

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 1:3-4 - Praise God for Predestination - Part 1

This morning we are launching into this first section in Ephesians and Paul wastes no time wading into the deep water. He opens up this epistle with the doctrine of predestination and God's sovereign will in salvation.

These are big topics. This is the deep end of the theological pool but I think it's really good for us to be able to dive deep into what the Bible has to say.

Definition: Predestination is the choice of God in eternity past to choose some for salvation and others for damnation, without regard to merit.

God chose who he chose for his own good pleasure.

There are people who might quibble that definition a little bit. But at the end of the day we're discussing the eternal and unchangeable plan of God in saving some and not others.

For Christians this is a joyous doctrine. Or it should be a joyous doctrine. Because without predestination you wouldn't be saved. You wouldn't be a Christian. Without God's sovereign work in our lives when we were dead in our sins we'd still be dead in our sins.

And so everywhere you see this doctrine in the Bible the response from the biblical authors is always of praise to God. It's never troublesome, never angst or frustration. It's always a glorious doctrine to the people of God.

Now, there are a lot of people who want to avoid this subject for a variety of reasons. Maybe it makes them uncomfortable - they don't like the idea of God deciding the eternal fate of people.

Maybe it seems unfair - how can God choose some people for salvation and not others? How can he do that? **Rom. 9.**

Maybe it seems to conflict with other passages: Joshua saying to Israel that they need to choose this day who they will follow. Jesus says whoever believes is saved.

I also know some have had bad experiences just talking about the subject. Those who hold to strong view of predestination are usually called Calvinists. I consider myself a Calvinist. The term isn't a great one, but for the most part I'm fine with it. But a lot of times those in the Calvinist camp aren't very kind or gracious in the discussion.

But nevertheless these words and themes are all throughout the Bible. And the Bible uses a bunch of different terms to refer to this issue.

"Choose" = Read 4

So the word choose is often used and a number of related words. Chosen, Chose. God is the subject, and we are the object. He chose us.

Jesus said to his disciples: You did not choose me, but what? I chose you.

That Greek word is also translated "elect" or "elected." Just like when we elect a president or senator, they were chosen. Same thing in terms of salvation. When God elected us, he chose us. This verb "to choose" is used 22 times in the NT, and the noun is used 22 times in the NT. (Storms, *Chosen for Life*)

"Predestine" is used 6 times in the NT. **Read 5, 11**

"God's purpose" **Read 5, 9, 11**

So every detail in all the universe is unfolding according to the purpose of God, and specifically our salvation is being worked out according to the sovereign will of God.

We also see words like “ordain,” “sovereign,” “determine,” “appoint.” And then there are just general concepts of God’s sovereignty which are often seen when talking about predestination.

Turn to Prov. 16 for a minute. And let me tell you a story while you’re turning.

When I was saved at 14 I went to a church that preached the gospel, but didn’t really talk much about theology or do expositional preaching. As a result, I had never really wrestled with many difficult doctrines within the Bible. When I got to Bible college the first doctrinal discussion I had was about predestination. I was driving to the beach with some friends and someone asked me what I believed. And I said “Well, God chooses those who chose him, right?” And my friends proceeded to absolutely destroy me with passage after passage about predestination, election, God’s sovereignty, how salvation happens. On and on.

At the time I began going to John MacArthur’s church and they have building about the size of our church building. The building was called the tape shack. It’s where they kept all of John’s sermons in cassette tape. Kids, you can ask your parents to show you a cassette tape on YouTube or something.

Anyway, I started listening to sermons on the topic of predestination, God’s sovereignty, election. I was also reading my Bible more than ever seeing these themes everywhere - basically on every page of the Bible. And it was almost like going from seeing things in black and white to things having color. My understanding of the sovereignty of God and the greatness of God increased. I began to understand that God really is free to do whatever he wants.

And it became clear that God does whatever he wants in nature and in history but also in my life. And as the realization was hitting home that God really just is in sovereign control of all things. The greatness of God and sovereignty of God - all the way down to me, my individual salvation - was not only everywhere but it was humbling.

And part of the reason I believed this was because it became apparent on almost every page of the Bible. And **Read 16:1, 4, 7, 9, 33; 19:21, 21:1.**

I used Proverbs for a few reasons. First, it doesn’t use the words “predestine” or “choose” but you get the idea of God’s sovereignty over all things, don’t you?

Also, Proverbs is for practical living. The notion of God’s sovereignty and purpose is very practical. It’s not just philosophical banter; it’s not just what you argue with your friends about at camp. You guys the sovereignty of God, and predestining work of God actually has an effect in our lives.

Spurgeon: The sovereignty of God is the pillow upon which the Christian rests his head.

When you know that our sovereign God is in control of every detail of the cosmos including all the stuff going on in your life, you can rest peacefully.

I also turned to Proverbs because it’s not a book you’d normally think expounds on God’s sovereignty. We could have turned to Isaiah. Or Genesis - Joseph says to his brothers “what you meant for evil, God meant for what? Good. What was he talking about? They sold Joseph into a miserable life and lied to their father so that God could use him to save his family.

Exodus: Pharaohs heart being hardened over and over by God which Paul uses in this discussion in Romans 9.

Deuteronomy 7 where Israel was chosen by God. God raising up Judges by his own will. It’s just all over.

Paul is told to keep preaching in Corinth in **Acts 18**. Why? Jesus says “I have many in this city who are my people.” They’re not saved yet, they haven’t even heard the gospel yet. But they were chosen from before the

foundation of the world and God is going to use Paul to preach the gospel to them and they will believe and be saved.

Why do we preach the gospel to our friends and family and coworkers and neighbors? Because there's a good chance that some of them are actually the elect people of God who just haven't heard the gospel yet. They'll hear, maybe once, maybe it takes hundreds of times over the years, and eventually God will open their blinded eyes, and raise them to spiritual life.

By the way, this is why you pray to God for the salvation of your friends and family. When you pray to God to save someone, you pray like a Calvinist. "God save my mom. God save my son. God open their eyes and give them repentance." You want God to do something in their lives to bring them to faith.

No one prays like an Arminian: "Lord, I want my mom saved, but don't violate her free will. Somehow, God, do something, where they believe on their own, but you don't intrude because that would bother me and be a problem for free will." No one prays like that.

Everyone prays like God has to do all the work of saving, don't they? "God save them. Please." What are we asking? For God to do a spiritual miracle in them, like he did a spiritual miracle in us. Because he is the only one who can raise the dead back to life.

One more note before we dive into Ephesians: God put this doctrine in the Bible on purpose. It's not like God accidentally let it slip that he predestines and somehow we stumbled on this thing that's a big secret. No, it's all over the place.

Calvin himself says: "When we inquire into predestination we are entering the sanctuary of divine wisdom." This is holy and sacred ground - this is like the holy of holies of God's Word. (Calvin, John. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1541 version, translated by Robert White, pg. 464)

He goes on about predestination..."[God] thought it good to impart to us ...everything which he knew was relevant and rewarding to us." (Ibid.)

That's important. Predestination is relevant to us. It's needful. And it's rewarding. It's good. A lot of people say "I don't want to talk about that because it's just arguing about stuff that doesn't matter." No. God put it in here on purpose because it does matter. And saying it doesn't matter is actually saying God messed up. Now it's good and rewarding.

Calvin goes on to say, "Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit. In it, just as nothing has been omitted which is [good] and useful to know, so nothing has been taught which cannot be profitably understood." (Ibid. pg. 465)

You get what he's saying? The Holy Spirit wrote this down on purpose for our good. He's right. It wasn't a mistake that this is in here. The Spirit moved the authors to put it in here so that we would know God and take comfort and encouragement.

This doctrine is for our edification. It's for our good and sanctification. It should humble us and make us more like Jesus.

Some people will say that election and predestination are "hidden things of the Lord" and "What can we really know about it?" Actually we can know a lot about it because God talks a lot about it. It's not a mystery. It's quite clear. Usually the people who want to make it a mystery are often the ones who don't like the doctrine and call it a "secret thing of the Lord" because they don't want to talk about it.

But God talks about it. He talks about it more than baptism, the Lord's Supper, marriage, spiritual gifts, hell, qualifications for elders or deacons, more than what music we should sing in church.

No one would say "We just don't talk about baptism because that's a secret thing that belongs to the Lord." No one would say "Well, God didn't say much on marriage so we just don't talk about it."

No, we should know it, love it, and rejoice in it.

And actually the title of my sermon is the big picture this morning: Praise God for predestination. Really, our knee jerk reaction to the doctrine of predestination should be “Thank you, Lord!, for choosing me!” Let’s go back to **Eph 1** and begin unpacking this section. **Read 3-5**

So we’re going to unpack **Vss. 3-6** this morning. Just a disclaimer: it will take us several weeks to get through this section. It so rich and powerful. I just want to touch on 3 points this morning and will build over the next few weeks.

1 - Response to predestination **Read 3-4**

Before Paul even tells us what he’s talking about, he gives the attitude that we should have: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And what he means by that is “Praise be to God!” Praise God! Praise the God and Father of Jesus our Lord.

He goes on to tell us why: because he’s blessed us with every blessing through choosing us. He predestined us. He gave us an inheritance. On and on.

But the reaction we should have to the doctrine of predestination and God’s choosing should be one of praise and thankfulness. And specifically the praise is directed toward one person in the Trinity. Who is that? The Father. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Father specifically chose each Christian for salvation before the world began. Which means that the Father chose you - you - for salvation before **Genesis 1:1**. He had you on his mind to redeem and adopt and forgive and give every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places to.

And he chose you in Christ. So Christ’s role in this is to do the actual work of redemption on the cross. And the Spirit takes the work of Christ and credits it to your account.

So the Father planned your redemption, the Son accomplished your redemption and the Spirit took the Son’s work and applied it to your account.

But it was the Father specifically who chose you and chose me before the world began. And we praise him specifically for our predestination.

Guys: stop and think about that for a minute. The reason you love God and have your sins forgiven is that he chose you. “Father, thank you for choosing me.”

Imagine waking up one day and your phone rings and it’s a lawyer from NVIDIA, And he says, “Hey, so interesting thing: our CEO died and chose to leave you with half the company. So you’re in charge now and you’re now and have billions of dollars.” I think our jaws would hit the ground and we’d be floored.

Why me? I don’t even know what an NVIDIA is, I’m not even sure what to do with this.

Well, listen, we don’t have some petty inheritance from the stock market. It turns out the Son of God died and left us an eternal inheritance far greater than stocks or gold. How do we know that? Because he rose from the dead. And in the Father’s wisdom, we get every spiritual blessing imaginable in the heavenly places. Every blessing and honor that Jesus has, we get too.

We get to reign with him. We get an inheritance that belongs to him, we get eternal life with him. We’re adopted into the family. Why? **Read 4**

Because the Father chose us in him. Thank you, God!

The response to predestination, to God’s choosing is always praise.

Psalm 33:12: Blessed is the nation whose God is Yahweh, the people he has chosen as His own inheritance.

Praise God he chose us! And maybe you think: well, that just applies to OT Israel - his chosen nation. No, Peter says we who believe in Jesus are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Christians are the nation that God has chosen.

Psalm 105:5-6: Remember his marvelous works which he has done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth, O seed of Abraham His servant, you children of Jacob his chosen ones!

Never forget, you guys, that you are chosen of God! Never forget his marvelous works. "But that's just for the Jews - the children of Abraham!" You know what Paul says in **Gal. 3?** He says that it is those who are of faith - Christians - who are the sons of Abraham. You and me through faith in Jesus are the sons and daughters of Abraham. Remember that! He chose you.

Psalm 105:43: He brought out his people with joy, His chosen ones with singing.

He brings Israel out of bondage and slavery and poverty and ruin. All the while they're complaining and miserable and disobedient. The psalmist says he chose them and brought them out with gladness.

I don't know about you but sometimes I wonder why God chose me and maybe he wants to change his mind. But can I tell you something? He chose me, and he chose you, with joy and with singing. Just like he brought Israel out of Egypt with joy and singing, he has brought you out of sin with joy and singing.

After a 3-chapter long marathon on the predestining work of God throughout history and in us gentiles, and the chosen of the Jews and his grand master plan this is how Paul ends in **Rom. 11:34-36:** For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given him a gift that he might be repaid? No one.

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To God be the glory forever. Amen.

The electing/predestining work of God is amazing and humbling and jaw dropping. And our response should simply be praise.

So let me ask you: when you think of predestination is your response praise? Or is it irritation? Or do you roll your eyes? Or do you want to avoid it? Or do you want to beat Arminians over the head with it?

The only reaction, our knee jerk reaction, should be Paul's: Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 - The Extent of Predestination - Read 3

Usually when we talk of salvation we mention that we were sinners on our way to hell. We were facing an eternity of the wrath of God because of our sins. But God in his mercy put our sin on Christ who paid the punishment for our sins. All that is true. Amen and amen.

But the forgiveness of our sins is just the beginning of the grace of God. We don't just barely sneak into heaven with our sins forgiven. Paul makes it clear here that God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

In heaven - that's the heavenly realms - we have waiting for us blessings that indescribable. God didn't just plan your salvation. He planned your entire eternity. And he's planned to bless you for all eternity. **Look at 2:6-7 Read**

Think about that. In the coming ages - that's eternity future - God continue to pour out immeasurable grace and kindness to us. In heaven every day is better than the last because every day God pours out more and more grace and kindness on us.

What does that mean? I don't even know. When Paul saw heaven it was so amazing he couldn't even describe it. But we can trust that if God says it's amazing and gets better and better we can believe it.

Every spiritual blessing possible is poured out on us for all eternity God has planned for his elect from eternity past.

So we have the reaction to predestination. The Extent of predestination.

3 - Direction of predestination. Read 4

What do I mean by direction? What I mean is that God chose us. We didn't chose God. He chose us.

There are a lot of people who get the direction wrong. They think we chose God. And because we chose Him, he therefore chose us. That somehow God looked down the halls of time in eternity past and saw who would choose him and so he chose the ones who would choose him.

Or somehow God is still in the act of choosing people now. That if you believe in God, the God believes in you and chooses you - right then and there.

But that's not what the Bible says. It never says that. It says just the opposite. God chose us. That's the direction. He chose us.

Vs. 5: he predestined us. We didn't predestine ourselves. We didn't predestine God to predestine us. That doesn't make any sense. He predestined us.

Vs. 11: We obtained an inheritance. Why? Why do you have an eternal inheritance waiting in heaven for you? Having been predestined according to the purpose of our will! No, it doesn't say that. According to the purpose of his will. It's his will that's primary.

Now, for those of you who can remember your conversion. I know there's a lot of you who have believed so long you don't remember a time when you didn't believe. Praise God for that testimony. But for those of you who can remember. Do you remember that moment when you thought: I just want Jesus. He died for me, for my sins, he rose, he's my Lord, I'm in. And your heart changed to love him. Do you remember that?

What happened in that very moment where your heart changed and melted into loving Jesus was that God spiritually took out your heart of stone and gave you a heart of flesh.

Or to use Ezekiel's language, you were a dead skeleton and your dead bones came back to life.

Turn to John 6. So many places we could turn. But here we see the crux of the issue. **Read 35-40**

So truth one: you want to come to Jesus? Come. You'll never ever thirst. He will give you eternal life.

But why do you come to Jesus? **Vs. 37?** Because the Father gave you to Jesus. And every single person that Father has given to Jesus will come to him. And Jesus will never cast you out.

Again, notice the order. You didn't come to Jesus and therefore the Father gave you to Jesus. No. The Father gave you - in eternity past to Jesus - and you will come to him.

And if you have believed on Jesus you will 100% be raised up in the resurrection on the last day. Why? Because Jesus is going to accomplish absolutely everything he was sent to do by the Father.

And he was sent to redeem the people the Father gave him. He will save and raise every last one the Father has given to him to save and raise. Watch this. **Read 41-47**

Jesus doubles and triples down. No one can come to Jesus - literally: they do not have the power to come - unless the Father draws him. Meaning the only way anyone comes to the Father is if the Father draws him.

Draw - the Greek word is helkuo - literally meaning to drag or pull by force. It's used to drag a bucket up out of a well or Peter dragging a net filled with fish. It's not a gentle suggestion. It's not a holy nudge.

It's God sovereignly bringing you into the Kingdom.

"But God would never force anyone to do anything." First, have you read the Bible? God forces people to do things all the time. Second, when you believed in Jesus, did it feel like anyone was forcing you? No. It felt like love and freedom and joy. Because when God draws a person into the Kingdom he does so by changing their heart to want Jesus. To want to follow.

Phil. 1:29: It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ to not only believe in him, but to suffer for his sake.

The reason you believed was because God graciously gave you the faith to believe.

Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God so that no one may boast."

What's the gift of God? Grace? No, grace is already a gift. Faith? No, it doesn't match the grammar. So what's the gift? All of it. All of it is the gift of God: the grace of Jesus on the cross, the faith to believe in him, the Spirit to follow him, and the eternal life as the reward.

All of your salvation, all of your eternal life and reward has been graciously predestined by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise be to him.

Pray