

GOD'S ABSOLUTE BLESSINGS FOR HIS CHILDREN

Ephesians 1:1-23

Key Verse: 1:5

"...he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...."

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, these four epistles are called Paul's prison epistles. Before going to a Roman prison, Paul was in a Jerusalem prison simply because he proclaimed the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Even though Paul was a prisoner in Jerusalem because of Jesus' name, he was eager to go to Rome to make the world mission center by means of Roman military roads. Since he was a Roman citizen, he claimed he wanted to be judged by the Roman court. Humanly speaking, he was helpless. He was old and tired. Above all, Jesus' world mission command to him seemed to have been totally impossible in the prison. Suppose you were in prison because of your faith. You would only think about the ill-treatment of Roman prison guards; or depression, a sense of injustice, and desperate longing for deliverance would fill your mind. But Paul's thought was none of these. Even though he was once a selfish man, he has grown up as St. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ for the world mission. His main concern was for other people. He had spent himself for the spiritual warfare when he was free; he continued to do so now in bonds, and Ephesians is one of the prison epistles (Ac 28:30), written about A.D. 63. It seems that Paul wrote this letter not only for the Ephesians, but also for other churches in Asia Minor.

He is anxious for his readers to realize the greatness of their spiritual blessings and privileges and to use them to the full in their Christian life and warfare. In the first chapter, Paul sets out his teaching and here we find one of the two most wonderful prayers recorded in the Bible. Where are they? Ephesians chapters 1 and 3. In the last three chapters he applied the teachings in very practical ways. Today we want to think about God's blessings for his children.

First, predestination (1-6).

Paul's greeting to the saints is in verses 1 and 2. There is no discussion of these verses in most commentaries. But it is worthwhile to think about these greetings. Look at verse 1a. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." In this verse, Paul had a strong conviction that his calling was not his personal decision, but it was the providence of God and the will of God. Here we learn that Paul believed the absolute sovereignty and providence of God for his life. He always reminded Christian brothers and sisters that he was an apostle of God by the will of God. Without this conviction that God, in

his sovereign will, chose Paul, Paul could not but wonder between the two: providence and fate. Look at verse 1b. "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus." To Paul, "Christian" meant faithful people, not pragmatic people. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Also, Revelation 1:8 says, "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'" It is not easy to be faithful Christians, for the world is full of ideas. These days, ungodliness is prevailing in every corner of this country. But we must be faithful in believing the promises of God, and we must be faithful in believing that God is sovereign Ruler of history.

Look at verses 3-5. "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. 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 his pleasure and will...." We praise and thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because he has blessed us to know heavenly things with every spiritual blessing in Christ. As we know, human blessing is conditional. For example, in order to get a Ph.D., one must sacrifice his sleeping time. He also must demand his wife's loneliness. Human blessings are first, long life, next, to become wealthy, then to have many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and to die peacefully. Human blessings are temporal and very meaningless. So Peter said in 1 Peter 1:24, "For, 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall....'" But the spiritual blessing is given by God and it is everlasting. God's blessing belongs to the heavenly realm. God's blessing comes through his Son Jesus Christ. Look at verse 4. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love...." When God saw the world, human beings were suffering beyond measure, because of their ungodliness and perversion. God could have just abandoned them to suffer more. But he did not do so. God decided to save them by giving them spiritual blessing through Jesus Christ. As we see in Genesis 3:15, God had a plan to save fallen men from their sins and change them to be holy and blameless in his sight. What did he do to save these fallen men? Verse 5 says, "...he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...." Here we learn that instead of raising his hand to punish them, God made a plan of world salvation through his Son Jesus Christ. Here we learn that God is love.

In this part, the word "predestined" has been a never-ending theological controversy. The word "predestined" was an effective weapon as an excuse for wickedness. They usually say, "Well, God predestined that I am a lazy man, a wicked man, or a selfish man. So there is no

way. I must live according to my fate." But their excuses are not spiritual. To the theologian, "predestination" is a very difficult word. But to a simple and faithful Christian, it is the easiest word. For example, Genesis 6:5 says, "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." But God, in his great mercy, wanted to save them, missing no one. In order to save them, he needed a good shepherd or the Messiah. God sent so many prophets in history. But the people did not listen to God's word through the prophets. Finally, God sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ. John 3:16 explains this in the best way. It says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

For example, Paul seemed to have been born to persecute the early church of Christ. But God had his sovereign plan for Saul. God had let him study the philosophers of West and East. In addition, he mastered Judaism. Because of his study, Paul could establish Christian theology, with which the early Christians were able to conquer the Roman Empire and all other European countries, as well as countries in Asia Minor. Here we learn that the word "predestination" indicates God's sovereign will through which he predestined to save men from their sins through the Son.

Second, redemption (7-10).

Look at verse 7. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace...." In this verse, "redemption" is a very important word. In the past, in the ancient society, slave trade was one of the most beneficial businesses. As we saw in the movie, Judah Ben-Hur was an aristocratic Jew. But because of his boyhood friend, Massalla, all his family members were put in a dungeon, and Judah Ben-Hur became a Roman galley slave, number 41. In the ancient time, food supply was very scarce. Usually, rich people ate two meals a day, and ordinary people ate one meal. In that situation, many people thought that to become a slave of a rich family in order to eat sufficiently was good luck. There were slave markets.

Spiritually speaking, sinful human beings' conditions were indeed miserable. Slaves were the possession of masters. Slaves' children were also the masters' possessions. The time period of slavery was one's lifetime. When Rome conquered Jerusalem, Judah Ben-Hur was in trouble because of Massalla. Judah's chief steward, Simonides, brought his daughter Esther to get permission for her marriage. At that time, in noble Judah's heart, a romantic feeling toward the slave girl arose. So Judah gave her freedom as a wedding gift; he also took Esther's slave ring and put it on his own finger. Since then they separated. But

Esther did not marry, and waited for Judah. Judah also did not forget about her, even in the galley, rowing the boat, sometimes at ramming speed, sometimes battle speed. By accident, Judah's ship was rammed in the midsection. The Roman Consul, Quintas Arias, jumped into the sea and wanted to commit suicide, sensing that he lost the battle. Judah jumped in and rescued him. Finally, news came that Rome won the battle. The Consul Arias adopted Judah as his son. Suddenly, misfortune turned into Roman princeship. This explains a little about redemption. From God's point of view, all human beings are under Satan's rule. Their hearts are weighed down with dissipation and anxiety, and every day is a battle for survival. But God predestined, and through his one and only Son's blood, he redeemed us from sin in accordance with the riches of his grace. Spiritually speaking, God lavished his grace on us to save us from our sins (8). In order to save us from our sins, he gave his one and only Son in our place. In this way, God made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment. God's redemption seems to be slow. But it will be fulfilled (10a). God's redemption seems to be slow. But God wants to make us happy and bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (10).

The best example might be a robber's story at Jesus' crucifixion. The religious leaders of Jesus' time finally reached the point of crucifying him. In order to make Jesus shameful, they crucified two robbers with him, one on each side of Jesus' cross. One of the robbers cursed Jesus out of his wickedness. But the other robber begged Jesus' redemption. Luke 23:42,43 says, "Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" "Redemption" is indeed a beautiful word, and it is the utmost desire of God's heart. On the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a). This prayer reveals the heart of God, who wants to save men from their sins.

Third, chosen people (11-14).

Let's read verse 11. "In 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...." There is an impression that St. Paul is going to speak all over again from the beginning. But the word "chosen," in verse 11, is very important. We will have the international Olympic Games this summer in Atlanta. There, many chosen people will come to compete with other nations' athletes. But being chosen is not easy. It starts first from a small community. And next city by city, county by county, state by state. To be a chosen one requires endless hard work to defeat the opponent. Still, we cannot guarantee that one can get a gold medal in the competition. Anyway,

being chosen as an Olympian is very honorable. On the contrary, those who are not chosen are very dishonorable and it is the time of discouragement, when they have to wait for four years until another Olympic Games begins. Nobody can choose himself as a chosen one. In the secular world, authorities in each field choose the chosen ones.

In God's world, God chooses according to his pleasure. When God wanted to start world salvation work newly after the deluge in Noah's time, God could choose 75 year old Abram. It might have been that all others were too corrupted to be chosen. God gave Abram a promise that he would make him a blessing to him as well as to all peoples of the world. This promise was a covenant between God and Abraham. Abraham was slow to grow to be a blessing. But God took care of him for 25 years, until he loved God more than God's blessing. Genesis 22:12 says, "'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. 'Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.'" To Abraham, to be a chosen people was indeed a great privilege and God's blessing.

God chose Israel as his firstborn son. After the Exodus, God said to his people: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:4-6a). God chose Israel, through whom he willed to fulfill his world salvation plan. Through many ups and downs, the people of Israel had done their best to be God's chosen people. The pride of being chosen people has been their strength and wisdom. The pride of being chosen people made them conquer in many fields of the world system. Now we see the Jews have been persecuted as those responsible for Jesus' blood for the last 1,950 years.

For example, when Paul was Saul, he was the ringleader to annihilate the church of God through persecution. On the way to Damascus, the Risen Christ visited him and said to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Ac 9:4b) "Who are you, Lord?" he asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The Risen Christ asked Ananias to take care of him. But Ananias was afraid. Then the Risen Christ said to him in Acts 9:15,16: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." By his great mercy, the Risen Christ forgave all his sins and chose him as the apostle for the Gentiles.

As we mentioned, Paul was a chosen one as a light for the Gentiles. But Paul knew that he was a great sinner. He said in 1 Timothy 1:15,

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst." In this verse, Paul explains that he was not worthy to be a chosen one. But by the grace of God he became a chosen one. 1 Corinthians 15 is a summary of the whole Bible. In this chapter, Paul did not miss the fact that he was the worst sinner. He said in verses 9-10, "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." Paul clearly manifests that he was a sinner, and that by the grace of God he is what he is, otherwise he was a mass-murderer.

To be a chosen people in terms of Christianity is not so difficult. Whoever receives his Son's blood is absolutely qualified to be a chosen people. It is out of God's world salvation plan, predestination. It is out of his hope in Jesus Christ so that they may be the praise for his glory. In other words, they may all be great victors for the glory of God (12). How do we know we are chosen people? Those who believe in the Son's blood, the Holy Spirit lets them know. And also, those who are chosen are guaranteed that they have inheritance and they are God's possession as the praise of his glory (13,14).

Fourth, thanksgiving prayer (15-23).

When we read verses 15-23, three things are distinctive. First, hope. Let's read verses 15-17. "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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." These verses are full of hope. Paul praised their faith in that wicked generation. Paul thanks God for them, remembering their life of prayer. Paul was full of hope that if they keep up their life of faith, they will receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation and a better knowledge of Jesus Christ. In short, Paul was full of hope that because of their faith and thanks they are full of hope to come to know the Spirit of wisdom, which is the heart of Jesus. As we know well, Ephesus was a commercial city which must have influenced Ephesian Christians. Humanly speaking, Paul could not expect Ephesian Christians would be conquerors of the world. But Paul believed that God would use them by faith as conquerors of the world with his gospel. So Paul thanked God.

Second, power. Look at verses 18-20. "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, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power

is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...." When we read these verses, Paul compares worldly power and Jesus' resurrection power. When we think about worldly power, we think of many conquerors, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon Bonaparte. But their powers were not their own, they were the demand of the time and deception of Satan. And when we read about them we feel that they were not powerful men, but very pathetic people. Napoleon Bonaparte knew how to fight. But he did not know how to talk with women. Likewise, all the men of worldly power were powerful outwardly, but inwardly very weak, abnormal characters.

Third, inheritance. Look at verse 20. "...which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...." When Jesus was on the earth as the Messiah, he was despised and rejected and finally crucified. But God raised him and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly realm. Jesus who rose again from the dead is now King of kings and Lord of lords. To him every title can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the age to come. His authority and rule is forever. Jesus has the everlasting power and authority as the sovereign Ruler, sitting at the right hand of God. We must thank God that Jesus was so despised and rejected, and even crucified as a criminal in order to adopt us through his blood. Now God raised him from the dead, because of his obedience to the world mission purpose and made him Everlasting Father and Ruler. Also, he gave us eternal life and the kingdom of God as our inheritance.

We thank God he chose his one and only Son as the Lamb of God for the sin of the world. We also thank that he chose us in this generation.