

Sermon 1: Ephesians 1:1-14: Our Eternal Salvation

OUTLINE

The Father's past planning of salvation
The Son's present accomplishment of salvation
The Spirit's future securing of salvation

INTRODUCTION

Ephesus, the 5th largest town in the world when Paul wrote this letter. A town that would have been a difficult place to be a Christian, and so the church there was in need of encouragement. Ephesus, was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and a bastion of the Emperor Cult, where deifying the Roman Caesar was a badge of patriotism. A clash between those who thought the Caesar was Lord and Jesus is Lord is inevitable. It was also the centre for Diana/Artemis worship, the temple of this goddess of fertility was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In Acts 19:21-41 we see the city wide riot as a result from Paul's preaching where silversmiths were losing business due to people converting to Christ. The battle for the hearts of the Ephesians for Diana or Jesus was visceral. Being a port town it was a place of the typical sins that go with that situation. It was prosperous, it had lots of different cultures, it was a centre for witchcraft, it was a place a lot like today where materialism, competing worldviews, and a growing animosity were the battlefield for the Ephesians to try and live out their faith.

Paul writes this letter as a prisoner to a church in the fire. Apart from the obvious need of the Ephesian situation there does not seem to be a clear occasion that Paul is writing to address. There is a very clear theme to the letter to the Ephesians, it is all about the church, more specifically, God's work in Christ to make a new humanity for a new creation. If Romans is all about the gospel, then Ephesians is the letter all about the church. As you read through the letter you can see how it is structured to serve this purpose.

After the introduction of 1:1-2 we see a description of the new life we have in Christ in 1:3-2:10; then Paul describes the new family that we are in Christ in 2:11-3:21, in particular the idea of Jews and Gentiles in one body; then in 4:1-5:21 that new standards that we are to live by in Christ; 5:22-6:9 describes our new relationships in Christ, and 6:10-20 our new struggle with the devil in Christ.

V1-2, 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' These introductory verses introduce us to the author, Paul, we are told that he is an apostle, that is a handpicked eye witness of the resurrected Christ who has been specially chosen to be an instrument of revelation of the good news of Jesus Christ. Being an apostle means that Paul speaks as God's mouth piece. He tells us that this is not a self-made position, he is an apostle by God's will. We know the story of how he was a persecutor of the church and was arrested by Christ on the Damascus road and put into service. These introductory verses also tells us about the recipients, there is a twofold description, 'the saints in Ephesus,' and 'are faithful in Christ Jesus.' These descriptions remind us of our identity on earth, we are saints, God's holy ones, a description first given to Israel indicating a priestly role, but we are in Ephesus or in Timaru or Temuka. God's consecrated ones living in a hostile environment. But we are also in another place, we are seated with Christ at the right hand of

God in Christ. And we are the faithful in Him. This could mean those full of faith, or those whose faith is in full action. And finally Paul gives his traditional greeting, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' Grace and peace sum up the saving work of God and its effects. Our salvation is by grace not works, it is of God not of us, we contribute nothing, God does it all. And when we are saved by grace there is peace between sinners and a holy God, peace between brethren in Christ, and peace within our own hearts.

So as we begin think about what Paul would want to say and need to say to a church in the Ephesians position. We will see in 1:3-14 that Paul encourages them with the blessings they have in Christ. Let me note a few features of this section before we get stuck into it. Firstly, it is all one sentence in the Greek. It is an overflow of the mind of the apostle who is amazed at the riches of the salvation we have and it comes as a single breathe. Secondly, it is Trinitarian in structure, this is hinted at in v3, '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.' You will see reference to the Father, and the Son, but also to spiritual blessings. This is a reference to the blessing of the Spirit, and He is the one who applies all of God's blessings to us. Things are always done from the Father, through the Son and by the Spirit. As Paul describes the salvation we have you will notice that v4-6 talks about the Father's past planning of our salvation; v7-10 speaks of Christ's present accomplishing of our salvation; and v11-14 speak of the Spirit's future securing of our salvation, and these will be our three points for the sermon if you are a note taker. Thirdly, you will notice that all our blessings come to us in Christ. This is a common theme in Paul. Jesus is mentioned 15 times in these first 14 verses, and 11 times Paul speaks about our being blessed in Christ. Fourthly, as you look at the whole of chapter 1 you will notice that v3-14 is Paul's praise to God for this salvation, v3 begins with the word blessed indicating Paul's worship; but v15-23 is a prayer to God for the Ephesians to grasp this amazing salvation. This means that we are studying that which moves Paul's heart to worship and should move our own as well.

The Father's past planning of salvation

V4-6, 'even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.' When all about you seems powerful and ready to overcome you, what do you need a reminder of? The eternal love of God! This is what begins Paul's praise. It is clear that Paul's mind goes back to before creation to the plan of God before time to save a people in Christ. The opening words of v4, 'even as' is Paul's way of emphasizing that God elects us in Christ 'even as' He blesses us in Christ. In eternity past when God planned His salvation God did not consider us in our sin for that would surely result in our judgement, instead He chose us in His Son. A picture that might help you to see Christ representing you even in election is the picture of the High priest with the 12 stones representing God's people on his chest. The Highpriest would be accepted into God's presence and on behalf of a people, in the same way Jesus represents His church before God and the love the Father has for His Son is the grounds for His plan of salvation. Here is why I think this is significant. Imagine God plans to save us, then He creates, and the sin of man is so abhorrent God wants to wipe us off the face of the planet, what ensures that He will go through with the plan? There are many things we can think on, God does not lie, He does not change, but Paul puts before us the fact

that the love that He has towards His own Son does not change and as surely as God loves His Son so surely will God save His church.

The fact that we are elect in Christ is often overlooked but the two big benefits of being made holy and being adopted will be ours because of God choosing us in Christ. How are we made holy and blameless in Christ? God does this by uniting us with His Son, so that all that is His becomes ours. 2 Cor. 5:21, 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' Picture a piece of paper with all your sin on it, then on another every command Christ has ever obeyed. Then exchange these, your sin is credited to Christ and He is seen in God's sight as a sinner and forsaken, but you are seen as the righteousness of God in Christ. You become as holy in God's eyes as Jesus is. Not only that think on the Father's delight in His Son, think on those words, 'You are beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' God's intention was to take those who were sinful, and those who were slaves and to unite them to the One who is righteous and the One whom He loves above all, so that in Him you would be holy and adopted.

The last part of v6 says, 'according to the purpose of His will.' We know that God is powerful to make His plans come to pass, this is to give you assurance. If He intends to save and love you, then be assured that He has the power to make His will come to pass.

Now these are controversial verses amongst Christians for there are those who believe in God sovereignly electing His people, those traditionally called Calvinists, and those who believe that God elected us to salvation based on what He saw in us. I am not going to untie this knot here, I have strong views on the matter which to the best of my ability to understand are built on the word. But no matter what view you take there are certain things you can know from what Paul has stated. Firstly, that salvation is an act of God, it is His choosing, predestining and His plan not ours. He is the author of our salvation and must get the glory not us. V6, 'To the praise of His glorious grace with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.' Secondly, Paul is talking about the doctrine of election in the context of assurance not evangelism or prayer. The point of this doctrine is not to arouse controversy but to assure us, if you are confused this is the point you should take away, that God has loved you with an eternal love, a love that precedes your works and outlasts your failures. He is a God who loves you, He chose you, He adopted you, He is for you. Thirdly, it is clear from the context that evangelism and faith are not to be neglected, v13 talks about hearing the gospel being preached, there is the necessity to evangelize, and that we received the Spirit when we believed, there is the necessity for the sinners to respond in faith. God's will will come to pass but God has appointed the means as well as the end. Whatever your view on these matters you cannot neglect to pray for and preach to the lost.

The Son's present accomplishment of salvation

V7-10, 'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.' We move from what God planned to how God brought His plans to pass. How can a sinner be loved like a son or daughter, how can an enemy become an heir, how can

someone who is sinful in deed and nature be holy as He is holy? V7 tells us about the work of Christ, the work of the Son for our salvation. God accomplishes our present salvation through the Son by redeeming us and forgiving us.

Redemption is to buy ones liberty with the paying of a ransom. In this instance the price is blood. Many falsely think that Jesus was a ransom paid to the devil, as if the devil had kidnapped us and Jesus paid him off. No, the truth is we were in trouble with God, under the condemnation of His law, and the blood was representative of the life given as a substitute for the sinner. The wages of sin is death, Christ died ours, and this is what is symbolized by blood. The blood was paid to God to satisfy the requirements of His law. Paul develops what is implied in his second assertion, 'the forgiveness of our trespasses.' Trespasses indicates our crimes against God's law, and God does not simply brush them under the carpet, He pays for them at great cost to Himself, in the giving of His Son.

Paul goes on to show how God financed our redemption and forgiveness, 'according to the riches of His grace.' Spurgeon said that the bible does not talk about the riches of God's power but it does talk about the riches of His grace. Why is this? God's grace is the jewel the treasure chest. What is grace? The common definition is unmerited favor, this is good but does not quite get to the heart of it. Imagine you are walking down the street and you see someone begging. You tell the man to follow you, you take him to your house and put him to work in your garden. This is not grace it is a wage, the opposite of grace. The next day you see him begging, and you give him money without working, that is unmerited favor. But it is not demerited favor. Imagine the next day that same man stabs you and steals from you. You recover and happen to see him begging again, and then you give him money, this is grace. But God is not grudgingly robbed He willingly gives to His enemies, and how much would you give the man who is begging after he had stabbed you and left you for dead? God gives His best, His Son, the brightest jewel in God's treasure chest is not withheld. God takes that enemy and adopts him, forgives him, heals him and rehabilitates him, He delivers him from his addictions, and employs him dignifying him with a life in His service which will yield eternal significance, all at the cost of Jesus paying for our crimes instead of us.

V8, 'Which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight.' Lavished is an understatement, but God's wisdom in saving sinner, paying for his sins and the sinner not dying but living, this is God's profound wisdom in saving us.

But how do we know that these benefits are ours, v9, 'making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ.' God has revealed these things to us. This mystery, which in the bible is not a riddle but rather a once hidden truth now revealed, was prophesied in the OT and has come to light in Christ. Christ is the fulfillment of all those promises and prophesies and as surely as Christ has been born, died and resurrected, so surely is this salvation ours. This plan includes not only our present salvation but the salvation of the whole world, not just a present forgiveness of sin but a future world without sin, not just victory over the devil but the removal of the devil from the scene, v10 points to this future, 'as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.'

The Spirit's future securing of salvation

We move now into the last section, now as we give it a quick glance I want you to notice when Paul says 'we' in v11, this is a reference to the Jews, then he speaks of 'you' in verse 13, and then finally 'our' in v14 speaking of Jews and Gentiles together. V11-14, '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, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.' Paul is telling the church that God's plan which began with saving Jews is a salvation for the whole world. Of interest to us is v13 that tells us how a person is saved. When you heard the word of truth, namely the gospel of your salvation, and believed, then you were saved. Paul says in Romans 10:14, 'How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?' When we hear it, and the Holy Spirit enables us to understand and believe, then when we believe God gives us the Spirit as a seal. There has been some unsettling business in the church in the last 50 years about a second baptism in the Holy Spirit, but it is clear from this verse that we receive the Spirit when we believe. Every believer has the Spirit, there are no second rate citizens in God's kingdom.

But of special interest to us is the way the Holy Spirit functions in our salvation, Paul tells us that the Spirit is given as a seal and as a guarantee of our inheritance. Seals were a common thing which were used to mark authenticity and ownership. A wax seal and a signet ring pressed into the wax set the owners mark upon an item. God has set His mark upon us in the person of His Spirit. But not only this the Spirit is also a guarantee, a downpayment, a first installment. Like a deposit on a car or house, God has given us a firstfruits, a first part of the inheritance which we will have in whole. This is greatly encouraging, Paul is telling us that we have begun to enjoy our inheritance in having the person of the Spirit abide within us. Paul is wanting you to feel assured that God has taken ownership of us until we take ownership of heaven and that He has forwarded a part of what will be ours as a proof of the rest that will follow.

That is the text and we have stated that Paul has done this in order to encourage the Ephesians in the difficult situation they were in. God has saved us with an immeasurable salvation, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are active and engaged, this is a work rooted in eternity past, accomplished in the presence and guaranteed for the future. It is a work of renovating the universe, it is the greatest and most lavish work of love God has done, it is certain as His plan and power enact it, and we have every blessing in Christ. It is with these realities that Paul seeks to enthuse the Ephesians and us in order to help us meet the challenges we face in the church, in our daily lives, in the spiritual battle as we engage with a hostile world.