



Series: Ephesians: Life In Christ

Date: August 7, 2023

Speaker: Pastor Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

Text: Ephesians 1.1-14, A Letter from God

Today we are going to begin a study in the book of Ephesians. The book of Ephesians...while called a book...is actually a letter. Curious how many of you write letters regularly to people you care about? I went looking this weekend thinking about how we are opening up a letter in church and found some old letters. Courtney and I are old enough and have been together long enough that we've got letters. I'm talking about love letters. We started dating when I was 15 & she was 16. She didn't know I was 15 cause I told her I was 16 but that's beside the point. Listen, those love letters we have are FILLED up man. Pages and pages. And you know what they are filled with? Not instructions. Hey baby here's 20 things I think you need to DO. NOPE. They are filled with ROMANTIC PRAISE that Shakespeare WISHES he could write.

All kinds of letters right. I got a letter senior year of high school from UNC telling me I got in. That letter brought great excitement because it was about my future. When I graduated high school I got a letter from my aunt wishing me success at UNC & sharing some

life lessons she had learned along the way & a promise to be there for me if & when I needed her. Still have that one today 23 years later.

The most powerful letters carry words that matter from people that matter. Those are the keepers right? Where meaningful words are given inside the context of meaningful relationships. The relationship bond makes the words matter more. The most powerful letters carry words that matter from people that matter.

What we are opening up is a powerful letter from a pastor, imprisoned for preaching the gospel, writing to the young church he founded in a major city called Ephesus. He can't text them, he can't email them... He's got one letter. So he thinks long and hard about what to write and pours his heart and his mind out to them. And the deep bond they have makes his words matter all the more.

There's an even greater layer to this. God didn't let this pastor named Paul write this letter JUST for the church in Ephesus. Certainly it IS that, but God in his infinite wisdom and power inspired this letter to be a letter FROM God himself to all churches at all times. **So here in our bible sits a letter. FROM GOD. To us.** Let me say it again: we have a letter FROM GOD. TO US. I think that might sound ordinary to church folk. But if you went to get your mail



7200 Providence Road, Charlotte, NC 28226
704-665-7028 | mercycharlotte.com



and you had a letter & it was like USPS certified mail FROM GOD...you'd probably open it right away right? That's what this is. If powerful letters carry words that matter from people that matter, what could matter more than this!? I hope your eyes & heart will devour it as such.

It's not long. Only 3 pages in my bible. It was written to help a young church flourish in a metropolitan pre-Christian city. And we receive it as a young church in a metropolitan post-Christian city. Paganism was the dominant religion of their day, Secularism is the dominant religion of our day. They needed help applying faith to real life, so do we. In its simplest breakdown Ephesians is 3 chapters of doctrine followed by 3 chapters of instruction. In other words, the first half is all about who you are in Christ. It's some of the greatest theological language anywhere. And the second half is filled with such good practical application of that theology into marriage, family, work, friendships, church, conflict & forgiveness, purpose and a whole bunch of other everyday things.

This is God's letter to us. It's not going to narrate a bunch of events like 1 & 2 Samuel. It's going to RECALL events - namely the death and resurrection of Jesus. But then it's going to tell us why Jesus matters.. And it's not written to you individually. That's important. though there will be PLENTY of individual applications. But it's written to his local church. So I invite you to receive it as a part of this local church. And take steps WITH your local church like starting point. So how about we do this. As we open God's letter let's stand. All 3 campuses let's stand for the reading of God's word.

We'll read the first 14 verses and as you will see that will be more than enough for us today.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will:
To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus.
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ 10 as a plan for the right time — to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him.

11 In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will, 12 so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might bring praise to his glory.

13 In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. 14 The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our





inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory. -- Ephesians 1:1-14

The word of God for the people of God. YOU CAN BE SEATED

In this letter The apostle Paul is trying to encourage “the faithful saints.” This small band of believers from different cultures now brought together in the church. The goal is to strengthen their hearts and sharpen their minds for living their faith in a hostile setting. And he starts by showing them the many blessings they have if they are IN Christ Jesus.

And THAT theme “IN Jesus” will run the whole letter and our whole series. Paul is going to tell us such great things about those IN Jesus. Which they needed. Ephesus was tough like I said earlier it was a big city. 3rd largest in the roman empire. And at the center of its paganism was the temple of Artemis...who was the god of fertility. So sexual immorality - prostitution & much more was so common it was even a part of religious worship for them. That’s a tough environment for young Christians. Temptation everywhere, most people don’t believe what they do. Sounds like today. If you don’t think sexual freedom & expression is a god our culture worships...you’ve been living under a rock. They had hundreds of gods in ephesus so they were a pluralistic society BUT one where everyone deferred to & did not challenge the pagan way. This is our society. Pluralistic. Lots of religions & beliefs. But you better defer to and not challenge the secular way. Yet Christianity says there is ONE God....and culture will not like that. What I want you to see is you and I need this letter.

They needed encouragement that God really did have a better way than all of this. So do we. The faithful saints in Charlotte, NC.

Ok The rest of the passage for today is, in the original Greek, one sentence. A theologian's treasure trove but an English teacher's nightmare. And I just want to excavate the promises God gives to you who are IN JESUS. Ready? Write them down. You should have a list in your notes: **WHAT GOD HAS PROMISED ME IN JESUS**. First part of the letter. Just trying to give you encouragement. It can get heady in some places so keep the nature of the letter in mind.

3 Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Starts with - Blessed is God the Father. Paul is following the pattern of scripture that so often starts out with Praising God before getting into anything else. ¹ If this were a psalm we’d call it a psalm of praise. Because it starts by PRAISING God who is...the father of our Lord Jesus. You see this word bless 3 times in this verse. As an adjective, a verb, and a noun. That’s because when you speak a blessing over somebody else - you declare it. It’s an acclamation of praise. And when you receive a blessing, you receive what someone else has done FOR YOU that is worthy of praise. This verse has both. So cool.

who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ.

¹ (Gen. 9:26; Exod. 18:10; 1 Sam. 25:32; 1 Chr. 29:10) Darrell L. Bock, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2019), 32.





What God has promised us in Jesus: Abundant Forever blessing.

Now that's not a bad start. It's actually a summary statement of what he's about to say in the next verses. And it's a little bit of a catch all. Like I'm about to specify, but that's not to limit blessing but to highlight blessing. If you are in Jesus you have the full array of blessings available in heaven. God in heaven has opened up his home to you and said everything here you need...it's yours. This is the power of this letter. When you don't FEEL blessed here and now - when life feels spiritually like a desert...He says draw your mind & heart back to the waterfall of promises God has for you in Christ.

*Fact - Faith - Feeling train?

4 For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him.

What God has promised us in Jesus: We are forever chosen.

God CHOSE YOU. IN JESUS. Maybe the greatest hope God is reminding us of in this letter. Before Genesis 1.1...Remember in the beginning...before the beginning...he chose you. See our God created time and he sits outside of it. He voluntarily entered into it but he exists outside of it. And he looked on every believer that would ever be and the ALL MIGHTY KING said I CHOOSE YOU. That's POWERFUL. Ever feel left out? Ever feel overlooked? Ever feel forgotten? But the point is - You are not an accident or an after thought or an extra...IN CHRIST YOU ARE CHOSEN! In fact, let's get nerdy. Gonna do this a few times in this series so just embrace it.

- There are 202 words in this 11 verse sentence. In the greek anyway there are 202.

- In those 202 words there are 24 verbs. Or actions. Of those 24 - God is the one doing 20 of them and we only do 4 of them.
- Vs. 3, God blesses; vs. 4, he chooses; vs. 5, he predestines and adopts vs. 6, he bestows grace; vs. 7, he redeems and forgives; vs. 8, he lavishes; vs. 9, he makes known and he purposes; vs. 10, he unites together in Christ; vs. 11, he works; vs. 13, he seals.
- Listen to the 4 that we do: we listen; we receive; we believe; and we hope.²

In case you thought you had anything to do with your salvation. NOPE. In the transaction so to speak, we do all the sinning and Jesus does all the saving. Pretty awesome right?

5 In Love...He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Ok I'm gonna stop right here. Because now we've seen the word chosen and the word predestined and we are going to see predestined again in a minute. So it's worth pausing and just having a brief "what does this mean?" pastoral aside. First, I want you to see that AS God introduces the idea of his outside of time pre-destined choosing language...Where did he put it? IN A LETTER. The context is RELATIONSHIP. You MUST SEE the relationship first because the point is the relationship. The blessing you receive IN JESUS. And then in light of

² Thanks to J.D. Greear for his grammatical nerd gold he pulled together for his sermon on this passage in 2017 titled "Chosen" preached at the Summit Church in the series "Love Incorruptible."



that you can, a finite human, *try* to understand the mysteries of an infinite God. So let's start by majoring on the relationship...

What God has promised us in Jesus: Forever Family. Isn't that powerful? You aren't just chosen to be in the kingdom of God...you are chosen to be in the family of God. You are chosen for a relationship with God where he is your loving father. He CREATED humans to have children so that we could understand in some small measure the power of the relationship we have with God.

Now, I want to try and unpack this 'predestined' language in light of this relationship. So We are going to deep dive into a divine mystery that has left theologians in awe for centuries. I'm gonna give it 5 minutes. HA! The reason I'm giving it 5 minutes is because figuring out the mystery of God's sovereignty & our free will or our responsibility isn't Paul's objective. This is a letter to encourage & equip you, not some academic textbook to merely educate you. OK here we go: SO God Chose you & predestined you which means he has always chosen you. Let's ask some questions in light of that relationship:

WHY did God choose us? Because fathers love their children. That's why.

Was it my potential - God saw me and thought...man if we can get that one saved they will do big things. NOPE. **Deuteronomy 7:7-8,** *"It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you..."*

We didn't have a lot to offer. we had nothing. Couple weeks we'll see - we were dead in your trespasses and sins. Yet, God loved us! A father doesn't choose to love his children because of their potential.

- *Ex: I used to play this little game with them when they were little - WHY DOES DADDY LOVE YOU? Bunch of answers...in the end it would be "because we are your kids."*

Was it because your sin wasn't as bad as other people's sins?

NOPE. you were just as bad. There is no kind of bad sin and REALLY bad sin. EVERYONE was dead in their trespasses and sins. Even Israel when God says he chose them, he called them a stubborn people whom he blessed because of his love NOT because of anything they did. It's not like God looked down and said "I know there's good in you." That's a scene from star wars NOT scripture.

SO Why does the father love his child? Because he does. Because that's what fathers do. It really has nothing to do with the merits of the child.

HEAR ME: FATHERLY LOVE DOESN'T REALLY NEED AN EXPLANATION. That's the whole point! **God doesn't love you because you are lovely, he loves you because he loves you.**

I've shared with you this quote from Spurgeon (WHO IS THAT?) before: *"I have no questions that God chose me, because I am quite sure that if God had not chosen me I should never have chosen him; and I am sure he chose me before I was born, or else he never would have chosen me afterwards; and he must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why he should have looked upon me with special love."*³

³ Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures, book 2, page 47*



Ok so - **Does God's choice mean I don't have any free will?** No it does not. God closes out the book of Revelation saying..whosoever will...let them come. God calls salvation a gift that we are to receive. That we are to believe. There is action on our part. Eph 2 says by FAITH we are saved. **SO HOW DOES IT WORK?**

Jesus pulled back the curtain on this mystery a little bit when he said **44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, -- John 6.44**

SOOOO...God created the hunger in us that drew us to God. It's not that we didn't have the ability to choose him. We did. We didn't have the DESIRE to choose him. God is the one who comes along and redirects our desire toward him. This is my favorite part of my job. When God starts changing somebody's heart. And they are like...I don't know man all I know is something is happening and I want to hear more, know more. I WANT God. This is where some of you are RIGHT NOW. It's why you are here. Some things have happened maybe both around you and also in you. And you can't explain it. But here you are. Listening to a sermon. This time last week, last year, maybe even last night you were in a very different place. But now you are here and Maybe you find yourself thinking how did I...of all people...wind up in CHURCH? WHAT IS HAPPENING? First off, welcome. We are glad you are here. Every last one of us is the same way. There's this story in the gospels of this blind man who encounters Jesus and Jesus heals his sight. And people start asking him all these questions and he's like I DON'T KNOW! I'M NOT SURE WHAT IS GOING ON. ALL I know is I once was blind but now I see. And I'm gonna stick with the guy who gave me sight.

So if that's you, just know GOD is the one who brought you this far. God is drawing you. Lean into that and we are here to help.

So if you are asking the question: Are YOU chosen? Well, have you chosen to repent of your sin and believe in Christ for your salvation? If the answer is yes...then you are chosen. And if that confuses your brain...Aren't you glad God is bigger than your brain? **5 minutes are up.** Let's get back to our list.

6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.

What God has promised us in Jesus: Abundant Forever Grace

Do you see that word lavished? It means lavished. That word is reserved for when something with **great value is given in great abundance.** Like you can't lavish cheetos on somebody. Because cheetos just aren't valuable. But you can lavish 2" thick medium rare reverse seared ribeye on somebody. God has given his extremely valuable grace to you in great abundance. How? In the beloved one. That's Jesus. Is that how you would describe God's grace? Priceless and abundant? Paul would because Paul remembers the sinner he was when God saved him. **If God's grace is unremarkable to you, maybe it's because your sin is unremarkable to you.** If you aren't in awe of his grace perhaps you aren't properly disgusted by/ terrified of your sin and its consequences. Grace is only amazing because it saved a wretch like me. Speaking of:

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding.



7200 Providence Road, Charlotte, NC 28226
704-665-7028 | mercycharlotte.com



What God has promised us in Jesus: Forever Redemption. The phrase ‘forgiveness of our trespasses’ is a way of clarifying what ‘redemption through his blood’ means. The goal of this letter is to encourage you in who you are in Christ. The gospel is the announcement that God has decided, according to the riches of his grace, to extend forgiveness to sinners like you and me. You and I have sinned. Which means we chose our way over God’s way. And that sin comes with a price.

- Just like when I was 17 trying to help my dad get something out of the attic and he warned me...don’t step on the insulation. ONLY step on the beams. And I was like yes sir. Then what did I do...I thought I’m just stepping lightly here it's fine. I’m 17 and I know everything. And BOOM right through the ceiling goes my right leg and now it’s dangling in my parents bedroom. Mom is screaming. One leg coming out of the ceiling like a horror movie or something. And the worst part of all of it was we knew a dry wall guy - the BEST dry wall guy in 2 counties. Rick Little. Courtney’s dad. So we are dating at the time and he comes over and while he never said it where I could hear it I can only imagine at some point he looked at her and was like “Are you sure?” But my point is - SOMEBODY had to pay for that hole. And I didn’t have the money to cover it. SO, either my dad had to pay her dad OR her dad had to eat the expense and charge us nothing. Either way there was a DEBT I couldn’t pay that needed to be paid on my behalf to fix what I broke.

THAT is the announcement of the Gospel. YOU sinned against God. You didn’t accidentally fall through the hole, you willingly went against your Heavenly Father’s instructions because you thought your way was better. That is sin. And it can only be paid for in blood.

And Jesus went up on the cross to shed HIS blood in our place. And so our debt is FORGIVEN! Ya’ll that was a light hearted analogy. The reality is... WAAAAY BIGGER DEBT. WAAAAY BIGGER COST.

9 He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ 10 as a plan for the right time — to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him.

How awesome is that? It was God’s good pleasure to give us His Son. Wow. And He made Christ both the head and the heart of creation. He reigns as the head over all with the Father but also is the heart by which all things are held together & function together. See this letter from God is letting you and I in on what we can’t see. He’s trying to comfort and encourage you that His plan...His plan for the world and for the heavens and FOR YOU... is still on track. Do you need that today? Maybe that’s exactly what you need to hear. God has not forgotten you & life is not actually out of control.

11 In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will, 12 so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might bring praise to his glory.

What God has promised us in Jesus: We have a forever Home. The inheritance - Check this. THE CHURCH is actually God’s inheritance. And full union with him in heaven - THAT is our inheritance. One day you will experience the full glory of the presence of GOD the father! Inheritance is usually a word for something a loved one leaves behind. But for Christians...it’s actually a GREAT TREASURE and it’s given by the one we are waiting to see in the future! WHY? That’s verse 12. So that we might bring praise to HIS glory!



7200 Providence Road, Charlotte, NC 28226
704-665-7028 | mercycharlotte.com



13 In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. 14 The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory.

What God has promised us in Jesus: Salvation secured forever through the Holy Spirit.

How beautiful is this? All three members of the Godhead are working together to author, execute, and secure our salvation.

God the Father is the source of our salvation

God the Son is the means of our salvation

God the Holy Spirit is the keeper of our salvation

What is our role? we listen; we receive; we believe; and we hope.

And as a down payment...as a promise to you of the eternity we have coming for us...God gives us the Holy Spirit here and now. And EVERY time we are convicted of sin, every time we pray & sense God guiding us a certain direction, every time we hear a word from a brother or sister that feels like it was straight from God...I like to call those 'God moments.' Every moment is a God moment. But, sometimes God makes himself SO OBVIOUS that even a dummy like me can see...God is working. All of those God moments are the DOWN PAYMENT reminding us that we are secure and something even better is coming.

What God has promised us in Jesus

- **Abundant forever blessing**
- **We are forever chosen**
- **We have a forever family**

- **We have forever redemption**
- **We have a forever home**
- **We have forever security in the Holy Spirit**

Paul chose to open his letter BIG. With a big anthemic announcement that should lift your heart. You are chosen by God, through the power of God, for the glory of God. All praise be to God. Now that we've heard the opening of this letter, what should it do for us?

Because we are in Jesus: We can have peace in how we view ourselves⁴

- If you deal with self-loathing. The promise that we are chosen in Christ - is so powerful. It is the antidote to **self-loathing** because there is nothing you can do to lose his love. He loves you because he loves you. So when you are down on yourself, there is great power in knowing God the father...he loves you.
- If you have a habit of thinking too highly of yourself...We are not Christians today because of our status, mind, pedigree, will to submit, or anything. We are saved because he loves us & chose us. So that should humble you. And my experience is MOST who present themselves as prideful are highly insecure internally. Good news - What God says about you is secure. So you can have peace and stop trying to impress everybody so much.
- **Self-pity.** A person, who knows they are a sinner saved by grace alone, can no longer feel sorry for themselves.

⁴ I owe the self-loathing/pity/inflation idea to a comment by Tim Keller in his sermon on this passage titled "Our Ransom".





Because their present situation is not their permanent situation. Leads me to:

Because we are in Jesus: We can have hope in our trials

Verse 11 - We were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will.

What things does God work according to his plan? EVERY thing. Man...No matter what you're dealing with or going through, it is nothing compared to the glory of what is coming. The value of what is guaranteed completely overwhelms the cost of anything God asks you to endure here. So you can strengthen your tired hands & weak knees as Hebrews says and endure suffering with Joy. Because what is coming is GUARANTEED. Listen ya'll we have HOPE. our faith says God CHOSE US, GOD SECURED US, GOD IS WITH US, GOD HAS PREPARED A PLACE FOR US. AND NOTHING can change WHO GOD IS OR WHAT HE HAS DONE!

Because we are in Jesus: We can have confidence in evangelism

Ya'll - you will see throughout the scriptures that God has sent us, His church, to share the gospel with the lost. And some will say...YEAH but if He already predestined who He will choose, why does it matter? Well for the apostle Paul, it was actually God's choosing that motivated him to GO share the gospel. Acts 18.9 - God says to Paul don't be discouraged in your preaching because I have many people in this city. God had them, but they hadn't believed

yet. That put courage INTO Paul's preaching. Cause he EXPECTED God to start changing lives any day as he preached the gospel.

Same is true for us. Talk to missionaries and church planters in places where there are no Christians and they will tell you - God's choosing is a comfort to them. It gives them hope as they share with the lost. They are working among the fields and they are confident God has a harvest of people he has chosen. My old pastor, back when my head was first hurting with this whole business, shared with me this quote from A.A. Hodge. It is pretty blunt which I needed:

A.A. Hodge: *"Does God know the day you'll die? Yes. Has he appointed that day? Yes. Can you do anything to change that day? No. Then why do you eat? To live. What happens if you don't eat? You die. Then if you don't eat, and die, then would that be the day that God had appointed for you to die?"*

(New slide) *...Quit asking stupid questions and just eat. Eating is the pre-ordained way God has appointed for living."⁵*

If we don't share Jesus with them does that mean they aren't elected? Stupid question. Share Christ because that's what God has told you to do. And leave the rest up to him. And our experience here at Mercy is the more people we share the gospel with, the more people keep getting sovereignly chosen by God.

⁵ Adapted from Charles Ryrie, who stole it from A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology* (1890), 92–93.



I'm out of time. Let's close with a time of response. With an invitation to come and receive.



7200 Providence Road, Charlotte, NC 28226
704-665-7028 | mercycharlotte.com