

**Ephesians...Practicing Resurrection
Predestined for Power!
Ephesians 1:11-23
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Last week we summarized the first ten verses of Ephesians with the phrase **God starts everything...our response is to receive**. If we can receive God's blessing, then we will become more like God. And for many of us, Major League Baseball gave us an image of humbly receiving grace and offering amazing grace; the image of a weeping umpire and a smiling pitcher demonstrated how God's grace shows up when perfection is ruined. This morning let's finish Paul's opening celebration of the Gospel:

¹¹In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Clearly, God starting everything means that **God initiates our salvation**. Many Christians seem surprised with the Bible telling us that God chose us, that we have been predestined according to a divine plan. But God's love is not random. God is not waiting to see who shows up; He is relentlessly in His pursuit of people.

Sin separates people from God. Our rebellion against God has caused a great chasm that put great distance between us and the holy God. Though every religion tries, it's not possible for us to build a bridge to God. God chose to build a bridge to us, and develop a plan to bring people across the bridge. Here was God's strategy. He chose to call a group of people (the Jews) into a relationship, and then use them to build God's bridge to the whole human race. So God revealed Himself to Abraham, making his descendents a covenant people—saved by grace, in order be a holy people, an example to the world.

It will help you understand if you write the names of the people Paul refers to. So when Paul wrote that *in him [Christ] we [Jews] were also chosen*, God was anticipating the Messiah when he initiated His relationship with the Jews; this strategy had been *predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we [the Jews], who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory*. Faithful Jewish who welcomed their Messiah blessed God and God's world.

Then in verse 13 Paul turns his attention to the Gentiles, immoral idol worshippers: *And you [Gentiles] also were included in Christ when you [Gentiles] heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation*. After the day of Pentecost, Spirit-filled Jews shared Jesus, their Messiah, with their pagan neighbors. A miracle happened—Jews and Gentiles became brothers and sisters in Christ. So you see, God predestined that He would have a family; He first chose Jews in order to create a pathway that would also include Gentiles.

Inquiring minds want to know whether God chooses to predestine certain individuals to heaven and predestined others for destruction. Do people have any choice, or is our eternal destiny determined for us?

This passage talks about God choosing and people believing; people's faith is always a response to God's relentless pursuit of us. When I teach classes on the doctrine of predestination, I try to demonstrate how Reformed ancestors were on solid biblical ground to put the emphasis on God's sovereignty, though they sometimes ignored the passages that emphasize that God wants a relationship, and relationships involve people's choices, and the passages that emphasize that God wants a relationship with everyone. Verse 13 is clear that Gentiles are *included in Christ when they hear and believe*.

This illustration helps me. Imagine that you receive a letter telling you to show up at a lawyer's office, and when you do, she informs you that you had a rich uncle who died and left you an inheritance of \$10 million. Wow! You could never save that much money in a lifetime, but your uncle chose to set it aside and makes arrangements to give it to you. But the \$10 million ain't yours till you hear the news and accept the check. I suppose that you could choose to refuse such a gift; but if you understand how good it is, you will accept it! And how foolish it would be to make a big deal out of how you believed the news and claimed the check. Friends, such unconditional and life-changing grace would fill you with sheer gratitude!

God set aside far more than \$10 million for you! Hearing the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation is far better than the news of a financial legacy—just you wait and see! Not that God waits; the rest of verse 13 shows us that having initiated our salvation, **God secures His investment**. *Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit*. When we welcome the gift of Jesus, we become bearers of the Holy Spirit, and become saints in God's eyes. Through the Spirit we have a relationship with God that will never end, because God never gives up on us. As verse 14 says that the Spirit is *a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory*.

If we are in Christ, our resurrection is secure; as Eugene Peterson wrote, until our final redemption, we are to "practice resurrection" on earth. Practicing resurrection means that we in the church are in the business of overcoming death even before we breathe our last. Let's hear from verses 15 to 23 and discover how **God empowers His saints**.

¹⁵For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²²And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Grateful for the faith and love of the Ephesian church, the apostle remembered them in his prayers. If we allow the apostle's words to speak directly to us...the prayer is that God would give you and I...

*a spirit of wisdom and revelation...
so that you may **know Him better***

Paul prays that the Holy Spirit within you forges your experience into wisdom while revealing new insights in your own transformation—the Spirit gives you a spirit of wisdom and revelation. It is our joy not just to know about God but more so, to enjoy a deeper relationship, to sense God's presence within us, and how God goes before us. And the apostle prays that...

*the eyes of your heart may be enlightened
so you know
-the **hope** which he has called you
-the **riches** of his glorious inheritance in the saints
-his incomparably **great power***

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and crowned him the Lord of the universe!

As much as you and I are tempted to focus our prayers on health issues, this is the most relevant prayer Christians can make for themselves and others. We should bring everything to God in prayer, but please remember that the prayer God wants to hear most, the prayer God is most likely to answer with an overwhelming yes is the prayer that the eyes of our hearts would be opened to our hope, the riches we inherit with the saints, and his incomparable, resurrection power that is available.

It's no secret that many Christ-followers feel power-less to withstand temptation, power-less to become more holy, power-less in being conduits of blessings to others. Years ago, a Presbyterian pastor in Philadelphia, Jack Miller, started to realize how low his congregation's expectations were about God's promise to give us power to overcome Satan and advance God's Kingdom. In his wonderful little book, Outgrowing the Ingrown Church, he describes how he came to the place where he decided that he would act upon the Bible's promises of power, instead of acting on the basis of his feelings. The basic problem is that we don't trust God, and so we don't ask God, and so we never see God moving in a powerful way. So as a pastor he started praying for revival, and challenging church members to ask God boldly to use them to bless other people's lives.

One of the most tangible areas of trust is the way that members of the church started getting involved in helping those in need, even when their problems were "messy," having them into their homes for meals, and sometimes even having them stay. The surest sign of spiritual power was when members no longer came to worship to get comforted and propped up, but when they came to celebrate what God was doing through them, and asking God to take them deeper and further, that they might know His power more and more.

May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for we who believe. Ephesians 1:18-19