

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:1-6

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, [and by extension here in Sacramento] and faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

“God’s Everlasting Covenant”

What I want us to consider today, is the covenant in our text made among the Persons of the Godhead before the foundation of the world: A covenant where God choose us to be a holy people, adopted & accepted in His beloved Son Jesus Christ!

The overriding covenant and we can be thankful that God takes all the responsibility and carries out all the details of the covenant and that He is fully responsible for the outcome...

- **This is the overarching Covenant that makes sense of all other covenants... AND all of history!**
- **It can be seen as the Everlasting Covenant: But it is also called the Covenant of Redemption, and often the Covenant of Grace.**

If we ignore this covenant or fail to see the significance of this covenant, we will be confused on many fronts:

- **Yes, we must understand the BIG picture of what God is doing in the history of His Creation!**

In this short, but profound, text before us today the Apostle Paul rightly begins with God & then note how he comes down to us when he says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”

- **Paul gives the proper adoration to our Triune God and this should remind us of the importance of how we open our services each week after God has called us together as a local body...**

We sing a hymn of adoration and then we greet each other in the Triune name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This should never become commonplace! It is an opportunity we should not miss unless we are providentially hindered! As I have often pointed out, IF we have an appointment with a governor or the president, or even a local judge, we would make all the necessary preparations and leave plenty of travel time to make sure we were there for that appointment on time!

Again, our children learn from our example and we should also be instructing them about the importance of blessing God in this way...

We have used the same hymn of adoration for almost nineteen years so that even the youngest of our children can join with us as we lift up our voices in adoration.

- **Each & every week we begin worship by being grateful for the rich gifts that God has given us in our Lord Jesus Christ!**

The Apostle tells us that God, ‘has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,’ ...

But he then goes on to say in verse 4 “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”

The Persons of the Trinity made a very important decision long ago...

- **What the Apostle Paul presents to us here, is how God made a covenant before the beginning of time!**

There are many covenants in the Bible and elsewhere that impact our lives and should be important to us... In fact, there are over three hundred direct references to covenants in the Bible so this could be a BIG subject to study!

- **BUT we must remember that ALL of the covenants that we find in the Scriptures, or even in our lives, revolve around the Great Covenant that God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit made together in eternity past!**

This Covenant is not a human covenant, but rather one made by the persons of the Godhead before the beginning of time, before God spoke anything of the Creation into being out of nothing.

It is what the Book of Hebrews calls the everlasting covenant and it is one we should strive to understand and rejoice in all the days of our lives.

- **While there are many conditional covenants between God and man or between men themselves, the obligations of this covenant lie solely with the Persons of the Godhead.**
- **The Persons of the Godhead agreed together, before the foundation of the world, to provide for the Son a Bride consisting of righteous people brought to Him by the Spirit throughout history.**
- **Thankfully this is clearly one of those covenants where God carries out the details of the covenant and is fully responsible for the outcome...**
- **Yes, the overarching Covenant that makes sense of all the other covenants... AND all of history!**

Ignoring this covenant or failing to see the significance of this covenant, we will leave us confused on many fronts:

- **For example, the entire question of how we see our children and their participation in the Church’s sacraments revolves around the understanding of this covenant.**

Another problem is how the American Church has become so dispensational in modern times and some of it so radical that they teach there are two ways of salvation or two Gospel plans.

- **In the Bible there are different dispensations, different covenants and different testaments, but they all must be seen in the light of the one Everlasting Covenant.**

Our confidence in evangelism is dependent on this covenant and of course our own personal peace and security finally rests on claiming the promises of this covenant!

- **It should be no surprise that we see the outworking of this covenant in ALL of redemptive history.**

The Apostle Paul tells us that it was established before the foundation of the world and thus we will see it throughout the history of the world if we have eyes to see...

This covenant was first announced in the Garden after the fall of man...

God does not say someday the Seed of the Women will crush the seed of the serpent IF, mankind does this or that...

- **But rather God simply promises Adam and Eve that THIS is what will happen, it is certain!**
- **And that is something we should be very thankful for based on what we know of human history!**

God's role was dramatically demonstrated when this promise was repeated and expanded with Abraham: Remember in Genesis 15, where we saw God pass through the pieces of the divided animals by Himself, which we will consider at the Table this morning.

Later the whole sacrificial system and the Prophets point to the work of Jesus where the everlasting promise is kept.

➤ And the outworking of this everlasting covenant is presented in all four of the Gospel accounts:

Matthew begins with the genealogy that takes us from that promise made to Abraham right up to the birth of Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Mark is even more blunt when he says in the first verse of his Gospel account:

"The Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;," who we know is the promised Seed of the woman.

John clearly presents the coming of the Son of God, Jesus as the seed of the woman, as God keeping His covenant!

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made..."

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Finally, we have the Gospel according to Luke which we studied together at length many years ago:

He begins with the birth of John the Baptist and when his father Zacharias is finally able to speak he takes people right back to God's covenant:

Luke 1:68 "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited & redeemed His people, 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, 70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,

Who have been since the world began,

71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant,

73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

Zacharias sees that the coming of the Seed of the Woman, God's Messiah, is a gracious gift from God that will bring great peace on earth as the angels sang on the night that Jesus was born!

➤ Grace is the beginning of our faith & peace is the end of our faith!

The Gospel accounts go on to present the life and work of Jesus Who was always focused on His mission until He makes the agonizing trip to the cross where He is able to cry out "it is finished," as He commended His Spirit to God the Father.

We then see in all four Gospel accounts how each Person of the Godhead is involved in raising Jesus from the dead on the Third Day confirming that the work of the Seed of the Woman had indeed crushed the seed of the Serpent.

Finally in the Book of Acts we have Jesus ascending to the Father's right hand and the Spirit poured out on God's people at Pentecost. And as we studied at length, we today continue to participate in the Spirit's work of filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus, carrying out & completing the everlasting covenant!

So, it should not surprise us to see the Apostle Paul immediately turning to this everlasting covenant in his overture:

Ephesians 1: “3 Blessed be the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”

- **Here we see clearly the great covenant of salvation made before the foundation of the world among the Persons of Trinity.**

God the Father choosing out a people for His Son, who would come to save them from their sins after which they are sealed and kept by the Holy Spirit!

This is something that we rejoice in each and every week and it should come to mind ANYTIME we see a covenant in the Bible, or elsewhere, because all the covenants of history, and in our lives, flow from the Truth of this one great everlasting covenant!

- **As we live out our lives, we will be involved with and make many covenants.**

Having trusted Christ we are part of the everlasting covenant and there we rejoice that God is the one who provided all the blessings and keeps all the promises:

- **Like not losing any who are His!**
- **But we also are involved in very important earthly covenants as well, which we should understand in light of the everlasting covenant.**

One of my greatest blessings is to see young couples enter such a covenant with their marriage vows: Each time we have a wedding I take the opportunity to encourage all of us who are married to remember the vows that we have taken.

- **And yes, how faithfully we keep those vows is a major part of our witness to a watching world.**
- **How can we ask people to trust a faithful God if we are unfaithful?**

As members of Church of the King we have signed a membership covenant which obligates us to be a part of this local congregation in various ways.

Keeping or breaking those wedding or membership vows will not get us into or keep us out of heaven, but our faithfulness to them provides the rich fellowship that couples or members can enjoy together.

- **Faithful living is what produces the peace that should be the end of our faith.**

Parents who bring their covenant children to the Church for baptism are also entering a covenant:

- **A solemn covenant with the obligation to be a faithful parent who will raise that child in the fear and admonition of the Lord.**

Of course there are many financial covenants and employment covenants or contracts that we can be involved with along with many others as well.

- **With all of them we should be aware of the obligations that we are entering into and to be faithful to them in the sight of God.**

Of course none of these earthly covenants can approach the majesty or importance of the eternal covenant of salvation, the everlasting covenant.

- **But we need to learn to take all of them seriously for the sake of the Kingdom.**

Our earthly covenants are not all equally important: Our church covenant or marriage vows are much more important than an agreement to pay a child \$10 to wash your car...

- **But we should remember that Jesus clearly taught how it will be those who are faithful with little who will be trusted with much.**

So as that agreement to get the car washed is negotiated and carried out, it can become a teachable moment where you relate it to how faithful our God is in keeping all of His covenants, especially the everlasting covenant!

- **We should be reminding our covenant children, and each other, over and over about how this Great Covenant is the solid, rock foundation for all of our lives.**
- **Yes, the angels proclaimed that it would bring peace on earth!**
- **We should be thankful at each and every meal that God has been faithful to His covenant by providing for His people.**
- **We should remember God's protection each time we see a rainbow!**

We should rejoice in the names and places that mark important parts of our journey as families or as a church.

- **We can remember the various speakers who blessed us at Family Camp or as those involved with Friday school prepare to start another semester, they should recount the blessings enjoyed this past spring!**

This should be true in our families as well:

I think of the hours that our children and grandchildren have spent, and will spend, looking through the photo albums that Linda prepared to mark the events of our lives and the journey that God has our family on!

From before the foundation of the world God has known where history would be going, which is the major reason the Apostle can tell us to be anxious for nothing!

- **And we should rejoice over how He has left us clear markers and/or events to help us remember where it is going and Who is in control!**

In the Old Testament we see and learn from all those altars and sacrifices, AND all those genealogies and histories.

In the Gospels we have the opportunity to really get to know Jesus, who clearly said IF we see Him we see the Father!

- **What would Jesus Do? That is not really a bad question to ask.**

We spoke about the Book of Acts, where we are given many more example of how to live and finally, we have all of the Epistles & Letters, and yes even the Book of Revelation to teach us about how to be faithful serving as those chosen in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world!

- **Even after the completed work of Jesus and the closing of the Cannon, history has given us creeds and church councils and confessions and catechisms that have reminded us about the journey.**

We must remember that our story is a part of that grand story! We should be confident about where it is going and marking and remembering God's blessings along the way...

- **Sometimes asking the question Nathan Wilson suggested: Do I like my character in God's story!**

- I found it interesting that half of the references to ‘covenant’ in the New Testament are found in the Book of Hebrews!

We should read and meditate on that important book often, and when you can, in a single reading...

The final covenant reference is a great way to sum up today’s lesson regarding the everlasting covenant:

The writer of Hebrews shows us that the Covenant of Salvation is all about Jesus and thus we should live for Him:

13: “20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Communion Meditation: Gen 15

“13 Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. 14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” 17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.”