

Not By Accident!

...according to his purpose.... Ephesians 1.5, 9, 11

Each of Paul's letters addresses particular issues that effect the church or churches to which he writes. Several of the letters follow a somewhat straightforward pattern: the first part lays a theological foundation for the practical application found in the second part. That is the pattern that Paul uses in this letter that we are beginning this morning.

If we were to construct a building, we don't just start putting up walls, we put in a foundation in the earth for the walls to be fixed upon, so that movements in the ground don't shift and weaken the walls. But beneath the foundation is a footing of cement, sand and stone mixed together with steel reinforcing bars that ties the foundation together.

Paul is doing essentially the same thing as he puts in the footing several concepts weaved together in this first part of the first chapter, that provide support for the rest of what he has to say in the first 3 chapters, thus supporting the instruction in the rest of the book. We will look at 4 of these concepts this morning.

1. *Blessed/Blessing* (v. 3, 3x) *Eulogy!*

What does it mean to bless someone? Normally we think that blessing is something that we either give or receive; and that's not a bad way to think of the idea.

One of the 2 words used in the NT conveys the idea of "well-being", as in the Beatitudes: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* The poor in spirit are blessed, or have a condition of well-being, because they have the kingdom. That's one word.

In *Ephesians*, as well as several other places in the NT the term that is used sounds very much like our word "eulogy"—what we hear given at a funeral, for example: good words, or praise. The idea that Paul has in mind is that good words or praise are uttered with reference first to God, and then to us. Here is how it might be translated, perhaps more accurately: *The God of whom good things are spoken, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has spoken good words to us in Christ with every good spiritual word in the heavenlies....*

OK, so that sounds a bit awkward. But maybe you can get the idea that it is not we who give God a blessing or gift, but rather we bless him by the words that we speak about him. Of course, we bless him because he has first spoken good words to us in the coming of Jesus Christ, and has done so with those good, spiritual words being in the heavenly places.

I think that one of the points that Paul is making here is that since Jesus is the Word that God has spoken, that Word speaks for us in the heavenly places with the sacrifice of himself; here we might reflect on what the author of *Hebrews* has already told us of Christ as both sacrifice and high priest, offering himself in the heavenly tabernacle in *Hebrews 8 & 9.*

God has spoke the best possible word on our behalf: Jesus Christ!

2. **Grace (6-2x, 7)**

The reason that God has spoken to us in Christ is grace. We don't deserve him speaking anything other than judgment and condemnation because of our rebellion against him. Yet Paul informs us that our being chosen in Christ, our being predestined for adoption into God's family is to the praise of his grace, with which he has graced us in Christ. Yes, Paul not only uses the noun "grace", but then turns it into a verb, both in verse 6. Further, the redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, is founded in his grace (v. 7).

No merit on our part, no payback, just grace on God's part. It should be a continually humbling consideration for us to remember that God did not save us, did not send his Son to die for us because we were good, but because we aren't good. Jesus saves sinners, not good people.

3. **To the praise of his glorious grace, glory (6, 12, 14)**

And while we are reflecting on that humbling consideration, we need to remember that God gets the glory for that. It is not just grace, it is his glorious grace.

How so?

As God is working out his will, he has demonstrated it in the people that he is reaching. Paul speaks of "us" and "you" in verses 12 & 14. He will do the same thing in chapter 2. Paul understands that God's saving work was initially with the children of Abraham, the Hebrews. That seems to be the "we" of "*we who were the first to hope in Christ to the praise of his glory*" in v. 12. He recognizes that he is a recipient as a Hebrew of Hebrews, **Philippians 3.5**.

All of Old Testament redemptive history points to God's grace to mankind for which he receives the glory. The people who he redeemed did nothing to deserve that redemption. If anything, they continually demonstrated that they didn't deserve that redemption. Yet God provided grace to them, and he is praised for it. He gets the glory!

Paul does not stop with just the OT people. He includes non-Hebrews in this redemption as well, v. 13 & 14:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

That finished redemptive work of God in Christ finds completion not merely in our being released from eternal punishment, but receiving a wonderful inheritance. His giving us his Spirit is the guarantee that he will do all that he has promised. And what does God get from all of this saving work?

Glory!

This is why we call him the "blessed God" in v. 3. It is us giving him the glory for all that he does for us.

Even a superficial reading of the OT & NT should bring us to an understanding of the great saving work that God does for his people. But Paul wants us to understand one more thing in this support for the foundation for his letter to this church.

4. God has a plan (10): *According to the purpose of his will (5, 9, 11)*

Over the years I have noticed several houses that seem to be unencumbered by architectural intent. In other words, there does not appear to be any one, overarching plan for their construction. If you look at the foundation, you will see that different sections were built at different times, sometimes with different materials—stacked stones in the first part, cemented stones in a later part, more recent sections have cinderblocks. Some rooms have 3 outside doors for no apparent reason.

I suspect if you went to the local town hall, there would be no blueprints on file, because there were none made. Someone had an idea, dug a hole, stacked a bunch of stones and built a shelter which over time grew into what is now there.

Paul wants us to know that God's saving work is not at all like those houses. But because he is the builder, the Master Builder, he did not show the plans up front because no one would have understood in the first place. But he shows us that plan as the project nears its completion. Our understanding comes as we look back on what he has done, not trying to figure it out looking forward.

As Paul tells us in vv. 9-10, he is *making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

God has a great cosmic redemptive plan. We see a piece of that plan this morning when we come to the table—we see his redemptive work for his people in Egypt, saving them from slavery and bringing them into the promise land. And as real as that experience was, it was also a picture of a greater saving work, that of Jesus Christ.

But we dare not simply look at this plan as a great cosmic redemption and miss that he has intentions for you and me in all of this. Yes, we are but mere specks of dust in the universe, but specks of dust that God cares deeply about because we are made in his image, and thus have value.

He has predestined us for adoption into his family, according to the purpose of his will, v. 5.

We have obtained, already because of Christ, an inheritance—because we have been predestined to it according to his purpose, his plan (v.11).

We should have learned something in this past year: we are not in charge, and we really don't have a grip or control over very much at all in this world. Not over viruses, not over elections, not over social tensions. And no one else around us has either. We have discovered, since apparently we have forgotten, that life for us is uncertain.

The comfort in that is that although we do not know what is going on, God does: *he works all things according to the counsel of his will* (v. 11). Coming to this table

demonstrates this. As we reflect back to the first Passover, we see God working out his redemptive plan for the benefit of his people, according to the counsel of his will. He shaped redemptive history throughout the OT to bring us to this time and place—not to leave us here, but to bring us home, to bring his saving work to completion.

Our partaking of the elements of this sacrament is our expression of trust, as well as the reception of his promise to us. Let us remember this as we partake together.