

07/15/12 Sermon – Ephesians 1:3–7,13–14
Ascension Batavia

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:3–7 (NKJV)

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

Ephesians 1:13 (NKJV)

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,

Ephesians 1:14 (NKJV)

14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

God Plans with Certainty

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20–21 (NKJV))

In Jesus' Name,

Dear fellow citizens with the saints and fellow members of the household of God,

In this age of text messaging and GPS, there seems to be no need to plan ahead anymore. You can simply jump in the car, enter the address into your GPS, call or text the person you are going to meet, and off you go. Or, you simply say, “I’ll call you when I am close.” Add to this our busy lives; add sports, after school activities, summer school, both husband and wife working, kids working, and ever changing work schedules. We find our lives are hardly even planned beyond tomorrow.

However God, on the other hand, who dwells in eternity, for whom a thousand years is as one day, as He views all things in the blink of His almighty eye, He does not plan last minute changes. He does not wonder if He will be able to make His appointments on time or whether He will reach His destination. God plans with certainty.

1. Plans in Christ

As of Sept. 30, 2010 there were over 100,000 children in the foster care system waiting for adoption. As parents around the world decide to adopt a child, there are many factors to consider. The wait for an adoption averages around a year. After a couple has been on that waiting list and has been preparing and anticipating the adoption of the child for some 12 or even 24 months; after the room has been painted and the crib set up, there is always the possibility that the adoption will not go through. Some 20% of potential adoptions end in disruption. Disruption is a break in the process before the adoption is finalized.

God plans an adoption with no such statistics. God plans don't hinge on the uncertainty of mankind and this world, but rather God plans in Christ.

(v.4,5). That word “adoption” that Paul uses is actually the legal term in his day for the adoption of children. We were chosen, that is elected to become sons of God. We read also in Galatians, **Galatians 4:5–7 (NKJV) — 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ... 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**

We have gone from possessing the rights of a slave to possessing the rights of a son. Before we were yet born, in fact, as we read, “before the foundation of the world” God had chosen us for this destiny; hence “predestined.” This is what we call the doctrine of election: God planning for your salvation in Christ. And God plans with certainty.

Yet this calls to mind a question. How is it that God chose us? What were His requirements. God might have certainty about His decision, but how can we?

v.4 – He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Think of what this meant for God who knows all things. He foresaw not just your election, but also your sins. He foresaw how even after having trusted in Christ for salvation we would still have rebellious impulses. We would run away from home back to our biological parent – sin. For apart from Christ we are called slaves of sin. Our parent by nature is ever seeking to disrupt the adoption. He lures us by the supposed satisfaction he offers.

God saw all this. God saw the big sins and the small sins. One contributing factor for disrupted adoptions involve cases where the child has special needs. Some 14% of special need adoptions end in disruption. God chose not just the special needs children, but the totally helpless. He chose those who hated Him, and wanted nothing to do with Him. “We were by nature children of wrath.” Having foreseen all sins you and I have ever committed including yesterday, including last week, He still planned your redemption in Christ. He still sent His Son to the cross to sacrifice innocent blood. He saw even those who would reject this free gift of His grace and still He punished His Son for their sins, for your sins, for my sins.

(v.7) That word redemption means “to buy back” as of a slave or captive. The word emphasizes the payment of a ransom. That payment, the riches, was all a gift in Christ, expecting nor demanding anything in return. Pure grace. Reserved for sinners but

undeserved by sinners. As Martin Luther penned, “A father’s heart He turned to me, Sought my redemption fervently: He gave His dearest Treasure.”

This section of God’s Word completely debunks any teaching that would attribute any credit on my part for my coming to faith. As we see in chapter 2, **even when we were dead in sin, made us alive together with Christ**. God’s plan to save you was made IN CHRIST. Over 13 times in chapter 1 we find references to “in Him” or “according to His grace.” All these emphasizing that God took salvation out of our doomed hands and placed them into Jesus’ holy hands.

v.5 – **According to the good pleasure of His will**. This was not a decision for Christ that was up to you to make. It was not the altar call that Billy Graham made so popular. No, rather John writes, **John 1:12–13 (NKJV) — 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.**

As we went out with the Traveling Vacation Bible School this last week for flyer distribution, initially I was formulating a plan to be sure each year we progress through all the surrounding neighborhoods without missing a single house. However as the distribution went on, we didn’t reach every single house and though it was organized, it wasn’t a perfect marketing scheme. We are now reminded that it is not the precision of our great outreach plans that will save souls. Rather it is only by the plan of God that He will make use of those flyers to bring His effective word into the heart of even one of those whom we reach out to. “...who were born not of the will of man, but of God.”

The certainty does not rest with us. And what certainty that brings us. For salvation rests not with you or with me. It rests not on what you have done, not by your believing, or what you have done to prove yourself a Christian. Nor does it rests with what you and I haven’t done. Multitude of one’s works does not influence this redemption, nor does the magnitude of one’s sin. (**v.6**) All glory goes to Him alone for He planned your certain salvation in Christ.

2. Plans for blamelessness

So in your hurried life, things not going according to plan, you leave the store and hurried off through the parking lot too fast. A car smashes into your passenger side door. So when you get the car to the auto body mechanic he tells you he thinks he can remove all blemishes. This really good body technician is able to straighten, buff, repaint and resurface the metal so that virtually no one knows that the accident ever happened. But no matter what he does, you will always be able to identify exactly where the damage was. You will always see a blemish.

To be “without blame” is to be “without defect or blemish.” (**v.4**) So often we try to buff and rebuff, to paint over our blemishes. So often we try to hammer out our dents so they won’t be noticeable. As children, you don’t want your parents to know that you

were climbing on their dresser and broke expensive item of mom's. Or as parents, you don't want your children to know you are speeding because you didn't plan ahead to get them to their appointment on time.

How much more don't want God to see what we have done or thought! Despite how much the world tries to buff out those defects, God will always know they are there. I don't know if you've ever seen Mr. Bean, but in one of his movies he finds himself in a closet with an original Mona Lisa. After having sneezed on it he tries to rub it off with a rag. He soon discovers that the solution he was using to clean the painting was paint thinner and the work of art becomes a smeared mess.

Our blemishes cannot be worked out or fixed by us. So how is it that God can expect us to be blameless. Well, the answer is two fold. Firstly, our damage will only be repaired in Christ.

Verse 7 uses a present tense to emphasize not just a past redemption, but an ongoing forgiveness: **In Him we are having the redemption.** So also the Catechism in the explanation to the third article: "in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives sins to me and all believers." Our blameless and holy appearance is only through God's ongoing forgiveness through that spotless sacrifice, Jesus.

v.3, God has **blessed us with every spiritual blessing.** He chose in Christ to declare us holy and without blame before Him. Secondly, then we are called to make visible what is invisible. These spiritual blessings are in the heavenly places. They exist in the place where God dwells. But now, we bring them to earth and make them visible for all to see as we reflect God's love in the way we live our lives.

This is the call to walk blameless now before the world. ... **In love.** Love in Christ is truly holy living. It was our Lord's whole purpose to walk in love. And now this love is ours to share with each other. We flee sin to serve God. No longer is our life driven by the plans of our sinful flesh, but we are driven by love. We serve our spouse, we resist the temptation to take the easy way, and we look with new care for the needs of those around us. Seeing what God gave up for the sake of even those who have rejected Him, we give up ourselves also for those who hate us. God planned for blamelessness.

3. Plans for full redemption

As we said before, planned adoptions can and do fall through. Yet more often than not, they do go according to plan. What a joy it is when the adoption goes through. What a blessing when one child is taken from poverty or from a mess of orphans with more needs than can be met and is placed into the care of loving parents. What an even greater joy when those parents raise that child in the care of the Lord – when they teach that child about Jesus and the redemption that is ours in Him.

God has planned your full redemption – the adoption of your soul and body to be with Him forever. He has made the down payment. (**v.13,14**) Literally, **who is the first**

installment ... the down payment of our inheritance. Think now of redemption in the fullest sense. In the first place our redemption is to be bought back from sin and given faith and life even while yet in this world. In the fullest sense, the Bible also talks about redemption of our whole being – the buying back of both our soul and body from sin and death. This is the inheritance of heaven. God plans for full redemption with certainty.

We had this hope mentioned in our preservice devotion at the beginning of your service folder. Peter in his first epistle mentions that God **1 Peter 1:3–5 (NKJV) – 3 ... according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

By the power of God we are kept safe. The Spirit is the down payment, the security deposit for your soul. The Spirit should be thought of as the living word working in you. We see this in v.13 – ... **after you heard the word of truth.**

There is our guarantee, the Spirit in the Word, creating trust to believe that Jesus has indeed given Himself for you. This is the living hope that as our Lord has risen from the dead, so also will we rise. This is the living knowledge that all our sins are forgiven and that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. This is the Word of truth – a powerful force by which God makes us His own. He promises that He who believes and is baptized will be saved. Your election is as sure as your baptism, for therein you received the seal of the Holy Spirit as God reveals His election in Christ.

God will redeem the purchased possession. When God makes that payment and calls you His own, He will see it through until the full purchase is in His hands. He possesses you at the cost of His dearest treasure. Should we doubt the power of Almighty God to keep His possessions safe from thieves?

Parents that choose to adopt look at that child as their own. They don't think in terms of biology but they think in terms of love. How much more deeply does God think of you as His own. He has not just adopted you, but has paid your ransom. He has delivered you from the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love. He has planned your full redemption, to bring you from here to there, not with probability, but with certainty. He will redeem His purchased possession.

With the frequent changing of jobs, and difficulty getting time off, you can hardly plan much beyond this month, and rarely are those plans in your control. More often your plans are controlled by work, by appointments, by commitments, and by children. However God is not bound by anyone or anything. He is absolutely free to plan according to His will – and in that will He chose you in Christ.

All praise belongs to His glory alone. He has done it all. He has planned in Christ. He has planned for blamelessness. He has planned your full redemption. He has planned with certainty.

We normally end Sermons, prayer and some hymns with the word "Amen." How fitting it is to end with a word which means: "It is certain" for nothing in Christ could be more certain ... "Amen."