

The Father's Plan: Election

Ephesians 1:3-4 (08/20/17)

Ernie Godshall

Faith Bible Church

Evansville, Indiana

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. (Ephesians 1:3-4)

Hetty Green was known as the Witch of Wall Street. She was a financial wizard and the richest woman in America in her day, worth 100 million dollars when she died on July 3, 1916. Yet she lived as a pauper. She only owned one dress at a time. She didn't turn on the heat or use hot water, and ate cold oatmeal to avoid turning on the stove. She was the richest woman in America, yet lived like the poorest. (Story told by Warren Wiersbe). God's amazing grace has blessed us with the greatest spiritual wealth imaginable, and yet we live as if we were spiritual paupers. Paul wrote Ephesians to show us the wealth God has poured into our spiritual bank accounts.

Last week we took an aerial view of Ephesians and saw the outline of the Wealth, Walk, and Warfare of the believer. Before we launch into verses 3-4 this morning, I thought it would be wise to briefly talk about three important truths we meet in Ephesians.

#1 God's **sovereignty**. You can't go very far into Ephesians without knowing that God is in absolute and total control of everything v. 11. Nothing happens outside of His will and plan and purpose. He is in control of the farthest reaches of the universe and the smallest subatomic particle. He rules this world and does whatever He wants because He is God. If He wants to save someone, He is free to do so. Hold on to that.

#2 God's sovereign **grace**. All God does in saving a sinner He does by free and sovereign grace through His Son. God is under no obligation to save anyone, yet He is free to save whomever He chooses. If you are saved, you didn't earn your salvation and you can't keep it. Grace is God's unmerited favor to sinners deserving His justice. God's grace reaches into eternity past and will deliver every saved person to eternity future. That's why we sing, "O to grace how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be!" Daily, every day, every moment recognize your debt to God for His amazing grace and pour out your thankfulness to Him.

#3 God's sovereign **election**. We'll see more of this in a moment, but this election is a clear teaching of the Bible which people often stumble over. When they hear that God chooses some to be saved and not others, they either reinterpret it to mean God chooses people because He knows they would choose to believe in His Son or that God chooses people because somehow He saw some good in them. Or they think it just doesn't seem fair that God would choose some and not others. If you struggle with this, you need to think about two things. First, whatever the Bible says is so. We can't reject a teaching just because it doesn't make sense to our little brains. Let God be God. Secondly, if God didn't choose some to be saved, no one would be saved. We are all sinners and naturally would never choose to believe in Christ. Our wills are bound by sin. When God saves those He has chosen, He sends His Spirit to free their hearts from that bondage so they can and will believe in Christ.

Let's read our verses in Ephesians 1:3-4 and see how Paul unfolds all the glorious riches of God's grace for us.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

BLESSED BE GOD! Focus your heart's praise and devotion on God in all His glory, grace and love for you in Christ. This is where Paul starts. As the Scottish minister Alexander Maclaren put it, Paul

starts with fervency and exuberance. Place a pen in Paul's hand and out flows this fiery stream of white hot worship. Blessed and highly praised above all possible praise! This is a doxology reflecting those Psalms of blessing to God in the Old Testament. Daniel 44:3-35 records Nebuchadnezzar blessing God after being restored from those seven years of living like a beast. "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" In the same way, Paul blesses and praises God. He starts with God, not with us. He wants you and me to be God-centered, to exalt God as He really is. Regardless of what is happening in your life, no matter how sick or miserable or rich or poor or whatever your circumstance, start here: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed is the word "eulogy," where people give great honor to loved ones who have passed away. Paul is saying we are to give great honor and exaltation to the living God who designed the entire scheme of salvation for sinners through His Son Jesus Christ. All the blessings of your life come down to you from God the Father. He is the fountain of all that you have and enjoy materially and spiritually.

And you immediately see that God is the Father and Jesus is the Son. The Spirit is here behind the scenes shining the light of glory on the Father and the Son. And between the Father and the Son is pure and perfect and eternal love. Don't ever forget that God the Father loves the Son. When Jesus came to earth, the Father spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved (or loved) Son, in whom I am well pleased." He is a God of loving relationships, not a mere force or a deistic God far away or an Allah-type solitary being all alone in his heavens. He didn't create the universe to fill some need or some dissatisfaction. He created the universe to glorify Himself and share His great love with sinners.

Focus your heart on God first and above all. Regardless of what you are facing, you must set the Lord before you high and lifted up. Be consumed with God's being, His perfections, His power and holiness and justice and love and grace and mercy. Aim your heart at Him. When you take that time in the morning to get with God, learn from Paul – focus on your glorious Father God and bless His name!

GOD HAS BLESSED YOU! Value above all else everything God has done for you in Christ – "He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." Here you have unfolded all the wealth of grace God pours out on sinners. We bless Him so highly because He has blessed us so completely. You may have a nice house, nice car, nice family, nice, job, nice TV, go on nice vacations, but above all, you are blessed by God in His Son.

Now God continues to pour out blessings on us, but here Paul is gathering up all that God has planned for His people, from eternity past to eternity future, and Paul describes it as one grand gift – He has blessed us! Not "We hope He will bless us." Not, "If we're good He will bless us." He has blessed us even though we are sinners. This is where your faith, small as it may be, reaches out and lays hold of God's promise with a hungry heart, opening wide to receive and rejoice in this assurance.

Spurgeon counsels us to believe God's promise: "We are not sitting here, and groaning, and crying, and fretting, and worrying, and questioning our own salvation.... If you have a great notion of His great mercy to you, you will be greatly grateful to your gracious God." God has blessed us with the most wonderful blessings we could ever want or need. You have been blessed in Jesus Christ.

He hasn't only blessed us, but He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. You have to stop and drill into that word "every." There isn't a blessing left that God hasn't blessed you with. In God's amazing and sovereign grace He has opened all of heaven's resources and blessed you with them. There isn't one blessing or one gift that you still need. 2 Peter 1:3 says, "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence."

All God's wealth comes to you through His Son and all that He accomplished in His incarnation, including His perfect life and the substitutionary death on that cross in your place, bringing you forgiveness (that's a blessing) and perfect righteousness (that's another blessing). God emptied heaven's storehouse when He sent His Son. He couldn't have sent anything more or better! Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" All things. Every spiritual blessing.

You are a wealthy soul in Christ, literally. Bill Gates is worth \$85 billion. Jeff Bezos, \$73 billion. Warren Buffet, 77 billion. Zuckerberg's right up there, too. But do they have a dime of spiritual wealth? They are poverty stricken if they are not in Christ. Why would a believer ever envy a wealthy lost man? The world leaves all its earthly wealth behind; you take yours with you!

Do you value above all these spiritual blessings? Is anything more important to you than your salvation? Is this world more attractive to you than Jesus Christ? Which do you value more, earthly blessings or heavenly blessings? Your citizenship is in heaven. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God!" (Col. 3:2-3)

GOD HAS CHOSEN YOU! To plumb the depths of God's blessings to you, you must go back to the beginning of your salvation, vs. 4 "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."

Paul isn't afraid to teach this doctrine of election or the truth that God has sovereignly chosen those whom He would save. Calvin rebuked preachers who hide this great truth from God's people. He wrote, "We shall never know where our salvation comes from till we have lifted up our minds to God's eternal counsel by which he has chosen whom he pleased and left the remainder in their confusion and ruin."

But folks stumble over this. Why one and not the other? Why Jacob and not Esau? Read Romans 9. God is sovereign and free to show mercy to whomever He wills, for His good pleasure and to the praise of His glory. We all deserved His justice and would have found ourselves in His eternal wrath if He had not planned to save a vast number of sinful souls from every nation and tribe and tongue!

The fact is that God chose all those who are saved. Out of the entire number of the human race from Adam and Eve to the last person saved, God chose them to be saved. He picked us to enjoy His blessings. Why? Not the way we go and pick out lumber at Lowes, "Hmm, this one's straight, this one's crooked." Or how they pick players at the volleyball game, "Uh, don't pick him. He'll lose the game for you." Or how you pick watermelon, thumping it and if it sounds hollow, you choose it. God didn't go around thumping sinners to see which one was a good one. We were all rotten, and you know what rotten watermelon smells like!

No, God chose us in spite of our guilt and regardless of the kind of life we lived. No one is beyond hope! God didn't look down through time and see you doing a pretty good job and decide, "She'll make a good one. I pick her." No, no. God didn't check us out to see if we were qualified. None of us were. He chose us in pure sovereign grace, because it pleased Him.

Lay two verses from John 6 side by side. John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." Then John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." These are two beautiful verses with six great truths. 1) The Father gave you to His Son. 2) The Father sent His Son to redeem you. 3) The Father sends the Spirit to draw you to His Son. 4) The Spirit makes sure you come to Jesus in faith. 5) The Son assures you He will never cast you out. 6) Jesus will raise you up on the last day!

God chose you in Christ. No one gets to God outside of Christ. All God does, He does through His Son. God didn't choose you in you; He chose you in Christ who did all that you needed to be redeemed.

But the big question remains, when did God choose you? God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world, in His eternal counsel. He chose you before He created the heavens and the earth. And

believe it or not, you, living in Evansville, born at St. Mary's or wherever, you were personally in God's thought and chosen by God back before time began, before the sun shone and the earth yielded its first plants, before God created Adam and Eve. That's what it says, doesn't it? Calvin said we must put our brain and reason under our foot and listen to what God says here.

God pulls back the curtain of eternity past and we see into His grand plan of grace that would bring maximum glory to His Son when in His great love He chose, in pure grace, undeserving people He knew would sin, and then you come forward through creation and into history as you see His grace unfolding age by age, from the animal skins in the garden of Eden to the thousands upon thousands of animal sacrifices, rivers of blood flowing all the way down to the fullness of time when God said, "Ok, it's time, My Son, to leave our heaven, to go down, to live and die and rise again and purchase all these sinful people we have chosen, then to come back up here to the Father's right hand, to pour out the Spirit for world-wide evangelism, building up the body of Christ, testifying solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God, and finally bringing them all here to glorify our grace and flourish in our love forever and ever! Wow!

All of this is by pure unmerited grace, apart from any works of any kind. You didn't choose God. God choose you in His grace. And that grace in His Son goes down deep into human depravity to rescue all these chosen ones. No matter how horrible and ugly and evil and hateful your heart, no matter how low-down filthy and corrupt you've become, or how arrogant and proud and self-righteous you became, God's grace is able to save the chief of sinners from the "guttermost to the uttermost!" And He gets all the glory. Let him who glories, glory in the Lord!

But why did He choose you? Just to fill empty places in heaven? Look at verse 4. He chose you in Christ for the purpose that you would be holy and blameless in His presence. God never chooses sinners to be saved to let them continue in their sin. No, His goal is to finally conform you perfectly to His Son, Jesus Christ. In the meantime God is growing you and changing you as you hear and learn and apply the Word to your life. And finally, you will be perfectly holy and blameless, just like your Savior Jesus.

What effect should this truth of election have on you? This is searching. It puts salvation in God's hands. Am I chosen? No playing games with Jesus. So how do I know if I'm chosen? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Come to Christ. Ironsides described the gospel as a gate with a sign over it, "Whosoever will, may come." That invitation is for everyone. That includes you. Then for those who actually come through the gate by faith in Christ turn around and look at they gate they just came through and it says, "Chosen before the foundation of the world."

These truths should humble you completely. You didn't deserve salvation; you have nothing to boast about. This grace should focus your heart on God Almighty and His love for you. That He should not spare Jesus but send Him to rescue you from you plight, this should bow you down in worship and thankfulness. It should help you have assurance of your salvation since it depends on God, not you. If God chose you, you can count on it, He'll keep you. And it should encourage you in your evangelism, since ultimately another person's salvation doesn't depend on how slick your methods are, but on God who uses the gospel to call out those He will save. We just need to be faithful to speak the gospel to whomever and wherever we can.