

## REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Rev. Steven D. Spencer

Ephesians 1:3–14

### I. IN CHRIST

Our epistle is full of Good News as St. Paul showers us with the proclamation of God's blessings. As we work through this text from Ephesians 1, I would suggest that it is good to note a couple things. First note how many different times you hear of God working to save you; second, note how this work is connected to Jesus again and again and again.

The Father has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Every spiritual blessing is yours, and it's yours for Jesus' sake. God holds nothing back. Our text doesn't say that Jesus has won a basic entrance into heaven for you, but after that heavenly blessings are all based on your work and merit. It's yours—every spiritual blessing in heaven is yours in Christ Jesus.

The Father has chosen us in Christ before the creation of the world. The Incarnation, the becoming flesh, of Jesus is not a ruse where the Lord looked upon the earth one day and said, "Salvation by works isn't going very well, so I'm trying something different." He has chosen you in Christ before the very foundation of the world. It's been His plan from eternity to pour out every spiritual blessing on you in the heaven for Jesus' sake. This gives another significant piece of good news for us: as the Father's choice has been from eternity, so it is for eternity. In other words, there will not be a day where God says, "I'm done choosing you now. Yesterday I would have forgiven you and made you holy and blameless, but you're dropped off My chosen list, I'm moving on."

In love, God has predestined you for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, for Jesus' sake. You're part of His family, He's gathered you in. Whether you're male or female, you have the standing of "son" in His family, because the sons are the heirs and you're an heir of His kingdom. This is His will, that He might be gracious to you for Jesus' sake.

***In Christ, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of trespasses according to the riches of His grace.*** You are redeemed and adopted into God's family because Jesus Christ has shed His blood for you. In our Gospel lesson we see John the Baptizer. John was the one who pointed his finger at Jesus and said "***behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***" Three years later, Jesus would be the Passover Lamb, sacrificed and spilling His blood for your sins and to spare your life. He will be missing for three days after. But then He will rise again. Why? So that you might have ***redemption through His blood. So that you might have the forgiveness of your trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.***

***The Lord has lavished this upon you in all wisdom and insight, making known to you the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth...in Christ.*** Looking at the world throughout history, with all of its violence and bloodshed, it's hard to discern what sort of God He is and what He's exactly up to. Apart from the Gospel, it's little wonder that non-Christians come up with all sorts of strange ideas about God as they try to read His mind from the world around them. But His will and purpose is no mystery to you, because your faith beholds your Savior on the cross. That is God's will and purpose, to deliver you from sin by the death and resurrection of His Son. There are a lot of things you cannot know, but because of Jesus you know this: God predestined you before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless and in heaven, all for the sake of Jesus Christ.

The Lord has sealed you with the promised Holy Spirit, guaranteeing that this inheritance is yours. How has He sealed you? By the Word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, which gave you faith to believe. Why has the Lord sealed you with the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing your inheritance? Because Christ has died for you. All of this is yours "in Him."

That sure explains a lot about our worship, doesn't it? If God does all of this for us in Christ, then our worship is going to be about Christ. Gathered by the Holy Spirit, we come to where Jesus promises to be. We gather to hear His Word, where He continues to seal us and give us forgiveness and all of those spiritual blessings, even as He sealed us with the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism. We gather at His table for His Supper;

for as He is present there with His body and blood, He lavishes grace upon us. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

## II. REDEMPTION BEYOND REASON

So our text from Ephesians 1 is full of Good News, one glad announcement of salvation after another. It's all about the blessings that God pours out upon you, lavishes on you, in Christ. However, wherever there is such Good News to be heard, you can bet that sinners will find a way of messing it all up. And indeed, the pure Gospel set forth in this chapter has been obscured by sinners in a couple huge ways for a simple reason: the blessings God gives are beyond reason. They're illogical. They're so rich and free that they don't make sense, and even Christians often fall into the trap of believing that the Gospel has to make human sense. Thus we turn our attention to the two great errors which obscure these blessings beyond reason, which we could also subtitle, "How Christians without knowing mess up the Gospel."

The first error gets the fancy title of "double predestination," and it goes like this: "Since the Bible says that God has predestined believers in Christ to go to heaven, He has also predestined unbelievers to go to hell. In other words, before the foundation of the world, God chose some to be saved and some to be condemned. If you're one of those chosen to go to heaven, then Jesus died for you. If you're one of those chosen to go to hell, then Jesus didn't die for you."

How does this error come about? Because we Christians are busy trying to make sense of the Gospel according to human logic. See, we normally think that a choice involves two options. You can choose to do one thing or you can choose to do another. As a TV commercial put it a while back, "one choice is no choice at all." It makes sense. And if that makes sense, then this makes sense, also: if God chooses some to be saved, then it only makes sense that He chooses some to be condemned. If a choice always has two options, then God must make both decisions. Seems logical enough, doesn't it?

But what does this false reasoning do to the Gospel? What does it do to all of these blessings that God lavishes upon you? You can't be sure that they're really for you—because you can't be 100% sure that God has chosen you. You might just be fooling yourself, thinking that you're chosen for heaven; after all, you know better than anyone, other than God, about the miserable sins that are still going on inside of you. (Do those chosen by God really have some of the wicked thoughts floating in their minds that are floating in yours?) What does this reasoning do to Christ? It takes the focus off of Him and His cross and puts it on the Father's sovereignty. In other words, a believer is saved because God chose him to be saved and used Jesus to get the transaction done. An unbeliever is lost—not because he doesn't believe in Jesus, but because God didn't choose him. That's what this error does: it takes the focus off of the cross and says that all of God's blessings are yours—only if you're chosen to be blessed.

In response to this error, we rejoice to declare God's blessings beyond reason. We don't make God submit to logic, but we must submit to the logic of God. The Bible never says that God chooses people to be condemned. It says the opposite: Ezekiel 18 declares that *God does not take pleasure in the death of anyone*, and 1 Timothy 2:4 declares that *God desires all to be saved*; furthermore, 2 Corinthians 5 proclaims that *Christ has died for all*. God doesn't choose people to be condemned: He offers salvation to all through Christ. Those who reject Jesus are lost because they reject God, not because God rejects them.

Therefore, rejoice: you don't have to wonder if God has really chosen you to be saved or if Christ has died for you. Instead, you have the certain hope that you are chosen from before the foundation of the world to have eternal life because Christ has died for you.

The other big error is the opposite ditch from double-predestination: it takes all of salvation out of God's hands and puts it into man's hands. It's called semi-Pelagianism or Armenianism, and it goes something like this: if man can choose to reject God, then man can also choose to believe in God. It only makes sense, because one choice is no choice at all. If man can choose one, then he must be able to choose the other.

What does this do to the Good News of Ephesians 1—what does it do to Jesus and the blessings God lavishes upon you for Jesus' sake? As far as Jesus goes, it robs Him of glory: it says that He did His part to save you, and now it's time you do your part to save yourself by choosing to believe in Him. It takes the focus off of Him, and puts it on your decision, your commitment, or your dedication. As far as the blessings

go, it makes them uncertain again: they're yours, if you really believe in Jesus enough. If you've really chosen Him and made a decision for Him, then salvation and all those blessings are yours. But if your decision wasn't sincere enough—then you're only fooling yourself and you're lost. You can't be sure if you're truly committed: after all, as Jeremiah 17:9 says, ***your heart is deceitful above all things***. And what about those times when you really mess up and sin—what does that say about your sincere devotion? You can't be sure. You see it turns the cross into a question mark.

In response to this error, we rejoice to declare God's blessings beyond reason and do not force Him to submit His will to our logic. The Bible never says that we can choose to follow God: instead, Ephesians 2 and Romans 5 make it quite clear that ***we were born dead in sin***. By definition, dead men can't do anything to save themselves. But Christ has died for you. ***He has redeemed you by His blood, forgiven your trespasses and lavished His grace upon you***. He has done all the work necessary to save you—and there is no doubt about His commitment, His sincerity or His faithfulness to you.

You're like Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead in John 11. Four days in the tomb, Lazarus couldn't decide to be alive again. He was dead. Jesus came and spoke His life-giving Word, "Lazarus, come forth." He made Lazarus alive, and Lazarus had nothing to do with the process. Now, if Lazarus had decided later to reject Jesus' gift of life and kill himself, that would be his choice—not the Lord condemning him. That is how salvation works: God makes us alive in Christ. That is His doing, not ours. If we reject it and are lost, that is our doing, not His.

This, dear friends, is one of the great gifts we Lutherans have to offer to our fellow Christians in other church bodies, because only Lutheran theology holds purely to this Gospel. These blessings beyond reason may not fit our requirements of logic, but they are faithful to the Word of God. Faithful to the Word, they keep the focus on Christ. Faithful to the Word, they proclaim that God's blessings are certain in Christ for you.

That's your joy today: from the foundation of the world, God purposed that His Son would come and redeem you by His blood, so that He might seal you with His Spirit and lavish His grace upon you today and forever. There is no doubt to these blessings beyond reason: because for Jesus sake, you are most certainly forgiven for all of your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in Jesus name and for Jesus sake, amen and amen.

*The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN!*

