

The Beloved
Ephesians 1:5-8

Romans 12

Romans 15:1-13

Responsive Psalm 135:1-7

Last week we began looking at chapter 1, I wasn't sure as I was preparing for the week exactly how far into chapter 1 we were going to get..and it would seem the answer to that question was up to verse 4. So this morning we are going to pick back up at verse 5. But before we do, just a little recap since verse 5 is not a new section or thought but a continuation of a statement by Paul. Let us go ahead and read this morning starting again in verse 1, to verse 12. In the first few verses here Paul establishes his authority to write this letter, and addresses to whom it is written, to the saints, to the believers, to the chosen and set apart ones who have been blessed by Jesus Christ with every spiritual blessing. This is not some special blessing given to just the saints in Ephesus, but Paul is identifying them as members of a group of Gods select people from all over the world, throughout all of time. We who believe today likewise fall into this same category, as Saints, who have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. So while Paul is writing to a group of people, he is not writing to identify them as a unique group among themselves, but rather to identify them in a unique group found in Christ that spans across all nations, and generations.

So it isn't that they alone are blessed in Jesus, but are rather counted as those who are joined with the rest of the believing saints who are blessed in Jesus. It seems like a small nuance, but it is an important one for it means that we today are just as much a part of this reality, as the believers in Ephesus. It means that this letter is written to us today, so that we may know God, believe and rest in his Son, and understand his sovereign will and purpose in salvation. When Paul writes to them, and informs them that Jesus has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, it is just as relevant to us as believers today as it was to them. We are apart of the group of blessed ones, and share in the glories, and mercies of Christ with these saints in Ephesus, with the believers in Rome, with the faithful listed in Galatians, we are all Gods children, born of his grace, blessed by the holy spirits indwelling, so that we may have direct access to the almighty father. There is no greater blessing, no greater standing, no greater calling, then to be blessed by the Sovereign God of creation.

That is essentially where we left off last week, So this week we are going to be looking deeper into how we who are called the saints have been called into these blessings. The simple answer, which is Paul's answer in verse 4, is that he chose us. The blessings that Paul mentions in verse 3 which he says are "in Christ" are tied directly into the calling mentioned in verse 4. Those spiritual blessings, are the things that Paul is now going into more detail about, the election of Gods people before the foundation of the world, the predestination of us as adopted children, the redemption through Christ's sacrificial death, and the forgiveness of our sins. These are an everlasting blessing that has been, and ever shall be, blessings for the saints both past, present and future. Throughout time, God is calling to himself those whom he has predestined and knew before the foundation of the world, this was a reality throughout scripture, this is a reality today, and it will be a reality 1000's of years from now if God delays his return for that long. According to the global birth rate data, on average 350,000 babies are born a day across the world....and some of them have been chosen by God to be apart of his family, and he knows each and every one for as he says.. he knew us before the world was formed. What a profound statement, and in many ways I guess can be hard for us as humans to grasp this stunning reality. God knows his children before they are born, God knew his children before he formed the earth.

Like I was saying last week, I think in many ways we don't really grasp and understand how sovereign God truly is, and in fact I don't think we truly can for we can only understand things through the lens of our own experience and life, but we have been given faith to understand and believe the things which are beyond us. In this flesh we are finite beings, we have a beginning and end, we are put on this world for a time, to live our lives, and it can be difficult for us to comprehend eternity, that there has never been a time where God has not existed. And in that time, before time, as Paul says, in eternity past God knew you and chose you. Your salvation was sure, guaranteed, predestined, and predetermined to happen at a set time in your life. That means the circumstances around your salvation, the things that drove you to seek Christ, whatever it may have been, a near death experience, some hardships, or just merely a person sharing the gospel, all were sent by God for the sake of that effectual calling creating in you the new creature you were predestined to be before the world was formed.

Which means in all things, and through all things God is with us, so the question then becomes, not why has God done this to me, but rather how does this moment, or time in our lives serve God's purpose? He has already known your times of plenty, and your times of need before you were born, he knows the and has determined the day of your death, the circumstances around it the thing that seems random and tragic at times has been predetermined by God. I have a friend who drove a truck, picking up and delivering products all day from building to building where I work. It didn't take long to recognize that we were both believers, and I remember him saying to me once, I think out of some depression and questioning the things going on in his own life, and some difficulties with the company he worked for, he said, "Sometimes I wonder why I am even here, why God has put me in this job." My half joking, but serious response was, "simply so we could meet."

This was something so simple, so mundane, we run into people all the time and it seems random and often times meaningless to us, but to God nothing is random or meaningless. Since that time him and I have had some pretty good conversations, and God has allowed me to be a person he can talk to when he needs someone. I think about this pretty often, how God uses circumstances in our lives to fulfill his purpose and will. Our previous pastor used the example of a tapestry, on one side a beautiful articulately created picture, but on the backside a mess of string, stretching across the back, intertwined, cut, knotted, overlapping. He said that is how God works in our lives, we don't see the backside which is his work, we just see the outcome. But honestly I think a lot of times its the other way around, we look at our lives, and the things around us and it seems like a mess of strings, cut, frayed, broken, stretched from one end to the other, just a tangled mess of problems, and issues..but God knows the outcome, and he is using all of it to weave us into a beautiful tapestry for his own glory.

In the old testament account, God chose Abraham...out of everyone on the earth at the time, he chose Abraham to bless him, so that through him, the world may be blessed through his lineage, by the arrival of the promised Messiah. Likewise God chose Israel to be his set apart people as a reflection of his electing reality. It had nothing to do with Israels choice, or even their own desire, or righteous behavior...but it was God who said.. you shall be my people and I shall be your God. Paul takes this truth, and in this letter he writes he shows that this is the reality for each of God's children, the object of God's choice, is us, that is, believers, who now belong to the people of God and therefore praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was always Gods intention to create for himself a group of people, a spiritual Israel if you will, that has been chosen from the mass lost sinful humanity, to be a part of his holy nation, a people conformed to the likeness of his Son.

Unlike the example we see in the old testament Israel, which was a corporate calling, a setting a part of a nation of people, in the true Israel, God has created a new nation of individuals set apart for his purpose and calling. Just how Israel of old stood as an example of this, we stand as an example of the one who called us, as living members of an eternal nation who are called to be a witness to this reality, a reality that is only found in the redemptive work of Jesus. These gifts we have been given, these spiritual blessings from the heavenly places that Paul previously mentioned are personal, our redemption, the forgiveness of sins in Christ, the sealing of the Holy Spirit following belief in the gospel of salvation are all personal, individual gifts given to each and every believer. There is of course yet still a corporate aspect, but that corporate nation which is called of God, is made up of the individuals called of God from all corners of the world.

So the implications are that this salvation is one that is highly personal and intimate between ourselves and Christ. As much as some, like for instance the Catholic church may try to interject themselves into this personal reality, without the personal effectual gracious calling of God there would be not corporate church. The Catholic belief system sets the corporate church up as the middle ground between God and Man, they believe that mankind's access to God is found through the church itself. The pope is believed to be the vicar, or the intermediary contact in which God speaks to his people, and through the priests, and the saints the people speak to God. They have set themselves up as the gatekeepers of access, placing themselves between God and man. But this is not the reality of belief in Christ, As Paul wrote to Timothy, "there is only one mediator between God and man, and that is Jesus Christ." This is a role that is unique to Jesus, and there is no other individual or entity that can serve as the connection point between God and man.

It was Christ who gave himself up to die for the sins of his people, not the church, it is Christ who was given as a ransom for all of humanity, not the church. Without his death, with out his mediation we would all be subject to the wrath of God for our sins. Salvation and reconciliation comes from Christ, and Christ alone, not the church, not an organization, nor any other individual. There must be a personal and intimate call for there to be justification and redemption. God does not call organizations or groups of people, but individual's whom he knew before the foundation of the world. There are so many who believe that "church going" is how we can find ourselves right with God, when rather it is the complete opposite. We do not gather together to be found right with God, we are as individuals found right with God through Jesus Christ, and we gather to worship and praise him for that reality. The chosen of God does not need the church for their salvation, but the chosen of God will desire to be in fellowship with one another, making out of many individuals a body of believers, who come together around the throne of God to worship and praise him.

That is the purpose of the church, it is a place where we encourage, and exhort one another, a place where we work to carry one another's burdens, to share life together as brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not come here to find holiness by our attendance, or to satisfy some moral urge, if you are looking to the church for your justification you are looking in the wrong place. Our justification before God is only through the work that Christ has done on the cross, on our behalf, the perfect and holy one sacrificed and died so that we as his children may live.

This elective call, again is personal, not corporate. God calls the people, not the church, God calls the individual, not the organizations. One may attend church service every day, for their entire life, but without the personal and intimate relationship between themselves and God, they can not, and will not find salvation in the church alone.

We as Christians it seems can perpetuate this problem a bit ourselves as well, we think that maybe if we can just get this person, or that family member to go to church things will be better for them. And there is an aspect where that may very well be true because through the ministry of the church and the individuals it is comprised of, hopefully the gospel is being preached and may be heard drawing that individual to Christ. But far to many churches are devoid of the gospel call, far to many churches have as the Ephesians church, left their first love . The sad state of Christianity and church in this country is a push toward church attendance with sometimes little regard for the interpersonal need of Christ. I see this a lot among people I know, there seems to be a cultural, or familial push to make sure to go to church, but there is little impact on the realities of their lives. Often times parents are going simply go because of their children. because they “want there kids to grow up as good people.”

The church has failed its people, by leaving off the offensive reality of God's wrath upon the sinner, and a call to turn to Christ in repentance ti has become an empty social gathering of morally decent people. There is no power, there is no true hope, only empty words of encouragement and trite sayings to those who maybe suffering. There is little focus on the individual, and all of the focus has been put on the corporate. Pushing the idea that your identity is found in the church, when the reality is your identity needs to be found in Christ. So largely now the protestant church has made a similar mistake of the Catholic church, where the Catholic church has set itself up as the gate keeper, the mediator between God and Man, the protestant church has moved passed the individual necessity of salvation and says, well, at least they are going to church. Often times a church that is devoid of the gospel, who seeks to soften the reality of mankind's rebellion and sin against God. Again it becomes about the corporate identity, not the individual.

Just to reiterate, I am not saying that we should not be inviting people to our little church, but what I am saying that should not be the end all of that conversation. There needs to be a clear and concise message of the necessity of Christ, who he is, who we are as sinners, and what he has done to rectify that problem. Unbelievers don't need the church, they need the gospel, they need Christ. The purpose of the church is largely for those who believe to be equipped to share the gospel, a place to find encouragement and rest from the fallen world as we worship together and rest in the reality of our status as God's beloved children. The hope is that our friends and family will comet to know Jesus and will want to join us in this fellowship. We can get a sense of this in all of the epistles, the various letters to the churches in the New Testament, they all address their readers as believers, with the assumption that those who are gathered are already saints, set apart ones, the beloved. Paul never writes to those in the church who are “seeking God” he writes to those whom have already been found by God, but knowing there are some among these groups who do not believe, he always implores them to come to Christ, but that isn't the focus of these letters, the focus is to instruct and reveal spiritual truths that can only be spiritually discerned by those who have been given the spirit.

As Paul addresses the church in Ephesus he writes to he says, “having predestined us into adoption as sons and daughters by Jesus Christ himself.” He is not addressing the seeker sensitive church, he is addressing THE church of the living God, a holy and blessed people who have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. We are, and should be a gathering of God's people who are striving to live our lives together as best as we are able to the glory of the one who has chosen us. In Roman's Paul said, “as much as it depends upon you, live in peace with one another.” Again, a message to the church, to the believers in Christ. That we are to strive to be united in Christ, worshipping and glorifying him in truth and in love in all that we do. As Paul wrote in verse 6. “To the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he made us accepted in the Beloved.”

If you are in Christ, then this is your status before God, a chosen, beloved one, whom he knew before the foundation of the world. This reality should bring great peace in our hearts, that God for his glory chose us to be in a relationship with him, loved us, died for us, so that we may know him, intimately and personally. Not as just some distant power, but as our beloved father. It is a deeply personal connection to know God, to love and to be loved by him, and it is through this relationship we are to likewise love, and be loved by one another, as fellow brothers and sisters of Christ, and that is the purpose and function of the local gathering of the church of God. To live out this reality together as his beloved ones. May God be pleased to continue that work in us, and may our reflection of love toward one another stand as a beacon of light and hope in a world of darkness. May we be a place where broken people may come and be made whole, where the weary and downtrodden come to find rest, and may we be ever faithful in our calling to proclaim this gospel message so that others may hear, and know, and believe.