

January 2, 2005
Christmas 2

"Chosen in Christ"

EPHESIANS 1:3-6, 15-18

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

Today you and I are here in this church praising our God for all the blessings that he has given to us this past year, and praising him for all the blessings he will be given to us in 2005. Why are you so richly blessed while people in Asia are looking for loved ones who were lost in the devastating tsunami that struck about a week ago?

I am sure you have heard some people attribute their blessings to something called "luck." Have you ever heard someone say, "I sure am lucky?" Or perhaps you have heard someone proclaim, "I can thank my lucky stars." As Christians we do not believe in luck or chance to govern our lives. We believe in the hand of God that blesses us, protects, and even gives us our salvation as a free gift.

Of all the blessings that you can count today, the greatest blessings are the salvation you have in Christ Jesus your Savior. You know that if a 30 foot wave rolls over you and buries you under mud and debris that you have blessings in Christ that allow you to live in a place that he has prepared for you. And if you have to face problems in life this coming year that seem worse than a thirty foot wall of water slamming you around, its OK because you have blessings in Christ that far outweigh even the worst problems you can imagine.

Why do you have all these blessings in Christ? Why do others not have these blessings? You cannot say, "I am lucky." You cannot say, "I am better than people living in places like Sri Lanka." All you say is "I have been blessed with blessings I have not deserved." The famous evangelist Dwight Moody was walking down the streets of Chicago with a friend. A man was lying in the gutter passed out from drinking too much cheap wine. The friend said, "Isn't that disgusting. Just look at that poor guy." Moody responded with the now famous words, "Here by the grace of God go I."

Dear Christians listen to the Apostle Paul tell you that all these blessings you have in Christ were not given to you because you are better than other people or deserved them in some way. These blessings in Christ have come to you by God's grace. Way back in eternity it

was God's plan to have you **"Chosen in Christ."**

1) Praise God for choosing you in Christ

This important teaching about your eternal election was not intended to confuse you. It is given to us in the Bible to comfort us, strengthen us, and overwhelm us with God's love. Listen again to the lofty praise given to God. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." The Greek word for praise is found in the English word, "eulogy." At some funerals people stand up and give eulogies that praise the person for what they did in their life on this earth. Here in this portion of Scripture the Apostle Paul leads us in giving praise to our God for blessing us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

It is good to enter a new year taking an inventory of the blessings we have been given, not just the blessings of family, friends, job, home, and country, but especially the spiritual blessings we have in Christ that are in the heavenly realms. The world does not see these blessings. In fact we cannot see them either, but we know they exist because of what God tells us in his Word. Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God praying for us every day. He is preparing a place for us. He is watching over us as a shepherd watches over the sheep. He does make it possible for us to pray directly to heavenly Father. Because Jesus is with his heavenly Father, after being raised to life again, we know that the ransom payment for sin has been accepted. That is why Colossians describes these invisible spiritual blessings as having our lives hidden in Christ. Your joy and happiness in this coming year is directly related to how clearly you see these blessings, especially on the darkest days of the year.

These spiritual blessings in Christ did not just fall into your lap by accident or chance. You did not earn them by winning some contest or proving yourself to be a better person than other people. You did not inherit these blessings from your mother or father. These blessings came to you by God's grace. God chose you to have these blessings even though you did not deserve them. You were dead in trespasses and sin, just as other people are. It was God who chose to make you alive in Christ. Listen to these words again, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In loved he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." God chose you to be in Christ, to be on his time, to be holy and blameless in his sight and inherit all the riches that are yours in Christ. You and I had nothing to do with this process.

When I was a child we went to school at our small church school in the farming community. During recesses whenever the weather was nice, we would pick teams to play softball. Usually we picked a team on Monday and those were the two teams that battled it out during the week. If I remember correctly there were always some kids that were picked last, and there was one kid that was always picked first. He was big for his age and he could swing the bat with equal power on the right side and the left. I felt sorry for the kids picked last. They knew it was coming and it still hurt.

These verses of Scripture tell us that you were picked to share in the blessings in Christ and be part of God's team. You were chosen to be the number one player, not the last to be picked. You were chosen to be holy and blameless in his sight. If our believing in Christ

depended on us in any way, we would never be picked. Lets take an honest look at how well we did this past year. True honesty will lead us to confess with Paul in Romans 3, "All have turned away, they have together become worthless." If that is any indication of how well we set ourselves up to be accepted by God, then you realize how foolish it is to think that something in you moved God to accept you. We could not even begin to hope to be picked last. Rather than reject us forever, God chosen to have us believe in Christ and share in his righteousness and be holy and blameless in his sight.

Why did the Lord choose you to believe? Paul has an answer for us, but it will never satisfy our human logic and reasoning. Do you want an answer for why you believe? Look more closely at our text. God did this "to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." God chose you in Christ because he wanted to glorify himself for the grace that he shows you in Christ.

When Job wondered why the Lord allowed bad things to happen to him, the Lord responded by saying to Job, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? ..Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation...Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place? ...Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?" The Lord never really told Job why he allowed the bad things to happen. The same is also true of the good things that come to you in Christ. The only explanation the Lord gives us is that these blessings came to us "to the praise of his glorious grace."

Imagine a team where all the worst players are picked to be on the best team. That is what has happened to you in Christ. With Christ you are now considered the best players on the team. In fact our text says, "he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will. It was our heavenly Father's plan from all eternity to not just put you on his team by choosing you in Christ, but actually give you the privilege of being his adopted sons and daughters. With Moody we can say, "Here by the grace of God go I." With Paul we can confess, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

2) Pray God to make this more clear to you

I can think of no better way to begin a new year than praising God for his grace that chose us in Christ. It is such a privilege to do this and it is so uplifting and comforting that we want to ask our God to help us praise him even more for his grace. Listen to how Paul prays for the Christians in Ephesus. "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopping giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." Then Paul prays specifically that they might receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know him better. He asks that their eyes might be opened to see more clearly the riches that they have in Christ in this life and for all eternity.

What a great year it will be if we can learn to appreciate more the love that other people have for us. One of the greatest treasures in my life is the love that my wife and kids have for me. If only I could appreciate this love more and not take it for granted. Yet, the love my family has for me is like a small piece of dust compared to the mountain of love my heavenly Father has for me who chosen me in Christ to be his adopted son. If only I could see that love more clearly. Even the worst days of this new year would be very special

when the Holy Spirit opens your eyes and mine to see this love more clearly.

The prayer that Paul prays here is similar to the prayer he prays in chapter three when he says, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he might strengthen you with power...and I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge..."

Let me ask you a personal question. Did you have any low days in 2004? Did you have any really low days and down times? Then, dear Christian, consider reading Ephesians 1 and if that chapter does not help you, read it again, and again. You will always be blessed when you see more clearly that you have been chosen in Christ. Amen.