

## Praise God for His Grace Ephesians 1:3-14

<sup>3</sup> *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.* <sup>4</sup> *He did this when he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love* <sup>5</sup> *he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will,* <sup>6</sup> *and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves.* <sup>7</sup> *In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace,* <sup>8</sup> *which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight.* <sup>9</sup> *He made known to us the mystery of his will in keeping with his good purpose, which he planned in Christ.* <sup>10</sup> *This was to be carried out when the time had fully come, in order to bring all things together in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.* <sup>11</sup> *In him we have also obtained an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in keeping with the purpose of his will.* <sup>12</sup> *He did this so that his glory would be praised as a result of us, who were the first to hope in Christ.* <sup>13</sup> *In him, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and in him, when you also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.* <sup>14</sup> *He is the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession, so that his glory would be praised.*

Today we begin a series of readings from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians is one of Paul's prison epistles that he wrote while under house arrest in Rome. Ephesus was a city where Paul spent a considerable amount of time especially at the tail end of his third mission journey. Then Paul spent roughly three years in Ephesus. In this letter, Paul says much about God's activity in establishing his Church. Paul writes to remind Ephesian believers of the execution of God's gracious plan. He gather his elect into one body under Christ. He blesses them richly for his praise. He keeps them what they are. We'll see all of that and much more from our second Scripture lesson over these eight weeks.

Today our focus is on praising God for the grace he has shown us. In this Scripture from Ephesians chapter one, Paul shows us how God chose us to be his own, how he redeemed us by his blood, and how he sealed us with his Spirit. For all this we praise God for his grace.

That God chose any of us to be his own is pure grace. Paul urges the Ephesians to praise God because he has given all of them spiritual blessings that surpass anything this life offers. Paul writes: *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.* The surpassing wealth of spiritual blessings excite our praise. These blessings originate in the heavens and come to us by God's grace. The blessings affect our spiritual life. That doesn't mean that God does not grant physical blessings. The first article of the Apostle Creed reminds us of everything that God graciously gives us for our body and life: food and drink, clothes and shoes, property and home, land, cattle, and all I own. Paul stresses how they affect our innermost being. Paul told the Romans, "*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32). The phrase, *in Christ* rings throughout the entire letter. If it had not been for Christ's saving work, none of the blessings would have been possible. Not only are they possible. They actually have become our possession—all by God's grace.

Paul gives evidence that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. He presents examples of the blessings we have received. The first one he mentions takes us back before creation. *He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.* It is entirely a matter of grace that God chose us to be his own. God did not predestine anyone to damnation. If some are damned, they have only themselves to blame. Before the founding of the world though God elected us to be holy and blameless before him. Now we can stand before him completely holy, completely without sin. God graciously planned this before we even set foot on this earth.

Paul mentions adoption to show us that by birth we were not God's children, holy and blameless. We were objects of his wrath. Still, it was God's purpose to adopt us and make us members of his family who share in all the blessings. Why did he do this? *He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves.* God did not look at what we would be or do. God looked at what his Son was and would do. All was made possible through Jesus Christ. It seemed good to God when he formed his plan that he carry it out. When God elected us by his grace he based it all on what Christ would do for us.

The doctrine of election is not given to us so we can wonder whether or not God has chosen us. It's all grace and it's comfort that we need. Living on this side of eternity there is much tribulation. As much as we wish it, we can never be free from sin and its effects on our world. Politically there will never be unity. Attempts will continue to be made to end human life, even those of our highest officials. But God wants you to know that before he said, "Let there be light," he chose you to be his own. He didn't look into your future and see you were better than most. His choice was pure grace. None of us could offer God good reason. Our whole lives are covered with the filth of sin. But long before God made Adam and Eve in his holy image, he chose you to be holy and blameless. And for that grace we praise him.

That leads us to our next gracious blessing for which we praise our God. He has redeemed us by his blood. Paul writes: *In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight.* To show the limitless nature of grace Paul uses a picture of a bucket filled to the brim and then having even more poured into it so it overflows. So God caused his grace to abound towards us. God's purpose was that we should be holy and without blame in his sight. How was that possible? Transgressions cling to us as guilt that must be punished. But we were bought free from them. And the price that freed us was blood. Jesus shed his blood in his suffering and crucifixion. He then cried out, "It is finished." His Father backed him by raising him on the third day. Christ's work has brought about and won us the forgiveness of sins. We are redeemed. Purchased and won by our Savior's life and death. Our transgressions no longer come into consideration. They are completely forgiven. And for that grace we praise God.

By faith we lay hold of it. Our transgressions are wiped clean. All who share in the faith are holy and without blame just as God chose them to be before creation. Here is solid comfort in times of trouble. God is not punishing us for any sins. We have redemption through Jesus' blood, the forgiveness of sins. Great as the number of our sins may be, there is grace enough to take care of them all. *"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound"* (Romans 5:20).

Paul reminds us how (God) made known to us the mystery of his will in keeping with his good purpose, which he planned in Christ. This was to be carried out when the time had fully come, in order to bring all things together in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. The supply of wisdom and understanding which God's grace grants is complete. To supply us with wisdom and understanding God made known to us the mystery of his will. We could never discover it on our own. God had to reveal it. In his amazing grace he has made it known to us. In keeping with his good pleasure, he made known his will. For that grace we praise him.

From our Savior's ascension until his return for judgment, God continues to manage his creation. God let's his will and plan be known. It can all be summed up in Christ. God will manage the course of history so that Christ remains the focal point. When the time run sits course, the Lamb of God emerges as the victorious King of kings and Lord of lords. Those who oppose him are cast into hellfire. But those who are washed in his blood, they live and reign forever. Jesus is the key to history. By revealing that plan God makes us wise for salvation. And for that grace, we praise him.

Paul concludes by emphatically pointing out that everything depends on Christ. He speaks of salvation that comes by faith. *In him we have also obtained an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in keeping with the purpose of his will. He did this so that his glory would be praised as a result of us, who were the first to hope in Christ. In him, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and in him, when you also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession, so that his glory would be praised.* Faith results from hearing the Word of truth. The gospel is good news of God's amazing grace. It is good news of your salvation. We were plunged into hell, but Jesus pulled us back. We are sure of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. This faith comes from hearing the gospel.

And now we have an inheritance waiting for us. All believers have this. Of this inheritance the Holy Spirit is given to you as a down payment. He is our guarantee that the full sum will be paid. The gift of God's Spirit guarantees that we will receive all the blessings of heaven in the Lord's good time. The Holy Spirit uses the means of grace to effectively work faith in us. Paul calls him the Spirit of the promise. The Spirit doesn't just come to you to work faith and then move on. He remains in us believer making us his temple. He is the seal which marks you belonging to God. And we'll consider much more in the coming weeks.

Today we praise God for the grace he has shown us. From eternity, he chose us. With his blood he redeemed us. With his Spirit he has sealed us. All grace. Praise God for that grace.