



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 1: 3-6

Fall 2023

"Chosen By the Father"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. Well, we started the book of Ephesians last week. We looked at the first two verses and this morning we're going to look at verses three through six. And I must say, we jump into the book of Ephesians with both feet with this passage—a great passage;

³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1: 3-6

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, what a great privilege it is to be together with the saints, to have fellowship as we do in this hour with them, and to do what we've just done, read a passage out of Your inerrant holy Word. And what a glorious text it is. The apostle reminds us of the great blessings we have as Your children, as sons and daughters of

God; we have a rich inheritance. And the reason we have it—it's due to Your goodness, Your kindness, Your infinite, unfathomable, unconditional love for us. May You be magnified in this hour as we consider this text. A difficult text for some, but very straightforward, LORD. And so I pray that You would open our hearts to receive the ministry of the Word and that the Spirit of God who is within us would guide us in our thinking, and in the proper application of this text to us. So LORD bless us, build us up in the faith.

We pray for others, LORD. We pray for the material needs we have. We are material beings as well as spiritual beings. We have material needs. We're dependent upon You for every breath of life that we take, and for our clothing, for our nourishment, for everything. And You are so faithful to provide that we take it for granted so often, and fail to realize that everything we have is a gift from You. And so, we're to be thankful, but we're also to recognize we need to come to You, routinely, and ask for Your help in time of need. So we do that, LORD, we thank You for Your goodness to us, but pray that You would extend that to those who have particular needs at this time.

You know our needs. You know where we are in life, and we pray that You would give healing and encouragement. We pray that You would strengthen all of us, and prepare us for those days when we'll go through difficulties, because we will. That's why this book, this Book of Ephesians, but all 66 books of the Bible are so vitally important for us. This is how we are prepared for this life, and for all eternity.

LORD bless us in this hour as we study and as we reflect upon You. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) The London preacher, Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, had a long and distinguished ministry at Westminster Chapel in London. I think most of you are familiar with him, if not familiar with his name. He began as a medical doctor and had a brilliant career ahead of him. As a young man he was assistant to Lord Horder, who was the physician to the royal family. And he would be a man whose, 'ticket was punched', it would seem—when he decided to leave the medical profession and take up in the

ministry. He first became a minister in a small church in Wales, and then, about ten years later, moved to London and had this great preaching ministry at Westminster Chapel.

One of the things that characterized him was he had a very analytical mind in the medical field, but also as a minister of the Gospel. And after many years of pastoral experience he made a significant discovery. He found that the people who seemed most miserable in their spiritual life were those who were always thinking of themselves—thinking of their blessings, their moods, thinking of their conditions. He wrote, "The way to blessing is to look to God. And the more we worship Him, the more we shall enjoy His blessing. This," he said, "is most practical."

We like practical. Well, the Book of Ephesians is 'most practical', because it gives us a good, long look at God. And it does so from the beginning—from verses three through fourteen in which God's plan of salvation is praised. In these twelve verses, Paul explains the ministry of each member of the Trinity: We are *chosen* by God the Father, *redeemed* by God the Son, and *sealed* with God the Holy Spirit.

One of the older commentators, George Findlay, called this doxology, "A magnificent gateway through which we enter the epistle. Just as the gate of an ancient walled city was designed to dazzle the eye of those who passed through it with its size and its beauty, these verses should amaze us with the power and glory of God's grace."

Paul was clearly amazed. This passage is called, 'An outburst of adoration.' He began, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us..." (vs3). The God he blessed, the God he praised, is the Father of Christ—so the first Person of the Trinity. He is "our Father" since believers are "in Christ", as Paul said in verse 2. And because of that union in Christ, God's eternal Son, He, "...has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places*..." (vs3b).

That's the first reason for Paul's praise to God: He has "blessed us"—and not just a little, but a lot, "with every spiritual blessing." We are rich; and our riches are safe.

We can't be robbed because our riches are, "in the heavenly places." That's an important phrase in this book. It occurs five times: It's a location; it's a real place; it's used that way. So our lives are joined to heaven and its influence, now, presently.

But what are these spiritual blessings? Paul didn't say, he didn't define them. But the phrase itself suggests its meaning: 'They're blessings of the soul.' They differ from the blessings of the Old Testament, which primarily were material blessings; good health, good harvest, victory in battle. It's all laid out in Deuteronomy chapter 28—obedience resulted in material prosperity.

But these blessings are different; this is, fundamentally, spiritual life and spiritual growth, and all of the blessings that accompany it: Knowledge, understanding, wisdom, all of which is the product of the Holy Spirit. So, "every spiritual blessing" is 'the blessing', the blessings of the Holy Spirit: The fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and the other blessings that He gives. It is the *supernatural life* that God bestows on all who are "in Christ"—united with Christ, and therefore united with His life. It's the spiritual gifts, the heavenly gifts that enable us to function on earth now—and function well.

Material wealth, worldly riches, can't buy that. It's the gift of God which makes us rich indeed. When the trials of life come, as they will, we are able to deal with them, not easily, never easily—but wisely and well. So naturally, Paul 'blessed the LORD', honored Him, praised Him for blessing us so richly "with every spiritual blessing."

But why are we "in Christ", and why are we so blessed? And here is where I think Paul's praise of God boils over into unabashed adoration. He wrote in verse 4, 'It is because of divine election.' God "chose us": "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love. " (vs4).

It didn't take Paul long to get into the subject of *predestination* and *unconditional election*, (which he will return to in chapter 2). It was obviously a glorious subject to the

apostle. In fact, all of the apostles: Peter, as well, began his first letter with divine election. He addressed it, "To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are *chosen*...". Chosen by God, which means He takes the initiative in our salvation and in giving us all of those spiritual blessings.

That's why Paul praised Him. We didn't choose Him, He chose us. And the saints have praised the LORD for His choice of them down through the centuries and have shown that the doctrines of sovereign grace are exceedingly *practical*. For example, in the 17th of the 39 articles of the Church of England it states, "The godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort."

I think so. But things have changed from when that was written in the year 1563. In the early 1970s, when I was in seminary, a book was published by a 'Professor of Preaching' at Fuller Seminary about, *Election and How To Preach It*. I still have it in my library. He wrote, "Sermons on election are so rare that even a regular church goer may never hear one. No other doctrine has been so decisive in theology—and so ignored in the pulpit."

Well, I don't doubt that and I think of it as true, and probably more true today, some 50 years later. There are reasons for that. People assume the doctrines, (the doctrine of election, the doctrine of predestination), deny human responsibility and lead to laziness and carelessness. The sovereignty of God is characterized as *fatalism*; so it doesn't matter how we live; 'whatever will be will be.' And, 'If it's true, then we are 'automatons', 'robots'—'like pawns moved about on a chess board.'

Now that's simplistic and that's a caricature of the truth—and utterly false; the Bible gives no support to such ideas. Rather, it lays great stress on human responsibility. We see that here in the fourth verse: We were "chosen", (*elected*), "before the foundation of the world", so "that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love."

The object of election is salvation to a holy life, to an obedient life, to a life that's lived before God to His glory and not ours. —To a selfless life.

The second half of the Book of Ephesians is all about our responsibility to live up to our election. Chapter 4 begins, "I...implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called." "I implore!", 'I beg' is the apostle's meaning. The apostle who clearly taught predestination and election strongly urged the saints to live up to their calling, and live up to their responsibilities—and he did not tolerate laziness and carelessness.

People are required to believe the Gospel for salvation. There's no salvation apart from faith. Election doesn't deny the human will—but it recognizes it is in bondage and only God can make it free. When the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, (*verse 30*), asked Paul and Silas, in despair when he was about to fall upon his sword, "What must I do to be saved?" , they didn't shrug and say, 'Well man, you've got to be elected; has God chosen you?' [*Laughter*], No, they responded immediately, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." (*vs31*). He did, and was saved—which was the proof that he was chosen by God.

But from all of Scripture it's clear that predestination and election do not exclude personal responsibility to believe and obey. They, in fact, are the reasons that we are able to respond: To understand the Gospel and believe it, and live in obedience to the Lord.

Why would God chose us, chose any? —Because we would not chose Him. That's implied in the words *chose* and *predestined*. It's made explicit in chapter 2 where Paul describes us as spiritually "dead", and "sons of disobedience". "But God..." he wrote, "...being rich in mercy...made us alive." (*verses 4&5*). I didn't make myself alive, you didn't make yourself alive—'But God made us alive'. That is grace; that's sovereign grace. He did it for us. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. It is unconditional; it is undeserved and unmerited grace in election. He *chose* us for eternal life.

That is the reason the 39 articles of the Church of England state, "The godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort." We are rich, rather than poor, because of God's sovereign grace. We have every spiritual blessing because God chose us.

Now, 'Why did He choose us, any of us, since we were all 'sons of disobedience'?' Well that's the great question. It's not, (as sometimes argued), because God looked down through time; He saw who would believe and He chose them based on their *foreseen* faith. If election were based on what God foresaw, none would have been chosen because all God would have seen was dead souls living in their sin; dead to the truth, dead to any spiritual ability. And all He would have seen were those who were 'sons of disobedience'.

In fact, as Paul put it in Romans 3, verse 11, (and he's simply quoting David from the Psalms, (Psa 53:3)), 'There is none who seeks for God. No, not one.' So if it was 'foreseen faith', (foreseen by God), what God would have seen was nothing pleasing to Him at all: 'No one seeking, no one believing.' And that is universally true. So why did God choose sinners for salvation and for every spiritual blessing? The answer is not found in us. It's found in Him alone, in God the Father.

Paul gave the answer in the next verse, verse 5, where he stated that God, "predestined us to adoption as sons...according to the kind intention of His will..." There's no room for 'foreseen faith' or 'goodness' in us; God *chose* us for eternal life and blessing and predestined us to be sons because He is a good God; and it pleased Him to do it. —It's that simple; it's that uncomplicated.

Moses gave a similar explanation to the nation Israel for the LORD's choice of Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 7, verses 7 and 8. He didn't set His love on that people and choose them because they were a 'great nation'. He said, 'You weren't, you're the smallest of the nations' 'The LORD loved them and chose them', Moses said, 'because He loved them.' Why He loved them isn't said. Election is bound up in the inscrutable love

of God—and really, that's where we have to leave it...Can't go beyond that. He loved a multitude of lost men and women who were dead in their sins and in open rebellion against Him because He loved them—and for no other reason.

It's sometimes illustrated from kids on the playground at school who choose up teams to play ball. One of them isn't athletic, so he is always the last one chosen; has a painful experience. But one day, two new boys show up to play. They're older—and are good athletes respected by all the kids; and so they are made the captains who choose up their teams.

And a surprising thing happened: The first team captain chose, first of all, the boy who was always neglected. His first choice was everyone else's last choice. Why? Well maybe he didn't know the kids and didn't know their ability and he just made a mistake. No, he knew the boy, and knew what he was doing. He was his older brother, and he chose him because he loved him. That's the reason the LORD chose as He did. That's the basis of election: The eternal, inscrutable love of God for His elect.

Now the story is nice; it's sentimental—but not really the full picture because, the boy chosen by his loving brother, *wanted* to be on the team. He *wanted* to be chosen; he showed up every day to be chosen. But, not one of God's elect have a desire to be chosen by Him and be a child of God—just the opposite. In fact, Paul wrote in Romans chapter 10, verse 20, (and here he's quoting Isaiah chapter 65, verse 1), “And Isaiah is very bold and says, ‘I was found by those who did not seek Me, I became manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’ ” We were enemies; we were at war with God. We were not seeking Him—just the opposite.

Romans chapter 8, verse 7 is very clear: The natural man, “is hostile toward God.” That was our attitude. And yet God loved us and chose us out of a wrecked and belligerent human race and made us His children—and, “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”

Now that should cause us to be lost in *holy wonder*—in praise and thanks, should it not? It did Paul; that's what he expressed here. And I think, if we are lost in the

wonder of all of that, we will live holy and blameless lives before Him—and do so from gratitude; not out of obligation, but thanksgiving. Our looking to God, learning who He is, what He has done, and considering carefully what Paul wrote in these verse, is, (as Lloyd-Jones said), '*practical*'; for it takes our minds off ourselves and puts them on Him.

The words of Thomas Erskine put it simply, "In the New Testament, religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude." All that we have is a gift from God—and the way to live our life properly and appropriately is out of gratitude for what He's done. That's the great motivation.

Now verse 4 ends with the words, "in love." It's possible to take that phrase with the next words in verse 5, "In love He predestined us." That is true; it's what we've just considered. But the phrase occurs five more times in the Book of Ephesians, and it's always used of 'Christian love'. Not God's love for us, but our love for one another—'brotherly love'. And that's probably, I think, the meaning here.

Love is important in the Book of Ephesians. It occurs ten times, (the word does). It's not romantic love, but selfless, unconditional love—like the love that God has for us in election. That kind of love should characterize the way we live; we are to live before God "in love" toward fellow believers.

And it will increasingly characterize us as we understand God's grace in election. It should. It was true of Paul in his relationship with the Ephesians. He reminded them of that in his farewell address to them in Acts chapter 20, when he spoke to the Ephesian elders and reminded them of his ministry; how he taught them and, as he put it, 'I did not cease to admonish each one of you with tears.' (vs31).—That was Paul's genuine concern for them.

And so later, in chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, Paul will urge them, (and us), to "...walk worthy of our calling...", (and *election*), "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love." That's beautiful, isn't it?

But hard. Really, it's impossible to love difficult people with humility, patience, and tolerance, which we all are. We're all difficult; but we're to love one another.

How can we do that? Well, it's what God did for us when He chose us to be, to become "holy and blameless...in love". (vs4b). Reaching that happens through the process of maturing, growing in the faith—which we do, by God's grace, through the Holy Spirit; it's *supernatural*—but also as we understand His love for us, and what He rescued us from. He didn't love the attractive and the nice, but the unattractive and the undeserving—the rebellious.

And He made us something very different—He made us members of His family. That should move us to imitate Him; His love for us should constrain us to love others—to love one another. It will; that's why looking to Him and not to ourselves is *useful*; is '*practical*'—we worship Him and we want to emulate His love.

And what comes next should only add to that motivation; He chose us to be holy, spiritually healthy, and blessed us with an orderly, productive, and beneficial life. That's what He *produces* in us. It's as I say so often, 'a supernatural life'. That's what He does; He makes us beneficial to one another—and to others.

Well, He's done all of that; but in addition to that, He chose us to be *noble*. That's the next purpose that Paul gives for election in verse 5—to be members of His royal family; "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."

Paul was writing to a largely Gentile audience really, probably more than to the church at Ephesus but to the group of churches there in Asia, probably 'the seven churches of Asia Minor.' And so He was using a Roman practice here to describe our position of privilege, that of *adoption*—which the Ephesians would have been very familiar with. In Roman law, adopted children had all of the rights and privileges of natural children. Some Roman emperors were adopted. Octavian was Julius Caesar's adopted son, and he became Caesar Augustus.

Adoption was a privilege; it is today—as well as a blessing. But nothing like the blessing and privilege that each believer has who has been given a position of being God's son, God's sons and daughters. Daughters are considered 'sons' as well in the

sense that it's *the son* that gains the *inheritance*. And men and women together 'in Christ' inherit the glorious future that we have—and the blessings we have now. So they're sons in that way. But that's the great privilege of position that we've been given as sons of God. And what that means is, *He loves us with all of the love that He has for His own eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

We are "in Christ", (Eph 1:1), and He sees us 'in Him'; therefore He sees *us* as He sees *Him*, and He is loving us as much as His Son—and He's continually transforming us into the image and likeness of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So we are in the world, but we are sons and daughters of God. Heaven is on our side. All of its power and blessings are for us; and we have open access to the Father, who sits on the throne of grace.

And the writer to the Hebrews urged us to go there; "...to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb 4:16). That boldness to go directly to the Lord God of the universe, the confidence believers have in our relationship with Him who is now our heavenly Father, is all due to this...**election**! He blessed us, predestined us to the honor of sonship "according to the kind intention of His will." Not our will, but His will. It's altogether of His goodness and according to His purpose.

That's highlighted by the fact that Roman adoption was not necessarily adoption of orphans, children that didn't have a family—but was adoption of those who did have a family. In fact, it was the transfer of a child from one family to another to continue the adopters family line. And that's true of us. The saints were all transferred out of a family, an *infernal* one. Our old father was the devil, "the prince of the power of the air", and we were enslaved to him. We were "sons of disobedience", we were "children of wrath" under the tyrannical rule of the evil one. (Eph 2: 2&3).

But God adopted us into His family; "He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son", as Paul wrote to the Colossians. (1:3). It's grace. It's free grace. —Free to us but not to Him. As Paul said, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." (5a). In other

words, Christ was the One who made it possible for sinners to be made sons. He did it through the cross in His work as Savior, which Paul explains in the next verses.

The only way for fallen, and guilty, and unholy people to be adopted into God's holy family is the sacrifice of Christ, which paid for and removed our sin and guilt—and replace it with His righteousness. So, what is free to us, cost God the life of His only begotten Son, who suffered hell in our place.

Now think of the blessing of that: Since God chose us out of a ruined humanity and Christ died for us when we were His enemies—‘What won't He do for us now that we are His friends...in fact, more than that, now that we are His sons, His children?!’ Of course there's nothing that He won't do for our good. If He chose us when we were hostile, He will never give us up now that we are His friends, now that we are His children—and adoption is a basis of our assurance and comfort in the Christian life. And Paul said we were “predestined” to it. (vs5).

Leon Morris wrote, "Predestination is not grim or forbidding, but joyful and attractive." —Now, I say “Amen!” to that. And Paul thought so too; it brought out an expression of joyful worship from him, "To the praise of the glory of His grace..." he said. (vs6a). Nothing could make him happier, and he couldn't help expressing it.

But this is not only a statement of worship, but a statement of *purpose*. This is *the third purpose for election*: It is ‘To His glory.’ That's the purpose of everything; that's the purpose of all things. That's Romans chapter 11, verse 36, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." He's done it all. He is infinite in His power, infinite in His wisdom and goodness; of course all the glory goes to Him!

But here in verse 6, (that concludes Paul's praise of God the Father's ministry), it is the glory of God's grace and our salvation that is praised—which he, (*Paul*), defines as “...freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” So again, salvation is a free gift, bought for us in ‘the Beloved’—by Christ. We can do nothing to earn it; we can only *receive* it as a free gift which the Holy Spirit brings to us. Now that's what *divine election* is...‘free gift’.

In three short verses, verses 4, 5, and 6, Paul has described God's sovereign grace in a variety of ways, almost to the point of being redundant. It's not repetitive, but the point is made repeatedly: 'God chose us', 'He predestined us', 'He did it before time was', 'according to His will', and 'freely bestowed it in Christ through His sacrifice, not our sacrifice, but His sacrifice alone.' What more does the apostle need to say to make the point clear?

Now I can't force these things on you. We don't have 'Thought Police' here at Believer's Chapel. I can't pound these things into anyone. You're free to disagree with everything I've said, and disagree with what's printed here in the first chapter of the Book of Ephesians. You're free to disagree with it—but why would you want to? This is glorious. It should make you want to praise God and thank Him, and live for Him who has done everything for you when you deserved just the opposite.

This is what will deliver you from being "the miserable Christian" that Lloyd-Jones described, to being a joyful, worshipful saint. It takes your mind off of you, and it fixes it on the Lord God to make you thankful, to make you joyful. And He gives wisdom and He gives perspective. These verses here, really all of the verses in this chapter, verses three through fourteen, have been described, as I said, as "A magnificent gateway through which we enter the epistle."

And when I read that, I thought of Daniel, and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, (who we know by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego). Those four were taken from their home, their Godly home in Jerusalem, and brought to live in the pagan city of Babylon—and they entered the city through the gate of Ishtar, *'goddess of love and war.'*

The gate was massive, a massive tower covered with glazed blue bricks, decorated with brightly colored lions and dragons and bulls, each representing a god of Babylon. It was spectacular. The street was lined with bright enameled walls, again with lions and gods. It was paved with limestone slabs, each one inscribed with the name, 'Nebuchadnezzar.' The sight was breathtaking.

They were boys and they'd never seen anything like it. It was vivid propaganda for paganism, and it challenged their faith. —And yet, they were not swayed. They stood firm because they knew the Lord God.

And this 'Magnificent Gate' into the Book of Ephesians, verses three through fourteen, fixes our minds on the LORD, on His greatness and goodness, (as will the whole book), to make us stable, equip us for the world's challenges so that we can resist them and prosper in this fallen world as those young men did in that pagan society. That's what a study of the Book of Ephesians will give to us.

But first, to be equipped you must pass through "the door" to enter into new life— eternal life. The door is Christ. He said, in John chapter 10, verse 7, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am *the door* of the sheep." He is the gate into the sheepfold—into the family of God, where we all are sons and daughters of God: Grace, life, forgiveness is, "...freely bestowed on us in the Beloved", in Jesus Christ. So to *receive* it, we must *receive* Him; we must *believe* in Him. That's how we enter through Him—by trusting in Christ, in who He is and what He did by dying for us.

May God help you to do that, if you've not believed in Him. Come to Christ and trust in Him—and become a new creature in Him.

And those of you who have, rejoice in God's sovereign grace and what He's made of us: Noble people, members of His glorious family.

(Closing Prayer) LORD, that day will come when all of us are called home, all of us are called out of this world; may our hearts be fixed on You now, in preparation for that great day. To be called home to see our Lord is going to be the greatest blessing we can ever imagine. It's hard for us to do that in this world, in this flesh; and so we pray that You would fill us with a vision of Yourself that we get from the Scriptures. Help us to understand more and more Your grace and Your goodness. That's what will give us a longing to be with You, so we pray for that for ourselves.

And LORD, if there is anyone in our presence who's not put their faith in Your Son, they will be called out of this world too, someday, abruptly, but they won't see the glorious beatific vision of You—there will be other things. LORD, convict their heart; bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ, and to a love for the Savior—for the Triune God. We thank You for Your grace that we've considered. —It is great.

And now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)