

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:7

“7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom & prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

“The Counsel of His Own Will”

We have been studying the Apostle Paul’s incredible introduction for his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he uses soaring language to summarize God’s grand story of redemption. This morning we will focus on the why of the story as we come to verse 11: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will”

- Understanding how God’s will is worked out in history is a vast subject, but one that is vital to understand, if we are to know the peace that passes understanding!**

I will do my best this morning to give us a proper understanding but at the end we will still declare what the Apostle Paul declares at the end of Romans eleven after spending those eleven chapters giving us all of the details about what he summarized in this introduction to Ephesians:

Romans 11: “33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom & knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments & His ways past finding out! 34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” 35 “Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?” 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

Now one could rightly wonder that IF the Apostle Paul was overwhelmed by the wisdom and knowledge of God, then why should we even try?

Well, I would argue that this is exactly why the Bible spends so much time on this subject and at the same time makes sure that we remember our place as creatures in His creation.

This is one of those important areas where we must NOT put God to the test if you will, by judging whether what He does is right...

- So let me outline what the Bible presents, discuss how we are to react to this, and then see why it is so important to us in our daily lives.

Now the easy way to lay this out is to simply review this long sentence that Paul writes from verse 3 to 14, taking special note of what God does:

“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. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. - and our morning text - 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. [and finally we enter the picture]

13 *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”*

The basic question comes down to this:

- Was our salvation determined by God’s will, our will or both?

Now as we often see there are again two very dangerous ditches to avoid when answering that question:

On the one side is what is often called hyper-calvinism or determinism where God is in charge and men are mere robots with no will, free or otherwise of their own. On the other side we have what is known as Arminianism where man’s will is elevated to the point that God must sit and wait for someone to make a decision before He can save them.

- I hope we can see that the Biblical balance is what is outlined for us in that long sentence.

It is obviously God who is in control of His story and He knows the end from the beginning and works it all out in history according to the good pleasure of His will and the counsel of His will.

God did not consult with anyone as to what the proper course of history would be and He did not use His foreknowledge to see what choices would be made and then adjust His will accordingly!

- **At the same time, Paul says that we are those who heard the word of truth, believed and trusted God!**

Now as I reminded you a few weeks ago when it came to our views about the end times, we must be confident in what we believe the Bible teaches here, but also very patient with with many of our brothers and sisters today: I may cringe when I hear an evangelist say something like, God has voted for you, the devil has voted against you and now you must cast the deciding vote!’...

- **But if a person walks that aisle and believes and trusts the Gospel as Paul stated, then they are truly saved, despite the weak theology of the evangelist.**

Sadly, today many who rightly hold to the truths that the Apostle shares here and elsewhere, do not have such compassion and actually do damage to the Kingdom when you hear them call men like Billy Graham or C.S. Lewis heretics!

Now with that caution in mind, let me explain why a proper foundation is so important here: IF all we had to defend the doctrine of God’s sovereignty in salvation were these few verses in Ephesians, those who want a bigger stress on man’s part might be able to make their case...

- **But God has always made it pretty clear who is in control...**

Consider this passage that many take great comfort in from Isaiah:

40:10 “Behold, Jehovah God shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him. 11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, Measured heaven with a span And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales And the hills in a balance? 13 Who has directed the Spirit of Jehovah, Or as His counselor has taught Him? 14 With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, And taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, And showed Him the way of understanding?”

- **We see this same linkage of salvation with creation in the Gospel according to John.**

John 1 “10 He [Jesus] was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

I will leave John chapters 6 & 10 as your homework, but I do want to visit a couple of Old Testament Saints who learned these lessons the hard way:

- **One was a prideful pagan king and the other a faithful Saint who served God in all that he did.**

Who remembers the account of King Nebuchadnezzar? We usually focus on the lessons from Daniel and His friends and of course all those strange prophetic passages, but God also taught the King who was in control. When we come to chapter four the King again troubled by a dream and Daniel has to come and give the interpretation [explain the dream] Daniel then encourages the King to heed this warning from God: 27 “Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.”

At bottom, the King’s sin was pride as we see just twelve months later when the King takes in the wonder of his kingdom:

30 “The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?”

- **The King takes credit for the blessings God brought to him and then he must suffer those hard knocks as a wild animal for seven long years.**
- **But in the end the King has learned the lessons that Paul is teaching us this morning!**

Daniel 4:34 “ And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, “What have You done?”

Now this of course should remind us of how the Apostle Paul addresses such matters in Romans chapter nine: In this chapter the Apostle laments the loss of many of his fellow Jews and then uses the examples of Isaiah and Jacob to show that God is in control and of course this bring the objection that it is unfair for God to choose one over the other by His own counsel and will:

And thus Paul responds, “14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, & whom He wills He hardens.”

- Here the Apostle Paul anticipates the question that is often asked when we teach that salvation is all of God:

19 “You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?”

- And Paul answers in a way that makes us very uncomfortable in the flesh:

20 “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”

Paul’s question about who are you O man, was asked of the other Saint that I mentioned from the Old Testament. Job was a faithful man who had to trust God in events he could not understand.

While he rightly confounds his unhelpful friends who insisted that he must have grave sins to repent of, Job desires to question God about what is going on to help him understand all that was happening to him... Well, God does give Job that opportunity and it is pretty humbling, just like those seven years eating grass was for the King. At Job 38 we read of God’s answer:

““Who is this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge? 3 Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.”

God then asks a series of questions about His creation [most of which we still have no answers for today] and then concludes at Job 40:1 “ Moreover Jehovah answered Job, and said:

2 “Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.”

Job then teaches us how to properly answers the question raised by Paul back in Romans 11:

3 Then Job answered Jehovah and said: 4 “Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. 5 Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.”

God again challenges Job and by chapter 42 we have a very humble Job responding as he should:

Job 42:1 “I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. 3 You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 4 Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’ 5 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. 6 Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes.”

There are really just three basic responses we can have to this glorious truth about God having mercy on whom He wills:

- We can rest in this truth.
- We can revise this truth.
- We can reject this truth.

If we choose to rest in this truth then we can enjoy the blessings that Jesus shared in John 10:27 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”

- That is the assurance we should have!

The second option is to try and revise this truth to make it more palatable to us and others. Here people try to affirm that God is in control, but then argue that He has ceded some of that control to us when it comes to us making a decision for Christ... Not only is that very difficult to square with the Scriptures, it often leads to a life of doubt, with people always wondering if they really did make the right decisions in the right ways. For myself, I have always pointed out that IF I had anything to do with the decision to place me in the Kingdom then I would manage to find a way out.

And finally, those Pharisees should come to mind as we consider the third option for responding to this truth: We can reject it.

That is not the place where we want to be because it can lead to hearing the most chilling words we find in the New Testament: Matthew 7: “21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

- Rather let us be those who embrace and belief the great truths that the Apostle Paul is teaching us!

It will bring us great comfort, a comfort we are reminded of by that great Preacher Charles Spurgeon in one of his evening devotions:

“We have many things in our possession at the present moment that can be shaken, and it is not good for a Christian to rely upon them, for there is nothing stable beneath these rolling skies; change is written upon all things. Yet we have certain "things that *cannot* be shaken," and I invite you this evening to think of them—

that if the things that can be shaken should all be taken away, you may derive real comfort from the things that cannot be shaken and that will remain. Whatever your losses have been, or may be, you enjoy present salvation. You are standing at the foot of Christ's cross, trusting alone in the merit of His precious blood, and no rise or fall of the markets can interfere with your salvation in Him; no breaking of banks, no failures and bankruptcies can touch that. Then you are *a child of God* this evening. God is your Father. No change of circumstances can ever rob you of that. Even if by loss you are brought to poverty and stripped bare, you can still say, "He is still my Father. In my Father's house are many rooms; therefore I will not be troubled." You have another permanent blessing, namely, *the love of Jesus Christ*. He who is God and man loves you with all the strength of His affectionate nature—nothing can affect that. The fig tree may not blossom, and the flocks may dwindle and wander from the field, but it does not matter to the man who can sing, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." Our best portion and richest heritage we cannot lose."

And as I said at the beginning, when we have spent a lifetime of study on these grand truths, we will in the end conclude as the Apostle Paul does in Romans 11: "33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom & knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments & His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

Communion Meditation: John 6

"26 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.""