

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow

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[0 : 00] There is nothing better on earth or more amazing and valuable than the church of Jesus Christ. There is nothing better on earth or more amazing and valuable than the church of Jesus Christ.

I wonder, do you believe that this morning? As Joe started our series in Ephesians last Sunday, that is what he said. And he did so because it kind of hits the keynote or the melodic line of this letter. Paul wants these Ephesians to know there is nothing better on earth or more amazing and valuable than the church of Jesus Christ. And it is that reality this morning that causes Paul to open this letter in an overflowing, in an outpouring of praise to God.

The normal pattern for Paul's letters is to start with the greeting. And if you see the verses before you there in chapter 1, verses 1 and 2, that's what we have, Paul's greeting.

That's a standard part of the way that he writes his letters. And normally that's followed by a thanksgiving or prayer. But if you look down here, you'll see just in the heading that's added in there that the thanksgiving and prayer doesn't start really until verse 15.

[1 : 29] And why is the delay? Why does he hold back with that? Because he's so overjoyed by what he's got to say to them. Because he's so overjoyed, overwhelmed if you like, he can't but burst out in praise and doxology and praise to God for all that he's done.

Do you see it there in verse 3? If you have the passage open in front of you, that'll be helpful as we scan through the passage. Verse 3, Paul bursts out, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 6, he says, To the praise of his glorious grace. Verse 12, To the praise of his glory. The end of verse 13, To the praise of his glory.

At the end of verse 14. Paul is full of praise and doxology and singing, if you like, and worship to God. So what is he praising God for?

What is he worshipping God for? It is for all that God has done and is given to the church. The church.

[2 : 39] And that's why we get a sense of Paul's overflowing excitement and joy here. It's a little bit like when you put a mento in a bottle of Coca-Cola. I wonder if you've done that before. And it just explodes anywhere.

If you are going to try it, don't try it indoors, okay? It goes everywhere. But that's how he's written these verses. You see, verses 3 to 14 here this morning in the original Greek, they constitute one big long sentence.

There's no full stops at all. And so as we read this, and as you read it, it's like Paul is so excited that you've met someone who is so full of something that they don't use any full stops and they just keep going and going and their words just all roll together.

You just want to say to them, breathe. That's how Paul is. He's so overjoyed and full of worship to God. This week, as I've read various commentaries and people on these verses, they've described them as a golden gateway, a cascading waterfall, a soaring eagle, a glorious fountain of doxology, a snowballing worship, or a symphony of praise.

Pick your metaphor. Paul is full of worship to God, blessing God for all that he has done and given to the church. And dear friends, that's what he's calling us to, inviting us to do this morning as well, if you like, to join our voices to the choir that praises God for what he's given to the church and for who we are as the church of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 20] And so let's have a closer look then. What's making Paul sing? Verse 3. Verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

That's what's making Paul sing, that God has blessed us in Christ. He's blessed the church with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. And now what Paul does is kind of proceeds to kind of gather those blessings and groups them together under three headings.

And so what we're going to do this morning, if you like, is just count back from three to look at all these blessings gathered under these kind of three headings, ask two questions about them, and then have one response at the end.

So let's look at these three blessings. And as we go, note the wonderful kind of Trinitarian shape as he gathers all these blessings under these headings. So first, he praises God.

Why? Because the church was chosen by the Father. Because the church was chosen by the Father. Verse 4. The Father chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

[5 : 39] In love, he predestined us, the church, the people of God, for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

And he picks that up in verse 11 too, doesn't he? That we are predestined according to his purpose. Friends, what was God doing before creation?

But before Genesis 1 and God spoke and Father, Son, and Spirit work to bring everything into existence, what was God doing?

We went to a dynamic earth in Edinburgh over the Christmas and New Year period. And there were some fun parts to dynamic earth. They had a kind of, you were watching lavas and volcanoes and thing, and the floor started to move, and no one's expecting it.

And, you know, everybody gets a kind of fright, or at least I did. Dynamic earth, if you've been there, they also have a big kind of block of ice in the middle of it that you can touch, and your hand gets very cold. So that's fun.

[6 : 42] Ice is cold. And you go through this experience of dynamic earth that's kind of meant to be telling you the story of the world from the beginning. But one thing, among some other things, but one thing I wanted to say to them at the end was you didn't start far back enough.

There was something happening before time and creation itself. You see, before creation, God was. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternal.

Before matter was formed and stars and planets and atoms and molecules, God was. And what was God doing?

Verse 4, verse 11, He was choosing His church in Christ for adoption into His family. He was choosing a people.

Now, the doctrine of God's election or choosing and predestination is a difficult one. And the word often can come with a kind of certain feel attached to it.

[7 : 53] People often imagine God at a distance, kind of austere, far off. It's kind of God with a clipboard before eternity, sort of ticking people off on an inventory, like an office manager, just checking off that they've got everything back there in the storeroom.

But is that the impression, the image that God gives, sorry, that Paul gives us here? No. Because what is it that's motivating God to do this, to choose a people for Himself?

End of verse 4, love, love. He's predestined us in love. You see, when we ask what God was doing before eternity, sorry, before time in eternity, we can answer it another way.

He was loving, loving. In John 17, we learn that the Father is loving the Son and there's intratinitarian love. But here too, we learn that God's love in eternity extends not only to His eternally begotten Son, but to the church whom He chose in His Son.

One writer puts it this way, long before you believed in the Lord Jesus, before you were born, before the first church gathered, before the Son came to Bethlehem as a baby, before the prophets promised He would come, before young David slayed Goliath, before the Red Sea opened wide and dry, before Abraham laid his precious son on the altar, before Adam and Eve were forced out of the garden, before God founded the mountains or placed His stars, before anything we know had come to be, the Father loved the church and chose her to be a people for His Son.

[9 : 44] Dear friends, what a glorious truth, what a comfort. It is enough to make us sing. You see, most of these Ephesians, as Joe was telling us last week, they're young Christians, converted from paganism, from worship of Artemis of the Ephesians.

So Paul, in raising talk of predestination here, he's not writing it to make their life more difficult, to make them scratch their heads and confused and compound their misery, if you like, and what is already hard for them as they follow Jesus.

No, he tells them this to comfort them, to encourage them, that before everything God created, he loved his church and he chose them as a people for his Son.

You see, what they used to believe when they worshipped Artemis, that life was kind of governed by fate and by chance, and they would pay magicians to break or rewrite bad horoscopes.

The gods were capricious and cold in their love. They would love you one day, but not the next. Love you one year, but not the next. And here Paul is saying to them, not our God, not the God of heaven and earth.

[11:07] No, he has a settled, fixed, assured love for his people in Jesus. So dear friends, whatever kind of week you've had, if you belong to the Lord Jesus, know that he loves you.

He loves you and he chose you before the foundation of the world. And whatever it is you face, therefore he will not, he cannot let you go. And surely then the same is true by implication of the church of Christ here on earth.

If God chose us in love before the foundation of the world, is he going to leave his church, his bride now, here on earth to flounder? No.

The temple of Artemis or any other false religion could dominate a city, as the temple of Artemis dominated Ephesus. But God has chosen his church before the foundation of the world.

What comfort for his people. Secondly, Paul then gathers up these blessings and he gives us, he gives us the second group.

[12:16] Praise God because not only are we chosen by the Father, but we're redeemed by the Son. Verse 7, in him, the beloved Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.

As if the opening wasn't enough, it is that the church not only enjoys the blessing of God choosing him, but of our redemption, redemption and forgiveness.

Let's just look at those two words, redemption and trespass. redeeming was a common idea in Ephesus across the Roman world. And it's the idea of buying back, freeing from slavery, from chains or from bondage at a price.

And the price that bought us as the church of God is Christ's blood. That's what Jesus paid for us with his very life, his blood and his body given for us.

And the word trespass there, what does it imply? It's a line crossed that humanity had gone somewhere. It ought not to have gone. It broke God's law.

[13:30] But what do we see here, verse 7? But there is forgiveness. Forgiveness. This week, we've heard, or at least I think we've heard a lot about presidential pardons.

I don't ever remember hearing so much about presidential pardons before, both Biden and Trump, issuing presidential pardons. And so, having heard a lot about it in the news or reading something of them, I thought, I'm going to look this up.

I want to know more about a presidential pardon. Not because I think I need one, I should add, having lived in America, but just wanted to know more about them. And I was reading about them this week, and here's what it said.

It said, yes, it frees someone from jail or from prison or whatever, but what struck me was that it didn't actually, or doesn't seem to erase, their criminal record.

Yes, they're free, but they still have a criminal record. Oh, dear friends, I wonder if sometimes we think of the redemption that we have in Christ like that.

[14:41] I wonder if sometimes we think, or we're tempted to live that way. Yes, he's freed us, but oh, I still have this criminal record on my back. As if God is just waiting to grab us and say, oh, there's that one little thing.

Oh, yes, you really did do that. Dear friends, the glory, the glory and grace and wonderful offer of the Lord Jesus and the pardon he offers us is freedom and full erasing, completely dealt with, paid for by his blood, washed clean redemption, washed clean.

The blood of Christ completely, utterly, fully erases our record of sin and debt. It's not just freedom with a record attached to our names. Friends, we need not fear.

There is and there cannot be no condemnation for those in Christ. There cannot be condemnation for those in Christ. We need not have worry or guilt or shame that some sin from the past will haunt us on that last day when we see the Father.

No, we are clean, spotless, washed clean. Why? Verses seven and eight, he has lavished his grace upon us.

[15 : 57] From the wealth, the abundance of God's wealth and riches, he's taken his credit card and he's run it through our account and the wealth of his riches have been poured out onto us so that we are redeemed and forgiven fully.

One hymn writer puts it this way, to redeem us, he paid a debt he did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay and friends, he has cancelled it all.

All of it, gone forever. And Paul goes even further. He goes even further for God's plan for the church wasn't just to be chosen or redeemed.

It's not just that we're redeemed from something but for something or more specifically for someone. Paul goes on to say that God has a plan for the world, for the universe, for everything. And what is it there in verse 10? It's that all things would be united in Jesus. You see, all of history, all of creation, all of time has a direction, has a goal, a telos, an end point.

[17 : 09] And that is that God is going to bring all things to be united in Jesus. And that's the mystery that Paul is writing of here. What was once hidden is now revealed.

That God has a blueprint, kind of architectural drawings, if you like. That the universe has architectural drawings. There's plans. And they show that all things, including Jew and Gentile in the church, are being united in Christ where he is head and ruler of all.

You see, what these Ephesians need confidence to know is that history does not belong to Artemis of the Ephesians. Her temple there, one of the seven wonders of the world and seemingly kind of indestructible and unmovable.

But Paul is saying to them, no, that is not where the action and the focus and the goal of history is. Oh, the church feels small and weak. Paul writes from prison with chains on his arms and legs. Death only a few years away for him. But the action of history is not in what is seen but what is unseen. Remember, these blessings are in the heavenly places and one day Paul says all will be united in heaven on earth under Christ Jesus.

[18 : 25] Seen and unseen, time and eternity. There is a center of it all and it is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, the Lion and the Lamb, the Alpha and Omega, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, crowned, resplendent, everything united in him and who is on his arm.

The church, the church, his bride, redeemed by his blood, people chosen from all eternity. Uniting all things in Christ doesn't mean that all will be saved.

It just means all will be in harmony again. All will be as it should be. The great music that plays through the symphony of history will have no notes that are out of tune, no broken strings.

All is at peace. Dear friends, if all history is coming to the one who redeemed us and chose us, why would we turn from him? Why would we not come to him?

Friends, if you don't know the Lord Jesus today, come to him for all history is his and is coming for him, come to him today. Belong to the one to whom history belongs.

[19 : 46] Come to the Lord Jesus. Know this redemption. Be the one who is part of the churches on his arm. There used to be a lot of talk a few years ago at least about being on the right side of history.

Dear friends, belonging to the Lord Jesus, that is the right side of history. Why? Because history is his and all things are heading for being united in him.

So when we're under pressure for Jesus or when the church looks weak or when we think about planting or any of those things, planting a church, really?

Is the church really God's way? Yes. He has redeemed us in Christ. The Lord Jesus gave his life for us. So, finally, this great Trinitarian shape of the blessings of God is rounded off with a third praise and wonderful blessing.

Praise God. We're chosen by the Father. We're redeemed by the Son and the church is sealed by the Spirit. That's our third blessing there. Sealed by the Spirit. Verse 13.

[20 : 54] When you believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

So, what he's saying there right at the end is the Spirit seals the church and the language changed a bit from you to us. Paul is speaking of Jews and Gentiles but the point is they're all being brought together and that the Spirit has sealed us and given us an inheritance.

It marks us out as being God. What does it as being God's? What does it mean to be sealed? It means we're marked out as being God's.

A few years ago, I got a personalized book embosser. It's when you stamp your name into a book with a lovely, you get your name on it and you get your initials and a lovely design in the middle and you get a new book and you emboss the book in the corner and okay, I love books and it's maybe something I geek out on that.

I got this amazing book embosser so you get the embosser, you get the book and it's got a mark with your name and a little stamp and you put it in the corner and it's wonderful because it says this book is mine and it belongs to the library of Ben Trainor or whatever.

[22 : 09] You can get your own one with your own name, it's wonderful. I'd recommend it. Right? But what does it do? It seals the book. It marks it. It says, this is mine and here's the thing, you'll never get that embossing out.

If I ever lend you a book, or you take a book from my library which you're welcome to do, you'll see that thing but it doesn't come out, it's marked the paper forever and God has sealed his church, he's sealed believers with his spirit.

It's his way of marking us out and saying, the church is mine. I've given you the Holy Spirit and you are mine forever. But the spirit does a second thing as well.

It does a second thing. It doesn't just seal. It's a guarantee of our inheritance. Or another way of thinking that is kind of like a down payment. Like you put a down payment down on a house.

It's putting a down payment. And what Paul is saying is he's saying, look, we really are chosen and redeemed in Christ. We really are. But as the church on earth now, we can only taste but a bit of it.

[23 : 17] But one day we really will, we really will see as Christ redeems and as Christ brings all things united in him, we will experience and see all of it. It's completely true of ours now.

We are God's and God is ours. And one day we will see it all when Christ returns and makes all things new. If you know the Lord Jesus this morning, you're an heir of his.

The church is an heir of his. We are going to inherit all the fullness of the blessings of Christ. I read someone this week who said, one way you can sort of divide up, the book of Ephesians is like this. I guess preachers love kind of alliteration. Wealth, walking, and warfare. And I think that's not too bad. So here we are talking about the wealth, the riches, the lavished riches of the Father, Son, and Spirit who have given us an inheritance.

But here's the thing, the wealth that God has given and lavished upon us, it's all there. It's stored up for him to give it to us. So what is that wealth? What is our inheritance?

[24 : 27] It is Jesus Christ himself. Life with God in new heavens and new earth in the greater Eden where we be with him forever. You see, there's nothing better better on the earth or more amazing and valuable than the church of Jesus.

Can we see it now? Chosen, redeemed, sealed to be God's forever. So let me just ask two questions before we come to our one response at the end.

Two questions. Firstly, how do we receive these blessings? How do they come to us? How do these blessings come to the church? Only in Jesus. Only in Jesus.

Please look down in the text. I want you to see again and again 11 times Paul tells us that. Verse 1, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Verse 3, he is blessed as in Christ. Verse 4, he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

Verse 5, he predestined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ.

[25 : 32] Verse 6, chosen in the beloved, of it. Verse 7, in him we have redemption. Verse 9 again, in Christ. Verse 11, in him.

Verse 12, in Christ. Verse 13, in him you also. 11 times again and again and again. Paul is at pains to drive it to us.

All this comes to us, to the people of God, to the church, only in Jesus. There is no other way to God, to Christ and to the blessings of Christ, outside of Christ.

No, only in him. These blessings are not found in Artemis of the Ephesians, not in Caesar, not in human government, not any human leader, not Zeus or Hermes or Buddha or Muhammad or the occult or somehow found inside of ourselves.

No, the only way is being united to Jesus Christ. He is the only way to life and redemption and the fullness of all the inheritance that we have.

[26 : 39] So being in Jesus, what does that make us? It makes us new people, new people. We are in Christ.

You see, in verse 1, this church is where? They're in Ephesus but they're also in Christ and that's the point that Paul is driving right through here is their most important identity. They belong to Jesus and all this language of being united to Christ and belonging to him is going to inform and shape how they live.

As we get to chapter 4 onwards in this letter, Paul begins to speak to them how they're going to live but all of that starts and comes from and flows out of the fact that they belong to Jesus.

chosen to be holy and blameless, verse 4, as his. We're not going to take our cues from the Ephesians, from the worshippers, the other Ephesians, those who worship Artemis of Ephesus.

[27 : 41] We're not taking our cues from any who are outside of Christ. We belong to Jesus. We're made new and that changes everything. That is who we are, Christ's.

Question 2, well, why do these blessings come to the church? They come to us only in Christ but why do they come to the church? Well, it's because it's God's will.

All of this is God's will in his settled plan. Verse 5, he predestined us according to the purpose of his will. Verse 9, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose.

Verse 11, having been predestined according to the purpose of him, he works all things according to the counsel of his will.

Will, revealed, plan, God's plan to unite all things in Christ and choose and redeem a people for himself. That is God's settled plan and will.

[28 : 46] And dear friends, it is a reminder to us as we thought about last week that the church is not plan B. That the church and the calling and redemption and choosing of God's people is God's plan A.

As Joe set up for us last week and we're going to see again and again, the church is not a means to an end. It is God's plan. So let's put this as clear as we can.

As we gather today here in the name of the Lord Jesus and worship him, God is working out his grand plan for history. Did you know that as you come to church this morning?

As we're here and we worship God, God is working out his grand plan for history. Here, here and not only here. Trinity, Gilcompton, Hebron, Deeside, other places and other churches known to us as well.

Meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus, submitting to him in all, God is working out his grand plan for history. So dear friends, none of this is an accident. The church is not an accident.

[29 : 52] History is not random. God is working to spread the church of Christ across the world to the praise of his glorious name that we would come to love and worship God and enjoy him forever.

That we would dwell with him forever and know him forever. forever. So what's our one response then? What's our response to all this? Surely it's that there's nothing better on earth or more amazing and valuable than the church of Jesus.

Can we see it? Because it is only to us, to the church of Christ, to those who belong to the Lord Jesus that he's given these blessings. That our praise is forever to be to God from whom all blessings flow.

He's lavished his grace and his love and all that he has upon his people. I had a professor at seminary at Bible College and every time he finished a class of his we would all stand and sing the words of the doxology together.

Praise God from whom I was going to sing it but I thought that would maybe just put you off your lunch perhaps. But this is what we would sing. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

[31 : 10] Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And dear friends that is the heart of what Paul is saying here.

And that's the song that he's inviting us to join our voices, our lives to. To praise God from whom all blessings flow. Have flowed to the church from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.

For that is what he made us to do, to worship and adore and honour him in Christ both now and evermore. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do indeed praise you from whom all blessings flow.

We thank you so much that in Christ you chose for yourself a people before the foundation of the world. In love you predestined us. Lord, may that humble us and fill our hearts with joy and wonder and praise that you would look on us who are so unlovely and unworthy and who would reject you. But yet you would choose us. And not only that, you would send your Son to redeem us. Thank you that you have sealed us by your Spirit. Thank you that we are truly yours and one day we will see you face to face, coming into the full inheritance of all that is ours in Christ.

[32 : 39] Help us to know that in him truly we are free and ransomed and pardoned, truly forgiven, that there is no condemnation for us who are in you.

May we live out our lives glory in Christ, worshipping the Lord Jesus for all that you have done for us through him. We thank you for this great plan that you have to unite all things in Christ. And so we pray you would help us in our lives and our life as a church to honour and praise and make known Jesus in all that we do. In his name we pray. Amen.