

Chosen by God, Redeemed in Christ, Sealed with the Spirit

(Ephesians 1:3 – 14)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's sermon is a prepared sermon from Pastor Charles Henrikson, St Matthew Lutheran Church.

Our Epistle reading today is from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. In fact, this is the first of seven straight Sundays when the Epistle comes from Ephesians. So this is an opportunity for you to dive in to this epistle and really explore it in depth. You may also want to read through Ephesians, perhaps even in one sitting – it's only six chapters long – perhaps several times over the coming weeks. You will be richly blessed, I guarantee it.

How can I be so confident you will be richly blessed? Because this is God's Word! This is the gospel, set forth in all its richness and blessing! St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians is a glorious gem, shining forth the beauties of God's grace in Christ from every angle. Ephesians takes us from the grand cosmic sweep of God's plan for the ages down to the practical realities of everyday life. It's all here, in one midsize epistle. Christ, eternity, the cross, the church, grace, faith, good works, the new life in Christ, marriage, family, spiritual warfare—all these themes Paul deals with in this letter. The Epistle to the Ephesians is as helpful to the church in the twenty-first century as it was to the church in the first.

Our reading from Ephesians today is really the opening statement of this epistle. It comes right after a standard introduction, "**Paul, an apostle of Christ, to the saints in Ephesus: Grace to you and peace,**" etc. Then in verses 3-14, which is our text for today, Paul launches into a grand doxology, a great acclamation of God's goodness, which sets the tone for the rest of the letter. It's like he's been thinking about all the rich blessings that God has showered upon us in Christ, and then he gushes forth with this torrent of praise for the triune God.

Paul's mind surveys the whole sweep and scope of God's eternal plan for the cosmos. It's the big picture Paul is giving us here. He takes us from eternity to eternity, to see what God is doing in all of this, to reflect on the cosmic dimensions of God's plan. It's the big picture! But the picture has a purpose and a focus: God's plan is centred in Christ. And the picture is not so big that it doesn't include us. Because it does include us, as we will see.

Now I think it will be helpful to look at our text today in three parts, according to the three persons of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And also in three parts according to the timing of God's big plan and purpose: first reaching back before creation, then moving into history, and finally culminating in the life of the age to come. And so our theme this morning: **"Chosen by God, Redeemed in Christ, Sealed with the Spirit."**

First, **"Chosen by God."** Our text begins: ***"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."***

"Blessed be God, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing!" And so Paul will begin to extol these marvellous spiritual blessings. This portion of our text emphasises how God the Father chose us to belong to him from ***"before the foundation of the world."*** We did not choose God; God chose us. In love he ***"predestined"*** us to be his children. That means he chose us beforehand, before creation, to be his own. This is what is called in theology the doctrine of election. This is a comforting teaching of Scripture, because it reassures us that even our coming to faith in Christ is all God's doing. It doesn't depend on us or on the strength of our ***"decision."*** No, God chose us in advance to believe in Christ and to belong to him. And it is not because of anything in us. It is purely by grace, God's free gift.

Indeed, we could not have chosen God. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, as Paul will say later, in chapter 2. But God made us alive in Christ, bringing us to faith through the enlivening word of the gospel. ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."*** Those are the familiar words of Ephesians 2, and they fit so well with what Paul is saying here in chapter 1. God chose us in advance, he predestined us for salvation, and he gave us the gift of faith. The whole thing is by grace. So the doctrine of election – that God chose us, we did not choose him – this is one of those spiritual blessings with which God has blessed us. We are chosen by God, and this is ***"to the praise of his glorious grace."***

Second, **"Redeemed in Christ."** Our text continues: ***"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.” “In Christ.” Notice how many times Paul repeats this key phrase throughout our entire text. Over and over again he says, **“in Christ,” “in him,” “through Jesus Christ.”** All of God’s plan for eternity is centred in the person of Jesus Christ. Our entire salvation comes to us only in connection with Christ. Apart from him, there is no salvation. **“In him,” “in Christ,”** we have every spiritual blessing.

The salvation God planned for us before the foundation of the world was accomplished in time, in human history, with the coming of Christ into the world. Paul calls it **“redemption”**: **“In him we have redemption.”** This is a great word in the biblical vocabulary. **“Redemption”** means a release from bondage, by the payment of a price. We were in bondage, and we were unable to free ourselves. There was nothing we could do or pay to get ourselves out of our slavery to sin and Satan. But Christ came and did it for us. He redeemed us. He set us free.

How? By paying a price we could never pay. Because there is nothing so valuable, in all of heaven or earth, as the holy blood of God’s own Son, Jesus Christ. **“In him we have redemption through his blood.”** Christ shed his blood for us on the cross, when he died to take away our trespasses. He, the sinless one, died under God’s judgment, suffering the punishment that we deserve. Now, in Christ, we have freedom and forgiveness, liberation and redemption. We have been set free from death, eternal death, and have been set on the path of eternal life.

Are you weighed down by your sins? Are you troubled in your conscience? Does your guilt before God hang heavy upon you? Then hear this today: You are redeemed in Christ. You have full forgiveness in him. God does not hold your sins against you. Jesus shed his blood for you, and you are free. Believe it, it’s true!

“Chosen by God.” “Redeemed in Christ.” And third, **“Sealed with the Spirit.”** Our text concludes: **“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.”**

Now we reach forward into the future – toward an eternal future, the life of the age to come. That is our **“inheritance,”** our text says. **“In him we have obtained an inheritance.”** Christ has won for us this wonderful inheritance, namely, eternal life with God in bliss forever. He won it for us by his death and resurrection. The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting – this is the hope we have, a hope to hold on to.

But it is in the nature of this inheritance that we have not yet acquired possession of it. Right now our bodies are still subject to decay and death. We still struggle with sin. Where is the hope? It is in the inheritance that is ours in Christ. You and I, we hold the title to this inheritance. We are in line to receive it. For you and I have been baptised into Christ. We have been made joint-heirs with him. We believe in Christ, we trust in him. The gospel gives us this faith. And so we have been sealed with the Spirit. We were “**sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.**” You see, the Holy Spirit is the guarantee, the deposit, the down-payment, telling us that there is more on the way, more to come. The Holy Spirit keeps us in the one true faith by means of the Word and Sacrament, which continue to strengthen us. We have been sealed with the Spirit. And so we look forward with confidence and a sure hope to taking ownership of the inheritance that awaits us, the everlasting life Christ won for us.

Chosen by God, redeemed in Christ, and sealed with the Spirit. Here in Ephesians 1, we’ve been taking in the big picture Paul has been putting before our eyes. It is a grand and glorious picture, stretching from eternity to eternity. God has a plan, a purpose, he is accomplishing: “**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.**” Everything in the whole universe finds its proper place in relation to Christ our Lord, the Son of God.

Yes, God’s plan is centred in Christ, and it means riches, grace, and every spiritual blessing for you. For you and I have been “Chosen by God, Redeemed in Christ, and Sealed with the Spirit.” All this, to the praise of his glorious grace. **Amen.**

May the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon read by Phillip Edwards, 11 July 2021

Reference

Accessed at: <https://stmatthewbt.org/2018/07/14/chosen-by-god-redeemed-in-christ-sealed-with-the-spirit-ephesians-13-14/>

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