

Chosen in Jesus

Ephesians 1:3-14

Heather and I once had a tour of the Vienna State Opera House. It's huge and impressive - with a stage capable of putting on the biggest, impressive shows with the grandest sets.

But the tour guide told us that as big as the stage is, when you pull back the curtains, what's *backstage* is bigger again. Huge set pieces being moved around, crew scurrying around to make everything happen that most of the audience would never think of or notice. The *unseen* bit behind the curtain was where all of the biggest and most impressive things happened to put on the show.

In Ephesians 1:3-14, we're pulling back the curtain. What's *behind* the stage of this life - all that we can't see - God is revealing to us on this tour. In v.3, when we look backstage, we get a view that's so grand, it's cosmic. Literally, it says, '*Blessed* be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the Heavenly realms with every blessing of the *Spirit*.'

God - who is One God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That's huge and mindbending. Then there's this stuff about the 'heavenly realms' - the unseen reality, the backstage that's as real as anything on the stage, and actually is shaping everything that happens on it. We're getting a glimpse into the eternal and unseen. That's massive and mind-blowing.

And we read this word 'blessed' over and over again. It's like the overture to the show. 'This is about how the blessed God blesses people... not just a bit here and now... but with *every* spiritual blessing.' Maybe you're not interested in 'spiritual blessings.' The stuff that God gives people that changes their lives and destinies that we're going to read about in Ephesians. Grace. Peace. Hope. Purpose. Security. Eternity. Identity.

But I hope you are interested. Or that you *get* interested. Because the good news is, everything God has got to offer you, He offers you *in Jesus* (as v.3 concludes.) And what He has to offer sets the stage for your life, both now and forever; to make it infinitely fuller.

Paul's prayer in vv.3-14 in the Greek is just one excited sentence, bubbling up with praise to God for what He has given us in Jesus. It's full of big cosmic scale thinking and grand language all in one deep breath. But it comes down to three things about who you really are to God.

First of all, vv.4-6 celebrate that *you are chosen children*. I once heard about an adopted child being teased at school about being adopted. But she wasn't sunk by it. She said to her bullies, 'my parents chose me. Yours just have to put up with what they got.' Burn.

'In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ...' Do you see what this means? God *wants* you. He really, really *wants* you to be His child, to know Him as a Father. He *chooses* you. v.4 says that He made that choice - backstage, behind the curtain - before an atomic brick was laid in His creation. Before the world took shape, He knew your name and *wanted* you.

If you've been chosen for something, you'll know the kind of dignity and belonging that brings. If you haven't been chosen, you'll know even more keenly the sense of indignity and alienation that brings. I don't know how you feel about God. But I know how He feels about you. He loves you. He chooses you.

How much have you ever thought about how God feels about you? I reckon most people who grew up in church think of God like He has to put up with us as the kids He got lumbered with. They know the words 'God loves you' pretty well, but they've never really *thought* about God actually *feeling* that way towards them.

And those who haven't grown up in church, or who turned away rebelliously years ago, think of God as being too busy looking at other kids with better prospects. He couldn't *possibly* want to adopt the problem child that couldn't find anything or anyone to foster them never mind keep them.

Look at the language Paul uses to describe what God has done towards us in this passage - 'chosen... predestined... included... adopted... made us His possession... loved... lavished... freely given...' God comes across as a parent adopting children who just wants to pour out belonging and security and good gifts to His kids. That's how He *feels* about you, and what He actually *does* for you.

'In love... He adopted us as sons...' I know, sounds a bit sexist, right? Does God only choose the blokes, then? No. When Paul wrote these words, only the sons had inheritance rights in a family. When he writes to these Christians, 'God adopted us as sons,' he means to tell all of them - women, men, boys and girls - that they are *all* children with full inheritance rights.

They are all heirs of God - just like Jesus the Son. Imagine that. Life, eternity, a part to play in the Kingdom. All because God chose us as children, way before we ever responded to Him.

Why? *Purely* out of love and kindness. There's nothing deserved or earned about it. It's all to do with the 'grace' that Paul speaks of a couple of times in vv.6-7. Grace is an undeserved gift, given out of pure love. And that's what leads to God adopting you and me. It's just loving grace.

*God chose you to be His child before the dawn of time...
What thoughts and feelings does that prompt in you?*

Then vv.7-10 celebrate that *you are redeemed slaves*. Maybe you liked the idea of being a chosen child better than the idea of being a slave... But it's a picture that teaches us not to think too much or too little of our worth before God. We human beings think we run our own lives, and we're just ordinary people.

But God says we start off as human beings with much less than we think. We start off not as our own mini-gods, but as slaves. Slaves to sin, slaves to death, slaves to a life that's in the dark about God and eternity and an infinitely fuller life. Slaves to seemingly repeating the same mistakes time and again, being weighed down with the same memories and fears, always trying not to look up at the death that we know is coming.

But God also says we're worth much more than we think. v.7 says, God has *redeemed* us. Paid a price, on a cross, to set us free. That's one of the blessings He gives us in Jesus. To be free of a life that's in the dark, to have our eyes opened, our past dealt with, chains of guilt and shame and fear and brokenness shattered, death conquered, ready to live a new life.

We're not ordinary people, we're extraordinarily loved and cherished creations of the Living God, who came in Christ to live and love and die for us, to set us free from every curse of sin and shame and death. To set us free to discover a way bigger life 'in Jesus' - who 'sums up... the fulness of the times' as v.10 literally says.

So, God's blessed us with being *chosen children* and *redeemed slaves*. And vv.13-14 celebrate that you're also *secured treasure*.

Those verses speak about God's Holy Spirit. That He is like a seal that marks you. In Paul's day, you would use a seal to mark that something

belonged to you. The Holy Spirit, in your life, is God marking you with a seal, marking you as precious.

v.14 says the Spirit is like a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. But it's not talking about what *we* inherit from God. It's talking about *God inheriting us!* Look a little further on - '...the redemption of those who are *God's possession...*'

Have you ever thought of yourself as being worth inheriting? Well, it turns out, you are. *God Himself* thinks you're worth inheriting forever. You are treasure that the King of the Universe wants to belong to Him. Incredibly, inexplicably valuable to Him. You are pearls worth diving for. Treasure worth digging for. People worth dying for. All for God to be able to wrap His arms around you and say, 'This one! This one is mine!'

So much so that He's put a deposit down. You know when you put a deposit down for a house, a car, a holiday? It's to take it off the market, right? Make sure that nobody else can claim ownership over it; it's yours. The deposit that God has put down is the Holy Spirit. His very presence in our lives, sealing our life in Him.

When you have the Spirit of God in your life, you can be confident that God has claimed you as His, and won't let you go. Not only are you chosen *in* eternity and *for* eternity, you are secured in that with the Holy Spirit of God.

Chosen children. Redeemed slaves. Secured treasure. Do you know that you've got these blessings from God? Because I keep saying '*you* have this, this is how God feels about *you...*' But who is the '*you*' I'm talking to?

Well, it comes back to those Paul is addressing in the passage in v.1 - 'those set apart as belonging to God through their faith *in Jesus.*' Look at v.13 too - '*you* also were included *in Jesus* when you heard the word of truth, the good news... and having *believed*, you were marked as belonging to God.'

If you are living 'in Jesus,' you are chosen children, redeemed slaves, secured treasure. And you're living 'in Jesus' if you believe the good news - that life in Him is infinitely fuller. That He died to rescue you, and that He rose - not to live in a tiny corner of your heart, but for you to live in Him now and forever.

If you haven't committed to that belief in Jesus yet, I guess the classic thing to say in a sermon is, 'Ah, go on, put your faith in Jesus.' And yes, your

response to God for all that you're hearing about Jesus is a crossroads call for you to make.

But this whole passage reminds me that before anything you do, is what God has already done and is doing with you. This 'peek behind the cosmic curtain' passage keeps repeating that God does all things according to His will. vv.4, 9 and 11 all say it. All this adopting and redeeming and sealing is His work. And He's at work in you.

He's drawn people around you who know and love Jesus. He's drawn you to this church. He's doing something to draw you to *Him* - and I think some of you know that, really. So as you and God increasingly come face to face, the attention is less on you and what your next move is. What I wonder is, what's *God* going to do next with you?

And if you are someone included 'in Jesus' because of your belief in Him, I'd love you to know from this passage that all these blessings are true for *you*. You *are* a child of God, chosen and adopted from before the dawn of time. You *were* a slave to sin and death, but you were bought at a price in Jesus' death, and you *are* set free. You *are* so treasured and valuable to God that He has secured you on deposit, sealing you with His Holy Spirit.

So He's never going to let you go. You're too valuable for that. He's never going to stop lavishing His love and kindness and warmth on you. He's never going to lose His delight in you, even when you often lose your delight in Him. What comes before everything else in this letter and in this life in Jesus, is this: God chooses you in Jesus.