

- ***READ Ephesians 1:1-14*** For people such as myself, one of the ways that this period of social distancing and quarantine has really been a bummer is that sports have been virtually non-existent. Mid-March through the early days of April are a few of my favorite weeks of the year because of March Madness. Spring football games are taking place during this same time of year. For my friends who are baseball fans, Major League Baseball is supposed to be kicking off, and this is a year in which the Olympics are supposed to take place.
- As we all know...this isn't a normal year and all of those events we love to enjoy are not taking place. There was no March Madness, spring football, MLB Opening Day, and the Olympics have been postponed until next year. For those of us who normally rely on sports as a form of relief from the difficulties of life, experiencing such a difficulty without the presence of sports has been less than enjoy and ideal.
- However, we were given somewhat of a reprieve during this sportsless time of social distancing over the last few days as the National Football League (NFL) Draft was carried out. Over 250 young men from all across this country (though mostly the south) and even the entire world were drafted to various franchises to be the new faces and contributors for this upcoming season and beyond. For many, if not all, of these individuals, this experience will be one of the top highlights of their lives.
- If I am speaking a foreign language to you, then let me quickly explain what took place over the past couple of days. Here are some basics of the NFL draft process:
 - Only a select group of men are true prospects who have a chance to be drafted.
 - The higher a player is drafted, the larger the initial contract because they are more sought after.
 - The draftees know that if they fail to produce results, can't stay healthy, don't out perform other players at their position, etc... they will be cut.
 - Every player knows that they will not play in the NFL for the rest of their lives.
- Though almost nothing is guaranteed from this point onward, this doesn't stop this moment from being one of the greatest and most exciting moments in the lives of these men. I can't even begin to imagine the feeling of hearing *"With the first overall pick in the 2020 National Football League draft...the Tennessee Titans select: Nick Angel, kicker, the University of Tennessee."* And the reality is that none of us and about 99.9% of people in this world will never hear such a statement about ourselves.
- However, though we might never be chosen by NFL owners, general managers, directors of player personnel, and head coaches...we all can take solace and find unmatched joy in the fact that we all have been chosen by God to be a part of His special people who make up the citizenship of the kingdom of heaven. My friend and preaching brother, BJ Sipe, highlighted this wonderful truth during one of his daily devotionals last week, and I would like to echo this ever-encouraging truth by taking time this morning to work through the text of **Ephesians 1:3-14** with each of you.
- When considering this text, we first need to recognize the purpose, content, and structure of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.
 - The purpose seems to be an effort to show that all people can be a part of this great body of saved believers, what that body looks like, and how it operates. (*Paul's Great Essay On The Church*)
 - We can also see Paul's great emphasis on love. Nineteen times in this letter, Paul uses the noun or verb form of *agape* which might not seem all that unusual until we consider that is a sixth of his total uses in the entire New Testament writings attributed to him. The letter includes a love inclusio (bookends) in which it begins with love in **1:4-6** and ends with love emphasized in **6:23,24**.
 - Finally, the letter seems to break nicely into two halves. The first half consisting of **1:1-3:21** highlights what God has done for us as His people, and the second half of **4:1-6:24** stresses that this ought to motivate us through gratitude to truly live worthy of our calling (**4:1**) as a part of His chosen people.
- With these thoughts in mind, let's dive into this text that is so fully of blessings, hope, and joy for the follower of Jesus. I do want to note that this section of text which, highlights the blessings that are enjoyed by those who belong to Jesus, is actually one continuous sentence in its original form in the Greek language. As Smelser points out in his commentary entitled *"Walk Worthily"*, *"To say that in Christ, God has given us*

'every spiritual blessing' is not sufficient." Unfortunately, our modern English language is also not sufficient to capture the compounding nature of what Paul states in these verses, but I do hope we will be able to walk away with the proper understanding of what it means to be chosen by God in Christ.

I. God's prerogative is clearly seen in choosing those who would be a part of His people. (1:3,4)

A. Numerous times, Paul emphasizes God's will being the catalyst for man's salvation.

1. It doesn't take much reading into this letter to realize that Paul really wants to stress the sovereignty of God within this letter. The first sentence alone highlights the fact that Paul was an Apostle *"By God's will."* (1:1) This sets the tone for what will be seen through this letter, but especially what will be seen in this opening section of Paul's writing to the Ephesians. Let's notice the language that clearly shows us that Paul wants the readers to understand that it is the will of God that makes the spiritual blessings (1:3) noted in this letter possible.
 - a) *"For He chose us..."* (1:4)
 - b) *"He predestined us...according to His good pleasure of His will..."* (1:5)
 - c) *"...according to the riches of His grace..."* (1:6)
 - d) *"...according to His good pleasure that He purposed..."* (1:9)
 - e) *"...because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of His will..."* (1:11)
2. Five different times in these few verses and in this one original sentence, Paul stresses the fact that everything that has been experienced by His children is a direct result of what our God has planned and decided to have take place. He did the choosing. He did the predestining. His will was considered. His grace abounded. His good pleasure was acted upon. He purposed. All of this was done according to His overwhelming power and the ability to do just as He pleases without desiring or needing the help of another. He alone is the sovereign God, and we are allowed to experience His blessings over because He has allowed such a thing to be our reality. We have not forced God's hand in any way. He has acted upon His own accord.

B. This reminds us that we have been afforded the opportunity for forgiveness of sins, a renewed life, and hope immortality because of God's gracious mercy.

1. The initial spiritual blessings we enjoy that are associated with being chosen by God are the forgiveness of sins and a renewed life. Lest any of us think that we are owed these blessings or we caused any of these blessings to come unto us, let us consider what is said in 2:8,9.

*"For you are saved by grace through faith, and **this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.**"*
2. I understand that these verses can sometimes become tiresome to us because they are often used to propagate a doctrine that teaches that there is nothing necessary on the part of man in order for salvation to be achieved. However, I don't want us to ever have negative feelings towards any verses, especially verses that emphasize the sovereign nature of God. We must never allow ourselves to shy away acknowledging or stressing the fact that we only have the opportunity and ability to have our sins forgiven and hope of eternal life born in us because of what God alone has done. Yes, I believe that He has designed this process in such a way that we must respond to His grace (Acts 2:36-41; 22:16), but that doesn't change the fact that He alone makes it all possible.

II. Christ is plainly observed as being the central component to God's plan & people. (1:4-13)

A. The emphasis on the centrality of Christ to those chose of God cannot be overlooked.

1. God makes it all possible through Jesus Christ and what He accomplished while He was on this earth living as God in human flesh. Thirteen different times in this text, Jesus is either specifically highlighted by name or alluded to through a pronoun as being the central key to everything that God has accomplished for he salvation of mankind.

2. Let's begin by noticing that it is in Christ that we have been blessed *"with every spiritual blessing in the heavens."* (1:3) This is quickly followed by the statement that God *"chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in love before Him."* This, along with the language of predestining, has led to a doctrine that holds to the idea that God chose the specific individuals who would be saved through Jesus. This means that, unless God has chosen your heart to be softened to the Gospel through the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit, you won't have the ability to be saved.
 3. However, I would challenge that understanding of this text because it takes the emphasis off of who Paul is striving to emphasize in this text. Paul isn't emphasizing us as being the special ones, but He is emphasizing Jesus Christ as the THE Special One! He is the one who God chose as the means by which we can be saved and made holy and blameless. The emphasis needs to remain on Jesus as the man God chose to be the means for His plan for mankind's salvation and redemption to be carried out.
 4. If we're not convinced of this then simply continue reading the text. Notice that God *"predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ..."* (1:5) Again, the emphasis is not us the "us", but it must be on the means. God predestined that through Jesus all people might be able to be adopted as sons of God. How is God's grace lavished upon us? *"...in the Beloved One."* (1:6) How do we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins? *"In Him...through His blood..."* (1:7) 1:9 stresses that the good pleasure of God is purposed *"in Christ."* Everything God planned to have take place and brought together was done at the *"right time...in Christ both things in heaven and things on the earth in Him."* (1:10) The inheritance we have received was done *"In Christ"* (1:11), and Paul said it was those who had already put their hope *"in Christ who might bring praise to His glory."* (1:12) Finally, the Holy Spirit sealed us *"In Him"* when we *"when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when [we] believed."* (1:13)
 5. You ask yourself this when you read these verses...*"Who is it that Paul, though the Holy Spirit, is emphasizing as having been the focal point of God's great plan that was from the beginning of eternity?"* As I read these verses, I don't see God focusing on individuals who will be saved and others who won't. No, I am seeing a plan that was chosen by God, and that plan was embodied & fulfilled in the man Jesus of Nazareth as He accomplished the Lord's purposes here on earth.
- B. This should have been understood by those who were familiar with Old Testament writings.**
1. My belief is that this should be the obvious understanding of this text simply based upon the fact that it is Jesus who is stressed all throughout the Bible leading up to this point. He is continually highlighted as being the One who God has specifically chosen for His purposes.
 - a) *"This is my servant; I strengthen him, this is my chosen one; I delight in him. I have put my Spirit on him; he will bring justice to the nations."* (Isaiah 42:1)
 - b) *"I am the Lord. I have called you for a righteous purpose, and I will hold you by your hand. I will watch over you, and I will appoint you to be a covenant for the people and a light to the nations, in order to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and those sitting in darkness from the prison house"* (Isaiah 42:6,7)
 - c) *"Coasts and islands, listen to me; distant peoples, pay attention. The Lord called me before I was born. He named me while I was in my mother's womb. He made my words like a sharp sword; he hid me in the shadow of his hand. He made me like a sharpened arrow; he hid me in his quiver. He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."* (Isaiah 49:1-3)
 2. From these three text alone, it seems abundantly clear that God had one particular person picked out and chosen from before the foundation of the world. That person would be Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. He has been chosen by God to make a way for mankind to be chosen and reconciled to their Creator, and through this reconciliation will come great blessings.

III. Those chosen by God are put into position to participate in God's divine purposes. (1:4-14)

A. Through Christ we are exalted to a position far beyond how we lived prior to Him.

1. Our lives before coming to faith in Christ could be described as wasteful years that were leading to nowhere but eternal separation from God through our sin and rebellion. However, through the actions of Jesus in bringing about the fullness of God's redemptive processes, we now have the ability to be raised and exalted to a high place in the sight of God. **1:3** speaks of us being blessed *"with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ."* Now, some might take that phrase *"in the heavens"* as a statement of location because Christ is currently in the heavens in the realm where God dwells. However, I would instead take it as a statement of status meaning that we have been exalted and lifted up by these spiritual gifts.
2. I believe there is internal evidence in this letter to show this to be the case. Consider **2:6** where Paul writes concerning what God has done for us, *"He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus..."* Are we to take this to mean that we are seated in the same location as Christ in the heavens? We can look around us and recognize that simply isn't the case. Instead, we are to recognize that through the incredible blessings we have obtained through our faith in Jesus Christ and being a part of the chosen people of God (adoption as sons, redemption, forgiveness of trespasses, an inheritance, etc), we ought to live and carry ourselves in a certain way that shows we desire and are willing to participate in God's great purposes for His chosen people.

B. Participating means just that...participating. We are to be active in living according to the purposes God has redeemed us to live in.

1. Let's again consider the text of **2:8,9**.
"For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do."
2. What does this text tell us? It tells us the the work we are to be doing for the Lord doesn't come before we are saved. We cannot earn salvation or work to obtain it. Instead, we are saved by God's wonderful grace through our faith so that we can now start working for Him and carrying out the good works which God prepared for us to do. What are these works? I would suggest that they have something to do with the way we were created. We were created in the very beginning to reflect the image of God in our lives. While we might do that in some ways apart from Christ (creative mind, creation of life, dominion over creation, etc)...it isn't until we are redeemed in Christ that we can truly reflect God in His holiness and righteousness.
3. We are now to live just as Jesus, the actual image of the invisible God (**Colossians 1:15**), lived by loving God first and loving our neighbor as ourself. In doing these things, we can truly say the we are participating in the divine purposes that God originally created us to do and that He has designed for us to reengage in through our being joined to the body of Jesus Christ.

IV. The historical Jews were the first to be chosen to experience the blessings of being in Christ, but now all people have been chosen in Christ. (1:13,14)

A. The Jews, Paul included, were the first to put their hope in the Messiah and receive the blessings, but now all people have the ability to experience blessings in Christ.

1. Finally, let's notice from this text that Paul makes mention and emphasizes that all people have been chosen and given the ability to be blessed with every spiritual blessings in the heavens in Christ. Again, there are some who want to specify things down to very individuals, but Paul in this text speaks much more broadly about those who come to Christ.
2. He first speaks of himself and his Jewish brethren in **1:11,12**. Paul is speaking of Jesus being the one through whom men receive an inheritance and how this inheritance was a predestined portion of God's plan. All of it is working together in agreement with the purposes that God was going to accomplish. It would first be accomplished in those who had already put their hope in Christ. This must be speaking of Paul and his Jewish brethren based upon his usage of personal pronouns such as *we* and *our*. The Jews

were the ones, as we mentioned earlier, who had been told of the coming Servant Messiah who would carry out the purposes of God for man's salvation. Jesus and His Apostles first focused on teaching them, and then they went to the Gentiles. This is the story we see in the Book of Acts.

3. This must be the understanding since Paul then switches from talking about *we* and *us* to talking about *you*. The Jews first hoped in the Christ, they were delivered the Gospel, the Gentiles were then *also* sealed with the "***promised Holy Spirit***", and then Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit being the down payment for "***our inheritance***" which I take to now meaning both the Jews and Gentiles as a unified people.

B. These words by Paul are furthered expounded upon in 3:1-13 as he speaks of His ministry to the Gentiles and how it was always a part of God's plan.

1. Here is another reason for which Paul uses language of things being determined long ago. The Gentiles might be think that they were simply an afterthought, but Paul wants them to know that they were always a part of God's plan for salvation. He first stresses that the Gentiles are "***coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel***" (3:6)
2. Yet, when was this decided upon? "***This grace was given to me — the least of all the saints — to proclaim to the Gentile the incalculable riches of Christ...This is according to His eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.***" (3:8-11) Why does all of this matter? It matters because we all, as Gentiles ourselves, don't have to be left thinking that we are an afterthought in the mind of God. No, we have been a part of this plan to be part of God's chosen people from the beginning. There was none of this sneaking in through the back door...no we have been welcomed through an open front door made possible by God Himself.

For all of the joy and excitement experienced by so many during the past few days over the NFL draft...we must recognize that there are so many more who are disappointed that they were not selected. Some believed they were good enough to be drafted but weren't. And then there are those like us who can only dream of being in such a position.

This morning, we have discussed the fact that each of us have been chosen by God to be found holy and blameless through Jesus. He has made the way open before us, and if we are willing to humble ourselves before Him...then we can live life free of disappoint in missing out on the greatest calling any of us can attain to. May God bless us and strengthen us to always live worthy of our calling, and may our lives fulfill the loving prayer of the Apostle Paul in **Ephesians 3:14-19**.

"For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:14-19)