

Sermon on Ephesians 1:3-6 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Ephesians 1:3-6

In Christ you are an intentional part of the church for your good and His glory.

Every coming-of-age movie seems to have a similar scene - one that represents a significant human desire and experience. Here is how it usually goes... In the schoolyard there is some pick-up game - dodgeball or basketball - there are two captains and the dreaded picking of teams. Anxious adolescents wait to be picked.

Depending on the story being told, the main character is either an early pick or the last person left after the teams are formed.

So much of life is summed up in that vignette. The inherited longing to be wanted, to be valued, to be chosen.

And we run after all sorts of things to match this longing - but true satisfaction is found ultimately in one place, in one person. Spoiler! It's Jesus.

The picking in Jesus, unlike our experience on the playground, isn't dependent on our skill, or what we bring to the table.

In this letter to the church in Ephesus and Asia we hear of the choosing in a refrain of praise.

Truth of it is meant to enliven us, in worship and the work we are called to as a church.

In Christ you are an intentional part of the church for your good and His glory.

We are taking a few weeks to work through one Greek sentence! There is so much here, it is so rich. Defining truths for the church.

Here Paul the apostle greets the faithful saints and launches into a doxology, a worshipful response. And in the opening stanza of this worship we realize we are picked for purpose.

This is a celebration of God's purpose in us. Everything here is "in Christ." For those believing in him, being united with him in faith.

"Paul uses the language of "in Christ" or "in him" or "in the Lord Jesus" roughly 40 times in Ephesians. The whole of our salvation can be summed up with reference to this reality. Union with Christ is not a single specific blessing we receive in our salvation. Rather it is the best phrase to describe all the blessings of salvation. We have unconditional election in Christ (v. 4), adoption in Christ (v. 5), redemption and forgiveness in Christ (v. 7), and the fulfillment of God's plan in Christ (v. 9), until the final uniting of all things in Christ (v. 10)."

Ephesians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places," (ESV)

Our entire blessedness—our victory, our happiness, our hope—is bound up in our being bound to Christ. How foolish, and ultimately disappointed, are those who stoop to drink from any other fountain.

Every blessing is ours in Christ because God chose us.

Chosen

Usually, when we think of God's selection of us - as his children - we think of it as a schoolyard pick up game. We have to have the reputation as capable, ownership of worthwhile qualities, having accomplished feats of strength! We think God treats us the way we treat other humans.

We come to the gospel however and it sings a different word over us.

The Father chose you to be in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Predestination. Not inserted into the text by eager Calvinists but the reality of our standing before God. What is at play here is what we call the doctrine of election.

“The idea of divine election flows out of the important theme of spiritual union, for election is “in Christ.” The doctrine of election is one of the most central and one of the most misunderstood teachings of the Bible. At its most basic level, election refers to God’s plan whereby he accomplishes his will. The meaning of election is best understood as God’s sovereign initiative in bringing persons to faith in Christ, resulting in a special covenant relationship with him. This theme serves as a foundation to the entire opening section of Ephesians, which includes the phrases God “chose us” (v. 4); “predestined us” (v. 5); and “predestined according to the plan” (v. 11). Paul’s focus on the Christ-centered character of election is vitally important. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. This indicates the centrality of the gospel in God’s plan for history.”

This is not a reality with the intention of making robots of us - or eliminating free will and responsibility - but meant to bolster us when the water rises, to trust that He who formed the church before the world existed will keep his great promises to those he calls his children.

“This is primary truth, and as John Stott, a man known for measured sensibility, says: “The doctrine of election is a divine revelation, not a human speculation.”⁵ It was not dreamed up by Martin Luther or John Calvin or St. Augustine, or by the Apostle Paul for that matter. It is not to be set aside as the imagination of some overactive religious minds, but rather humbly accepted as revelation (however mysterious it may be) from God. We must never allow our subjective experience of choosing Christ to water down the fact that we would not have chosen him if he had not first chosen us (cf. John 6:44; 15:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-7). The doctrine of election presents us with a God who defies finite analysis. It is a doctrine that lets God be God.” Hughes

Even if you are confident you chose Jesus - Scripture tells us God chose you.

Jesus would make it clear himself.

In an exchange about not working for food that perishes, Jesus calls the crowds to believe in him, that is the work of God.

John 6:35–40 “Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. [36] But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. [37] All that the Father gives

me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. [38] For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. [39] And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. [40] For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (ESV)

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, the church, those that believe in Jesus are that which the Father gives to the Son. You are chosen.

There is something comforting, fortifying in this truth.

Knowing you better than you know yourself, God said “I choose you.”

This is both corporate and personal. God chose before time, the church and the saints that are built into a spiritual house.

When you are anxious about life, uncertain you have what it takes, when you find yourself wandering toward other people or things for belonging, know that even at you worst, God chose you.

And he chose you for a purpose.

Purpose

According to the purpose of his will - the unity of all things in Christ, our ultimate destination - he chose us to do something in and through us. Three things: transformation, adoption, glory.

Transformation

Ephesians 1:4 “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love” (ESV)

We are chosen to be holy and blameless. Holiness and blamelessness are the results, not the basis, of God’s election.

Those that are in Christ are meant for sanctification - becoming more like Jesus.

We have already talked about how through the work of Jesus for us we have been made saints (set apart for him) those who are full of faith in him. Now comes the promise of transformation.

Colossians 1:17–23 “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

[21] And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, [22] he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, [23] if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (ESV)

We keep faith and sanctification is worked out in us.

In Christ, you are not left where you were, trapped, enslaved to sin, but you are now free and increasingly given victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Discipleship keeps before us this promise of transformation as God’s purpose in us. We are meant for more, that the fragrance of Jesus would rise from us.

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24] He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” (ESV)

“The saying goes, “God loves you too much to leave you the way you are.” It is true! He is not asking us to start a self-help program or struggle toward perfection. He is perfection! If we will allow His life to grow in us, we will truly be sanctified and blameless at His coming.” Jack Hayford

It’s what you were chosen for. To be like Jesus.

Being chosen is not just about making you different. It is also about making you family.

Adoption

Ephesians 1:5 “he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,” (ESV)

Not as servants, not merely as acquaintances, but as sons. Heirs with Christ.

“When God chose you, he had a purpose, and so he predestined that purpose to come about, namely, that you would become a child of God. That you would be part of his family. That you would become an heir of all that God owns. That you would take on the family likeness...We are destined to take on the character of God our Father, the character of holiness and blamelessness. That's our destiny.”
John Piper

We can get stuck thinking of God as far-off and aloof. That he is a grumpy figure in the sky that we better be careful around. Sadly, some of us have had fathers that kind of matched that description.

But with a good father, there is a stressless freedom of existence. Peace in being protected by that father, secure, and spurred on to great things. This is what Jesus brings us into.

John 1:9–13 “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. [11] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. [12] But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (ESV)

God’s divine purpose of predestination is that those chosen are adopted into his family through the finished work of Christ. Male or female, in Christ you have sonship!

“In the Roman world, sons were adopted to carry on the family name and maintain property ownership. The adopted son was no longer responsible to his natural father but was only responsible to his new adoptive father. Similarly, all believers, male and female, who receive the Spirit that brings about adoption (Rom 8:15, 23) acquire a new status with its accompanying privileges and responsibilities. We are no longer obligated to our old father, the devil (John 8:38, 44).”

Now for the church “Father” is God’s name.

“If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. “Father” is the Christian name for God.” J.I. Packer

Jesus, not ashamed to call us brother or sister, brings us in, gives us family, gives us the belonging we long for.

This is why we value adoption of children at Reservoir - it reflects the gospel with such clarity. Given family, inheritance, security, identity in Christ.

God’s work of predestination was done “according to the purpose of his will” (v. 5). It was done in accordance with his “purpose,” indicating that the choosing of his people was something in which God delighted. And it was done in accordance with his “will.” God has a definite plan and redemptive purpose for adopting wayward sinners into his family.

In transformation and adoption so much changes. Living in His way, loving, setting aside idols of culture religious and otherwise.

All of this to spotlight his grace.

Glory

Ephesians 1:6 “to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” (ESV)

Our experience of every spiritual blessing, being chosen, made new, adopted, all of this is for the praise of his glorious grace in Jesus.

He chose us, changes us, makes us children, for his renown.

God’s ultimate purpose is not redemption as such but the praise of his glorious name through redemption. And this is good news for us because redemption is still ours!

His grace that we experience in Christ, this unmerited favor that brings us in and gives us purpose.

“To the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.” God is essentially glorious. When God glorifies his grace, he glorifies his whole character. Grace becomes a platform upon which all the perfections of deity exhibit themselves, and grace becomes a light which shines on all the rest; and they, albeit bright enough in themselves, seem to be doubly bright when they glow in its brilliance.” Spurgeon

His glory is good because he is good to us and when we have encountered this grace we can’t help but praise in response to it.

Now the purpose of the church is to exalt him - as ambassadors of Christ wherever he puts us. Living for others to see the transformation he works, to welcome others into the family. For the glory of God.

In Christ you are an intentional part of the church for your good and His glory.

Rest in his choice - You are his. Secure in Christ. This is your place of belonging, of identity, of eternity, in Jesus. Believe in him.

Lean into his purpose - Pursue holiness in community for his glory and your good. And know that he has you. His promise will bring you all the way home.

“We were made to be sustained by a meaningful, purposeful future. We were made to be strengthened each day by this assurance, this confidence: that what is happening in our lives today, no matter how mundane and ordinary, is a really significant step toward something great and good and beautiful tomorrow.” *As chosen, transformed, adopted children of God in Christ.* “If you are trusting in Jesus Christ this morning, the roots of your life were planted in the eternal counsels of God, and the branches of your life are growing into an absolutely sure and glorious future with God. There are no unimportant days in your life. You don't ever have to go to bed at night feeling that your life is going nowhere. You don't ever have to give in to the lie that you are not connected to an awesome purpose.” JP

This is your in Christ.

Jude 24–25 “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, [25] to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (ESV)