

SERMON FOR THE 8TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST – 7-15-18 Our Redeemer, Iowa City

Ephesians 1:3-14 “Blessed by God – In Christ!”

Dear fellow Redeemed,

Have you ever considered how often you are moved by the actions of others to say, “Thank You!”

- As our children are growing up, one of the first things you hope to teach them is to say “Thank You” when someone gives them something or says something nice to them.
- As we look around us and see the goodness and blessings that God continually showers upon us, we are often again led to say, “I have so much to be thankful for.”
- When we see terrible damage caused by tornadoes, we say we are thankful to have been spared.
- When my mother-in-law called last spring to tell us about the 28” of snow they received, my first thought was how thankful I was that we didn’t get all that! And, of course, the things to be thankful for could go on and on.

But, you know, so often when we analyze our reasons for gratitude – what is it that we find? Perhaps we are thankful for good health, a good and permanent job, a good crop; perhaps we are thankful for a loving spouse, good children, a nice home, and the like. And, indeed, these are all wonderful gifts given to us by a gracious and loving God; gifts which we ought never take for granted, gifts for which we ought daily to thank our God.

But all these gifts are in the realm of the material things that are a part of life here in this world. These are not, however, the only or even the most important reasons for gratitude. Paul, in the word of God before us, taken from his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, calls our attention today to something else – something which we so easily take for granted, something for which we so often fail to thank our gracious and merciful God. Paul here directs our attention to the spiritual blessings which God has so graciously prepared for us, and which He gives to us for our temporal and eternal happiness. For these too, we are moved to say, “Thank You, God!” or as Paul says: **“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...”** We are, then, indeed:

BLESSED BY GOD – IN CHRIST!

1. He has chosen me in Christ;
2. He has forgiven me in Christ;
3. He has sealed me in Christ.

Paul begins: (vv. 4-6) **“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 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 One he loves.”

Paul, here, calls attention to a doctrine which might seem to be rather dark and difficult. But it need not be. The doctrine or teaching of election is most simple and most comforting if we will only silence our reason and believe what our God tells us. Listen again to what our God says He has done: **“He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.”** Isn't that something!

- God here assures us that before the world was made, before time began to be counted, before we were born, before that...God already thought about us and chose us as His own dear children.
- He did this as a pure act of grace and mercy in Christ.
- God was moved to do this, certainly not because He saw something intrinsically good in us; not because of any merit or worthiness which He foresaw in mankind. As Paul clearly says in 2 Timothy 1:9: **“God has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”**
- That, plainly and simply, is the doctrine of election or predestination.

Because God has revealed this truth to us in His Word, we, who are believers, have the assurance that our coming to faith was not something that happened by chance, but is something that took place because God in eternity has so decreed it; God, in eternity, chose us to be His own, as Paul says here in our text: **“In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace...”**

That much God tells us, and there our reason must stop. If we ask, “Why did God choose some and not others?” then we are going to be in trouble. God simply tells us that those who are saved, are saved by GRACE; those who are lost are lost through their own fault, because they rejected God's grace. The Bible clearly teaches that it is the will of God that ALL be saved; to say that He has chosen some for damnation is contrary to His Word and His Will and it is wrong. We simply let God speak and find comfort in what He has revealed to us, and rejoice that He has chosen us!

So many people today are concerned about where they come from; what they are doing here; and where they are going. People are seeking purpose and meaning in their lives. The child of God need look no further! Are you important? God says that you are! Before the world began He knew you and chose you to be one of His dear children. Yes, **“blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing...”** We are blessed by God – He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

II.

Before time began, God chose us in Christ. Because of this fact, He has now called us to faith in Christ as our Savior. By faith, we partake of all the blessings of Christ's redemptive work. As Paul says here: **"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, 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."**

So, being called to faith by the Holy Spirit, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. We, who were dead in trespasses and sins; we whose hearts were filled only with evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, etc.; we whose righteousnesses are as filthy rags; we who deserve only death and condemnation – **WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS!** God no longer charges our sins against us. They are forgiven in Christ. Our slate is washed clean; we are free! God accepts us as His children, children washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus!

And not only has he forgiven us, but **"He has lavished on us the riches of God's grace with all wisdom and understanding, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ..."**

- He has given to us wise and discerning hearts enabling us to know the will of God.
- He has made us new creatures, enabling us to walk before Him as His children.
- We are, as Paul says, **"His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."**

Thus, what God had planned in eternity is being effectively carried out today. One by one, those whom He has chosen unto eternal life, are being called to faith in Christ, and are being gathered together in the family of the Holy Christian Church. That is His Will – to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ! Being redeemed by His blood; called to faith by the Holy Spirit through the Word; we are part of the family brought together under Christ. Once again – We are blessed by God – in Christ!

III.

Our text speaks to us about yet one more blessing from God. He who has chosen us from eternity, who has called us to faith, He will, through the Gospel, also preserve us in the faith unto eternal life. Our God has sealed us to Himself in Christ, as Paul writes: **"In Him...you also 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."**

Do you get it? **“You were marked with a seal!”** The use of seals on letters and documents has a long and interesting history. Many seals are mentioned in the Bible, from the clan signet seal of Judah to the scrolls with seven seals described in Revelation 5. Most Christian congregations have an official seal as well. A seal on a document is legal proof of ownership. The Holy Spirit, given you in baptism, is proof that all God’s promises to you in Christ are yours..

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives is a seal – a guarantee that what God promises is true. It means that we can say with all confidence, **“I am the Lord’s! He found me! He made me one of His children! Remember what Jesus says in John 10: “My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one shall pluck them out of my hand.” Peter puts it this way: “You are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”**

Yes, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us is God’s deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance – that inheritance being eternal life with God in heaven. The blessings we now enjoy in the Gospel – chosen by God; called by God; renewed in Him; being at peace with Him; assured of forgiveness – these are our sure guarantee that we shall reach our heavenly home, where we shall praise and bless and thank our Lord throughout eternity.

We have much to be thankful for, both physical and spiritual blessings. But the greatest blessing of all is this: **“God has chosen me in Christ”** – He has called me to faith in Christ; He will also lead me to glory. What a precious comfort for every believer! What an exalted motive for unending gratitude and praise. **Amen.**