

Blessed By God

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to read together now from the book of Ephesians chapter 1 verses 1 to 14 from the New Testament and Lewis is going to come and read for us. Ephesians chapter 1 from verse 1, Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the same servant Ephesus and our faithful in Christ Jesus, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance having being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

In him you also when you have heard the word of truth the gospel of your salvation and believed in him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is a guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory. All right we're going to look together at the passage Lewis-Red Forest Ephesians 1. We started a new series this morning on the letter of Paul to the Ephesians and this is a letter that Paul wrote in sometime between the year 60 and 62 from a prison in the city of Rome and he writes it to Ephesus. This is a church he planted in the 50s. He was there for about three years with the Ephesian people. He really loved them.

If you read Acts 18 and 19 you can read the story of Paul in Ephesus and the church plan and all that and you get from Acts 18-19 that he had very deep love for the Ephesians and they for him. There were a lot of tears when he left and he's writing to them now from prison and it's a circular, the scholars will say this is a circular letter which means it's a letter written to one church that was meant to be copied. Lots of copies would have been made and then they would have sent it around to all the churches near them and they would have told them now you make copies send it around to all the churches near you and so in some of the early manuscripts we have actually there is no word Ephesus there and in verse one it says to the saints who are in and there's a blank there in some of the manuscripts which means that you could fill in they would make a copy that would leave off Ephesus and you could put the name of your church into the blank. So Paul says he's an apostle he's got authority to speak from God and there's a blank there to us today where it says Ephesus.

So by by God's power Paul is writing to us to it says it says to the church to the saints who are in Edinburgh and it's all about the church it's to the church for the church about the church that's really the central theme of the book of Ephesians and there's this implicit question in it that just ask who is the church what is the church what does the church do that's really the question that unites the whole of the book and it's really important and in chapters one to three you get basically the foundational truths about who the church is and then in chapters four to six it's all about what the church does relationships and how we live out into the world we'll get there eventually chapters four to six but we'll start chapters one to three and think about who the church is now we as modern people live in a society in a culture in a time where we think a lot about constructing identity and the world around us is constantly teaching us implicitly explicitly that our fundamental human identity is a product of the way we feel in the decisions we've made so the way that your emotions are moving that's how you're being shaped who you are is how you feel on the one hand on the other hand the

decisions you've made both your achievements and your failures is who you are and so we are all combinations the contemporary world says of our feelings and our achievements or our failures and what Paul does in this letter and in this first section we read is come and tell you that when you follow Jesus Christ you get an identity that comes from the outside not the inside that your identity is more objective than it is subjective and that that identity is cosmic in its scope that when you understand what Paul's saying in this first sentence he writes you realize that who you are as part of such a big vast grand narrative that it disrupts any sense of subjectivism that's at play in the modern world order and verses 3 to 14 that we read is probably Paul's most famous sentence and I say a sentence because it is one sentence so in English you'll see that there are periods full stops all throughout verses 3 to 14 but in Greek there isn't in Greek this is one long sentence that the scholars will tell you is full of bad grammar so it's not in Greek the grammar is not correct and it's and that's exactly the point it's not a mistake Paul it's as if Paul got so overwhelmed by saying blessed be God the Father let me tell you about your cosmic identity in Jesus that he just his pen just kept going and going and going and he forgot to put the punctuation in and so we've got this one long sentence from 3 to 14 and it's all about who the church is and fundamentally what your identity is if you follow Jesus and so every single week in this series we're going to ask the question who is the church what is the church and every week you'll get an answer to that question and this week we're just saying the church is blessed by God and so we need to think about what it means to be blessed I went through and made a list of all the ways that Paul says we're blessed in verses 3 to 14 and this is what he says he says we're chosen elected predestined loved redeemed forgiven adopted lavish by grace and sealed with the Holy Spirit so he says you've got every spiritual blessing you've got everything you need so what are you worried about why are we [7 : 35] anxious we've got everything we need Paul says and so let's see that what does it mean to be blessed and then today we're just going to look at one of those blessings which is election or being chosen predestination martin I moi but remember Lloyd Johnston, 24.

So we'll be, we'll, three weeks right here. What does it mean to be blessed? We are blessed. That's what Paul teaches us here first. John Mackay, a Scotsman, he became president of Princeton Theological Seminary in the early 20th century, about 1903.

And he came back to Edinburgh and gave lectures on Ephesians right across the street a very long time ago. And I just want to tell you what he said about this letter. He says, to this letter I owe my life.

He said, when I first read it, I was just a little boy in the Scottish Highlands. And he says, I experienced rapture in the Highland Hills of Scotland.

He said that when he read this sentence, verses three to 14, I saw a new world. Jesus Christ became the center of everything. I became alive.

[9 : 00] Now, I think that John Mackay experienced exactly what Paul is experiencing when he writes this sentence. This sentence, the commentators will say, is all about this enraptured worship experience that Paul's having.

So he says in verse three, blessed be God the Father. And then just rolls on with these sentences, this one sentence of worship and almost rapture.

And John Mackay talks about that. And you can see what he says. He says, blessed be God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So he's worshipping there. And then he says, and blessed are we in Christ.

So he uses this word blessed over and over again. And the Greek word blessed is the word eulogize. So it's the word for eulogy. So we talk about giving eulogies at funerals.

But the funerals, not the only place for a eulogy. Paul says, I am eulogizing God because he has eulogized me. That's literally what it says in Greek.

[10 : 02] And a eulogy is just when you offer praise and acclaim and publicly state that something's valuable. That's a eulogy.

And when we use it for people, for humans, we use it to mean a eulogy or blessing is when you give somebody a gift or you give them words of praise and words of value, words of love, right?

So Paul says here, it's a very simple idea. He says, I want to eulogize God, bless him. Which you can't give God anything. He means I want to give words of praise to God because God eulogized me.

And so he's saying, because I have been so lavished by gifts from God, I want to turn around and give a eulogy to God. So he's worshipping here because he's been so blessed.

And so what do you know what that means? That means that he's saying that his entire identity is basically summed up in the word, I am blessed, I'm blessed.

[11 : 06] He has a, Paul has a God-centered view, a theocentric view of who he is. And it drives him to worship. It drives him straight into singing.

And so some people will say this may have very well been a hymn that Paul's effectively, he's writing here, a hymn of praise that he's giving to God. And I just want to point out to you, especially since this is week one of three weeks looking at this long sentence, the structure that he gives us, because it's very structured.

So if you look at verse three, you can see he says, bless it be God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then he lists the blessings that come from God the father. And then if you jump down to verse seven, he says, in him, Jesus, we have redemption through his blood.

And then jump all the way down to verse 13, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit. So the commentators will say that what he's doing is saying, praise be to God the father, and here's the blessings God the father's given us.

Praise be to God the son, and here's the blessings the son gave us specifically. And then praise to the Holy Spirit. Here's the blessings the Holy Spirit gives us specifically. But he also does another layer on top of that, which is God the father has blessed us from eternity past.

[12 : 21] God the son blessed us in the middle of history, and the Holy Spirit is blessing us right now. So it's got a Trinitarian structure and a Eternity, History, Present Day structure, a Time structure as well.

So it's a hymn with three verses, three stanzas, but they're all one sentence. And it says, Father, Son, Spirit, Eternity, History, and Today.

That's how he structured it for us. And what do we learn? Here's what we learn. Very simple. When you read this hymn of praise, this Trinitarian hymn, and it says, Blessed be God the father, because from eternity he has blessed me.

You learn that everything we have, and especially salvation, our salvation, comes from God alone. It's the simple idea, if you've been here before, if you've been here awhile, you know this, but it's worth saying, because this is what Paul says, he says, God does everything when it comes to our salvation.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, God does it all. And at the very beginning of the passage, he said, Grace to you and peace to you, Saints and Ephesians, Grace to you and peace to you, Saints, you Christians in Edinburgh.

[13 : 36] And what he's saying there is, what is a Christian? A Christian is nothing but a person who is able today to say, God has given me something I don't deserve and I realize that.

That's all a Christian is. It's just to say, I'm a person who knows that what I have from God is not what I deserve. That's Grace to me. And what I have by Grace, what he's lavished on me, is peace, peace with him, and I don't deserve it.

That's all a Christian is. And so he says, and because of that, Blessed be God the father, blessed be God the Son, blessed be the Holy Spirit. How do we feel about it? That's what we're talking about.

How do you feel about that today? And Paul says, if you are a Christian, if you become a Christian, if you realize that all you have from God you do not deserve, the way you should feel is that it should drive you to worship, that you should then return and say, I just need to say, I need to eulogize God today.

I need to say it. I've got to worship. I've got to say it out loud. I got to sing about it. And that's exactly what Paul is doing here. He's saying that when you realize it, when you realize that you don't have to have a subjectivist view of your identity, an identity that depends entirely on your performance and your feelings, but you can have a theocentric view that participates in all that God's doing from eternity to everlasting life.

[15 : 04] You say, I've got to sing about that. I've got to eulogize God. It drives me toward it. Let me say it one final way, and then we'll get to the specific blessing. In other words, what Paul's doing here is he's saying that when you see that you can have a cosmic view of your identity, not a mere subjectivist view, it drives you into the arms of the Lord.

It drives you straight to worship. And he does that with two little phrases, and these are so important. We're gonna see him throughout the entirety of the letter. And there in verse three, he

said, he worships and says, bless it be God the Father, who has blessed us, and here it is, in Christ. And the second phrase is, with every spiritual blessing from heaven, or in heaven. So he says, here's your cosmic identity.

You are right now in Christ, if you're a follower of Jesus, in the heavenly places with every possible blessing you could ever want. Meaning that God has so associated you, God has so associated this Christian family with Jesus in heaven right now, that every single thing that is true of Jesus Christ, God says is also true of us at this very moment.

So he said, we are, we right now, the church is so united to Jesus that whatever you can say about him, you can say about yourself. So that when he died, carrying sin, you died, your sin died, when he came to life and defeated sin, and lives forever, you now have defeated sin and live forever.

[16:48] Every single blessing that Jesus right now has in the heavenly realm is true of you. He says that is your cosmic identity, an identity that stretches far beyond the moment, an identity that stretches far beyond the subjectivism of the way you feel, the subjectivism of the way you've made good decisions and bad decisions this week that gives you something so much more than your performance to stand on.

So he says, why are you worried? Why are we anxious? You've got a cosmic identity where you've been given every single blessing in the heavenly domain. You see, your identity of being blessed stretches, it's transdimensional, it stretches into the visible realm but also into the invisible realm. It stretches from eternity all the way into everlasting life. And so Paul's saying, do you see your identity? Does it drive you to worship? He just says, we're blessed.

You're blessed if you're a follower of Jesus today. Now let's think together for the next couple weeks beyond this about these blessings. And I just wanna, for the rest of our time, just look at one, the first one, and that's that we're chosen.

He says, blessed be God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ who's blessed us because he chose us before the foundation of the world. He predestined us to be adopted as sons and daughters.

[18:11] Now, John Stott says, when you realize the greatness and the majesty of what Paul is saying here, he says, this sentence is a violent collision with all self-centeredness.

Falling human beings, we are imprisoned, he writes, in our own little ego, and we have an almost boundless confidence in the power of our own will.

We have an almost insatiable appetite for the praise of our own glory. But the people of God have begun, when they read a sentence like this, to be turned inside out.

They've begun to realize we are a people in God's own possession who live by God's will under God's authority according to God's decisions. So it's a big view, and it's exactly what predestination, what we call election, or being chosen, as Paul says here, drives us to.

All right, so this is what it means. Paul says today, if you're a follower of Jesus, you're blessed, and you've also been chosen by God from a time before the foundation of the world, from eternity past, which is actually no time at all.

[19:26] He says, you were chosen from a time before time ever existed. You were loved by God from before the world was ever created, that's what he says. You were named, and therefore you have been predestined.

In other words, all your life has been directed by God, ultimately to your faith in Jesus Christ. Now, this is here to say we're blessed.

This is a blessing. It's a blessing to be able to say this out loud. Paul is saying this, and he's not giving you any philosophical explanation. He's not giving you any model for how you can work this out with your views of human freedom.

He's just saying, praise be to God, that God is so powerful that he would choose us from before the foundation of the world. And the first order of business is actually just to let this truth be that, to let it be good.

Paul doesn't give it and say, do you think this? Do you think there's an option before you? No, he just says, this is the truth, and praise be to God for it. And yet, we have a really tough time with it.

[20:34] So we as modern people, more so than ever before in history, have a really difficult time with reading a verse like this. And so here's three objections that might come up in your mind.

And let me say, in every single one of these, the objection leads to a reason why we should and want to believe this all the more. And here they are. You come to this and say something like, you know, I feel that I'm a Christian, not because God made me become one or something like that, but

because I chose to be.

You say, you know, where's my freedom? Where is my choice in this idea that God has determined the church from before the foundation of the world? And I think that what Paul's doing is anticipating our potential objections and addressing them.

So in verse four, he says, he chose us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world. He's emphasizing it, he's pushing it. He's saying, before time ever began, he chose us.

And he said, and I know, I know you're gonna come around Ephesians and Edinburgh folk, you're gonna come and say, well, what about my freedom? Isn't it the case that if I want to follow Jesus, because I chose to follow Jesus?

[21 : 45] And Paul's trying to get us to see that, yes, if you're a follower of Jesus today, you did choose to follow Jesus, and you must. You must, you must trust, you must take a step of faith, and your decision is not absolute and ultimate.

So your decision to follow Jesus is penultimate, it's secondary, and you decided, because his decision was absolute and his ultimate. And here's one way to think about that.

If you ask, you know, if I was to sit down, if we were all to sit down together and say, why are you a Christian? You might say something like, it's because I realized my deep need.

You know, I'm a sinner and I realized I'm in need of grace, I'm in need of salvation. And I said, great, and why is it, why is it that the person next to you, the person in your family, the person that you've prayed for for so long, whoever it may be, heard the very same gospel you did, but is not yet a Christian, does not believe.

And look, if you can't say today, if you're not willing to say today, it is because of God first. Then what you're left to say is, well, the reason I'm a Christian and my friend is not a Christian, is because, you know, I've got better insight than them.

[23 : 02] I was able to say, you know, I can really see the truth that I really am a sinner and they don't yet see that. You know, I've got the humility in my heart that they have yet to achieve.

I've got the intelligence to see the truth about creation that they have yet to see. You know, there's something about me that is truly great and therefore I'm so humble that I'm able to come and have faith in Jesus.

And you see, if you can't say, if you won't say, I am a Christian because God determined that I would be, because God chose me, because God entered my life, because God did it all from top to bottom.

Then what you're left with is just an argument that says, I'm a Christian because I'm truly great. I did it all, you know. I was humble enough to see my sinfulness. And you know, you've put it all, you're back to subjectivism.

You're back to an identity that begins with your feelings, that begins with your achievements, not with a truly objective identity. Think about the apostle Paul for a second and I have to hurry, but what happened to the apostle Paul?

[24 : 10] He was on the road to Damascus to murder Christians. Now, and Paul wrote maybe one of the greatest sentences that's ever been written in human history. How did he get there?

How did he get the authority? It's not because he became humble. Paul was on the road to Damascus to murder Christians and he got kicked off his horse. He got knocked off his horse by Jesus.

You know, Jesus did every bit of it. He, Paul was a murderer of Christians and then God said, I'm gonna interrupt that. I'm gonna get into your life. I'm gonna do it all. And it's because God had determined that to be the case from before the foundation of the world.

Now, here's the second objection that might come up. Isn't Paul just coming and saying something like, God, what God did in eternity was he looked into the future and saw that I would choose to follow him one day.

And so his election, his predestination of me is because he saw that that would be my choice. And so he elected me in the sense that he allowed me to choose but because he can see all time at once, he foreknew me and thus elected me.

[25 : 21] But it ultimately was about my freedom and my choice. And let me just say the consequence for saying something like that is huge. Because if we say something like that, we're saying that I am so big, I am so important, that my choice becomes the foundation of God's determination of all of history.

In other words, we've taken a human being that's so contingent, that's so relative, that need not exist and we need not exist. And we've made ourselves into the absolute. If we say, God looked into the future and he let me choose and then he based all of history around my choices, then we've become absolute, we've become God.

We've flipped creator and creature, we've turned the whole world upside down. It can't be that either. And then the third and final thing to say is this, do we then say that that's unfair?

It's unfair that God would make decisions. It's unfair that God would choose his church from before the foundation of the world. And Paul goes out of his way, I think, to address this. In verse six, he says, all of this idea of election, predestination, choice, God's choice, is to the praise of his glorious grace.

Meaning, he wants to say, do you see that everything that you've received, including your salvation, if you follow Jesus, is grace from bottom to top? And grace is just another word for gift.

[26 : 45] And do you see what he's saying? He's saying, is it unfair? It is unfair because we do not get, as Christians, what we deserve. What are our rights before the Lord?

Our rights before the Lord are to be judged. Our rights before the Lord are to receive the justice of our sin. And yet, we've been lavish with grace. And so, what Paul's saying is the only way this is unfair is to say, it's unfair that I've been given a gift I don't deserve, that Jesus Christ was condemned so that I might live.

That's what's unfair, that's what's unjust. I don't get the justice I deserve, I just get grace. I just get lavish with a gift. And that gift is that God has chosen me from before the foundation of the world. If you're a follower of Jesus today, if you trust in Jesus today, look, I mentioned this last Sunday night. But it could be the case that, and we'll move on to the close, it could be the case that you've been in the church a long time, perhaps, and you came to church Sunday after Sunday, and you heard the teaching, you heard the preaching, you were bored, you didn't care, it never really struck you in any way, shape, or form.

And then all of a sudden, one day, one day, you could say what John Mackay said, that there was one sentence, one verse, one lyric from one hymn, and all of a sudden you said, I'm alive.

[28 : 11] I didn't care about this yesterday, and today I feel like I could say, I've been enraptured, I'm alive. What's happened? You see, it's exactly playing out, it's nothing you did.

It happened to you, it's something you received from top to bottom, from inside out, and it's because God loved you from before the foundation of the world, and then he called you in this specific moment in history.

That's how it happened, that's how it works. Now, let me give you a couple takeaways, and we'll be finished, four takeaways, and we'll be finished. First, we have to, we have this morning to let the fact that it says God has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be good news for us, to be something that we can say, bless it be God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ because he's done this.

And one of the ways that you can maybe get there this morning, if you're not there yet, is to say, Paul is giving us here God's point of view.

He's giving us here a God's eye view of all of human history, and he's essentially saying to us, if you had the mind of God, you would understand how all this works.

[29 : 26] He said, well, what about my freedoms, what about my choices? The Bible never says that we don't have freedom, the Bible never says we don't have choice, it's not a zero sum game. Instead, what he's saying is, if you had the mind of God, if you were absolute like God is absolute, you would understand how it works, but you don't.

We don't. And so all we can do is come and say, bless it be God the father who is so big and so absolute that, of course, I don't understand. If you have trouble with thinking God has chosen his church from before the foundation of the world, how does that play out in my freedom, my choice, then you should say, of course I have trouble.

I shouldn't be able to understand it because I'm contingent and I'm not a believer in God. I shouldn't be able to understand it because I'm contingent and the God of all creation is absolute.

And so Paul, I think, is inviting us to let God be God, to let God be big and to remain little, to remain small. That's the first thing I think he's drawing us to.

John Calvin in 1558, he preached, he preached 48 sermons on Ephesians in 1558 and 1559. This is what he says, although we cannot conceive by argument or by reason how God has elected us before the foundation of all the world, we know it because he declared it to us.

[30 : 49] And the experience itself in reading it vouches for us sufficiently that we have been enlightened in the faith sufficiently. He's saying, John, in eloquent words, is just saying, I don't know what it means, I don't know how it works, but I'll read it on the page.

And I'm going to let God be God. I'm going to believe it because this is what he says. All right, the second thing to take away this morning is this. God, if God has done this and he has, it means that you now have an identity as a Christian that can never be taken away from you.

What is that identity? That identity is to be blessed and you have been blessed, Paul says, from before the world was ever created.

You have been blessed by God and loved by God from before there was a sun in the sky. God's love for you is older than the sun and SUN.

And that means you can say today that I have an identity that will never go away, that it can never be taken away. Your identity now cannot be taken away by your circumstances. So if the world gives way beneath your feet this week, if the world gives way, is giving way beneath your feet right now in your life, you have an identity blessed, loved, that will never leave you.

[32 : 17] No matter how you feel, no matter what your feelings are telling you right now, you have an identity that will never go away. The word of God says that from eternity he has loved the world.

And so thirdly, you can say today I am from before the foundation of the world the beloved of God. I'm loved by God. Tolkien, I love Tolkien's line, he says the praise of the praiseworthy is above all reward.

Every single one of us wants to be praised. We want to be loved by someone that is praiseworthy, by someone we respect, by someone that is worthy of love. And when you are willing to say I have been loved from before the foundation of the world by the absolute God who made everything, you can say I have the praise of the most praiseworthy.

I have the eulogy from the one who deserves all eulogy. I've got God's love. I am beloved of the Father. I think a way to think about this is, you know, if you're a parent today or if you have nieces and nephews, if you're a covenant parent of children in this church, can your children do anything, do anything to remove, to rip away your love from them?

You know, even in the worst circumstances. And we come as parents and we say no matter what, if I saw my child on the horizon, the prodigal son and daughter coming home, I would do what the master in Luke 15 does, I would roll up my robe and run straight out and say come back to my table.

[34 : 00] What can your children do to lose your love? But look, our parental love is small compared to the love of God, the absolute Father, for his children from before the foundation of the world.

It's that big. Now lastly, that means finally that we have an object of worship that will actually satisfy your need to worship. So Paul begins and ends this hymn of praise, the sentence with just saying, blessed be God.

What else can you do if you realize this and you believe this, but to just cry out and worship to the Lord and say that you truly are great and you have done great things, Taylor Swift cannot sustain worship.

We pour our worship, our fandom, into all sorts of objects in this life and praise, praise, praise stuff. But these things are far too small to carry the heaviness of the weight of true worship.

Every single human being needs to worship, we long to worship, we have to worship and we need an object of our worship that can hold it, that can carry it, that's big enough to sustain it.

[35 : 13] What about a God who is absolute? What about a God who can determine all things from before any time ever begins? There's only one being that can hold, carry, bear the burden and weight of your worship and that's this God, the God of predestinating love, the God of election.

And that means that when you see this, when you awake to this, if you will awake to this morning and trust this God in Jesus Christ, it will, it can drive you to be so satisfied with him that you will worship.

The God who would send his only son, Jesus Christ, to die for the beloved of the Lord whom he knew before the foundation of all the world.

That is a narrative big enough. That is a God big enough, a narrative big enough that's really worth living into. An identity that is big enough and grand enough that makes, that makes your life so valuable.

Let us pray together. Father, we ask that you would give us a big, grand, cosmic vision for who we are as the church.

[36 : 31] Loved by you from before the foundation of the world, wow, it's something we can't imagine. It's something we can't sustain in our thought life. We can't produce philosophical models to make sense of it.

And so we come today asking for the trust we need to just believe what your word says. And we ask that we would be moved by it. So Lord, would you, would you break the crust and the hardness of our hearts now and drive us into a place where we can say, blessed are you, O Lord.

We eulogize you as we come to sing our final hymn. And so we do that now, Lord, as we lift up our hearts before you and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.