

Included in His Will

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Let me welcome you once again to Truth Community Church as we turn our attention to God's word this morning and I would invite you to turn to Ephesians 1. There are many people visiting with us today and we're so glad that you're with us. We want you to know that we've been studying verse-by-verse through the book of Ephesians over the past several weeks and you're joining us as we come to verses 11 and 12 of chapter 1. I think it's fair to say that the past few weeks of our Sunday morning teaching have utterly enveloped us in the glory and the power and the wonder and the love of God. Scripture tells us that by the power of a Triune work rooted in eternity past, working its way out in time and culminating in eternity future, God has chosen us. God has adopted us. God has redeemed those of us who are in the Lord Jesus Christ and it is a spectacular wonder to contemplate the multifaceted nature of our salvation. But there's more to it than just that.

One of the things that we saw last week is that God's ultimate purpose in the universe so far transcends our individual salvation that we need to understand that the whole purpose of history, the whole direction that everything in the universe is moving toward is the crowning glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. One day, Christ will reign supreme over the entire universe. He will be acknowledged by friend and foe alike that he is Lord. There will be no question of his conquering rule, his majestic sovereignty. We praise him greatly for that and we look forward with great anticipation to that day when our Lord Jesus Christ is alone the focus of the universe and he is thoroughly glorified according to the great worth that he intrinsically has. As believers in Christ, our affections belong to him alone and we want not our glory, we want not our success, we want not our best life, we long supremely for the day when the one who chose us, adopted us and redeemed us is set on his rightful place on the throne of the universe and all of creation acknowledges it and gives him glory because only then will the final, ultimate bottom line aspiration of our heart find its fulfillment. The glory of Christ with all distractions put away.

That's what we are living for. History is moving toward a one point pinnacle where Christ is on display and glorified and everyone and everything acknowledges it, creation cries out, "You are Lord!" to the glory of the Father. And that will be the purpose at the bottom of God's purpose in the universe. In a message, in a realization, in an acknowledgment that needs to ring out in this narcissistic, selfie-taking world in which we live, the purpose of creation is the glory of Christ, not the glory of man. That's the day that we're living for.

That's what we want to see come to pass and when that happens, when Christ is on the center of display, not us, we will be most joyful and we will realize that we recede in the background. He must increase, we must decrease and the culmination of that great verse in John 3:30 will be in that final day and that's the purpose, it's for Christ to be glorified.

Now, as we continue in our study of Ephesians 1 this morning, we're going to see that God has still more splendor in this passage for us to understand and adore. What should be happening as you walk through this series with us, as you hear the word of God week by week by week and it's so important to hear it week by week by week because there is a cumulative impact of it all. What you should be finding is that your affections are increasingly centered on Christ and the things of this world are growing strangely dim. It's just not as important to you as it used to be, that as you see the purpose of the universe is the glory of Christ, that your heart is shaped and fashioned after a desire to worship him, to love him, to be faithful to him, to obey him. That's the only way that a redeemed heart can possibly respond to these things is that as Christ is lifted up to the pinnacle, that your heart is drawn in that same direction. If you find your heart cold and indifferent and somewhat bored by these things, let me assure you that you have never been born again and that you're not a Christian and that you need Christ to do a saving work in your heart because Christ is the focus of everything and a true believer loves it that way. What we're going to see is going to make us love it even more.

Look at verse 9 of Ephesians 1 with me as we read it together, grateful to God that he has revealed himself in his word and that we can read the very word of God in our own language. What a precious gift we hold in our hands, the word of our Creator speaks to us now in Ephesians 1:9,

9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation - having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Now beloved, after what we saw last week and just summarized briefly in the past few moments, realizing that the universe and the ultimate purpose of history belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ and recognizing that it belongs to him and he rightfully will claim the glory of every created thing at his feet one day, it is of inexpressible wonder and majesty to realize that after seeing the purpose and the flow and the direction, the certain current of human history summed up in Christ, what we see in these two brief verses, verses 11 and 12, is that Paul is now emphasizing that you and I who believe in the Lord Jesus

Christ are going to be included in that final glory. The majesty of the purposes of God are inexpressible. There is an ineffable glory about what God has decreed to occur and the ultimate purpose for which it comes. It is of incalculable wonder to contemplate the focus of the entire universe directed to the Son of God. And yet, what Paul is saying and what we're going to see is that you and I who belong to Christ are somehow going to be included in that final glory. In other words, Jesus Christ is going to subdue the entire universe under his feet. Jesus Christ is going to be receiving the worship from his people and the acknowledgment of his supremacy from his enemies. All of that is going to be true. It's all going to be focused on Christ and he deserves it and yet in what must be one of the most precious truths in all of the Bible, Christ is going by the exertion of his power, Christ is going to subdue the universe without forgetting you and me in the process. You and I who belong to Christ, while Christ is exercising his dominion, he is going to bring us along and not forget us in the process. Little old you and me with a whisper of a lifetime on a rock in the galaxies, you and I are going to be there. Not only are we going to be there, we're going to belong there because that's the way Christ wants it because he purchased us with his blood so much that he bought us at the cost of his own life because he wants us to be there. That is his purpose.

I don't know how you ever begin to put that into human language to express the majesty of it. How can you ever get your arms around it that the one who has power over all of creation, the one who causes nations to rise and fall, has his eye on the sparrow and I know that he watches me. And that he is going to bring those of us who belong to Christ with him as he is displayed on the theater of the universe having glory, he redeemed us so that we would be there with him on his side, under his command, the unique objects of his saving love. How do you express that? Well, we're going to give it our best but feeble shot here this morning to talk about it. We're going to talk about the prize, the purpose and the praise today. The prize of our redemption. Here is the wonder of it: this must make you love Christ. It must. This must drive out every other competing affection in your heart and say, "This is what is alone worthy of my deepest heart affection." Jesus Christ does not ascend to glory and leave his people behind. Christ rises to glory and he brings us with him. He selected you according to his purpose so that he could share his victory with you. That's what we're going to see here.

Look at verses 10 and 11 with me. This is God's purpose. "He purposed in Him," verse 9, "with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times." This will be the climax of history, that is, "the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth." That's what we looked at last week. Everything visible, everything invisible. All of creation, all of humanity will acknowledge the glory of Christ and bow down before him and all of his purposes will be accomplished without fail, without exception. Things in the heavens, things on the earth. That's what we looked at last time.

Now, follow the train of thought. In most of your Bibles there is a period after the word "earth" or however it's translated there and the translators have introduced a new sentence. That's okay but it's really just a continuation of the same flow of thought. There is no actual break in the sentence in the original language so everything's going to be

summed up in Christ and the idea is this: in whom, that is in Christ, "also," notice that word. He's adding something additional to bring forth and to evoke our praise. He's bringing forth something additional beyond what he's already said so that we would praise him even more to the glory of Christ. How could you go beyond summing up everything in the pinnacle? What could possibly be added to that? Well, what could be added would be the gracious, loving, merciful, kind, saving intention of God toward his people. When you realize that the great climax of history, if you're thinking rightly at all, you understand, "Wow, I have no business being there." I mean, think about trying to walk into a formal state dinner at the White House. You need credentials and you've got to clear security and all of that and the heads of state are there and most of us will never be invited to an event like that where the world leaders congregate together and do whatever they do in those hidden times. They can have it as far as I'm concerned, I've got Christ. But you don't belong there. You're not invited there. You're not part of that power group. You don't have the money to buy your way in there; you don't have the position to force your way in. You know, most of us are going to go home to modest houses in Kentucky and Ohio. We don't have any business in the White House. I don't care. I don't care because what's here in front of us in the Scriptures is so far surpassing and yet those of us who don't belong at a state dinner in the White House belong at the climax of the universe because of the gracious saving intention of Christ toward us. We could go to a state dinner and be turned away, "You don't belong here." We can go to the climax of the universe, we will go to the climax of the universe as believers in Christ and we'll belong there. Christ, as it were, will say, "Of course, come my people. Come, this is my victory and I share it with you. It belongs to you." At the climax.

"In Him," verse 10, "also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." Verse 10 shows us the cosmic plan. Verse 11 shows us that believers are included in it. Verse 11 shows us that no one can lay a claim of demand, a claim of entitlement upon Christ. What we see is that the sovereign of the universe is so gracious toward his people that he includes them in a place where they don't belong by their own desserts, by their own rights, by their own merit. When it says that "we have obtained an inheritance," it's a word that only appears here in the entire New Testament. It's interesting. It comes from a word group that's related to the making of decisions by the casting of lots or the rolling of dice, would be the modern equivalent of that. But here it's not an arbitrary result from a lot that is being cast. We have obtained this inheritance. There is a decision that has been made in the halls of heaven. Look at verse 11, "We have obtained this inheritance." We are on the receiving end of a glorious gift. Why? Because it has been predestined according to the purpose of God who works all things after the counsel of his will. God, brothers and sisters in Christ, has assigned to you a portion. He has assigned to you a share in that great ultimate triumph that Christ will achieve at the end of time. What this verse is saying when it says, "In Him we also have obtained an inheritance," we also, meaning we believers in Christ which is who this is directed toward, those of us who love Christ now, God not only has a plan for the universe, he has a plan to include you in the outcome. You're a part of that plan. The one who can orchestrate the movement of nations to accomplish his will has looked upon you if you're a believer in Christ and said,

"I will include you in that plan. I want you there. You are on the receiving end of a gift from me and it pleases me to do that." That is the way that God has dealt with his people.

But the prize is a gift that will bless you throughout all of eternity. We'll not only see the climax of everything submitted to Christ, we will enter into the eternal state with him and enjoy this in unbroken unfolding of ages in ways that we cannot begin to comprehend. Oh brothers and sisters in Christ, Christianity is not primarily about this life here on earth. This is a temporary passing mist of smoke compared to the eternal glory which God has appointed for us to receive by the unlimited measures of his grace and mercy towards his people. That's what our inheritance is. This is our prize. This is what comes next ultimately for us.

Look at it, God set this in motion in advance. He determined this ahead of time. We'll talk about this more in a minute. He didn't sit around to wait to see what you would decide to see if this would happen for you, he predestined it. Look at verse 11. It says, "we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined," determined beforehand, marked out for this grace ahead of time, "according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." To be predestined is to be marked out beforehand. God appointed you to receive this blessing before he created the world. He marked it out. This was what he determined to happen. It was his desire and here we are enjoying the blessings of salvation now as a very small down payment on a much greater inheritance, a much more glorious prize that we are going to receive. Listen, if you could see, if I could see by comparison how great that glory is going to be, we would instantly understand that nothing in this world matters by comparison. Nothing matters in comparison to this great gift that we are still yet to receive, the final outcome of our salvation. All of our earthly joys and sorrows are going to be completely swallowed up in what is still to come.

If you are a believer in Christ this morning, it belongs to you. It is certainly going to come to pass because God determined it ahead of time. That's the prize and, my friends in Christ, it is supremely important for you to understand why you are in that privileged position. It is of massive significance and consequence for you to grasp something about what underlies this precious future that is ahead of you and Paul did not leave it open to speculation. It is right there in the plain words of the text as we come to the purpose. We saw the prize of our inheritance and now we're going to see the purpose. Why is it that we have this great prize? Why is it that we who are born, live and die from an earthly perspective and we come in with nothing and we go out in a box, why is it that in that little realm of insignificance that we would have this given to us? You must understand that we have this prize because God wanted it that way. It is according to his purpose. Look at verse 11 with me again. "We have obtained an inheritance," and Paul alludes to what lies ahead as we will share in that coming glory of Christ but it's like he can't even stay on point long enough to expound on that, he has to go right back to the throne of God and say why this is. Why do we have this prize? It's because we have been predestined for it. It was determined beforehand and according to what? According to how good we were? No. According to our choice of Christ? No. You can't emphasize it

enough. This whole passage, Ephesians 1:3-14 is about the glory of God to the praise of his glory. There is nothing giving glory to man in this.

So we see that the great prize that belongs to us comes because God appointed it that way. We have been predestined. Look at the words, let the words speak for themselves untainted by what you may have been taught in the past. "We have been predestined according to His purpose," not ours, "who works all things after the counsel of His will," not ours. This is God's will, God's purpose and God gets the glory for it. This verse 11 is pregnant with significance that the Bible unpacks. If we took the time to interpret it fully, we would go all over the Scripture. This is a verse that is a cornerstone of the doctrine of divine Providence and if you have not heard those messages from our church, I would encourage you to go to our website and hear them. You need to hear those messages on divine Providence: God overall, God over sin and God over you. This verse just briefly alludes to it when it says, look at it with me, that God "works all things after the counsel of His will." All things, beloved. God has complete control over everything in history and over everything in your life. Nothing has happened in your life that did not first go through the purpose and plan of God. The filtering wisdom and marshaling, orchestrating purpose of God in your life. And God, because he has complete control over everything that happens, silently directs human history to achieve his purpose.

The Bible repeatedly affirms this sovereignty of God. Let me just give you one verse to write down, a reference you can look up later. Psalm 103:19, "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all." Now listen to me, here's Paul's argument, here's his logic in what he's saying and it's really important for you especially if you come out of a background where you've been taught that you can lose your salvation, it is of supreme importance for you to understand what Paul is saying here and why he says it in the way that he does: he is writing to give glory to God and part of the way that he's giving glory to God is he's pointing to the ultimate climax of history in Christ. Then he goes on in order to give more glory to God and he says, "You have an inheritance by which you will have a portion in that final outcome. You will be under the glorious protective umbrella of Christ and his glory will be that in which you share and witness." Now watch this, Paul says that's your inheritance and it's like he's anticipating people who would question, "Well, maybe you can lose it by the way that you sin." He says, "No, no, understand that your inheritance," here's what he's saying, "your inheritance is secure. It is certain. It is more bound to happen than your next breath because you have been predestined for that inheritance." Look at verse 11 and put your finger under the word "predestined" there. You are certain to receive your inheritance because you have been predestined for it. Not by your choice, but according to God's purpose and God's purpose cannot fail because he works all things after the counsel of his will.

He has appointed you for this. He has determined that you will receive it and what Paul put side-by-side with that predetermining purpose of God is for you to understand that God, here it is, God has the power to deliver on it. The one who can submit the universe to Christ has the power to make sure that you end up there in the end and it is a massive statement of the glory and the certainty and the security of our salvation. He operates the

universe, he can certainly make sure that you get to heaven like he wanted and appointed before time began.

There are two thoughts, hopefully I can keep them together and get them out, that should just overwhelm us. One is that God can do that, that God has the power and the sovereignty over all. That's head on the ground type worship inducing truth. Then there is the fact that he brought you and me into this by name, that he included us in that great plan and that also puts our forehead on the ground in worship but, beloved, don't you see how it fills your heart with gratitude? It shrinks your pride to nothing and it makes you see the greatness and the glory of God and it should make you love him. It calls forth the deepest affection and love and response of worship in your heart. "God, whatever you want from me, I will do. However you would have me suffer, I will walk through it and still have your praise on my lips because the one who rules the universe, rules over my heart and kept me and brought me into the plan. God, I don't deserve that. The eternal riches of such glory are totally outside my ability to merit and yet you have given it to me, you have predestined me to receive this and now you are keeping me so that I will one day walk into the fullness of it. Great sovereignty and we worship him. Unspeakable grace and condescension and we worship him. And our hearts are just overwhelmed before, O God, our hearts are just overwhelmed before the presence of your majesty, the greatness of your purpose and the unspeakable splendor of who you are."

You see, the Bible is no superficial book. When we gather together as the people of God to worship, we don't do so in a light and fluffy manner like we were going to see a concert by the Wiggles, in deference to our friends from Australia who are here. No, what Scripture is talking about are things that belong to a great realm that we should respect and defer and humble ourselves before. Christ who will receive the worship of the universe bought us and included us in the plan. I want to stop right here. I want to just stop right here. I want to be translated into that realm right now because I want to receive the fullness of that final inheritance and it's just really hard as much as I love all of you, it's really hard to have my feet still stuck here on this ground under the force of gravity because I can't go there just yet. The glory of that surpasses any human affection or achievement in this world and we look forward to the inheritance that we are certain to receive. Charles Hodge, the great 19th century theologian, said this about Ephesians 1:11, and I quote, "It is neither by chance nor by our own merit or efforts that we and not others have been highly favored like this. It has been brought about in our lives according to the purpose of God." All we can do is respond in worship.

Look at verse 11 with me again, it says that he "works all these things out after the counsel of His will." It's a term that refers to God's decisive resolve. God wants it this way and he is determined to bring it to pass with no obstacles to stand in his way. What that means is, beloved, God's determination, not yours, ensures that the outcome will be what he wants. This will come to pass according to the purpose of God, not the strength of man. The arm of your flesh, the power of your determination and will will fail you. If we were all honest with each other right now, we'd say, "Yeah, I know it. It failed me this past week." You see, this is gloriously liberating to understand that the current that is carrying us to heaven is driven by the mighty power of the unconquerable purpose of

God, not our fleeting whims and emotions. We can't keep ourselves in this kind of great salvation. It takes the great power of God to keep us and Scripture says he will, he does and he is glad to do it. It's what he wants. That's how great our salvation is. That's how great our God who loved us and gave himself up for us is. You are on the receiving end of the power and purpose of God in a way that goes beyond anything that you could ask or think.

Let's look at a couple of verses to help reinforce this in our minds. Turn over to 2 Timothy for a moment. 2 Timothy 1:9. What I love about this among many, many other things is the fact that the clarity of Scripture on this means that God exclusively gets the glory. It preempts any pride on our part. We're just humbled under this truth, humbled with gratitude and humbled by a sense of undeserving. 2 Timothy 1:9 says that God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works." It's not what you did. If you're in Christ, it's because of something else that Paul immediately explains. He says it's, "but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." God purposed to give this to you before time began. Before all of eternity, those of us who are in Christ can say, "God purposed us to receive this before he created the world." From all eternity. It's according to his eternal purpose, the same word as in Ephesians 1:11. His purpose, his decisive resolve. Here's the point: the outcome for you in your salvation is assured just as in the realm of every other area of the universe because God works all things according to his purpose and plan.

Turn over to Romans 8. You see it in the realm of salvation once more. Romans 8:28 where it says, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Same word. "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." And beloved, let me say something that engenders hostility in other places but not here at Truth Community: this truth about the purpose of God exposes one of the fatal weaknesses of the view that suggests that God wants everybody to be saved but men resist his will and God doesn't get what he wants. That's not true. Scripture utterly refutes that. There are teachers, some without realizing it, who suggest by that teaching that the eternal purpose of a great and sovereign God can be thwarted simply because a man doesn't want it that way. Does that sound like the God of the Bible that we've been hearing about to you? No. Do you know why it doesn't sound like it? Because it's not. God does not subordinate his purpose to the will of man. He accomplishes it despite man's opposition and rebellion and at Truth Community, we're proud to align ourselves with that truth which has been taught by great men of God throughout the centuries. We're not teaching anything that men haven't taught throughout the course of the history of the church and we gladly align ourselves with them.

God's purpose. So what's the outcome? What's the outcome? Turn back to Ephesians with me. We've seen the prize, the purpose and now we see the praise. Let's read it again together, "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will to the end

that," for this purpose, "we who were the first to hope in Christ," commentators differ on exactly who Paul is referring to there. I think he's referring to that immediate apostolic circle, "we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." It's to the praise of his glory. Paul goes back to his theme: this is why all of this comes to pass. It's so that God's people would praise him, that God's people would ascribe to him the honor that he deserves and evacuate their souls of any sense of deserving.

We've seen these verses many times but I want to bring them back to your attention again. Verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Verse 6, it's "to the praise of his glory." Verse 12, it's "to the praise of his glory." Verse 14, it's "to the praise of his glory." That is why all of this comes to pass and you can see why it has to end up there, right? You understand why it couldn't be any other way? For God to display his power in subordinating the universe to his purpose, for him to take us in our sins and rebellion and rejection and so work in our hearts to draw us to faith in Christ so that we would share in that great ultimate purpose and have an eternity of unfolding blessing that we'll enjoy without threat of ever being evicted is to the praise of his glory. How great is this God? Yes, he's great. And we say as we realize what he has done for us in Christ, we say, "Yes, and he's not only great, he's good and he's been good to me." And if you're in Christ, he's been good to you and he's not going to stop being good to you. You will experience his goodness throughout all the ages of eternity. So what can we say except praise God?

Bow with me in prayer.

Father, we are so grateful to you for your saving, glorious purposes in Christ. We thank you that you will subdue the universe to him and that we will be there to join in the proclamation that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. At the same time, O God, we thank you that you have included us according to your purpose. Father, we are glad to acknowledge that. We are glad to bow before you and say that salvation was your design, not ours, that it was not our dead heart of stone that prompted us to come to Christ, it was the fact that you drew us by your grace so that you could bestow blessing upon us that we otherwise would have turned away from. You removed our heart of stone and gave us a heart of flesh.

Father, by name Christ died for us. By name, the Spirit worked in us. And now, Father, in response to you dealing with us by name like that, O God, we praise the glory of your name and we honor you and thank you that you have included us in your eternal purpose which you established before the foundation of the world. Lord, we love you. We honor you and we pray that our lives might be increasingly transformed to reflect the affection and obedience that this great gift of you to us should bring forth from our lives.

Father, we pray. We realize that because we have not yet reached the end of time that Christ has not yet been put on display in just exactly this manner, we realize therefore that your work is not yet done. Father, that there are some even in this room who need to put their faith in Christ and we pray that you would work in their heart and draw them to that. Lord, we don't know how much time there is. We don't know the roster of the elect.

We just proclaim the gospel and tell everyone who would listen that Christ died for sinners just like you and if you put your faith in him that he will receive you and you'll have a part in this glory at the end of time. Father, we can't make men believe that. We can't manipulate them into a true response. We're dependent upon you and we pray that you would work in them to that end. Yes Father, we join with Scripture in saying that we who have hoped in Christ are gladly to the praise of your glory. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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