

His From All Eternity

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Bible Text: Ephesians 1:4

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We have been looking at the opening verses of the book of Ephesians. And as we have we have seen that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.¹ We read that in chapter one and verse three. And as we go to the fourth verse we begin his enumeration of what those blessings are. He begins to talk to us about what, in fact, we are blessed with.

The first blessing that he mentions is the blessing of our election. Now the word “election” has stirred up an incredible amount of controversy and misunderstanding in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, it has been the cause of many splits in churches. It has been the cause of a lot of division. And I think the reason for that is that there are so many people who really have a limited understanding of the greatness of our God; the fact that he is sovereign, that he is in control, that his will will be done and that what he wants to accomplish he will accomplish.

Now that should seem very logical to us. I mean, you know, when we set out to a task we have a plan and we have a goal and, in possible, we achieve that goal. Isn't that true? I mean, think of those of you that are involved in the building trades—and we have a number of you here today. I mean, if you were to set out to build a house, you don't go to the—at least I hope and at least I hope it is not a house you are going to build for me—that you don't go to the site and when you get there decide what you are going to do. Say, “Well, you know, I think I'll put a little concrete here and I...I think, well, no, I think, a board would be good in this spot. And let's see if we can set up a little bit of a foundation over here.”

Well, the house would fall down, wouldn't it?

You have a plan. It has been worked out by an architect. The architect has spent a lot of time developing the plan for this house. And then the carpenters come and they begin their work and meticulously following the plan they put together the structure of this house and eventually it becomes something that hopefully will stand up, that will not come down at the first wind that blows by it and will be a place in which people can actually dwell. We do planning.

¹ See Ephesians 1:3

Now we are not perfect in our planning. I wouldn't know how to build a house. I drive a nail in and it goes in sideways so I wouldn't make much of a carpenter. But one of the things I do—and some of you are aware of this—I am an amateur radio operator and I build equipment that I then use for receiving and transmitting. And I can remember recently I built a transceiver and I had a plan. There was a definite plan. I knew that this resistor went here and this capacitor went there and, you know, eventually when the thing went together hopefully it was going to do what it was supposed to do.

Well, in this case it didn't. Have any of you ever had that experience? I don't mean with a piece of radio equipment, but you put something together and it doesn't do what you wanted it to do.

And I sat down and tried to figure it out and ultimately the reason it didn't do what it was supposed to do was that I didn't follow the plan exactly. I made a mistake. And something was soldered in the wrong place. And I had to search it out and find it and unsolder it and put it where it belonged. And then all of a sudden it worked beautifully and it works perfectly now.

Well, that is the way we operate because we are imperfect creatures. But the wonderful thing about our God is that not only does he have a plan, but he has the ability to begin, carry out and complete that plan with absolutely no mistakes because he is a perfect God.

Is it true that God, in fact, has a plan and will accomplish it? Well, the Word of God says this all over the place. In fact, I would go so far as to say it is probably the primary theme of the entire Bible. God has a plan and God carries out that plan.

If we turn to Isaiah chapter 46 beginning with verse nine I am looking at one of a multitude of passages that tell us this. It says, beginning with verse nine:

Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.²

What is God saying? He says, first of all, "I have a plan." The plan is the history of this entire universe. And he says, "I am going to accomplish my plan and it will be fulfilled."

We find the same thing in the book of Ephesians in the passage that we are looking at. And, in fact, we are going to get into this concept in much greater detail when we get down to the 11th verse of chapter one where it says this, "Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after

² Isaiah 46:9-11

the counsel of His will.”³ In other words, God says, “This is my will. I will work it and that is what is going to happen.”

Boy, I wish I could plan like that.

I want to tell you something. Wouldn't it be marvellous if the next time I sit down to build a transceiver I didn't have to do any troubleshooting at the end? Love it. How about if you were building a house or constructing something and everything went right, not one glitch in the whole process. Wouldn't that be marvellous? Well, it doesn't always work that way. But in God's plan, in fact, it does.

So we see, first of all, God has a plan. He calls it the counsel of his own will. This is his plan. Part of that plan has to do with the salvation of human beings. And the Word of God tells us that everyone who is saved, everyone who comes to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is someone who is chosen of God.

Now the word that is used here where it says in verse four, “Just as He chose us...”⁴ is a word that is used in many places throughout the New Testament. It is sometimes translated “elect” or “election.” That is actually a transliteration of the Greek εκλεκτος (ek-lek-tos') or εκλεγομαι (ek-leg'-om-ahee), those are the noun and verb forms of the word. And the idea is to choose. It is the word that I would use, for instance, if I were to walk out into the pew and I would say, “Well, let me see...which hymnal should I pick up?” And there are three of them there and I have a choice. Now it really doesn't make a whole lot of difference, but I am going to pick either this hymnal, that hymnal or that hymnal. I have a choice. And I will pick the one that I want to use to read from.

It may be that—and we can give you another example. This is, of course, from the Old Testament, but translated using the same word in the Septuagint translation which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures where David was about to have his battle with Goliath. It says that he chose five stones. Now when the stones were chosen, the stones didn't do anything. They just stayed there. But David looked at all the stones. There were a multitude of them. And of those stones he picked five of them. Why did he pick those five? I have no idea. But it says he chose five stones.

This is the same word that is used here in Scripture where it says that we are chosen of God.

Now for us to have a real understanding of this concept of election we have to understand that it is used in three different ways in the Scripture. First of all, God has a chosen nation, a nation that he chose in the Old Testament. That nation was the nation of Israel. You will remember that he picked a nation.

Now some people will say, “Well, he must have had a reason for it.” And I'm sure he did. But the reason was nothing about Israel. There was nothing special about Abraham that

³ Ephesians 1:11

⁴ Ephesians 1:4

he would choose him and not choose somebody else. In fact, he even says that. In Deuteronomy chapter seven where we read about the choice of Israel he says this beginning with verse six. For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”⁵

The first question would be: Was it because there was something good about them? Were they a special kind of people? Were they better than others? Could God point to them and say, “Well, you know, Abraham, you are really a neat guy. I am going to pick you.”

Well, we find out in the next verse that that is not the reason. For he says this: “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.”⁶ You see, he chose them because he chose them. He chose them because they were the ones that he wanted. That was his choice.

It says in Psalm 135, “For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession.”⁷

And then in Isaiah chapter 41 and verse eight:

But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend, You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts, And said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.’⁸

Why did God choose Israel? I don’t have the vaguest idea, but he did. And that was within his plan and his counsel.

Now he chose Israel for a reason. The primary reason, as I understand it in Scripture was that out of them would come the Messiah who would provide a redemption for God’s people. And so we find that the second big choice that the Lord made was that Christ would be the chosen one to provide a redemption.

We read, for instance, in Isaiah chapter 42 and verse one—which is a passage that talks about the Lord Jesus Christ—it says, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights.”⁹ Read the passage. It is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵ Deuteronomy 7:6

⁶ Deuteronomy 7:7

⁷ Psalm 135:4

⁸ Isaiah 41:8-9

⁹ Isaiah 42:1

And then, again, in 1 Peter chapter two, beginning with verse four. “And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice [this is the same word Greek εκλεκτος (ek-lek-tos’)] which is choice and precious in the sight of God.”¹⁰

So, first, we narrow things down. We have Israel as a chosen nation. God did not choose the other nations of the earth. He chose Israel. Out of Israel there would be one who was born who would be the chosen one to be the Messiah. That was the Lord Jesus Christ. And then there were those who are believers in Christ. And they are the chosen of the Lord. And the same word is used throughout Scripture to describe them, just as it is in the passage that we are studying, “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”¹¹

And I could read you a whole list of Scriptures that give us this wonderful picture of the blessing that we have as the chosen of the Lord.

Now I would like to look at just a few of them with you, but before we do that I think that it is important that we understand that there have been objections to this view. And probably the primary objection goes something like this. There will be people who will say, “Yes, God does elect or choose. But he does it on the basis of what he knows a person is going to do.”

Now let me just give you an idea of what I mean by this. This is the way this argument has been phrased, something like this. God, in all eternity past, looked down through the corridors of time and he saw those people who, because they of their own free will would choose the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, he in love chose them. In other words, the concept was that God didn’t really choose. God chose those who chose him.

Now in my mind that doesn’t make a lot of sense. It is just like saying that when David picked up those five stones, something about the stones...it was sort of as if—and this is the same word and concept that is used—it is sort of as if he was looking down at the stones and one stone was saying, “Please pick me.”

Now that is a little ridiculous isn’t it? He chose a stone because he chose a stone, because he wanted it.

But that is the way the argument goes.

And there are a couple of verses that are used to foster this argument. One of them is the passage in Romans chapter eight beginning with verse 29, a wonderful passage in God’s Word that goes like this. It says, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren.”¹²

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:4

¹¹ Ephesians 1:4

¹² Romans 8:29

And, then, another verse that is used in very much the same light is in 1 Peter chapter one where we read this.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.¹³

And there are those who will say, “Well, you see? It is according to foreknowledge.” In other words, God knew who would select him, so he before time selected them.

Well, I hope I am not getting too confusing here, but if we look at this very carefully that is not what it teaches at all. It teaches something totally different. When it says that God foreknew somebody, it is not saying that he foreknew something about them. It is not saying that he knew something that they would do. It is saying that he knew them ahead of time.

What does the word “know” mean in Scripture? Well, it actually has two different meanings. One is the common meaning that we use all the time. You know, I know that one and one equals two. That is pretty good deductive reasoning, isn't it? I mean, usually one and one does equal two, doesn't it? Shake your head. Isn't that true? Good. Ok. Two and two equals four. Four and four equals eight. You know, I mean these are things that I know. I know most of you by name. I know you.

But the word is also used in another way that is very, very interesting. In a passage in Amos we are told when God speaks of Israel, “You only have I known of all the nations of the earth,”¹⁴ talking to Israel.

Now what did he mean, that he didn't know anything about all the other nations in the earth? Of course not. He knows everything. The word “know” in that case has to do with approved or loved. “You only are the nation that I have loved among all the nations on the face of the earth.”

Another example in the book of Genesis, right in the beginning of the Bible. It says, “And Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived and bore a son.”¹⁵ Now think about this logically. That does not mean that Adam walked over to Eve and said, “Hey, I know who you are. I know you.” It doesn't mean that at all. It means that he had a close and intimate relationship with Eve to the extent that she bore a child. It talks about a love and an intimacy.

And so when it talks about God foreknowing, it means that he fore-loved. He loved them before the foundation of the world.

¹³ 1 Peter 1:1-2

¹⁴ See Amos 3:2

¹⁵ See Genesis 4:1

When it says in Romans chapter eight and verse 29, “For those whom he foreknew, he predestined...”¹⁶ These are the ones that before the foundation of the world he knew as the people that he loved, the people that he had chosen. That is what the passage is telling us.

Well, isn't this what the entire Word of God tells us about God's relationship with his special people? I believe it is. I could, as I said, enumerate many, many passages. I am going to look at just a few. And then I am want to discuss with you a little about the wonderful implications of this great teaching in the Word of God.

If you would turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 13. Excuse me, there is no Acts chapter 38. You can tell I am good shape today. Acts chapter 13. We are going to read a passage about the preaching that took place and something very special that happened.

In Acts chapter 13 Paul is at Antioch and he preaches a great sermon. And we read this in verse 48. “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”¹⁷

Paul preaches a sermon and a lot of people believed and some don't. And this passage explains why it is that some believed and some didn't. Well, the passage tells us very clearly that it is those who had been appointed to eternal life, those whom God had chosen, those who were the elect of God who had come to trust in him.

We see many, many indications of this throughout the Scriptures. It says, for instance...you turn with me to Acts chapter 18. And I want us to understand that in Acts chapter 18—let me get there first—Acts chapter 18 Paul is just getting to the city of Corinth. This is a new place of ministry for him. He had never been there before. The gospel had not—as far as we know—been preached there before. There is no indication that there were believers in the city of Corinth. But Paul goes in and he is very upset because he is about to experience some very difficult times in his proclaiming of the Word of God.

And it says—let's begin in verse eight.

And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer...”¹⁸

“Don't be afraid anymore.” Now, when God tells you not to be afraid, first of all, that means that you are afraid, right? He wouldn't say that unless there were some fear in your heart. But he says to him, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do

¹⁶ See Romans 8:29

¹⁷ Acts 13:48

¹⁸ Acts 18:8-9

not be silent.”¹⁹ A wonderful message for all of us, isn’t it? I mean our job is not to be afraid of teaching the Word of God, but it is to get up and teach it, to preach it, to tell it to people. And he gives a reason for that. He says, “For I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”²⁰

Now I want you to understand this. He had not proclaimed the Word there before. God is talking about people who are going to come to know him as believers in Jesus Christ. But what does he say here? He says, “I have many people in this city.” In other words, “There are those who are going to be the children of God. There are those who are the chosen of the Lord who are in that city and they are going to believe. So, Paul, don’t be afraid. Don’t be scared. Just simply go and proclaim the Word of God because those who are mine will, in fact, believe.”

You know, as I said, this is a difficult to understand, difficult to comprehend teaching in God’s Word. But it is one that is so abundantly clear, one that is given to us to help us to understand the wonderful grace of God.

We are going to look at just one more passage before we examine the implications of this teaching. In 2 Thessalonians chapter two and verse 13 we read this. “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and [belief] in the truth.”²¹ We should give thanks to God because he has chosen you. That is what the Word says.

Now we see the truth of this wonderful passage. We see in 1 Peter chapter two and verse nine that you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession. God, throughout the Scripture speaks of us as the chosen of the Lord.

What does it mean to us today? Well, for me it makes me awe struck at it. That is a bad word, isn’t it? Anyway it makes me stricken with awe. How is that? That’s a little better, ok. Stricken with awe at the marvelous love of God. That God would, for some reason love me and choose me before the foundation of the world.

It is something that as we contemplate it should almost if not completely bring tears to our eyes, to realize that as the Scripture says to us that, “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”²² And so when we look at our own lives we ask the question: Why did God choose me? Why did he love me before he made the world? I don’t know. I know I am not worthy of it. And if you look at yourselves you can say, also, you are not worthy of it. But if you are a believer in Jesus Christ you have the marvellous and wonderful blessing of knowing that God loved you even before he created this world, that God had you in his mind and loved you on the very day that Jesus Christ ascended the cross of Calvary. When God looked down from heaven and saw his Son dying, he had you in

¹⁹ Acts 18:9

²⁰ Acts 18:10

²¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:13

²² Romans 5:8

mind if you are one of those who would trust in him. You are special. Why are you special? Because of God's love, God's matchless and wonderful love.

The question then comes up. Well, why then do we go out and preach the gospel if, in fact, God has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world?

I had one person in a Bible conference bring up that question. He said, "You know, if God is going to save his people, then why should we go out and preach the gospel?"

The answer is: Because he told us to. That is our job. My job is not to go out and to change goats into sheep. God pictures the world in those two terms, but to go out and seek the sheep of the Lord and to preach his Word that they might believe.

Some might then say, "Well, why don't you just preach to the elect?"

Now that would be great. If you can put a mark on their foreheads I'll do it. I don't know who they are. The one thing I do know is that as I proclaim the Word of God the multitude of people who are the Lord's will come to know him as Savior and Lord. And that gives me assurance that my work of evangelism and my work of proclaiming and teaching the Word of God will not be in vain.

For he said that. He said in Isaiah chapter 55—and I would like to read it exactly—Isaiah chapter 55 he said this. "So shall my Word be that goes forth from my mouth, it shall not return unto me void, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."²³ What does that say? We can go with confidence knowing that our teaching of God's holy Word will lead to the salvation of multitudes of people.

But, my friends, I want to ask you today: Have you come to know Christ as your Savior?

Some will say, "Well, I don't know whether I am one of those." I will tell you how to find out. If you trust in Christ you are one of them. It is as easy as that. If you haven't, I challenge you today to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, the one who died that a multitude of people might have everlasting life.

For those of us who are his children, we can proclaim his Word with confidence knowing as he said to us that his Word will not return unto him void. Let us be faithful in that ministry of proclaiming the Word that multitudes might hear and believe.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for all that you have given to us as we examine this wonderful passage in the book of Ephesians chapter one. We have looked at just one of the blessings, the blessing of your choice of us as your children in Christ. We are going to go on and look at all the wonderful other blessings that you mention in that marvellous passage. And we ask, our Father, that you will help us to understand them and help us to

²³ See Isaiah 55:11

enable us to live our lives in a way that will honor you. For, Lord, you who loved us deserve all of our love. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.