

Ephesians 1 ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To God's saints in Ephesus,¹ the faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--

⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

¹¹ In 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,

¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

¹³ And 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,

¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

Introduction

Issues of identity, (71 genders on facebook (71 genders - and it doesn't even include Pantomime dame !), Ppt black activist Rachel Dolezal)

Who am I ? Where do I fit in? Is there any purpose to my life? I am just an insignificant dot on the planet or am I part of a larger scheme of things? Ephesians was - unlike many of Paul's letters - not written to one particular church or person, addressing their particular problems, but probably was intended as a circular to go around to various churches within say 100 miles of Ephesus. So its message is far more universal - it explores not only the purpose of your life and mine, but God's purposes for his church and indeed the whole of creation

Paul begins with the big picture –*Like the London eye – giving you an overall view of God's whole purpose – focussing in on particular places, but always aware of the whole view.* Paul shows us God's cosmic plan and what he sees fills him with praise and joy at the extraordinary grace and generosity of God.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed** us in the heavenly realms with **every spiritual blessing** in Christ.

⁶ **his glorious grace**, which he has **freely given us** in the One he loves.

⁷ **the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us**

What are these wonderful blessings that God has lavished on us ?

First, God has adopted as his children v.4 *in his love God predestined us to be adopted as his sons*
In other words God has made us part of his family

Tina Heath's experience

You are beautiful! I want you to be part of my family:

Adopted as sons i.e. full-blown heirs whether male or female

2^{ndly} God has given us a new identity: what's more it is an identity that is more important and more secure than any identity this world has to offer.

Some seek their identity in fame or success or their work or their friends.

All of these things can let us down:

- The most famous can be forgotten,
- success can be short-lived,
- the most dedicated employee can be made redundant,
- our friends can desert us:

3rdly Not only a new identity, but **a new destiny**

This passage talks a lot about God's purposes:

v.5 He predestined us to be adopted..in accordance with his pleasure & will

v.9...he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ

v.11 having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

God has made us part of his family, not just so that **we** could be happy, not even just so that **He** could be happy

but because we have a vital part to play in His eternal purposes

What is this destiny? this eternal purpose? Stated 3 times:

v. 6 to the praise of His glorious grace

v.12 in order that we, might be for the praise of his glory.

v.14 to the praise of his glory.

(viz. being chosen to sing in a choir before the queen at her diamond Jubilee)

God has chosen us not just that we might praise God in all his glory

but in order that **others**, indeed the whole Creation, might see us and praise God.

We might ask: how on earth is that possible ?!: that God can actually expect that ordinary fallible people like us can lead others to praise God.

Well actually it's precisely because we are so ordinary and fallible that we will cause others to praise God

I used to play the trumpet – very badly.

It was so bad that whenever I practiced our dog used to howl.

My family begged me not to.

My friends used to say that when I got to the pearly gates

St Peter would look down the list and say: Ah yes you can come in...but Andrew....without the trumpet. On Sunday Dec 11th Messiah concert in church:when at college each year we would have an impromptu performance of the Messiah. Wonderful piece called "The trumpet shall sound" My great ambition – but however hard I practiced not up to it (didn't help having the dog howling).

Have to wheel in a much more gifted trumpeter

*But according to this passage as if God saying Andrew I want **you** to play in the orchestra to be part of this wonderful concert which will lift peoples eyes and hearts to praise me. And what's more I'm going to make it possible. Then if my friends came and heard me play musically and beautifully, what would they say? A miracle has happened!*

God must be truly amazing to enable someone as terrible as you to play the trumpet so wonderfully.

This is the destiny that God has for his church. God has chosen us in Christ *to be holy and blameless* i.e. like Jesus

so that people – the universe will say: *Truly, a miracle has happened –*

how extraordinary is the power and grace of God, how generous is his love

What's more, God has this destiny not just for us as individuals but even more so for us as a community as his new family.

When the world sees a transformed community – people from totally different backgrounds, people who would normally have nothing to do with each other, people who otherwise might even have been enemies, living in unity, full of love and compassion and forgiveness, it will say:

What an extraordinary miracle, what an amazing God first of all even to think of this and then to bring it to pass.

In other words we will be **to the praise of God's glory.**

Now you might have spotted a little flaw in all this:

How on earth is God going to get a terrible trumpeter like me to play *the Trumpet shall sound*

musically and beautifully ?! In other words, how on earth is God going to make us deeply flawed

human beings with all our issues and habits and hang-ups, holy and blameless - so that we cause the whole of creation to praise God's glory?

2 key concepts:

1. Grace – e.g. viz v.6 *to the praise of his glorious grace...*

i.e. Not dependent on how good or deserving we are – but God's plan, his purpose, his power, his amazing grace and generosity

...which he has freely given us in the One he loves

viz v.11: In 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, This is God's master plan, his purpose from before the beginning of time and it is God who will make it happen

2. Spirit – who viz v.14, is a deposit – a first instalment

Dad giving Jessamie for Christmas a year's subscription to BBC Music magazine - first month's copy

This passage talks about redemption something that both **has** happened and **will** happen

We have already *been* redeemed i.e. saved or rescued from judgment and eternal death by the blood - i.e. death – of Jesus

We also look forward to the day when we *will be* redeemed

i.e. when we will be made perfect in body, mind and soul – we shall become the glorious human beings that God created us to be.

And the Holy Spirit is the first instalment of that redemption or perfection that God has promised He will bring about by his grace – for that is his plan and purpose. And what God purposes He brings to pass. And the way he does all this is **in Christ**.

How can we be sure God has included us in this extraordinary destiny ?

If we are in Christ, then again and again Paul tells us God has chosen us.

How do we know we are in Christ ?

v.13 Paul says his readers were included when

- they heard the word of truth – the gospel, the message of Christ
- they believed – in Christ
- v.12 He says it is those who *put their hope in Christ*

When we do that we are included in Christ, and when we are in Christ

- we receive a new identity as sons and daughters of God
- we become a vital part of God's plan
- we receive the deposit of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Christ,
- we receive a new inheritance – forgiveness, the riches of his grace which God lavishes on his children,
- and that inheritance includes a new destiny of becoming holy and blameless and the glorious human beings we were created to be, of living in perfect unity with one another and in perfect unity with God. How much better is this than what any other religion or world view offers – the bland anonymity of Nirvana, or a popular view I heard just yesterday that we each become a shining star – you can't get more isolated and remote than that!

All of us will be brought together in unity with Christ and for the glorious enterprising of contributing to the praise of his glory

Being aware of all this changes our outlook (gratitude, joy, purpose, sense of identity and self-worth)

It will also change our priorities – *c.f the Agatha Christie weekend.*

Who killed the vicar? An affectionate homage to Agatha Christie. It's involved giving up Wednesday evenings for rehearsals, and I spent a large amount of Friday afternoon procuring from various charity shops and hardware stores some man-bling for my narcissistic Vicar character. But it's been great to be working with others to part of the plans to celebrate Agatha Christie. Now Agatha was a great writer, but how much more wonderful and more worthwhile to give up all to be a vital part of the cosmic celebrations of the amazing, infinitely loving, generously gracious Creator of the Universe who has rescued and redeemed us in Christ