

EPHESIANS

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH REVEALED

SERMON TITLE: Let's Begin with Worship

DATE: August 29, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:1-14

PASTOR: Charlie Boyd

The Book of Ephesians is a beautiful picture of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and as members together in Jesus' Church. When he arrived, Jesus revealed what was once hidden from us throughout the ages through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we're introduced to something new—a life in Christ where we find THE answer to the brokenness of this world. But what should this look like? How should we, in the power of the Holy Spirit, live this new life? Jesus' church is meant to be a source of wholeness and life amidst a world of brokenness and death. What does this entail? What does it mean practically? In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains the mystery of the church and gives us practical insight into living as believers who have been raised from death to life by faith in Christ.

How often do you come into a worship service and you find it hard to worship? ...not because of something going on in the auditorium, but because of something going on in you. Maybe you're tired, stressed, worried, overcome by everything going on in your life...maybe you feel trapped in some situation and you can't see a way out. You lay awake at night thinking about it and that makes you tired and the fatigue makes you feel even more emotionally spent. If you find yourself in a place like that, the passage we're going to look at today offers you some help.

This morning we begin a new sermon series in the book of Ephesians. Most scholars believe that the letter to the Christians in Ephesus was a circular letter, meaning, it was passed around to many house churches in and around Ephesus. But why did Paul write this letter? ...Most NT letters were written to address some problem in a local church. False teaching needed to be confronted or not living in line with the Gospel of grace needed to be challenged. There's no such issue behind the writing of the Ephesian letter. At least, it's not mentioned in the letter itself. No, Paul knew that his friends in Ephesus were very concerned about him because he was in prison, most likely in a Roman prison. When one of your key leaders takes a hit for the Gospel, that can really shake you up. So, Paul writes and he says in 6:21 that he has sent his friend Tychicus to them with this letter so that "you may know how I am and what I am doing...that you may know how we are, and that he (Tych) may encourage you." This letter was meant as an encouragement to all its readers and the form this encouragement takes begins with an astounding song of praise. The letter to the Ephesians is set in an atmosphere of worship.

READ 1:1-14 — Even though he's in prison, Paul regards himself as a richly "blessed" man. He's saying in these opening lines, "Don't worry about me; it's well with my soul!" He's not discouraged. He's totally encouraged. And, what flows out of his heart through his pen is one long, 202-word, song of praise. He gets so caught up in the reality of all that God has done for him in Christ thru the Holy Spirit that he can't find enough words to express what fills his heart. So, this passage is about worship; it's about praise; it's about holding on to the reality of who God is, and what God has done, is doing, and will do in the future, so that his soul doesn't become weighed down by his present, difficult, circumstances.

Now, I would say most of us who have been Christians for a while, have not read these verses in that way. Why not? Why do we miss the main point of the passage? It's because we get stuck on the words chosen/elect, predestination, and before the foundation of the world (vv4,5, 11). We get bogged down with those words and we call "time out" because we feel we've got to settle how it is that God chooses/predestines some to heaven and some to, well, the other place. We get hung up over divine sovereignty and human responsibility and those doctrines eclipse the real import of the passage which is praise. So, we might as well push pause and tackle this issue or we'll never be able to unpack the main point.

Two observations about election from this passage.

First, when people talk about election and predestination, they typically think of God choosing which individuals go to heaven when they die and who doesn't—kind of like an "election"—I vote for this candidate, but not for that candidate. And we read this text that way because of the way we understand the Bible's story. We typically think of the Bible's story this way—[01 Our Storyline]—Here we have God—who creates me/us—and sin comes along and separates us from God—but then God sends Jesus to die for us and rise from the dead to give us new life—and when we put our faith in him—we go to heaven when we die, but if we reject Jesus, we go to hell. That's the storyline I heard some 56 years ago when I trusted Christ as my Savior—and that decision to put my faith in Jesus set the whole trajectory of my life, for which I am very, very grateful. The problem is, that's not how the biblical writers understood the storyline of Scripture.

For many of us election means, God chooses *some* out of the *many* to go to heaven rather than hell—[02 Election in our Storyline]—See how that works? But again, the problem is, that's not how Paul understood the storyline of Scripture.

Paul understood Scripture telling this story—[03 Paul's Storyline]—God creates humanity—(*God creates a people for himself*)—and he blesses them—(*God will be their God and they will be his people*)—but the very first of those people turn from him and go their own way—and sin and death and violence and corruption fill God's good world. So, God comes and he *chooses one man out of the many*—he chooses Abraham—and he *predestines* the family of Abraham to be the one nation through whom he will one day restore God's blessings to the whole world. Tim Mackie of the Bible Project puts it this way—"God chooses one out of the many so that through the one he can restore his blessing back to the many." This is the logic of Biblical election. So, Abraham's family grows into the nation of Israel, but Israel does not fulfill its God-given mission to be a blessing to the nations. They repeatedly fall into sin just like the whole human race fell into sin in the beginning and now, there's a double problem that must be solved. And so, all through the OT we read of a Messiah who is to come—a Messiah who will restore God's blessing both to Israel and to all the nations. And, this Messiah will bring both Israel and the nations together as God's new humanity. Messiah Jesus—*the seed of Abraham*—will fulfill Israel's mission by extending God's blessing to Israel and to all the nations—*You seeing this?*—one more time—God blesses all humanity—*humanity forfeited that blessing*—he chose and predestined one family to be the vehicle of blessing to the nations—*they forfeited that blessing*—so that the promise of blessing gets put on *one-hoped-for Messiah* in and through whom all nations can experience God's blessing. The Messiah will solve Israel's problem and the nation's problem. So that now, the way that Israel and the nations can experience God's originally promised blessing is in and through Messiah Jesus. Now go back and read Ephesians 1:3-6 with that storyline in mind and see how that makes a difference in how you understand God choosing us and predestining us. Jesus is the one man chosen by God before the foundation of the world. God predetermined that he would be the one man among the many who restore God's creation blessings and bring together Jew and Gentile in one new humanity—[04 Election in Paul's Storyline]. God chooses one—Jesus—out of the many, so that through the one, he can restore his blessing back to the many. (cf Mk 10:45). Do you see how Paul is so caught up in the mysterious love and wisdom of God, and, in his plan to restore his blessings to all of humanity in Christ, that he literally can't help but shout praises to the glory of the grace of God? Hear me: If your understanding of this passage results in theological debates and arguments over *who's in and who's out* rather than uncontrollable praise for the love and wisdom of God in Christ, you have missed the whole point of the passage. Rom9 and 11 teach the same things (for example see Rom 9:4-5; 9:6-13; 11:2; 11:5). Okay, second observation—Election carries with it the idea that b/c we are "in Christ" God has chosen us for something, to do something (see vv 4, 5. 11-12). It's not just that we are chosen (period). We are chosen for something, to be something, to do something. And Paul will flesh that out in chps 4-6.

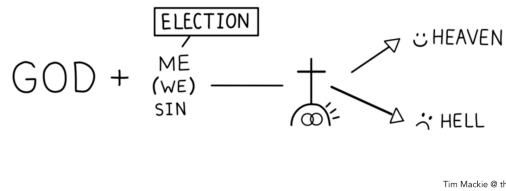
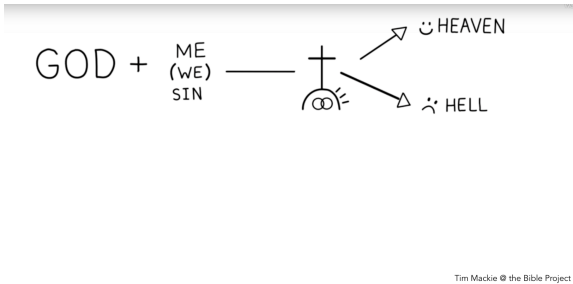
Okay, let's get back to what this passage is really all about. This praise song has 3 verses—3 verses that focus on a different member of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. First, vv1-6 talks about what God has done for us in Christ in eternity past. Second, vv7-12 talks about what Christ has done for us now in the present. Finally, vv13-14 talks about how the indwelling Holy Spirit guarantees our future inheritance with Christ. This three-stanza song of praise permeates Paul's understanding of Scripture, and it permeates his theology. Ephesians truly is set in an atmosphere of worship!

So, why don't we praise God like this very often? ...especially when we find ourselves trapped in circumstances we don't like? —Could it be because—"We tend to see things not as they are, but as we are" (Steven Covey, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People). *We see things not as they are, but as we are.* And, to make matters worse, there's a great spiritual battle going on to keep us that way. (We'll learn more about that next week and when we get to chp6.). Paul was able to passionately worship God despite his circumstances because this song of praise expressed what Paul believed was true reality (cf 2Cor4:18). Why is it so hard to forgive yourself? Why do present circumstances threaten to undo us? —because—we see things not as they are—not as God says they are—but as we are. Here's the question I've been asking myself this week as I've meditated on this passage—Do I see things the way they really are or the way that I am? How about you? Whatever "prison" you might find yourself in today, do you see things the way they really are, the way God says they are, or as you are? God says that all the Spirit-given, eternal, blessings we have received in Christ are more real than all the problems we face in this life. And, if that's true then it should result in a shout "to the praise of his glory!"

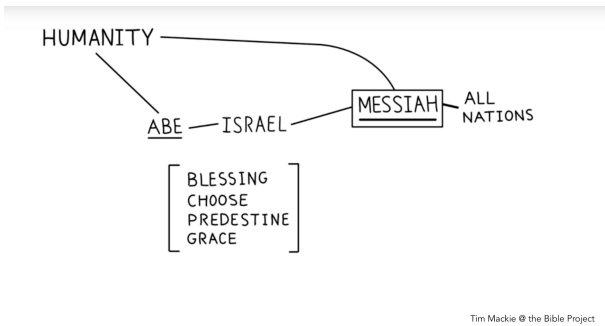
Discussion Starters —

1. Take some time to go around and ask how everyone is doing? ...Ask your group what particular stresses make it hard for them to really worship God on Sunday mornings?
2. Ask the group where Paul was when he wrote the letter to the churches in and around Ephesus. Then ask—"How is it that he could write these verses (vv3-14) when his life was on hold, when he was stuck in terrible circumstances with no end in sight?"
3. Now read Ephesians 1:3-14. ...Ask—"How does thinking of these verses as Paul's song of praise change the way you might have previously thought about them?"
4. Based on what you heard in the message—How does Paul understand the history of redemption? How does that change how you might view the doctrines of election and predestination?
5. How do the repeated phrases of being "in Christ," "in him," "through him" (some 11 times in these verses) factor into our understanding of election and predestination? ...These words applied to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and to Israel—then to Christ—then to us. What does that tell you about what Paul is trying to get us to see?
6. How does the sentence—"we tend to not see as they are, but as we are" shed light on our problem with worshipping God when our lives don't go as planned?
7. What else needs to be discussed? ...Any big "aha's" or "take-aways?"

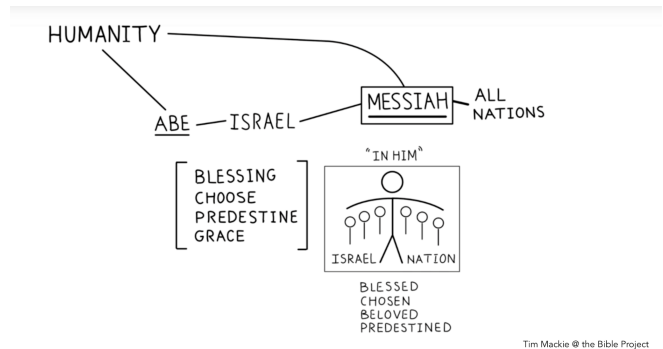
HOMEWORK — Spend time this week reading through and meditating on Eph 1:3-14 every single day. If you are really brave, try memorizing it. Then when you come back to your next meeting begin by sharing what further insights you have had about this song of praise since the last time you met. Reference the images below for a guided look at how this passage particularly applies to us (from Tim Mackey, The Bible Project).



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