest that things are rather hopeless.

The stock market is down, drug use of all kinds is up, excitement for the future is down, gas prices are up, people won’t work, morality is abysmal, government is largely inept, there are wars of all sorts, racial tensions, violence, people are hurting.

It goes on and on.

And whether or not we’re consciously aware of it, all this does have tremendous potential to affect how we behave—our perspectives. How we look at life. How we think about the future. How we think about today.

A couple days ago, I saw one news article that said more and more people are tossing out even life-long habits of caution and morality and frugality. They’re giving up on saving anything for the future because they don’t believe that much of a future is even going to exist.

But you know, that’s not right.

A future does, very much, exist.

Contrary to what, it seems more and more people are choosing to believe, time does not just wander in circles.

Time—history—is moving in a direction ordained of God, and those Corinthian Christians had—just as we Wilmonian Christians have—an important part to play in God’s future.

Some say, “Well I’m just a little, powerless individual. I can’t affect the big, important things of our world.”

But you know, God says, “Oh yes you can.”

² Galatians 4:5; Romans 8:14, 23; Romans 9:4; Ephesians 1:5

Because of the grace God has shown us, because of the spiritual gifts God has given us, and because of the family of which God has made us a part, you and I are equipped—you and I have been “*enriched in every way;*” you and I and every Christ-follower have all we need to be pleasing to God today and to work in ways that affect our world’s future.

Because of all these things for which Paul is thankful, you and I and all Christ-followers have all we need to do our part in bringing God’s plans for this world to completion.

There is no need to wait for some distant day to pass to really begin serving and pleasing and doing important work for God.

But so many don’t seem to get that.

We’ve said them since we were little kids: the words that launch us into a game or a race or a contest of some kind, “Get ready, get set, go!”

But there are so many Christians today who “get ready” and “get set,” and then they “get ready” and “get set” again and again and again, and they never get to “go!”

There are so many who get to “ready,” and then to “aim,” but they never seem to get to “fire!”

Why? Because they feel they still lack something: maybe some training, maybe some ability, the time, the money—maybe it’s really the courage.

And yet God says, “In what I have already given you—in my *grace*, my *gifts* and my *family*, you are already “enriched in every way.” In my grace, my gifts and my family, you have all you need to be part of my world-redeeming plans.”

Are we aware of this? Are we aware of all that God has given us?

That’s the first question.

The second question, then, is, “How are we using these blessings—this enrichment of God?”

Are we using—are we employing—God’s grace, God’s gifts and God’s family in the way He designed, or are we using them for our own gain and to diminish others, as the Corinthians were?

In failing to use them, or in using them inappropriately, you see, we are wasting God’s blessings at best, and at worst, we are risking the judgment of God on ourselves.

That’s why Paul wrote this letter.

Those Corinthian believers needed to see, just as we need to see, how important it is to receive and use correctly God’s gracious gifts. We need to understand how much depends on our right use of what God has already given His people.

You see, this stuff about God’s grace and gifts and family, the stuff Paul was so grateful for, it’s all much bigger than we often realize. The reality and ramifications of who we are and what we do are far larger than we tend to think.

You see, just as our brothers and sisters at Corinth were in their day, all who follow Jesus today—you and I—are people called by God to participate in a world-wide

movement to extend the destiny of God’s rule by living as a covenant people set apart for service to Him.

Did you catch that? Let me say it again:

Followers of Jesus—you and I: we are people called by God to participate in a world-wide movement to extend the destiny of God’s rule by living as a covenant people set apart for service to Him.

You see, followers of Jesus, we’re no longer simply individual entities who get to choose on our own terms what we want to do.

We are part of something far larger than that.

And a time is coming when all of God’s plans and purposes will come to pass in their fullness.

But in that process, even now, God has given us—lavished upon us, really—grace and gifts and connections for specific work that He wants us to do.

We don’t deserve any of it, but He’s given these things to us anyway that we might be useful to Him in accomplishing His purposes for our world.

He’s given us access to Him.

He’s given us divine tools and abilities.

He’s given us a family—a team—made up of Himself and all others who know and love Him so that we can be the important players God intends us to be in His grand plans for our world.

We’re not dealing just in things that are important to us or our families or our towns or even our nations for today and maybe tomorrow.

No, followers of Jesus are actors in a creation-wide, eternal, cosmic drama that results in the final triumph of God’s righteousness and rule in the Kingdom of His Son, Jesus.

The stakes of who we are and what we do are far higher than we tend to think. And so, what we do with who we are and all that God has given us (the grace we enjoy, the gifts we have, and the body to which we belong), what we do with all those is critical, you see?

How we use all that God has given us matters urgently, because it’s all a part of God’s strategy for the renewal of His world.

How much farther along would God’s redemptive purposes be if the Corinthian believers would have used God’s blessings as God intended for them to be used, instead of abusing them as they did?

Let’s not let some future generation ask that question of us.

Are you aware of all that God has given us? The grace? The gifts? The family?

He’s given us all we need to live in obedience to Him and to affect the world for Him.

Are you using these blessings of God as He intends them to be used?

Don’t say, “I’ll do it tomorrow.”

Don’t say, “I’ll do it when I get older.”

Don’t say, “I’ll do it when I have a job, when I have money, when I have time.”

There is no reason to wait—to delay.

There’s no reason to stop at “get ready—get set.”

We have all we need to “go!”

God has given *grace, gifts* and *connections*—a *team*, a *family*—so His people can accomplish His purposes.

What part is He asking you to play in His story?

Please, God is not like a boss who tells us to do something but then doesn't give us the equipment we need to do it.

He has enriched us in every way.

Let's get serious about doing what He asks. Let's take up our place in His grand plan and begin, today, moving His agenda ahead. He's waiting for you to do that. He's waiting for us to do that.

Prayer:

Father, You know very well that there is an enemy in the world that would like nothing more than to convince us that we are just not able, that we don't have what it takes to do what You are calling us to do. And yet, we see right here in Your word that You have given us grace. You have given us gifts, and you have given us the connections, the family, the team with which to work. You've given us all we need, enriched us in every way.

Jesus, would You convince us today? Would You help us to see the urgency of the matter and the importance of taking up our roll in what You want to do in this world?

Lord, thank You. We thank you just as the Apostle Paul thanked You for these gifts. Help us to use them for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Closing Song: *Wherever He Leads, I'll Go*

Benediction:

There's something about confessing. When you hear God speaking to you, and He says, "I want you to do this, or I want you to use this gift—look, I've gifted you for

this, or I want you to do this or that or the other," it's very easy to hear His voice, still and small, and then just sort of walk away.

However, it's a different thing if you confess it to somebody else. If you say to somebody that you trust, "I have heard God say this to me. I don't know exactly what it all means, but I want you to know. And I want to ask you to pray for me for this, and help me understand."

Have them hold you accountable. There's something in that that keeps God and His message alive in our minds. And then, that person will come back to you and say, "So, what have you been hearing?"

There's a good kind of divine pressure that comes from confessing what you know God is asking of you. So, if you hear God's voice today, asking you to "get serious, would you, about this gift I have given you." Or, "I've given you all of this grace. Why are you not being gracious to others?" Or, "Engage with the family that I have blessed you with—the Christian family. They are here for you, and they need you and you need them."

Whatever He is saying about that kind of stuff, tell somebody else. If He is saying something to you, tell somebody you trust.

May God's Word and God's Spirit deeply convince every one of us of the truth of Paul's words here: that we are blessed. We have been given all we need to accomplish God's purposes, so that neither fear, nor intimidation, nor weakness, nor anything else would keep us from taking up the role God has for us to play in bringing to completion His righteousness and His rule—so that His Kingdom comes and His will is done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Thanks for coming to worship today. The Lord bless you and keep you.