

We Worship

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to go back this morning to the passage we read in Ephesians chapter 1, and look at the section from verse 3 to verse 10.

It's an absolutely fantastic part of the Bible, a wonderful section, in many ways it's where we believe God is saying, through the Apostle Paul, God is saying, this is who I am.

This is what makes me tick. This is God. And when we find out and when we see who He is, then we begin to understand what He's done.

And that, I think, is a really difficult passage to look at because you feel you're kind of wrecking it. It speaks for itself. It's a hugely powerful passage of Scripture.

So pray that I'll not wreck it. And pray that as we listen, that we will see Jesus Christ only and that we will really be able to by God's Spirit worship Him in our lives as a response.

[1 : 17] And what we see about Jesus Christ here, or we see about God here, is that He is only in will, okay?

This is the unfolding of His will, what He does, what He plans, what He's involved in. Verse 5 speaks about us being adopted through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will.

In verse 9 it says, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose. In verse 11 it says, we have obtained an inheritance according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

So we have, anytime you see three things repeated slightly differently, the same kind of phrase, you know it's important and significant. And even verse 8 speaks about all that He's lavished on us with all His wisdom and insight or knowledge.

So His knowledge and His will. And this is a revelation of the will of God. And it's clear, it's crystal clear.

[2 : 27] There's no hiding place here, there's no surprises that God will need to face up to in the outworking of His will. This is a revelation, at least a little bit of a revelation of His plan for humanity, for the universe, for the cosmos.

And there isn't, I've said this before, haven't I? There isn't for God any plan B. There's no undiscovered future that's going to make God say, oh, I need to change what was my will.

I need to think things out differently. There's no different insight that we will ever receive that is going to change what God's will is for the universe that we looked at briefly last week, this great uniting of all things in Him together in heaven and things in earth.

Now, for us, much is unexpected. We don't know what tomorrow holds. We don't know what the future holds.

I barely know my own will. But God is not like that. That is not what is in the mind of God. You know, whatever else we can accuse God of, we can't sit down today and say, God, what are you doing?

[3 : 42] You have no idea what you're doing. He is no idea. We can't accuse God of that because He is clear and He has made His mind and His will clear here.

We might not like that. We might, we do struggle with that, absolutely. But I hope we will find from it great comfort, great challenge and great excitement when we think of the character of God.

What is it that is His only will? What is He revealed to us as we unpack this passage together? Well, one of the things is that He has chosen, and this is written to Christians, it's written to the church, it's written to every believer, He has chosen a people for Himself, an unholy and a blame-worthy people.

That's the influence, isn't it, of verse 4? Verse 4 says, even as He chose us in Him in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should become or should be holy and blameless before Him.

The influence there is that He has chosen a people who are unholy and blame-worthy. In other words, there is nothing in the choice of God for His people that is meritorious in His people.

[4 : 59] He hasn't looked down before the creation of the world and said, I'm going to choose them to be my people because they are special, they're good, they're different, unholy and blame-worthy. And He chose a people in that condition to be adopted, He says in verse 5, as sons or daughters.

Sons and daughters, it means the same, in Jesus, through Jesus Christ. So He's chosen a people from before the foundation of the world to be in His family, with the privilege and the belonging of all that goes with the love and belonging and unity and fellowship of the Trinity, God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

He knew we would rebel, He knew we would reject His laws of love, yet He chose unholy and blame-worthy people to be His own.

And He did that, as we were told in these verses, verse 4, before the foundation of the world. It wasn't a reaction to what happened in the Garden of Eden, it wasn't a response to what happened there, it was a preemptive rescue.

That's what the Bible is telling us here. I know we struggle with that, I know we battle with the whole concept of God's choice and God's election, but that is clearly what is revealed here.

[6 : 30] The fall of humanity in the Garden didn't surprise God in the slightest. It wasn't something that knocked Him off His pedestal and made Him think of another plan to redeem the people that had responded to the temptations of the evil one.

This was always in the will of God. He wasn't surprised by what happened there before the creation, before the foundation of the world.

He had chosen a people to adopt as His own. Stonishing truth, always in His will. And that one will, choosing a people to be His own, choosing a people to become holy and blameless is part of this great plan that we saw when we looked at verses 9 and 10 last week, which was to unite all things, humanity, heaven, earth, angels, the environment, all things to Himself in Jesus Christ.

Verse 10, remember that as the core verse for the whole of Ephesians that in the fullness of time He's uniting everything to Himself, things in heaven, things in earth. The extinction, in other words, of all sin and of all evil.

That's where the unimagined cosmic unity will be revealed and will be outworked. The stuff of unparalleled dreams for us, that there will be no sickness, no death, no separation, no division, no disunity, no unholiness, no blameworthiness, nothing like that, because we will be united in and through Jesus Christ.

[8 : 18] That is the clear will of God. That's what is stated here as revealed to Paul that God is doing through Jesus Christ, that this is His purpose.

The divine architect that we looked at last week has laid the plans and He knows the end of this plan from the beginning of the plan. And throughout history, and as He works out His plan, there is no compromise by Him.

There's no adaptations. There's no changes. There's no fine tweaks. God has His purpose and it is being outworked, as He says in verse 8, with all wisdom and insight.

This is God, remember, with all wisdom. That is with infinite wisdom and infinite knowledge and infinite insight, so that it's, you know, it's difficult for us, and our kind of mind blows a little bit when we talk about infinity and the infinite will and wisdom and mind of God.

It's infinite. It doesn't have an end. It doesn't have edges. So in all of His wisdom and His knowledge and His insight, this is His purpose.

[9 : 28] He's not going to be second guessed. He's not going to be surprised. He's not going to be taken aback by anything that happens. This is His loving purpose and plan.

And that's the revelation here. Now that's been questioned and doubted and rejected over the centuries, of course, God's electing choice.

But whether we choose to accept or reject it or like it or dislike it, it is clearly what is revealed here in Scripture and I guess our understanding of the authority and the significance of God's Word also will come into that.

But we are going to balk at it, aren't we, at one level, unless we work through it a little bit and see how great it is as hope, it will go on to see in amazing ways.

He has one will, clear will. He's chosen a people which we belong as Christians before the foundation of the world, an unholy and a blameworthy people to become holy and blameless in His sight through Jesus Christ.

[10 : 42] With the view of enjoying and having fellowship in family with His people in a world that has dealt with sin and evil and rejection and judgment and all that goes with it and death, that's His purpose, that's His plan, only one will.

And there's only one way and this is really where it begins to be remarkable for us to understand this. There's only one way that His will is outworked.

So you've got this great sovereign, almost kind of distant will as it were, one that we struggle to comprehend and we can't understand and take simply beyond us in many ways, but it's when we begin to see how this will is outworked that we can, I think, begin to understand it and God knows that.

And the only way that this is outworked, the only way He can unite all things, the only way He can have a people for Himself, how?

Verse 5 probably sums up best. He protested us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace which He has blessed us in the beloved.

[12 : 02] It's through Jesus Christ. Now, I talked about repetition earlier. Seven times in verses 3 to 10 that we either have through Christ, in Christ, in Him.

And it's absolutely soaked into the passage that this is how God's one will is worked out. It's through Jesus Christ.

The core of the whole epistle is being, uniting all things in Him, things in heaven and in earth. So Christ is the very kernel. He's the very core. He's the very center of God's will and the outworking of God's will.

In other words, the unity of the universe can only happen, your salvation and mine can only happen through in Jesus Christ, through His life and through His death and His resurrection as ascension to the right hand of the Father.

It speaks about that. It speaks about in Him we have redemption through His blood. The forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace.

[13 : 09] So this one will of God, which sometimes is taken as being arbitrary and callous and cold and indifferent to our responsibility and our reality, it can only be outworked at astonishing cost, at the cost of God, the Son becoming flesh, at the cost of Jesus Christ revealing Himself as God, taking our flesh, becoming a substitute and dying in our place, absorbing the wrath of God against sin and evil and responding to and defeating the power of death and evil and the grave.

It's a bit like an hourglass, you know, the hourglasses you get with sand going through them where it's widening, narrow and wide again. It's like that narrowest bit as Golgotha.

That's where everything comes together and it's where everything flows from, is Jesus Christ on the cross in many ways. So whatever else we find difficult about this high and mighty doctrine of choice and election, we can't say that God, in outworking that, is distant or careless or cheap or disinterested.

The only way this amazing plan of unity and of people to Himself can be worked out is through the death of God, the Son on the cross in our place.

Future would be impossible, our life would be impossible, redemption would be impossible, hope would be impossible, forgiveness would be impossible unless God the Son became flesh, unless God committed, unless Jesus said, I will go.

[15 : 13] And that we know was also planned before the creation of the world, that this huge personal cost to the outworking of the plan of God was in His mind from all eternity.

Christ meets sin and death and evil head on. You see, we hate sin, don't we? Sin has maybe got so many connotations for so many people.

But we certainly hate evil. Nobody likes evil, believer or unbeliever, nobody likes evil. And everyone would want to be rid of evil. And God is saying here in His love, this is the only way where the sovereign King of the universe faces up to and defeats His power and ultimately crushes its head to its eternal destruction on the cross of Calvary.

That's where the wrath of God is dealt with and meets His astonishing love for us. It is remarkable, isn't it?

We all got that you've all bothered to come here today. You've gone out your comfort zone, you've moved to a different building, you've made it up the stairs, you've come to worship today and you've come to worship because of what happened on a hill outside Jerusalem over 2,000 years ago, where the sun stopped shining on that event because of its cosmic, environmental, universal, personal significance.

[16 : 55] And as believers we have come to know this Savior who has adopted us from before the foundation of the world to be His.

It's the most significant moment in the whole of history, in the whole of the universe, our pure glass and it's genius, it is genius that this is what God did in order to work out His purposes of love for this people.

So it's worked out, there's only one will of God and it's worked out only one way through Christ, A, one way A and B, worked out through Christ and in love.

And this again is very important, isn't it? Because apologetically you'll face a lot of things all the time and I face, if I'm speaking about Jesus Christ or God, that He doesn't love.

How would God allow such things? How can He be a God of love? All of these questions come up and yet at the very core of this one will of God is that through Christ motivated by love is why He is doing what He is doing.

[18 : 12] This is an amazing paragraph that we have here in Ephesus chapter 1 that we've read and the structure of it in my deep and insightful Greek knowledge, the structure of it kind of reflects the point that is trying to be made.

It's a bit untidy. A lot of the scholars think, oh it's very untidy and it's not really very Pauline, it doesn't look like the way Paul would speak. And yet you can feel Paul speaking because it's just an overflowing of descriptions that remind us of the lavish love of Christ.

You know the language itself, according to the riches of His grace which He's lavished upon us with all wisdom and insight. It's like if you could see the words visually it'd be like a waterfall.

They're all cascading over us. He tries to explain the character and nature of this motivation behind God and that's why His plan is so great.

If it was a plan hatched in hatred or in jealousy or merely in power it would be terrible, wouldn't it? We'd be quaking today.

[19 : 29] But its motivation is outstanding love for people and for His own person, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, God.

And this plan is not sterile, He's not grudging, He's not forced, He's not miserly. He didn't make a last ditch, oh well I better save one or two of them, they're such a miserable bunch.

It's trinitarian effulgence. It's out of His very nature, out of His very character. He pours out this great longing and desire to save our people who cannot save themselves and who have made a mess of things that He knew would be the case.

And with the entrance of evil this was the only way He could deal with that. He could only deal with it in Himself. There's great joy in His giving here, there's great amazement in what He's done that we are people who, as He says, are blessed in verse 3 in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.

In other words, when we come to Christ we have all the blessings of the Spirit of God in us and with us into the future many that we still in many ways have to claim and understand and know fully.

[20 : 50] So we have this great Christ who's commitment to us, who's association with us, who's cost in order to redeem us is beyond words.

So what we might say is that God, and I mean I speak reverently, He didn't just talk a good game. God acted on what He saw needed to be done to deal with evil, darkness, death and our lostness.

He saw and He knew it cost Himself. This overflowing love. And you know a few months ago, a few weeks ago we looked at the miracles in the New Testament and we saw how they spoke of salvation. They weren't just miracles, it wasn't like magic that He did just to be popular, but they expressed His love and they expressed what He was doing.

So you had 12 basketfuls left over. You had tons, gallons and gallons of wine made at the marriage feast. You had the calming of a storm.

You had resurrection from the dead. They were big, significant, extravagant expressions of what God had come to do.

[22 : 06] The crucifixion and the stone rolled away. It is absolutely good news. I think sometimes we struggle with that, don't we?

We struggle with the good news of the Gospel. We kind of shrug our shoulders and we've heard it all before and we yawn a little bit. It is absolutely good news for us today as Christians.

There can't be better news that we as believers have been in the heart of God from all eternity and that His plan for us will not change. He has a future for us that's not pie in the sky and fluffy, daft psychological crutches that will keep us going.

It is in His purpose and His plan that He has ordained from before the beginning of the creation that we can see being outworked on the cross of Calvary in His death and resurrection and in the lives of every one of us as we know in newness as Ephesians goes on to speak about.

And so we finish briefly. If there's one plan and there's one way in which that plan A and B is worked out through Christ in love, there's only one response, isn't there?

[23 : 18] There's only one response. Blessed or praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's a liturgy of praise that we give back to God. That sentence is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 3 and also by Peter in 1 Peter 1 verse 3 which we read at the beginning of the service.

It's that it became part of the worship, the formal worship and praise of the New Testament church, this great adoration as the plan and revelation of God is unfolded.

Now we can't fully understand that plan and I wouldn't pretend in any way to understand the paradoxes that we have there.

The paradox of being chosen and yet being commanded to choose Christ and the great responsibility we all have to choose Jesus Christ.

[24 : 24] That paradox is revealed in Scripture, it's never explained, probably because we can't in our mortal and finite minds understand it.

However, through Jesus Christ and what He has done, surely today we can see God and we can see His love and we can see His word and we can trust Him and praise Him for who He is even when we don't understand Him.

You know sometimes for me that's the most comforting thing, He's unsearchable. If I could understand everything about Him and all His sovereignty and all His power and all His glory and what is happening in this world and why He isn't working out at my timetable then I guess I couldn't worship Him.

If I could understand everything, He wouldn't be sovereign and there would be nothing to trust. He would be an idol really wouldn't He? He'd be someone that I've made up.

And if your God is someone who gives you no discomfort, if He doesn't make you feel uncomfortable at some point, and I don't mean unhappily uncomfortable, I just mean mind-blowingly uncomfortable because of who He is compared with what I am and what you are, then it may be that we've shrunk Him, He's just become an idol, that we can stick in our back pockets and take out when we need Him when we want Him every now and again.

[25 : 55] If He's manageable, He becomes just like us and if we can understand everything about Him, I'm not sure we can worship Him. I'm not sure I could ever bow my knee to somebody that I could fully understand.

But it's His glory and His majesty and His greatness and His love and how different He is from us that enables us to worship Him.

The trouble is sometimes we have a God that we demand of rather than that we worship, a God that we always want answers from and always want to do our will rather than allowing Him to work out His will, His perfect, wise, knowledgeable, sovereign, purposeful will which He has made clear to us.

We battle all the time with being broken image bearers, don't we? From the very beginning that's been the problem. We've battled with being image bearers of God.

We don't want to be image bearers, we want to be God. That is what Adam and Eve craved at the beginning, to be like God, that independence, that knowledge of good and evil, that self-will to do what we want.

[27 : 11] But only God in His perfection and in His love and in His character and in His justice can do what He wants because it's always going to be right.

That is a huge challenge for us to consider. So therefore He is a worthy God of our worship and our praise. He's not a trivial God.

He's infinitely divine but He's infinitely personal and He wants us as believers to really adore and worship Him and praise Him.

This section is believed by some to be just a formal liturgy that was used in the early church, used when the church Christians came together to express the nature and character of God as they came in worship and praise.

And of course that's a great thing. But the danger of any liturgy, our liturgy, which is very informal, very laid back or much more formal liturgies, is that they can be prescribed and prescribed from the outside.

[28 : 21] We can just go through the motions outwardly because what Paul is desperate to get across here as the Spirit works through him is this great desire to praise God from our hearts.

And therefore God's word is always challenging us to change in our hearts through His great work, through Jesus Christ in order that we can worship Him and praise Him as He is.

We recognize our guilt and our blame and our zeal. And nobody can worship Him. You will never come to Christ and we will never grow in Christ if we don't recognize our need of Him, of our guilt before Him, of our unholiness and worthlessness in terms of being right with Him until we come to accept that our worth and our holiness comes through what Jesus has done on our behalf.

Cry out for forgiveness and we cry out for trust and we live lives from our hearts which begin to express and understand who this God is.

The heart of worship is not a nice building, although it's a very nice building, although not it's issue of the colours. The heart of worship is not in a building, wherever it be.

[29 : 43] The heart of worship is worship from the heart. It's not from the front, it's from my heart and your heart as we are prepared as we use the mirror of Scripture and we use the character of God to reflect our need and we come to Him in need and we don't just come to Him in a perfunctory fashion.

Going through the motions, oh it's 11 o'clock Sunday that's what I do, I go to church, I go to church sing a few songs, I go and go away. Going through the motions.

Heart of worship is worship from the heart. You need to ask yourself that question, I need to ask. Heart of worship is not a flash sermon, it's not a well structured or thought out sermon, although it may include these things, well thought out not flash.

But the heart of worship is our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If we understand our holiness and our worthiness comes from Him, not from ourselves and that we've been chosen before the creation of the world.

Not only to worship in our heart but also to worship Him in our lives. And I haven't had any time to spend on this, with this we finish.

[31 : 07] But our life in Christ as believers is to be a life that is holy and blameless. Isn't that interesting?

So chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. But as Christians, it's not God who lives a holy and blameless life for you as you leave here.

But as you are filled with the Spirit, as you're born and you, you and I have the responsibility to live a holy and blameless life. If you take nothing else from this, take from it that you walk in steps that are to be holy and blameless.

This kind of idea that God's chosen me from before the foundation of the world. Woohoo! I can live any way I like, because I'm chosen anyway. That's a sure sign that probably you've misunderstood grace altogether and the Gospel.

Understand it? Unless you repent and turn. You're not His. And the great reality of the New Testament and of Ephesians here, which goes on to be ethical and practical about the new life and living the new way, is to be in Christ worshipful, holy sacrifices.

[32 : 17] Not just for the hour that we're here. That's easy. That's the kind of public face of our Christianity. But in our lives, when we're driving to here, driving from here, when would it work, when would it home?

In our thought life, in our entertainment life, in our pleasure pursuits, all of what we are and all of what we do, He wants us to be living sacrifices, holy and blameless.

And we can be as we come to Him, as we repent and as we turn every day in unison to Him. He's given us that privilege and that power in the Holy Spirit.

And next week we'll look at a little bit more about the Holy Spirit's part that He plays, we'll also look a little bit about predestination and evangelism, which is an offshoot of what this theology is speaking about in many ways.

But may it be that, you know, as we think about this paradox, that we outwork our salvation with our responsibility to be holy and blameless and not to blame God for our sin and our failure.

[33 : 28] But to remember that He is one plan which we're apart in Christ, that is not a trigger for pride, that is an absolute trigger for humility.

It wouldn't be radical for us all just to lie on the floor in abject humility before God who has done this for us.

Culturally it might be a bit strange, but it wouldn't be out of place because of who He is. And I hope and pray that as we look at this book and as we look at these passages and as you study, I hope on Wednesday night at City Groups this passage again, that it will inspire you to praise Him.

It will inspire you to worship Him, not just here and not just together as a community. And much of that holy and blameless living is to be outworked together as a church, as a community of believers.

If you're visiting in your own home church, it's a corporate work together, holy and blameless. And may we worship as a new community, may we worship from the heart, may we worship to the glory of God.

[34 : 45] And if you don't know Jesus Christ, then He invites you to know Him and He gives you no excuse, certainly not in this theology, to stay away from Him because He loves and He never turns away anyone who comes to Him genuinely crying out for hope, for sight, for salvation.

I mean, let's pray. Father God, we ask that you would help us to understand you better. Forgive us when we shrink you down and when we walk with you on a lead.

Forgive us when we ignore you altogether, when we fret about our own plans as if we were there.

There is nothing ahead as if there is no purpose as if we just make our own plans as we go. Forgive us for not coming to you and committing all that we are, all that we think, all that we do, all that we hope to do to you for guidance and for help.

And as we do so, may we know the truth of your scripture that we are not anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition, making a request known to God and the peace of God, the past is all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ.

[36 : 14] We thank you for the amazing truth of your word which is just so remarkable and so other worldly in many ways and so divine and yet is so practical and so earthy also and so much what we need.

We thank you that your perfect plan is driven by your perfect love and justice, but your perfect love.

And we thank you that is in and through Jesus Christ that these things can only be known. So we worship in the name of Jesus and we ask that Jesus today will be held high and that through this time of very small turmoil in our own congregational life as all these practical changes happen, that Jesus will be lifted high and we will worship him as a community together better in our public gatherings and in our communities.

We need you and we ask for your help. In Jesus' name, Amen.