

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 8 – July 23rd and 26th, 2009

Ephesians 1:3-14

³Praise 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. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

¹¹In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Dear Chosen people of God,

This past week we were able to see on video how some very brave people risked their own lives to free a mom and two children from a burning SUV. As you watched the video, all you could see was the SUV engulfed in flames and people who were frantically trying to free the young child from the back seat. Finally, when it almost seemed like it was going to be too late they pulled the young boy to safety. A couple of days later, there was a news conference in which the father of the family tried to in some small way say thank you to the people who risked their own lives to save his wife and children. You could tell that it was a hard thing for him. How could his words really convey the true thankfulness that he had for those heroes?

As we gather here this morning and once again see the great plan that our God has made in eternity to rescue us from the fires of Hell, we too can only in a feeble way try to say thank you to our good and gracious God. How can we ever truly praise and thank our God enough for sending his Son to die for us and for sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts through the Word and Sacrament to give us faith. So this morning we will once again take the opportunity to:

Theme: Praise God For His Grace!

- 1. He chose me to be his own**
- 2. He redeemed me by his blood**
- 3. He sealed me with his Spirit**

Our text is a portion of Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus. After identifying himself and greeting his readers, he goes into what amounts to a 12 verse doxology, that is, a song of praise to God. He begins, "**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.**" Isn't that a refreshing perspective that Paul offers? When we are so tempted to count blessings only in terms of material things: the cars in the garage, the stocks in the portfolio, the CD's in the changer, what does Paul do? He steps back and says, "Wait a minute. Let's look at the big picture here. God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Far, far more important than all the physical stuff God has given me (far more than I

need or deserve) - far more important than all that stuff is the wealth of spiritual blessings God has given me in Christ.

So what are some of these spiritual blessings that God has given to you? First, God Chose You From Eternity. Paul puts it this way in verse 4, "**For (God) chose us in (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.**" Paul goes on, "**In love (God) predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.**" Really, both of those sentences are referring to the same thing, namely that before time began, before the foundations of the world were laid, God had already chosen you to be his own. He chose you to be adopted into his family. Theologically, that's referred to as the Doctrine of Election or Predestination, the fact that God knew you personally before you were born, and he in fact planned out your personal salvation before anything else came into being. God elected you from eternity.

Tell me, doesn't that make you feel good? You maybe remember back when you were younger and the kids on the block were choosing up sides for softball or kickball. When one of the captains called your name, that felt good didn't it? Or maybe it was the first time you were invited out onto the dance floor. That cute guy came over to where you and your friends were all huddled together and he chose you. The very thought probably gave you goose bumps. Now, that's maybe not exactly the effect that God's election has on you, but I hope you see the parallels. Out of all the people that would ever inhabit this world, God chose you.

The question is, "Why you? What made you different than everyone else? Did God look into the future and see that you had what it takes to be a Christian? You were more open to the spiritual side of things? Is it something in you that led God to choose you? Absolutely not. The fact is, God chose you, even though there was nothing you could offer to him. That's what St. Paul means when he says, "**(God) predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.**" Or to put it another way, God chose you simply because he wanted to choose you. It was an act of pure grace on God's part.

But now, someone might ask, "But why? For what purpose did God choose me? What goal did he have in mind when he chose me? Paul tells us, "**God chose us in (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.**" God chose you so that you could be holy, that is, sinless. But that's a problem isn't it? I mean, by nature, you and I are not sinless. We're sinners. And that leads us to the second thing that God has done for you. Not only did he choose you from eternity,

2. He Redeemed you by his Blood.

Do you see the natural connection between those two points? Yes, God chose us from eternity. But because we all came into this world as the property of the Devil, God had to redeem us, that is, he had to buy us back.

Isn't that the way it works in real life? If I go over to Kohl's department store and search through all the clothes' racks until I find just the right shirt, can I just walk out of the store with it? Is it mine just because I chose it? Of course not. If I want it to be my own, I must pay for it. Well, so it is with us and God. For God to make us his own, he must first pay the price. He must buy us back, or in theological terms, he must "redeem" us. And what does he buy us back with? Paul tells us, "**In (Christ) we have redemption through his blood.**" It was the sinless blood of Jesus Christ that stained a wooden cross and purchased our freedom and brought us into fellowship with a just and holy God.

But now, maybe you're thinking to yourself, I know all that. But isn't that pretty much ancient history? That happened 2000 years ago. I want to know, "God, what have you done for me lately?" Doesn't Paul answer that for us? He says, "**We have redemption through Christ's blood, the forgiveness of sins.**" Tell me, what was the last sin for which you needed forgiveness? Maybe it was the tone of voice you used on a family member on your way to church. Maybe it was your unspoken desire to be somewhere other than God's house. Maybe it was one of the countless stray thoughts that went through your mind since the beginning of this sermon. Can you imagine how you would feel if there were a big

screen up here flashing all the images going through your mind over the course of a one hour worship service? What do you think we would see? Sinful thoughts, baseball games, clips from the movie you watched this week, old boyfriends, how many more minutes is this service going to last - there would be no end to the images that we're guilty of letting Satan use to push God and his words from our hearts and minds.

And yet, as embarrassing as that mental slide show would be, the fact is, when God watches it, it's a blank screen. Why? Because it has all been erased by the blood of God's Son, today, right now, as it happens. Talk about receiving God's blessings in real time - there you have it! If someone asks you what God has done for you lately, then tell them, "Well, as of this second, he's erased every sinful thought, word and deed I've ever had. Because of Jesus' blood and merit, I'm not guilty. Instead, I'm forgiven. That's what God has done for me in Jesus Christ.

But now, maybe you're thinking to yourself, "Well, that all sounds good in theory-but how do I know that all that applies to me personally? I mean, it doesn't say, "God chose you, Mark Gartner." It doesn't say, "God has forgiven your sins, _____." So how do you know that God has done all those things for you? You know it because of the third thing that God has done for you.

3. He has sealed you with his Spirit.

Listen to how the Apostle puts it, "**You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in (Christ) with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.**" You were marked with a seal. In Bible times a seal was used as a sign of ownership. The Roman emperor, for example, would place his seal on the bottom of a letter to prove that it was authentic, that it really belonged to him. A hundred years ago, ranchers identified which cattle belonged to them by putting a seal on them. They called it a brand.

Well, so it is with you and God. How does God identify you as his own? He does it by putting his seal on you. And what's the seal? Paul says that it's "**the promised Holy Spirit.**" Okay, but how do I know the Holy Spirit is in me? Should I feel like he's in me? Should I feel a tingle in my spine? Should I be able to speak in tongues or experience some kind of miraculous healing? How do I know that the Holy Spirit is in me?

Again, Paul answers that. Verse 13: "**You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.**" What does that mean? Simply put, it means this. If you believe the gospel, namely, if you believe that you can never do enough good things to get on God's good side, but rather have no choice but to throw yourself on his mercy...if you believe that your only hope is to trust that Jesus lived a perfect life in your place and then gave up that life on a cross to pay for your sins. My friends, if that's your personal conviction, well, then you can know that you've been sealed with the Holy Spirit. To put it another way, "If God hadn't marked you as his own, if he hadn't given you His Holy Spirit, you would never believe that Jesus is your only hope of heaven. Without the Spirit, you couldn't believe it.

That gift of the Holy Spirit is not only your assurance of all that God has done for you in the past. It's also your assurance of all that awaits you in the future. Paul says, "**The Holy Spirit...is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.**" You might say that God has given you the Holy Spirit as a down payment on your eternal treasure -- Heaven.

As we think about all that Paul has told us today, there is no better way to sum it up than to join together with Paul in saying, "**Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ?**" He chose us. He redeemed us. He marked us -- all to the praise of his glorious grace, in Jesus' name. Amen.