

"Chosen"

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Date: 29 February 2020

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[0 : 00] Let's turn in our Bibles then please if you have them to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 1 we're going to consider these four verses together, these opening four verses of Ephesians chapter 1.

It'll be helpful for you if you have your Bible open. We're going to be making reference to what Paul says here so it'll be good if we have our Bibles open in front of us.

We all have that experience of being chosen. Perhaps you think back to your school days and you can remember lining up waiting to be chosen for the sports team.

Perhaps you go into your local bank and they say, oh Mr. Key, good to see you. We have a special offer just for you. Special rates on your mortgage, special rates on your loan, special rates on your credit card, whatever it is.

It's just for you or so they have you believe anyway. First one is probably Tesco's. You go into Tesco's, scan your club card and what do you get at the end?

[1 : 03] You get about five or ten vouchers that say here's an offer just for you, an offer exclusively for you. Perhaps some of us have a more negative memory of being chosen.

Perhaps some of us were always those who were the last to be picked, the last to be chosen. And yet as we come to Ephesians chapter one this afternoon, as we come to these opening four verses, Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians that they have been chosen in Christ, that they have been chosen before the foundation of the world, that they have been chosen by God.

As we think about these four verses, we want to think about three things together. We want to see three things this afternoon from Ephesians chapter one. Firstly we want to think about the beginning, the beginning of the letter as Paul begins this letter, he reminds the Ephesians of some important truths.

He reminds them of who he is. He reminds them of his apostolic authority. So we'll think about the beginning of the letter. Secondly then we want to think about the blessing that is ours in Jesus Christ.

As Paul moves on to verse three, he reminds these Ephesian Christians of the blessings that are theirs in Christ. As we're going to see, it's every spiritual blessing that God has conferred upon them.

[2 : 32] And then thirdly, finally we'll see how Paul reminds them that it was before the foundation of the world. It was before the foundation of the world that they were chosen in Christ.

Meaning, blessing and before. So as we come to it then we see that the beginning, and we'll look at verses one and two to see what we're reminded of at the beginning of Ephesians chapter one.

The first thing that we're reminded of, the first thing that we see is quite an obvious thing but sometimes the danger is that things are obvious, we can easily overlook them. So the first thing we notice is who is it who's written this letter?

Who is it who's sent this letter to the church in Ephesus? Well it's Paul. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus.

The same Paul who at one point had been a persecutor of the church. The same Paul who at one time had been on his way to arrest and kill Christians. The same Paul who approved of the stoning of Stephen.

[3 : 38] And when we consider the content of Ephesians it helps us to remind ourselves who it is who's writing the letter. Because how do we explain it?

How do we explain this letter that's so full of praise for Jesus Christ? How do we explain this letter that's so full of the glory of Christ?

How do we explain the fact that it's this man who did everything in his power to destroy the church who's now writing this letter?

Well Paul himself gives us the only explanation there is. And that is that God had chosen him. God had chosen him before the foundation of the world.

God had called him out of darkness into his glorious light. God had taken him off that broad road that leads to destruction and placed him on the narrow path that leads to life.

[4 : 39] It's only the gospel of Christ. It's only the grace of God that affects such a change in an individual. Paul left to his own devices and desires would have continued to hate the church.

Would have continued to think of Christians as apostates. And would have continued to arrest, persecute and kill them.

But the grace of God found them. The grace of God changed them. And brought this man who persecuted the church into being a preacher.

And we see how Paul further describes himself. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. It was Jesus who appeared to him on that Damascus road.

It was Jesus who radically turned his life around. It was Jesus who Paul was an apostle of. But I wonder this afternoon when you hear the term apostle, what is it you think of?

[5 : 42] Where does your mind instantly go when you hear apostles? See it can mean different things to us. We might think of the twelve apostles, those twelve disciples of Jesus who are his close friends.

We can think of those who perhaps have been sent by the church to be missionaries. Those who have been commissioned by the church sometimes can be called apostles.

But that doesn't really fit with Paul here, does it? He wasn't one of the twelve. He wasn't one of those initial disciples of Jesus. So when Paul uses the term apostle here, what does he mean?

As Paul uses this term here, it gives him an authority. It gives him a right to speak. He was an apostle of Christ Jesus.

He was one who had been sent by Christ Jesus. He is one who had seen the risen Christ. He is one who had been given a ministry by the risen Christ.

[6 : 41] And so as Paul uses the term apostle here, it gives him an authority. It gives him a way. It gives his words gravitas.

It was Christ who had commissioned him. It was Christ who had sent him to take the message to the Gentiles. And it's important for us to remember that.

Because as we come to the letter, to the church in Ephesus, as we come to this book, this letter of Ephesians, what we have here is no less God's word than the gospel.

What we have here written in front of us is no less inspired by the Holy Spirit than the words of the gospel.

Our doctrine of Scripture tells us that all Scripture is God's breathe. Our doctrine of Scripture tells us, as Peter puts it, that men wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

[7 : 40] Some Christians today say, well, I try to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. I like his teachings, but I don't like Paul. All that theology, it's all a bit heavy.

As Paul reminds us here, friends, he was an apostle. He was one who had been sent by Jesus Christ. He wrote these words under the inspiration and guidance and authority of the Holy Spirit. And therefore we have to deal with them. We have to reckon with them. We may not like what we read about predestination. We may not like what we read about homosexuality. We may not like what we read about women, elders and ministers, but we have to deal with it because it's inspired by the same Holy Spirit.

So this is a letter written by Paul. It's written by Paul, who's an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. But who's it to? Paul again reminds us, tells us here, to the saints who are on Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Notice how Paul describes the believers in Ephesus. Notice how Paul describes those who the letters written to, to the saints. There was a story in the newspaper a few weeks ago about Prince Charles.

[9 : 00] And he said the news because he'd attended the canonization of John Henry Newman, the great prominent Roman Catholic scholar. And at his canonization, John Henry Newman was being recognized as an official saint of the Roman Catholic Church, as somebody who could be prayed to and who had power and authority.

And even as Protestant sometimes, that can be our view of what saints are. Saints are people who are especially holy. Saints are people who are especially good living, people who are especially righteous.

Brothers being officially recognized by the church. And yet Paul here, writing a letter to the whole church in Ephesus, writing a letter that was to be read aloud to the brothers and sisters.

Paul says to the saints, all of them, not the especially holy ones, not the especially righteous ones. And to the saints who are in Ephesus. And I wonder friends, if that's how you see yourself this afternoon in Christ.

[10 : 18] Do you think of yourself as a saint that perhaps sounds a little big headed given our ideas of saints?

You don't feel especially saint like you're aware of indwelling sin, you're aware of how far short of God's standard you fall, you're aware of how far short of your own standard you fall.

And you don't feel especially saint like. But what are the qualifications? I just pulled the scribe into the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

That's what it means to be a saint. To have faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, to have trust that he is forgiven your sin, to have confidence that he is your savior.

If you are in Jesus Christ this afternoon, if you've asked him to forgive your sins, then you are a saint. And what does Paul offer them?

[11 : 31] We're working our way very slowly through this. What does Paul offer them? To the saints who are in Ephesus, who are faithful in Christ Jesus. Then verse 2, what is it he offers? Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Two ideas that are very closely interwoven in Scripture. Two ideas that we often find together in Scripture. The Old Testament term for this would have been the covenant love that God had for his people.

The he said that God had for his people. And in the New Testament there's grace and peace. In the New Testament there's covenant love as shown to us, which supremely in the Lord Jesus Christ who appeared bringing grace and truth.

Who appeared bringing peace with God and peace with one another. As a church, that's the gospel we have to offer.

As a church that's the good news that we have. The grace and peace is available from God. That peace with God and peace with man is possible in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[12 : 46] That sinful humanity and its fallenness can be restored to right relationship with God. That's the gospel, that's the good news.

And doesn't our world need it today? We live in a world that's increasingly polarized. You turn on your TV, you pick up your newspaper.

And as soon as one person adopts a position, someone else will adopt a contrary position just because that's the world we live in. And over and against that we have the gospel that offers grace and peace.

Over and against that we have the gospel that offers peace with God. Over and against that we have the gospel that offers sins for giving. We have a message of peace to proclaim to our divided world.

So that's the first thing we see then. We see the beginning of the letter. Paul reminds them who he is, an apostle of Christ. He reminds them who they are, saints of the most high God.

[13 : 54] And then secondly then we want to see the blessing that he reminds them of. The blessing that he reminds them of. And we see that in verse 3. Verse 3 we see the blessing.

And we notice that as we come to verse 3 there's this one word that appears over and over again in this verse. It's blessed or a variation. Blessing.

The word's the same word that we get our English word eulogy from. When we hear eulogy at a funeral, what are we hearing? We're hearing good words about a person.

We're hearing the life story of a person. And Paul encourages us here. Paul encourages the Ephesians verse 3. Blessed, speak good words of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

He's encouraging the Ephesians to speak the truth about God. He's encouraging the Ephesians to remember who God is. He's encouraging them to wholeheartedly praise God, to praise the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:03] And praise should be the overflow of our hearts towards God. When we consider all that God has done for us. When we consider who we are by birth.

When we consider what we're really like. When we consider all that God has done for us. When we consider the fact that Christ came he who knew no sin. What was made sin for us. So that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

How can we do anything else but praise? How can we do anything else but give thanks to God? And as you read this.

You can almost sense Paul's excitement can't you? You can almost feel Paul's passion. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

[16:10] This wasn't half hearted. It wasn't common every day run of the mill. This captivated Paul, captivated his heart, captivated who he was.

Now I know we're Scottish or no other Irish in my case. This level of excitement perhaps doesn't come as naturally to us as it might to some others.

But has this gospel, has the grace of God, has the peace with God become so common? So run of the mill that it doesn't excite us anymore.

That it doesn't warm our hearts anymore. Has coming before the God of the universe. Has coming before the God who spoke and things came to be.

Has coming before the God who nipped each one of us together in our mother's womb. Sees to amaze us.

[17:11] Sees to captivate us. They talk about soldiers becoming battle weary so that the horrors of battle don't strike them anymore.

They become hardened to the effects of battle. I wonder this afternoon friends if we're in danger of becoming praise weary.

With the blessing of knowing God, with the blessing of the gospel, with the blessing of sins forgiven, sins forgiven doesn't excite us anymore.

Doesn't thrill us anymore. That that passion and zeal and fire that we once had has been dimmed with the passing of time.

We're not necessarily talking here, don't misunderstand me. We're not necessarily talking here about a charismatic excitement.

[18:08] But we're talking about an excitement of soul. Now with joy I went to the Lord's house.

With joy I stood with the people of God. That's spirit when we approach church.

And notice how Paul describes what God has done for us. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thought a little bit about that.

Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. Perhaps it helps us to understand what Jesus talks about.

We remember those very famous words of Jesus that He has come that they might have life and have it to the full. Paul reminds the Ephesians here that they have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ.

[19:07] Now notice that this is every spiritual blessing. This isn't every spiritual gift that Paul would talk about in 1 Corinthians. This is slightly different than we've been given every spiritual blessing.

Why? Because Jesus Christ Himself is our head. Because Jesus Christ Himself is our elder brother. Because Jesus Christ Himself knows every spiritual blessing.

He is in very nature God. All things were made by Him and through Him and for Him. And as adopted sons and daughters of God, everything that is His is ours.

Everything that is His is ours. I remember when I went to university I lived with a few friends for a short period of time.

And one of our favourite activities was to go to the All You Can Eat buffet at Pizza Hut. I think you paid about six or seven quid and you could well eat all you wanted.

[20:13] Very self-explanatory. Everything in the restaurant was yours. There were new pizzas being cooked all the time. Rather optimistically the salad bar was being refreshed every hour or so.

But everything you wanted was yours. You wanted more pizza, go and take it. You wanted more drink, go and take it. Everything was yours.

And that says Paul is what God has done for us. That in Christ He has given us every spiritual blessing.

And yet notice how that's qualified. Christ has given us every spiritual blessing. Please don't misunderstand that. But notice how it's qualified. He's given us every spiritual blessing.

What are we told in the heavenly places? You could take verse 3 and if you left out the heavenly places you could make a health and wealth gospel out of it.

[21 : 17] Christ has given me everything. Christ has given me health, wealth, prosperity. But the biggest blessing that is ours is in the heavenly places.

Let the thought of that sink in for a moment friends. If you're here this afternoon and you're a Christian. If you're here this afternoon and you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. It is impossible. It is impossible for you to be any more blessed than you already are.

You have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. You may suffer in this life. You may lack in this world. You may lack in the here and now and the material things. But every spiritual blessing is yours.

[22 : 20] You can rest assured that you will one day hear that wonderful, free, well done, well done, good and faithful sermon.

Enter into my rest. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. We cannot want for anything, any spiritual thing in our Savior.

So we thought about the beginning. We've seen Paul remind them of who he is, who they are.

We've seen Paul remind them that they are blessed beyond measure. And then thirdly, finally this afternoon we want to think about when this all happened.

And we see in verse 4 that it happened before the foundation of the world, before the foundation of the world. This is of course connected to verse 3.

Paul is reminding them that they have every spiritual blessing verse 3. And as we come to verse 4 he is going to outline, he is going to show them what some of those spiritual blessings are.

[23 : 25] And as we come to verse 4, the first thing that we are reminded of, the first spiritual blessing that is ours, verse 4, is that he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.

God chose us in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world. Here we see the doctrine of election and its full force.

Some people may object to that. Some people may not be really happy with that this morning, this afternoon. You might say well the doctrine of election doesn't allow me any choice. If God chose me from before the foundation of the world then I don't have any choice.

I don't have my free will. But when we stop to think about it, can it really be any different? Can it really be any different?

Let's say our salvation depended on if we decided for God or not. Then would God be God? No.

[24 : 28] We would be God because we had decided for God. We had taken the decision ourselves. Effectively if we denied the doctrine of election we put ourselves in God's place.

There could be people out there who God desired to draw to himself who would never come, who would never bow the knee. If God is to be God then election chosen before the foundation of the world is the only real choice.

Maybe you want to say well the problem isn't so much the choice that I make. The problem is that if we accept the doctrine of election then our zeal, our passion, our urgency for evangelism is gone. If the sea after sea of no matter what then what's the point in telling people about Jesus? Because ultimately God will sort it out in the long run.

That's exactly the point isn't it? We don't know who is elect. We don't know those who have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. We don't know those who have been chosen before the foundation of the world.

[25 : 41] And so it increases our urgency in evangelism. It increases our zeal to see people come to Christ because we want the full number of elect to be made complete.

It is as Paul says here that God chose us. Not that we chose him. Not that we pulled ourselves up by our spiritual bootstraps and made ourselves good enough for God.

Not that we lived a good enough life and God was born to accept us but rather God chose us from before the foundation of the world.

Not based on any forcing fear but simply part of his sovereign plan. Just as he had with the people of Israel those years before.

Not because they were more numerous. Not because they were more powerful. Not because they were more worthy. But because of his sovereign choice.

[26 : 44] It's tremendously reassuring this afternoon to know that our salvation depends not on how strong our grip is of God.

But that our salvation this afternoon depends on how strong God's grip is on us. God will not let us go.

Christ will not lose any of those for whom he came and died. We have four small children. And as you're approaching a road in Dumfries as we go across the road what is it that guarantees their safety?

It's not how strong they hold on to my hand but it's how strongly I hold on to theirs. Our salvation this afternoon depends not on how tightly we grip God but on how tightly he holds us.

What a reassuring thought it is to know that we have been chosen since the foundation of the world. To know this afternoon that we are a treasured possession of God.

[28 : 03] And finally notice what they're called to be. Notice what they were chosen to be. That we should be Paul says verse 4, holy and blameless before him.

We're chosen to be set apart. We're chosen to be different. Choosing to be God's treasured possession.

So what are we this afternoon in Christ? What are we as we are united to Christ by faith, by the effectual work and effectual calling of the Holy Spirit? What are we as Christians this afternoon?

We're holy and blameless. We're set apart for God. We're saints. Not an inn of ourselves.

But we're holy, blameless, we're saints, we're set apart in our Lord Jesus Christ. We've gathered this afternoon as a preparation to come to the Lord's table tomorrow.

[29 : 14] Consider this as you go home. What is your hope to come to the Lord's table tomorrow morning? What is your claim to come to the Lord's table?

If it's in yourself, if it's in your own righteousness, if it's in your own good works, then you have no business coming.

But if your claim as you come is that I'm a sinner saved by grace. If your claim as you come is that you're a child of God, bloodbought by the Savior, then you have no business staying away.

Amen.