

Sunday, May 19, 2024

Blessed Be The God And Father Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

This is the second in a series of sermons through the book of Ephesians. After Paul's introductory words in chapter 1 verses 1-2, he immediately jumps into a rapturous, lofty praise of God in verses 3-14, blessing Him for His sovereign, Trinitarian plan of redemption, spanning eternity past to eternity future. As we go through it, it's easy to lose yourself in the majestic language, but it's important to slow down and look at it carefully. I can't do it justice in one sermon, but I hope to at least hit some main points. The underlying Greek consists of 200+ words and is one continuous sentence (the longest one in any of Paul's epistles). You can almost see Paul feverishly, breathlessly writing, laying down a string of glorious phrases, all interrelated. Indeed, some commentators note that this wasn't necessarily meant to be a giant "sentence" but rather was intended to be read aloud, with one punchy truth after another, and the repeated refrain that God's plan of redemption is all to the praise of His glory. Now, let's read through the passage and then try to dissect it a little bit, with the understanding that many of the topics raised in this blessing will come up later in the book of Ephesians, so Lord willing, I might be able to flesh some of it out further in the future:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Beloved, this may be the greatest treatise on the sovereignty of God in the matter of salvation and redemption that we find in the entire Bible. And it is this topic that elicits such praise from Paul. He jumps into it immediately, without apology. Just look at the stark contrast between that and the phony “Christians” that fill this world. They want to start with themselves, and their perceived “free will.” They not only don’t praise God for it, but they enter a state of apoplexy and bring down the most virulent hatred, calumnies, blasphemies, and accusations against God and any of His loved ones who would hold to these doctrines. I’ve heard phonies refer to God as a “divine rapist” for saving people without first getting their consent. They become enraged at the very thought that God would graciously choose people to redeem, and that their “free will” wouldn’t be included in the discussion. They suck out every drop of comfort, hope, assurance and grace that this passage provides by saying that it’s not actually to the praise of the glory of His grace, but it’s to the praise of the glory of my fickle will. “My glory will I not give to another” (Isaiah 42:8). I mentioned last time that these doctrines in this passage are prime targets for Satan and his false preachers. They love to pervert them. They love to take the glory of God and give it to man. Knowing that wolves were going to come attack the sheep in Ephesus, I believe this is why Paul hit the ground running praising God for these things. It was for their comfort and their protection.

In this passage, we’re talking about an eternal, guaranteed plan. The whole purpose of creation and human history is centered around Christ and His church – God **will** redeem a people for Himself to be His children, and all things **will** be gathered together in one in Christ. Such a doctrine should keep us safely moored in the midst of life’s upheavals and vicissitudes on the one hand and the daily humdrum of life on the other hand. We are part of God’s plan. We are living the plan right now. What’s happening right now is necessary to bring the plan to fruition. The redemption of the church is not a peripheral matter – it is of utmost concern to God and His plan.

Each person of the Trinity is highlighted in this passage, with the common thread being the Lord Jesus Christ. You’ll see that He is the centerpiece. “In Christ” or some phrase like that appears over 10 times. There are no spiritual blessings outside of Christ. There is no redemption outside of Christ. The mediation of the Son is absolutely essential. All the doctrines in this passage (election, predestination, adoption, etc.) are precious and beautiful, but if they are considered outside of Christ, they are worthless. In fact, they aren’t just worthless, they are positively dangerous because you’ll start to think that if you can recite the details about some disembodied doctrine that means you’re saved. No! These things are found only in Christ. It’s when you start to marginalize Christ that you get into trouble and become involved in a “Christless Christianity” where you start chasing new doctrines and trusting in your own understanding, standards and good works. Moving on, let’s consider the blessings in Christ that Paul lays out in this glorious passage.

All Spiritual Blessings

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: (Ephesians 1:3)

Paul begins by ascribing blessings and praise to God. There are two reasons here: 1) because of who He is; and 2) because He has blessed us. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is covenant language. Like the God of Abraham. The God of Israel. The Lord thy God. Jesus said, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John 20:17). He is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His capacity as mediator. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His capacity as the divine Son of God. I say, this is covenant language. Paul is praising God because of the everlasting covenant of redemption, entered into in eternity past between the three members of the Godhead. God the Father would choose whom to redeem. God the Son would redeem us. God the Holy Spirit would apply the redemption. Here, Jesus is called OUR Lord Jesus Christ. This is the language of personal relationship. The body is related to the Head. He is ours. He's not just some generic Lord. He's not just somebody else's Lord. He's ours!

God the Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. We have the whole Trinity being represented here. The spiritual blessings are blessings that come through the Holy Spirit - that's what makes them spiritual. They are heavenly, because they originated in heaven, they are designed to lead us to heaven, and they will end with us being in heaven. Even now, we are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) and strangers, sojourners and pilgrims on earth (1 Peter 1:17, 2:11), our treasure is in heaven (Matthew 6:20-21), our affections are in heaven (Colossians 3:1-2), our hope is in heaven (Colossians 1:5), our inheritance is reserved in heaven (1 Peter 1:4), the risen Savior is in heaven (Ephesians 1:20), and insofar as we are united to Him, we are there in a sense and dwell in that realm with Him (Ephesians 2:6). Don't skip over the "in Christ" at the end of the verse. These blessings that Paul fleshes out in verses 4-14 simply don't exist for us unless we are in union with Him.

Election

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (Ephesians 1:4)

The first spiritual blessing of God is that He has chosen us in Him (that is, in Christ) before the foundation of the world. This is the doctrine of election. This is the fountainhead from which all the other blessings flow. Only the elect are adopted, redeemed, forgiven, have the mystery of His will revealed to them, believe the gospel, and are sealed by the Holy Ghost. "Choosing," by definition, means that He selects some out of a group – He doesn't choose everyone. And "choosing" includes the fact that He chose us for Himself – He didn't just make a choice and

then walk away. We're chosen in Christ, not in ourselves. Christ was involved from the very beginning. There is no election without being joined to Christ. The timing of this choice was before the foundation of the world, meaning that the choice was made before you even existed. You didn't contribute to it. You didn't ask for it. You didn't merit it.

One of the keys to understanding election is to understand that it is intended to produce a result. The result is that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. To be "holy" is to be sanctified (set apart) and morally pure – the same word is often translated as "saint." To be "without blame" is to be without fault, or without blemish. Now, if we are made to be "holy and without blame," isn't it self-evident that we started off unholy and blameworthy? "Holy and without blame" includes two things. First, it refers to us living sanctified lives – not sinless lives, but lives where we become more and more conformed to Christ. Second, it refers to our position in the sight of God. This same phrase is used later in the book to describe the church as "holy and without blemish" when we are presented to Christ (5:27). In other words, when God sees us, He sees people who are holy and without blame. Why? Because we're in Christ, and Christ is holy and without blame! Remember that we were chosen in Christ. We are not chosen to be holy and without blame in a vacuum, but to be so "before God," meaning "in the presence of God." He wants a people who are characterized by being holy and without blame so that we might stand in His presence. He chose us with that end in sight. Remember this: if you have reason to believe that you are one of the elect of God, you have been chosen not so you can sin, but to be holy and without blame. Those people who lie about election and say "if God elected you, then you can live however you want and you'll go to heaven anyway" don't know the first thing about what the Bible actually teaches about election. Finally, all of this is "in love." It could either refer to God's love (He chose us because He loved us), or it could refer to our love (we are characterized by love for God and love for one another). I think the latter is more likely.

Adoption

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, (Ephesians 1:5-6a)

Now, looking at another facet of this jewel of blessings, He predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself. "Predestination" means to set the bounds of something before it happens – to predetermine. It comes from two Greek words – *pro* (which means "before") and *horizo* (which means "to mark out the boundaries or limits of, determine, appoint, ordain, or decree"). You might notice that we get our English word "horizon" from that Greek word, because it marks the boundary between the earth and the sky. That same word was used in the ancient world to identify property markers – those things that identify the boundaries of a person's property. The image here is that God has marked out His people,

placing boundaries around them to identify them as His own possession, and, as if that isn't glorious enough, appointing them to be His own children.

In adoption, a person moves from one family into another family. We are no longer bound to the old family. We get a new name, a new standing, new relationships, new inheritance. All the rights, responsibilities, privileges and blessings that are associated with being children in the new family are now ours. We used to be in Adam's family, and now we've been adopted into the family of God, and our new Father happens to be a King which makes us royalty. And it is by Jesus Christ that we are adopted. It is by His work and by our being incorporated into Him that we are adopted. We can call God "Abba, Father" because Christ does (this is the close, personal term that one would use for a beloved father). We are heirs because Christ is. We are sons because Christ is. Our translation says "adoption of children" but the original language is actually "adoption of sons." I think that's an important distinction because it draws attention to the fact that it is through the Son that we are adopted – whether we are male or female, we are sharing in His divine sonship. He has brought us in so that we might share in the same relationship that Christ and His Father have had from eternity.

Understand that adoption is a legal transaction, but this is not some sterile, arid legal transaction. He adopts us "to Himself." He wants us to be His children. He says that He does this not just "according to His will" but "according to the **good pleasure** of His will." Adopting us as His children gives Him great delight. What other reason do we need? He chose to do it because it made Him happy. So, I repeat, this is not some cold, impersonal transaction on God's part – this is so He might have a redeemed people in whom He can take great delight and pleasure. One of the ends of election and predestination is relational – that is, God will have us as His children for eternity. We don't go to heaven as disassociated orphans – we go there as children of the King, and we will have sweet communion with Him.

All this (election, predestination, adoption) is to the praise of His glorious grace, and should result in gratitude and praise. One way to know if you're a true Christian is, do these doctrines cause you to praise God for His grace? Or are they boring to you? Do they make you angry? Are they just an intellectual stimulant for you? Are they just a debate topic so you can show everyone how smart you are? If you don't delight in the plan of the Father and praise Him for His grace, you really have no business calling yourself a child of God.

Making Us Accepted In The Beloved

wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (Ephesians 1:6b)

It's this grace "wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." This just keeps getting better and better. I don't believe that the translation of "accepted" is nearly strong enough.

It's the same word as when Gabriel called Mary "highly favoured." (Luke 1:28). The underlying word is the same as "grace" – it means that He begraced us with His grace. He did that in the Beloved – in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, we are of great value to the Father. This term "Beloved" is very significant. It is what God the Father called Him at His baptism and transfiguration – "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This love of the Father for the Son is particularly revealed in the context of His willingness to identify Himself with His people and go to the cross for them – "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." (John 10:17). You can't understand the love of God for us unless you get your head around this. The Father sent His Beloved – the One whom He had loved for all eternity. This mutual love between the Father and the Son, we can't even begin to comprehend. But it is this Son whom the Father sent (John 3:16), it is this Son whom the Father did not spare (Romans 8:32), it is this Son whom He made to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), it is this eternally Beloved one whom the Father watched as this vile world perpetrated our crimes against Him. If you don't understand who it is who suffered for us, you won't understand His love. And it is only because the Savior is Beloved that we are beloved, since He has made us accepted (well favored, graced) in the Beloved, and only in the Beloved.

Redemption

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; (Ephesians 1:7)

Jon has recently done an extensive series of sermons on the redemption of Christ, so I would point everyone to those. But it's impossible to speak of the redemption of Christ too often, so I'll say a few things here, in no particular order:

- Redemption means that we were delivered or freed from something by the payment of a ransom. In this case, the ransom price was the blood of Christ.
- The "blood" refers not only to His death, but also to all the OT sacrifices that He fulfilled. It points to the fact that He was a substitute for us.
- Redemption presupposes that you were in bondage and needed to be redeemed. And in fact, we all were once in bondage to sin, Satan, the law.
- The obstacle between us and being adopted as His children was our sin. Redemption is the solution to that problem. It is the means through which God made us His people. It is the plan that God devised to save us.
- The ones who are redeemed are the same ones who were previously said to be chosen and predestinated to adoption. Not everybody.
- "We have redemption" is in the present tense. This is a blessing that we have now.
- Redemption is not cheap. It required the blood of the Savior and was a bountiful expenditure of His grace. You measure the value of something by the price paid for it. But it is free to us. We can't earn it or pay for it.

- Redemption shows how seriously that God takes sin. Forgiveness is no easy thing. It required the death of His Beloved.
- Redemption includes the forgiveness of sins, but it is more than that.
- God doesn't just forgive people because He's compassionate or loving or merciful – redemption is His way of forgiving. Redemption is required to be forgiven.
- A Christian is one who is redeemed by the blood of Christ. If you define your Christianity by whether or not you do this or that thing, or avoid this or that thing, you're on the wrong road. It's time to reevaluate things and go to the beginning of the right road.
- Redemption and forgiveness are "according to" the riches of His grace (i.e., liberally), not just "out of" the riches of His grace (i.e., begrudgingly). They are given fully and completely. If you say, "I'm not worthy enough to be redeemed," while that may be a true statement, you're only confessing your ignorance about the riches of His grace and His plan of salvation.

Making Known The Mystery Of His Will

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: (Eph. 1:8-10)

Just as He exhibited the riches of his grace in redeeming us and forgiving our sins, He has abounded toward us with that same grace in wisdom and prudence. He has lavished His grace on us. The idea is overflowing grace. His grace isn't some sideshow that peeks out every once in awhile – it is essential to the character of God and how He operates. Wisdom generally means having knowledge and understanding, and prudence generally means having the insight to know how to act. In the text, "wisdom and prudence" could either refer to God's wisdom and prudence in graciously devising and executing and revealing His plan of redemption. Or, it could be read to be gifts that God has given to us so that we might be able to understand it, love Him for it, and behave accordingly.

In this passage, the way that His grace has abounded is in making known to us the mystery of His will. "Mystery" does not mean something that is incomprehensible. Nor does it mean a riddle that we must solve by going around like detectives to uncover clues. Rather, it means something that was previously fully or partially hidden, and now God has revealed it. It is something that we couldn't possibly know unless God revealed it to us. It is the Father letting His children in on His plans. God has revealed to the church what His ultimate purpose is for all history. And He has made this known according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself (that is, purposed in Christ). God has taken great pleasure in laying out His plan, both in adopting us (v. 5) and in making the mystery known to us (v. 9). And Christ was not only an

active participant in making the plan, but He is the central figure in the plan – it was purposed (determined, intentioned) in Him.

So, what is this mystery? It is defined in v. 10. “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” Redemption is much bigger than just you having your sins forgiven. It is cosmic in its scope. It is so grand, so glorious, so sweeping, that it encompasses way more than an individual’s salvation. “Dispensation” refers to the administration or management of an economy, a plan, a scheme. In fact, it is where we get our English word “economy.” It is related to the word “oikos” which means “household” and can mean “the administration of a household.” The phrase “fulness of times” means when all the times and seasons of world history are complete. I believe that what we’re talking about here is that God manages His creation and administers His plan through the successive times (ages, epochs) of history, bringing it to its consummation (“the fulness of times”), at which time all things will be gathered together in one in Christ. History has an ultimate goal, and even now God is administering every detail, setting all the pieces in place. And at the very center of the climax is the Lord Jesus Christ. He adds an extra “even in Him” at the end in case you forgot.

This “gather[ing] together in one all things in Christ” is at the very heart of the mystery. The phrase “gather together in one” is one word in the Greek (*anakephalaioō*). It means to sum up, recapitulate, summarize, gather together under one head. Paul uses the same word in Romans 13:9 when he says that all the commandments are “**briefly comprehended** in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Historically, the word has been used as an accounting term to refer to summing up all the numbers in a financial context, or in a census. It’s been used as an oratorical term to refer to the recapitulation that an orator gives at the end of a speech. What you have to understand is that all creation has been put in disorder and disarray and disharmony due to the fall of the first Adam. But all things will be gathered together, reunited and restored under the last Adam. And not just restored, but in an even better state, never able to fall again, because it is all in Christ. All these redeemed souls that He has adopted as His own children, all the elect angels who have desired to look into these things, all the created universe that is groaning and travailing in pain – all gathered together in Christ. All the prophecies, all the promises, all the types, all the shadows, all summed up in Christ. All creation has been by Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16). And THAT is the mystery that God has been delighted to graciously reveal to us.

Inheritance

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be

to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: (Ephesians 1:11-13a)

This Christ in whom we have redemption is the same Christ in whom we have obtained an inheritance. God purposed to gather together all things under Christ, and in particular, He has purposed that you and I would have a place there. To “obtain an inheritance” is a single word in the Greek, and it has the meaning that we’ve obtained it by the lot (the clear allusion is to the children of Israel obtaining their inheritance in Canaan by lot). God has allotted it to us. He has assigned us a destiny, an inheritance. Not because of our works. Not because of our merit. Not because of a choice we made. Not because of our free will. But we have obtained this inheritance because He predestinated it. There’s this predestination word again. Back in v. 5, he talked about predestination from the angle of it being according to the good pleasure of His will to be gracious to us – He did it because He delighted to do it – He delighted to take a bunch of unworthy people, redeem them, forgive their sins, and make them His children. Now, he’s talking about predestination from the angle of it being a carefully designed plan – He planned every detail to make sure that those same people whom He has adopted will be guaranteed an allotted inheritance. He multiplies words here like “purpose”, “counsel” and “will” to drive home the fact that He didn’t consult anyone else in this plan. He didn’t take suggestions. It’s not contingent on anyone else’s thoughts or actions. The false teaching that God looked down the corridors of time and made plans based on the decisions that He saw that people would make is absolutely foreign to this (or any other) passage. Had He done so, zero people would be saved, because the only type of people that He would have seen are the type of people who were dead in trespasses and sins. No, these are the words of an intricate plan, conceived in the mind of God and implemented by Him down to the minutest detail.

“He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.” All things. I understand that a lot of the time in the scripture, the word “all” isn’t used in an absolute sense. It depends on the context. But you tell me, if this isn’t talking about absolutely everything being under the control and jurisdiction of God, what is excluded? If anything is excluded from His purview, how can He ever guarantee that His plan is going to come to fruition? Don’t talk to me about “free will” – nobody can will to thwart the plan of God. He “worketh” (Greek: *energeo*) these things. It means He does it powerfully, effectually. When God works a work, it will get done. And why is He doing this work? “That we should be to the praise of His glory.” That is, the fact of our existence praises His glory, and we exist to praise His glory with our words and our thoughts and our actions.

Now, much attention has been given to this “we...who first trusted in Christ” (v. 12) compared to the “ye also trusted” (v. 13). Why the “we” vs. the “ye”? Some say it is “we Jews” vs. “you Gentiles.” Some say it is “we who believed before you Ephesians believed.” Whatever it is, I

believe the main point is to personalize it for the people in Ephesus, to drive home the point of something like, “you saints in Ephesus who heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed it, and trusted in Christ...you have the exact same privileges as those of us who first trusted in Christ, because we are all in Christ. We are fellow heirs.”

This passage shows us that God works out His plan by means. He uses the means of the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, to save His people. It is by the foolishness of preaching that His people are saved. Believing the gospel is essential. Trusting Christ is essential. It is a fatalistic perversion of scripture to say that God predestinates people to be His children and to have an inheritance, and then does those things whether they believe or not. Faith matters. Repentance matters. Obedience matters. Holiness matters. Of course, those are also gifts of God. Many hear the word, but not all believe it, because it doesn't come “in power, and in the Holy Ghost” (1 Thess. 1:5) to everyone. But every predestinated child of God will, at some point, hear and believe the gospel and will trust in Christ. That is also part of His plan.

Sealed By The Holy Ghost

in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13b-14)

Once a person believes in Christ, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. The Holy Spirit Himself is the seal – He was promised to us, both by the OT prophets and by Christ Himself. He indwells us. This is one of the ways that we can have assurance that we're saved. A seal has many functions. It marks ownership, authenticity, protection, security. We are indelibly marked as the authentic children of God, and we are secure in that standing – we can never lose our salvation. The seal, remember, is only as significant as the one who is making the seal. It is God Himself who seals us, and nobody can tamper with that or forge it.

The Holy Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance. An earnest is like a down payment or a first installment. It is a guarantee that the rest of the payment will be coming later and is of the same type as the thing that it is an earnest for. We have a glorious inheritance waiting for us. In the meantime, we have the presence of the Holy Spirit as a foretaste of what's to come. For example, do you genuinely love God? If you do, as imperfect as it is, it's there as part of your earnest. You'll love Him perfectly later when your full inheritance comes. He'll be with us as our earnest until the redemption of the purchased possession. We are God's purchased possession (1 Peter 2:9 – “Peculiar people”). The day is coming when our redemption will be consummated, and we will receive our new bodies (Romans 8:23). All these spiritual blessings – from our election in eternity past to the future redemption of the purchased possession – all are to the praise of His glory. Lord willing, I plan to cover Ephesians 1:15-23 next time.