

January 5, 2014  
Christmas 2

*“Chosen in Christ”*

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### **EPHESIANS 1:1-6, 15-18**

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**P**aul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> I pray 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 his holy people,

Shortly after Christmas we received an email from a former member of our congregation Don Karstedt. In this email he marvels at the grace of God that would send his Son to die for us when we are such a small spec in the universe. He encouraged us to search for the video clip, "Hubble Ultra Deep Field 3D." There we could find what the Hubble Space telescope observed in deep space. What seemed to be an empty space in the universe when observed with other telescopes was actually filled with distant galaxies 47 billion light years away from the earth. Our limited human minds cannot begin to grasp the vastness of the universe that our God created. We seem so small and insignificant by comparison.

However, when we read these words from Ephesians chapter one, we are far from small and insignificant. We discover that we were chosen by our God to believe in Jesus his Son even before the creation of the world. It is hard to grasp how the eternal God who always existed chose us before the world began. It underscores the great reality that in the mind of your God you are hardly a small and insignificant spec in the universe.

In his book *Confessions*, the great church Father Augustine confesses the difficulty he had believing in a Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and yet one God. One day he saw a child digging a hole in the sand on the beach and then saying, "I am going to take all the water in the sea and put it into my hole." It dawned on him how foolish he was to think he could comprehend the greatness of God with his small little mind.

How vast and glorious is the greatness of our God. He reveals to us in his Word before us this morning that he has chosen us in Christ from all eternity. With this amazing revelation he wants us to know beyond any doubt that it was his grace and love and mercy that brought us to believe in Christ. Now let's look more closely at these words from Ephesians to see that we were chosen in Christ from eternity and also chosen in Christ for eternity.

**Chosen in Christ from eternity**

The Apostle Paul is writing these words about being chosen in Christ from a prison in Rome. He starts this letter to his dear saints in Ephesus with these words, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." Paul loved his new name Paul. He never lost sight of the dramatic change that had taken place in his life when he was changed from the old Saul to the new Paul. He was once a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He followed Old Testament laws and teachings of rabbis with the hope of gaining his own acceptance before God based on observing the law. He hated the name of Jesus with a passion. He pursued the death of Christians. Then his life changed, not by his will or desire, but purely by the will of God. God willed him to see everything he tried to do to save himself was worthless. God willed for him to believe Jesus did everything necessary to save him from eternal death and punishment in hell.

He calls the dear Christians living in Ephesus saints. What a privilege it is to look out at you this morning and realize I am speaking to people who are saints. You are saints because you have been washed clean of your sin by the blood of Jesus. That makes you very special and very precious to the Lord, hardly a spec in the universe not worth noticing.

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." These are well known words. Grace has been defined as God's redemption at Christ's expense. 2014 will be a banner year for you and me if we see more of God's grace that sent Jesus to rescue us and save us. This grace, God's redemption at Christ's expense, will bring greater peace into our lives even though we may have some dark and difficult days.

"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." It is good for us to praise our God and bless his holy name for all the blessings he has poured out to us this past year and for all the blessings he will pour out to us in this New Year. Think of the meals you enjoy, the comfort of your home, the blessing of family and friends, the money that allows you to provide for your needs and the country we call the United States of America. At the top of the list of blessings are the spiritual blessings we have in Christ in the heavenly realms.

Recently in one of our Bible classes, someone asked what the Bible means when it speaks of heaven. It speaks of the heavens and earth or the sky above this earth. The Bible uses heaven to describe the new heavens and new earth that God has waiting for us after this present heaven and earth is destroyed. Heaven is also used for the heavenly realms where Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God the Father. The riches we have in Jesus are secure with Jesus who is in the heavenly realms.

See Jesus in the heavenly realms with the nail prints on his hands, the supreme evidence he declared you not guilty when he rose from the dead. See Jesus in the heavenly realms and think of how he is watching over you as a shepherd watches over the sheep. See Jesus in the heavenly realms loving you with an intense personal love that will not fail you. See Jesus in the heavenly realms planning out your life in 2014 for your good and his glory. Your life may seem like an insignificant spec in the universe until you see the riches you have in Christ.

How did all these riches come to you? Here is the answer. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the pleasure of his will." You did not inherit these blessings in Christ from your parents. You did not earn these blessings because you are doing a better job of living your life than other people.

When I was a child we had pickup games in softball at the Lutheran elementary school I attended. There was one kid who was bigger and stronger. He could even bat left handed and right handed.

He was always chosen first. There were those who were picked last. I cannot say that God chose me for riches in Christ because I was a better than others. Honest evaluation of self will lead us to say with Paul in Romans 3, "All have turned away, they have together become worthless." God in his love and mercy has chosen people who were rejects, objects of his wrath and the last picked for the teams. He chose us to be in Christ and to have all the riches that are in Christ. He took dead branches that are fit for the fire and attached them to Jesus the true Vine.

Why did God choose these insignificant specs in the universe to be the object of his love? He did this as it says in verse 6 "to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the One he loves." When Job wondered why the Lord allowed bad things to happen to him, the Lord told Job, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?...Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?... Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons?" We don't know exactly why God allows bad things to happen to us when they do. We certainly don't know why God allows blessings to come into our lives that we don't deserve. And above all we cannot comprehend why God would choose us to have these riches in Christ that we don't deserve. All we can do is listen to these very clear words that God does this to the praise and glory of his grace.

God chose you in Christ to be holy and blameless in his sight. Our greatest need in life is to be blameless and holy in God's sight. We never know if our last hour of life on this earth will come in the year 2014. We don't know if this is the year that Jesus will return in clouds of glory. Whatever the future brings I need to be prepared to stand before a perfect and holy and righteous God. It is only through these blessings or riches we have in Christ in the heavenly realms that we stand pure and holy and blameless in God's sight. These riches were won for us in Christ and they were given to us as a gift of God's grace. They were planned for us from all eternity.

### **Chosen in Christ for eternity**

The God who chose you from eternity to believe in Jesus has also chosen you for eternity to enjoy blessings with Jesus that last forever. Paul prays for the dear saints in Corinth to know these riches in Christ even better. "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know him better." Then he prays that they might know and appreciate the treasures that are waiting for us in the future. "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."

Because you are so rich in Christ, you have eternal treasures waiting for you when this world comes to an end. You are not just a tiny spec in the universe who has little value. You have a glorious inheritance waiting for you after you die. Peter writes in his letter that we have a living hope and an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for us. Romans 5 says we rejoice in the hope of glory. Titus 2 says we are looking forward to our "blessed hope."

Christians believe that the sufferings of this life are not worth comparing to the glory that will someday be ours. The Lord has taken seemingly poor and insignificant people and chosen them in Christ for eternal blessings that go on forever and ever and ever. When Paul was about to die, he wrote to a young pastor named Timothy, "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day-and only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." Joni Tada Erickson tells how this hope of glory sustains her as she spends every day of her life in a wheel chair. She says, "I look at my feet and some day I know that these feet will dance." The Lord has chosen you from eternity to believe in Christ and chosen you for an eternity of joy with him. Amen