Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 10
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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Blessed in every season of life!

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.

4 He did this when he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5** he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, **6** and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves.

7 In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace, **8** which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight. **9** He made known to us the mystery of his will in keeping with his good purpose, which he planned in Christ. **10** This was to be carried out when the time had fully come, in order to bring all things together in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.

—Ephesians 1:3-10

We don't realize this when we look at a translation, but Ephesians 1:3-14 is one sentence in Greek. It's almost as if the apostle Paul is just so excited about what he's writing that he goes from one truth to the next without taking a breath.

But we're going to take a breath today and just ponder some of these truths that God places before us through Paul's opening words to the Christians in Ephesus.

Let's pray. Lord, bless us this day as we study your Word. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us in all truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

The apostle Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians by writing, **"*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."** He encourages us to bless God as God blesses us. Some translations have **"*Praise* be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."** The word essentially means, "to speak well of." Therefore, it comes to mean "praise." So, it makes sense that some translations would have **"*Praise* be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

Whether you translate that word as "Praise" or "Blessed," I have a question for you. When do you find it easiest to praise, bless, or speak well of God?

I'll be honest with you that it's easiest for me to speak words of praise and blessing to God when things are going well for me. The air conditioning works in your cars during days of 118 degrees. "Oh, thank you, Lord, for this AC." You get home from your work and everything went well. It was just a great day at work. "Thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of my job." You had a follow-up doctor's appointment because the doctor saw something that didn't sit well with him. But during the appointment he comes in and says, "Everything is great. You are very healthy. I'll see you in 12 months." You are driving home with a smile on your face. "Thank you, Lord, for giving me good health." You had a great family reunion this summer. Everybody had a blast with each other. Your relationships are clicking well. "Praise be to God for all these tremendous blessings." You see, for me, when life is going great, it's easy to say, "Thank you, Lord," and to bless his holy name.

But what happens when tragedy strikes? What happens when you hear the news that someone you love and care deeply about is prematurely taken from you in death? Is it still easy to praise God and bless his holy name? What happens when the doctor comes in and tells you that your child has cancer, and it's going to be a long road to recovery? Do you still praise God and bless his holy name? What happens when the unexpected medical bill comes because you needed the procedure, and you don't have enough to cover the bill? Do you say, "Praise be to God"? What happens when the AC breaks down in not one, but two of your cars? As you are sweating and almost passing out while driving, do you say, **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**"?

I don't know how it is for you, but it easiest to praise God when things are going great. I think that's generally true for Christians. It can be easy for Christians to praise God and bless his holy name when things go well. But what happens when tragedy strikes? Do you feel as though God is still blessing you, or do you feel as though God is out to get you?

It's no small thing that throughout the Scriptures God directs our focus on certain foundational facts to lift our eyes from the things that change so easily. You and I know that life can change in an instant. Air conditioners break

down. Health deteriorates. Our lives are so fragile. A few weeks ago, our sister in the faith, Pauline Gray, was abruptly taken out of this world in a fatal car accident. You know how life can change so quickly.

So, the apostle Paul focuses us on foundational truths that will never change. And it's in those foundational truths where we can say, "I am blessed in every season of life." Because no matter what you face, these foundational truths never change.

Let's take a breather and look at some of these tremendous words from Ephesians 1. The apostle Paul speaks a big game in these words. Well, he speaks a big game for the Lord. **"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."** Every spiritual blessing. "Every" is a big word, isn't it? God has blessed you in Christ with *every* spiritual blessing. There is not a single blessing that is left out. No spiritual blessing is missing. **God "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."** How so?

Well, the apostle Paul gives some examples of how you are blessed. And what I would like you to notice is what he focuses on. He blessed you. When? **"He did this when he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons (and daughters) through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves."**

Here's the first thing that Paul focuses on to show how richly we are blessed. He goes to a teaching called "predestination" or "election." He focuses on the fact that God has chosen you to be his child. You see, God reveals this truth to us to make us even more certain of our salvation. He wants us to have comfort and trust in his grace to save us from beginning to end. He wants us to look beyond the events of this life and into eternity to see how much he blesses us.

You know, I've found that when I teach the doctrine of election or predestination, sometimes people are less certain of their salvation. With a worried look on their faces, they will often ask, "But how can I be sure that God chose *me*?"

Why do Christians get confused by the doctrine of election? I think it's because we tend to look at how we go about choosing, and we think that God must choose us in the same way. My friends, God's choosing is not the same as our choosing.

This past week, my wife Kris and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. Twenty-five years ago, I chose her to be my wife, and she chose me to be her husband. So, why did I choose her? Why did I marry her? Well, I can tell you that it had nothing to do with grace. I married Kris because I selected her out of all the girls I dated to be by my side for a lifetime. I chose her because I liked the way she looked. I liked her perspective on life. I liked our friendship and our commonality. I liked what was in her heart. I liked how she put God first her life. In other words, in my mind she had all the qualifications to be a good wife for me. Isn't that the way people often "choose"?

My friends, that's not why God chose you to be his bride. That's not why God chose you to be his son or daughter. If you apply the way you choose people to the way God chooses people, you will get yourself into all kinds of problems and miss out on the real comfort, hope, and blessing that God gives.

Here's the key comfort in this blessing. God didn't choose you because of what's in you. God chose you because of what's in him. And what's in him is love for you.

Paul says, "**God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world."** Before God made the mountains, the valleys, the prairies, the waterfalls, the grizzly bears, the wolves, the starry sky; before God made all of that, he chose you to be his very own. The world is a grand formation, the universe is an amazing creation, and yet even before God made such a wonderful creation, he chose you.

That's important. God chose you before there could be any reason for his choosing. There isn't any merit involved in his election. It was not a selection process, where God chose the best and the brightest to be his people. It was an election. God simply chose us. As Paul says, "**He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves."**

Do you understand the comfort that gives us? All our lives, we are subject to the painful process of human selection. We are constantly being measured and chosen to be worthy or unworthy according to fickle, human standards. The coach chooses only the top players to make the team. The little girl at school chooses who gets to be her friend for the week. A young lady waits to be selected by some awkward young man and asked out on a date, and then maybe she's never chosen. The human selection process can be cruel and painful.

Can you imagine if God had used this "selection-by-merit" process that people use? What if he lined us all up against the wall and compared us against each other, trying to decide which one of us should get the nod to be

children of his kingdom? Which of us would ever imagine that we could be fit for the kingdom of God? Who could be confident that God had indeed chosen him or her, when we can always find someone who has lived the Christian life just a little better than we have?

Friends, God chose you before the world was created, not by merit, but by grace. He chose to love you just because that's what was in him for you. Not because of what you would someday accomplish. Not because your potential was greater than another's. Not because you were among the brightest and best of all the world had to offer. No, God chose to love you and adopt you into his family because of his grace and for no other reason than that. Period. Exclamation point. Hard stop.

Please look at these words very carefully. There's a little phrase that is so important when he comes to God's choosing. Note the words, **"In Christ."** How many times in these short verses does the apostle Paul use the words, "In Christ"? We're only looking at verses 3-10, but let's count them.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* (1) with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He did this when he chose us *in Christ* (2) before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves. *In [Christ]* (3) we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight. He made known to us the mystery of his will in keeping with his good purpose, which he planned *in Christ* (4). This was to be carried out when the time had fully come, in order to bring all things together *in Christ,* (5) things in heaven and things on earth." Five times? And you could count another few times by including "in love" or "through Jesus Christ."

What's the point Paul is making? If you want to see how greatly you are blessed, don't look at the circumstances of this world which change so quickly. Look at the foundational facts of who you are in connection to Christ Jesus!

God accepts you as his son or daughter for eternity **"in Christ."** You are acceptable to him because Jesus died on the cross to forgive your sins. You are acceptable because you have Jesus' blood and righteousness, which makes you holy and blameless in his sight.

God didn't choose you because of who you are or what you would be. He chose you in view of what *Christ* did for you. So, if you want to know how God could have chosen you, go back to the cross. Center you attention on the certainty of what Jesus has done for you. Because if you understand how God could accept you **"in Christ,"** then God's choosing you from eternity isn't going to be hard to believe.

God made the entire history of this world serve his purpose of salvation **"in Christ."** You know that. In time, when God designated it to be the right time, **"God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem, to ransom, those under law"** (Galatians 4:4). God's own Son, Jesus, was the ransom payment. He gave his own blood, his own life, over to death for us. Jesus' blood became the ransom payment so that we would be set free from the chains of Satan. God's own Son died, so that we could become his adopted sons and daughters. Paul writes, "**In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight."**

Do you see why Paul focuses our attention on these foundational facts, on these tremendous truths? Oh, it's true that when tragedy strikes, we may wonder if God continues to care for us. We may wonder if God has it out for us. We may question whether God continues to care about us or not.

So, look at where Paul focuses your attention. He focuses us on foundational facts that go beyond the day-to-day events of life. We are chosen and adopted as God's dear children. He planned that from eternity and made it happen only in connection to Jesus.

Just think about what that means. Your sins are gone. You are forgiven. You have peace with God. And you know this. You believe this. He pulled back the veil and revealed the truth of his plan for you.

And even though tragedies may strike, God will not leave you or abandon you. In fact, he has it all planned out. "**He made known to us the mystery of his will in keeping with his good purpose, which he planned in Christ. This was to be carried out when the time had fully come, in order to bring all things together in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth."**

My friends, God's got your eternity planned out. When we recognize these tremendous spiritual blessings, how can we not trust that God will give us everything we truly need at the right time? Therefore, no matter what you may face in life, you can confidently say, **"I am blessed in every season of life."** Amen.