

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Ninth Sunday after Trinity, August 1, 2010

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Hymns: 411, 465:1, 40, 473, 448:5.

Lessons: Genesis 12:1-8, 2 Corinthians 1:18-22, Matthew 23:37 (KJV and NIV)

Text: Ephesians 1:3-14.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

If you are ever feeling unloved, or unappreciated, or under-appreciated, these are words of Scripture to read for assurance of comfort, and of love, God's love to you. Surely we could point to many other words of Scripture for assurance of God's love toward us, but these are special, in that they assure believers of God's love in electing them to eternal salvation.

These words tell you how important and how loved you are to God. These verses tell you how special you are to God.

St. Paul tells us that God has chosen you, and all believers from eternity, for eternal salvation. This is known as the scripture doctrine of election, or predestination.

At the beginning I must emphasize, that all those who by the grace of God alone, for Christ's sake, through the means of grace, are brought to faith, are justified, sanctified, and preserved in faith here in time, that all these have already from eternity been endowed by God with faith, justification, sanctification, and preservation in faith, and this for the same reason, namely, by grace alone, for Christ's sake, and by way of the means of grace. Just as clearly as we accept by faith this doctrine, so we reject any teaching that God has predestined any humans to eternal damnation. Many people reject salvation by trying to earn righteousness before God by their own works, that is, through self-righteousness, by work-righteousness. Our Gospel lesson shows Jesus' sadness at so many of the people of Jerusalem rejecting him and the salvation he came to bring. It is plain that they *"were not willing"*, that they *"would not"* be gathered into eternal salvation. Unbelievers are damned, not because God wanted them to be damned, for Scripture plainly speaks in 1 Timothy 2:3-4 of *"God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*

With that introduction, let's talk today about

ELECTION -- PREDESTINATION

- 1. God's eternal plan was fulfilled in Christ for our good and blessing,**
- 2. So that we are led to thank and praise our gracious God.**

Last week we talked about verse 3, in which God's plan gives us unspeakably great and precious blessings and is our reason for praising him.

Verses four through 14 are one sentence in the Greek, and this section of Scripture has three main ideas: One: From eternity God has had a plan of salvation. Two: This plan is fulfilled in and through Christ. And again, repeating an idea we talked about last week, Three: God's plan gives us unspeakably great and precious blessings and is our reason for praising him.

In Christ, God chose us to be holy and blameless. We certainly were not holy and blameless to begin with. He chose us when we had no righteousness to offer. He chose us before we were born, before the world even existed. God chose us not because we were holy and blameless but he chose us to be holy and blameless. He chose us, sinners that we are, in order to make us righteous in Christ. Every spiritual blessing rests on Christ. God's choosing us from eternity is often referred to as "election." It can also be called "predestination," as we read in verse five: "**he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will**".

Election and predestination are not two separate, unrelated things. God chose us by predestining us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. This is in essence repeated in verse 11: "**in him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will**".

What a blessing! What comfort for sinners! From eternity, before time existed, God's plan was to make us members of his family, to bring us into his household as his sons and daughters. Thus, as God's children we are in line for a full inheritance. Everything that God has is even now being used for our good and blessing, and in heaven it will visibly and tangibly become our personal possession.

Why does God do all that? Well, this is a pure gift of God's grace, God's undeserved love. Remember, we talked about grace last week? And the result of this gift of God's grace? That we may be led to thank and praise him, "**to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves**" – Jesus Christ. Note again how everything comes through Christ. After all, at Jesus' baptism, scripture tells us "**And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'**" Matthew 3:17. God was pleased with him because he accomplished every tiny part of his heavenly Father's plans!

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory." In this section the emphasis is on the one through whom our election was made possible.

In the first verse of our text we heard that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. Now our adoption into God's family is emphasized. The greatest blessing is being redeemed by Jesus' blood and in that way being given the forgiveness of sins we have in Christ. Notice the words redemption and forgiveness. Redemption implies that someone is a slave or captive and needs to be ransomed. Forgiveness implies that someone has acted improperly toward another and in so doing has incurred guilt that needs to be covered over or taken away. Both redemption and forgiveness require the payment of a heavy price. Every sinner has offended God Himself. The price is – or at least should be – the sinner's life. "**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" Romans 6:23.

But "**in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us,**" God himself paid the price. He sent his only-begotten Son to be our substitute, to suffer and die in our place. Through his blood we have been rescued from the captivity of sin and freed from its guilt. No human could ever have come up with this plan. It is a mystery only in the sense that people cannot come to understand it by themselves.

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” We must realize that nothing happens by chance.

In order to fulfill his promise of the Savior, God chose Abraham from out of all the families of the world and gave him three specific promises which were mentioned in our Old Testament lesson. God promised that he would make Abraham into a great nation; that his descendents would live in a special land; and that from his descendants, the Jewish nation, the Savior of the world would be born. That is the way all peoples would be blessed through Abraham. God was faithful to his promise. God stuck with his plan. God kept patience with rebellious Israel, the descendants of Abraham. And all this glorifies God. We sinners are undeserving of God’s blessings, just as Abraham was. But God chose him and his descendents. God chose us, God elected us, God predestined us to eternal life

God’s faithfulness to the Jewish nation was only part of his plan. When Paul says ***“we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory”*** that makes it clear that although the Jews may have been the first to believe in Christ, ***“you (the Ephesian readers, Gentiles by birth) also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation”***. The Jews are part of God’s plan, but in Christ God’s intention is made clear that the Gentiles are also in the plan. God’s plan includes bringing ***“all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”***

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.” All three persons of the triune God are plainly taught here in these verses of our text. The Holy Spirit does his special work of bringing people to faith in Christ through the message of the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit brought the Ephesians to faith but ***“Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”*** In ancient times a seal was the sign of ownership. For a Christian to bear the seal of the Holy Spirit is an indicator that he or she belongs to God. That is a blessing for today.

But there is another blessing coming from the Spirit’s presence in our hearts by faith. We have the assurance for the future. The word of God describes the Spirit as ***“a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.”*** A deposit, a down payment, is the first installment of a transaction and guarantees the rest of the obligation will also be met. The fact that God has given his Holy Spirit into our hearts by faith now – at the present time – is an assurance that the rest of God’s promise will also be coming to us. It is his guarantee that he’ll hold our inheritance in heaven for us ***“until the redemption”*** – the final deliverance – of those who are God’s possession.

For the third time in this section St. Paul tells us why God has showered us with all these blessings: to give us cause to thank and praise him. This is to the praise of his glory.

To close the sermon with this thought, we turn to the words of Martin Luther’s explanation of the first and second articles of the Creed: “All this God [the Father] does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.”

“All this [Jesus Christ] did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.” This I believe! Thank you God! Thank you Jesus! Amen.