

Sunday January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14  
“Living the Celebration”

It was in the spring of 1844 when the young German scholar made a most remarkable discovery. His name was Konstanin Von Tischendorf, and he had been traveling through the Middle East. He came one night to an old Greek Orthodox monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai. Knocking upon the door, he was invited in by the Russian monks who lived there and invited to spend the night.

It was bitterly cold in the desert, and the monks had baskets of old dry cordwood and vellum (dried calf’s skin used as paper)) to throw into the fireplace. Tischendorf was warming his hands at the fire when his eyes caught sight of one of the pieces of vellum and he did a double take. This piece of vellum had writing on it. Tischendorf had benefited from a classical education, and he recognized the writing as a part of the Greek Bible. He began digging through the baskets of refuse and came up with 129 pages of what was to be the oldest manuscript of the Bible to be discovered up to that time.

The monks could see that he was excited, and they became cautious. When he asked if he could take the manuscript with him, they allowed him to take only 43 of the 129 pages. The rest of the manuscript was sent to Mother Russia where it remained until after the Communist Revolution. It was not until 1933 that the Russian Communists, having no use for old copies of the Bible, agreed to sell the Codex Sinaiticus to Great Britain for a price of 100,000 pounds (current value adjusted for inflation is 8,825,790.00)- making it one of the most expensive books in the world.

What’s one of the best gifts you’ve ever received? Maybe some of you are leaning into your spouse right now and saying, “My husband” or “My wife.” Aww... That’s so sweet. But not accurate since chances are you had to work for your spouse. You had to date them, try and look attractive for them, treat them nicely. No, I’m talking about an item or thing someone gave you that you really like—pure materialism.

Maybe some of you really like receiving gifts. On the [Five Love Languages Quiz](#) penned by [Gary Chapman](#) you score high in “Receiving Gifts.” Maybe some of you don’t like receiving gifts, so you score low. Today’s sermon is about a gift that I hope all of you will want to receive. It’s the gift of God’s grace. Just to be clear, mercy is not receiving a punishment we do deserve, and grace is receiving a gift we don’t deserve. Grace is a gift. Paul starts our passage and his letter to the Ephesians this way.

[Ephesians 1:3](#) “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

Today’s text, [Ephesians 1:3-14](#) in the original Greek is one long continuous sentence in which Paul describes the blessings we have in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A blessing is a gift. A blessing is anything good we receive from God. In this passage Paul explains three gifts we receive from God, the first of which is the most controversial. Grace is a gift and the first gift we receive is this...

## 1. WE ARE CHOSEN BY THE FATHER. (V4-6)

Ephesians 1:4-6 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption, to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

The first gift we receive is that as Christians we are chosen by our Heavenly Father. However, there is probably no other gift in the history of the church that has caused more division, disunity, distrust, and disagreement. For people who are supposed to be all about peace, we are awfully good at arguing and getting mad over the doctrine of election and predestination.

In George Whitefield's biography. He was the most famous preacher during the Great Awakening in the 1740s in both America and England. He preached on the Boston Common to 25,000 people without any microphone. The entire population of Boston was only 17,000 at the time. George Whitefield believed in the doctrine of election and predestination but his mentor, Charles Wesley, rejected it. And they very publicly argued about it and condemned each other in the newspapers. It caused a huge rift between them for years. I don't want that to happen here.

This is still a touchy subject today. When I was graduating seminary, I was cautioned by our professors that when I interviewed with a church, we would be better served to avoid controversial subjects like predestination and election. So, over the years I don't think I've preached much on this topic in any of the churches I have served. Maybe because we haven't had a text that emphasized it or maybe because I didn't want to cause division. Can we agree on two things?

1. The church should be a safe space to talk about difficult things, like election and predestination.
2. Whether we agree or disagree let's just try and understand what the Bible says.

So, what does the Bible say? It says we are...

### A. CHOSEN BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

Have you ever gotten picked for a team, like for dodgeball, capture the flag, or baseball or soccer? The best athletes always get picked first. The athletes who have proven how good they perform in sports, they are chosen. But have you ever played sports with someone who chose you not because of how good you are or how athletic you look but simply because they loved you (like a parent or aunt or boyfriend)?

Before you or I could do anything right or wrong, before the world was even created, our Heavenly Father said, "I love you. I choose you. You are mine." Grace is being picked not because you're the strongest, or best, or even good at all; but simply because God loves you. *Grace is a gift.*

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Now maybe some of you who know your theology know there are two camps, Calvinists, and Armenians, who hold different understandings of election. Perhaps an oversimplification is that Calvinists say God elects or chooses individuals for salvation.

While Armenians say that God chooses a group and whoever chooses to be a part of that group is saved. For example, Calvinists would say that God chooses people to get on the bus while Armenians say God saves anyone on the bus already.

In our text we see that God does save a group. This letter is written to the church at Ephesus and notice how Paul always seems to address a plural group of people—“who has blessed us” (v3), “he chose us” (v4), “he predestined us” (v5), “grace, which he has freely given us” (v6), “we have redemption” (v7), “he lavished on us” (v8), “made known to us” (v9), and “we were also chosen” (v11). God saves the big-C universal Church, all believers from all times and places. God saves the entire bus.

What is the bus? The bus is Christ. Notice how many times our passage says, “in him,” or “in Christ.” “He chose us in him” (v4), “In him we have redemption” (v7), “In him we have obtained an inheritance” (v11). One commentary I read said “in him” or “in Christ” or other variations occurs eleven times. The Heavenly Father first chose Christ Jesus, and anyone who repents of their sins and puts their faith, and trust, and hope, and life “in Christ” are saved.

But... our passage also seems to highlight God choosing individuals. I see this in verse 12 which says, “we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ...” Paul uses a plural “we” but then clarifies that the “we” is all the people who have put their hope in Christ. Another way we recognize God choosing individuals is through the theme of adoption in verse 5 because adoption is always a personal event. You don’t adopt a group of people but individuals. I suppose you could adopt siblings, but each is uniquely adopted into the family. *The Father chose us before the creation of the world. We are...*

## B. DESTINED FOR ADOPTION THROUGH CHRIST.

Verse 5 says, “he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ...” What’s the destiny God chose for us? Adoption. Sonship. Before creation, before you were born, before you could do anything good or bad God chose you to become his child, to become a son or daughter of the king.

In ancient cultures sons normally received the inheritance (not daughters) so if the Bible isn’t making a statement about gender but about rights. If you know Christ, you have the rights of a son! The ESV says in verse 11, “In him we have obtained an inheritance.” Because of what Christ did, we get to share in his inheritance. What does Christ get? Everything... Glory! Praise! Honor! Joy! Love! Relationship! Authority! Christ gets more of those things since he is the firstborn son, but we get to share in them too.

I once watched a documentary of a rich family. They had adopted a girl who I think was their niece. When they interviewed her, she could tell you what it was like to have nothing and what it was like to have everything.

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We've been adopted by the richest, most kind and generous and loving family in the universe. Chances are that your family, although they may be great, isn't perfect. If you know Christ, the Father has adopted you into a perfectly loving and good family who wants to spend time with you and know you and love you forever and ever. It's hard to imagine just how good this is and one day will be.

As many of you know we recently lost our beloved Mother and mother-in-law June. One of the tasks left for Laura and her brother is to sort through the things that she left behind. One of those things is pictures. Lost of pictures. The pictures that seem to grab my attention the most are group photos. Particularly photos of the family together. Christmas time with our families is like a living snapshot of where and among whom we belong.

Adoption as Paul speaks of it, is the promise that no matter how good or how bad your family is in this life, you are going home for the Holidays. You are going to spend eternity with your Father and your older brother Jesus and all your crazy diverse siblings and it's going to be "drama free." *The Father destined us for adoption through Christ.*

The first gift of grace is that *the Father chose us before the creation of the world.* The second is this...

## **2. WE ARE REDEEMED BY THE SON. (V7-10)**

[Ephesians 1:7-10](#) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9) he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10) to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Richard Coekin's *Ephesians For You* connected "redemption through his blood" back to its Old Testament origins, the Passover sacrifice and exodus. Do you remember the story of Israel? They were held captive by the nation of Egypt for 400 years until God sent them a leader, Moses, to lead them out of captivity. But Pharaoh didn't want to let them go so Moses, empowered by God, called down plagues on Egypt.

The last plague was that every firstborn would die, Egyptian, Israelite, human or animal ([Exodus 12](#)). But God also provided for a way of deliverance. If the Israelites took a lamb "without defect" (v5), sacrificed it, and wiped its blood "on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses" (v7), when God came to Egypt to strike down the firstborns he would "pass-over" those families. It's by the blood of the lambs the Israelite firstborns were saved.

It's by the blood of these lambs that they were redeemed from death. This symbolism continued in the sacrificial system. But are sheep an adequate substitute for human lives? No. These lambs were pointing forward to a final lamb to come. Jesus is our Passover lamb. He chose to die on the cross as a lamb "without defect." His blood was wiped on the tops and sides of the cross. Because of Jesus' death God "passes-over" us. And now God offers salvation, deliverance, and forgiveness as a gift.

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He spares us from the punishment our sins deserve and then just like he led the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt and into the promised land he is leading us, his exodus people, into our promised land.

Verse 10 tells us this redemption isn't just for me. God's purpose is "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." His redemption can heal and deliver me spiritually, but it can also heal and deliver us Cornerstone, us church, us churches all around the world, my neighbor and me (frontline), my gym, this world, this creation, all things. Jesus' blood can even bring unity to Calvinists and Armenians. *We (all who know Christ) are redeemed by the Son.* That's the second gift. The third is this...

### 3. WE ARE SEALED BY THE SPIRIT. (V11-14)

Ephesians 1:11-14 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, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

What does it mean in verse 13, "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit"? One commentary said, "Seals were used widely in the ancient world as the primary way of indicating ownership." A person sealed or marked important things that belonged to them, like livestock (branding). We've been marked with the Holy Spirit that we belong to God (Rom 4:11; 1 Cor 9:2). Anyone chosen by the Father and redeemed by the Son also receives the Holy Spirit. John 3 tells us the Holy Spirit is like the wind (John 3:8). He goes where he wants to go so if you receive the Spirit, it's a gift.

Maybe some of you are sitting here and asking yourself, "Am I chosen by God? Am I one of the elects? Has Jesus really redeemed me?" One of the ways we know is if we have the Holy Spirit in us. How can we sense if we have the Holy Spirit? It's more than a feeling.