

Ephesians 1:11-12

Introduction

This morning, we'll reach word *one hundred sixty-two* in Paul's *single* sentence of 202 words. We remember that this entire sentence depends on that opening phrase – "**Blessed be** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (See sentence diagram on last page) So as we move through the sentence, we're not supposed to forget that opening phrase. This whole thing is just one big *blessing* of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But then we also see from the sentence diagram that so far there are six main sections or themes that celebrate God's lavish goodness to us. And in each one of these sections the theme of "in Christ" is constantly repeated – over and over again. We'll see that theme again this morning, and then *again* next week. God's lavish goodness is constantly, day by day, flowing to us through our living union with the living Christ. So this is how we could title each of the five messages we've had so far:

- ✓ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ..."
- ✓ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who chose us in Christ..."
- ✓ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who predestined us in Christ..."
- ✓ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed us in Christ..."
- ✓ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has made known to us the mystery of His will in Christ."

And now the title of this sixth message would be what? Well, that's where people disagree. Have you ever heard of a hapax legomenon? It's a way of talking about certain words that give us fits by using words that only give us more fits! A hapax legomenon is just a word or a phrase that's used *only once* – whether at all, anywhere, ever, or just within a specific book or collection of writings. And the reason this sometimes gives us fits is because it can be hard to translate a word when you don't have lots of examples and case studies to work with. Paul begins this sixth part of his sentence with a hapax legomenon – a word that appears only *once* in the entire New Testament, and only three times in the entire Greek translation of the Old Testament. So here are the first four words of verse eleven:

I. "in whom also eklerothemen"

"*In whom also*"—there's our most wonderful, and most precious **union** with Christ—"In whom also *eklerothemen*." So far we can all be agreed – so long as we don't need to understand what we're saying! But if we try to translate this into English we end up with some very different ideas. Almost all translations go with something like this, "In whom also ***we have obtained an inheritance***" (ESV; NASB; NRSV; NKJV; KJV). But then there are a couple of translations that switch it up: "In whom also ***we have been claimed as God's own possession***" (NET; NCV).^{*} And then the NIV translates like this: "In whom also ***we were chosen***."[†] So what *does* the word

^{*} cf. "In whom also ***we were claimed by God as His portion***" (Bruce; O'Brien); "In whom also ***we were made a heritage***" (Hoehner).

[†] cf. "In whom also ***we were appointed***" (Lincoln).

mean? Is Paul talking about an inheritance that *we get*? Or is he saying that *we are* an inheritance? Or is he not talking about an inheritance at all – and the point is just that we’ve been chosen or appointed so that we might be to the praise of God’s glory (v. 12)?

Now I could just go with a translation and not tell you why, but my expectation is that you will demand an explanation. This isn’t just *any old book* where a discussion of the meaning of a word is boring and irrelevant. This is the book upon which we are basing our eternal destinies. This book is filled with *words* that are, all of them, inspired by God. That’s *why* I expect that you won’t let me off the hook without an explanation. That’s why I want us all to take seriously the *meaning* of this single word.

Our Greek word here *is* used in other places *outside of the Bible* where its basic meaning is this: “to get, or appoint, or choose by lot” (or by the casting of *lots*). Our modern day version of “lots” might be drawing straws, or “eenie meenie miny moe.” How do I *choose* what I want to order off the restaurant menu? Well, I could draw straws. How do I *appoint* people to different jobs or stations? Well, I could do the “eenie meenie miny moe.” How do I *get* (or *claim*) my fair share of the loot? I could cast lots.

But sometimes the idea of the “lot” falls away into the background and the emphasis is just on the choosing, or the appointing, or the getting – not so much on how it’s done (by the casting of lots). So that explains why the NIV says, “In whom also *we were chosen*” (no mention of any “lots” here). But it seems very strange that Paul would *pick* a word like this (the *only* time he ever uses this word and the only time it’s ever used in the entire New Testament) and not intend for us to be thinking about *something* related to the idea of “lots”! There were definitely simpler and more obvious words that Paul could have used. And it also seems strange that Paul would basically just be repeating what he already said in verses 4-5. That’s why I must disagree with the NIV.

So then is Paul saying that all of us here have chosen, or appointed, or obtained something by casting lots? – Because that doesn’t seem to make sense either. Well, sometimes the actual *casting of lots* isn’t the point, but rather the actual *portion* that we’ve been “*allotted*” – the actual portion that the lot falls to.

- ✓ Colossians 1:12 (cf. Prov. 1:14) — Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the ***inheritance*** (literally, the “***lot***” or the “***portion***”) of the saints in light.
- ✓ Isaiah 17:11 (LXX) — The seed shall spring up for a crop in the day when you shall ***obtain an inheritance***, and as a father, you shall ***obtain an inheritance*** for thy sons.

There’s no casting of lots in this verse. Instead, the point is the portion, or the inheritance, that an “imaginary” lot might fall to. So it’s solved, right? What Paul is saying is this, “In whom also we have obtained a portion (an inheritance).”[‡] Now that’s a *beautiful* thing, isn’t it? And it’s also *true*! But is it really what that word (eklerothemen) means here? Is it *really* what the Word of God is saying in this particular place? Because our Greek word here is actually in the ***passive*** voice. So instead of saying that we have obtained something by lot, the most *natural* way to translate would be to say that we ourselves have been obtained by lot.

[‡] It wouldn’t do to say that we have “appointed” or “chosen” an inheritance.

- ✓ 1 Samuel 14:41–42 (LXX) — Saul said, O Lord God of Israel... is the iniquity in me, or in Jonathan my son? And Jonathan and Saul were **taken by lot** (kleroo; middle or passive), and the people escaped. And Saul said, Cast lots between me and my son Jonathan: whomsoever the Lord shall cause to be **taken by lot** (katakleroo; middle), let him die... and they cast lots between him and Jonathan his son, and Jonathan was **taken by lot** (katakleroo; middle or passive).

But how in the world have we been taken, or obtained, or chosen by lot? Did God actually cast lots for us so that it was all by chance? We'll see in a minute that nothing could possibly be further from the truth.

We assume that here is one place where the actual casting of lots isn't the point, but rather the *portion* that's been *allotted*. Instead of saying that we have obtained an inheritance, the most natural way to translate this word is to say that we ourselves have been **taken** as an **inheritance**! Now there's a little more to it than just this. And if you want to know more about it, I've put it all in a footnote.[§] But I think at the end of the day, it really is this simple. And so that's why I *must* disagree with almost all of the translations. The NET Bible comes the closest to our translation by saying, "In whom also we have been claimed as God's own **possession**." But I still think this falls short. There's more to this word than just the idea of a possession – or even a *treasured* possession. That really wouldn't explain the idea of the "*lot*." There's the idea here of an *inheritance* (cf. almost all translations). My *lot* is the unique and special *portion* that's fallen to me. So remember Colossians chapter one:

- ✓ Colossians 1:12 (cf. Prov. 1:14) — Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the **inheritance** (literally, the "**lot**" or the "**portion**") of the saints in light.

In the *Old Testament*, the "lot" was especially connected with Israel's inheritance of the land.

- ✓ Numbers 26:55–56 — The land shall be divided by **lot**. According to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall **inherit**.
- ✓ Numbers 33:53–54 (cf. 34:13) — And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it. You shall **inherit the land by lot** according to your clans... Wherever the **lot** falls for anyone, that shall be his. According to the tribes of your fathers you shall **inherit**.

So we conclude that what God is revealing to us through the Apostle Paul right here in Ephesians chapter one is just this: *His portion* is *us*. We are the *portion* that God has *allotted for Himself*. In other words, we are His **inheritance**. Now that just demands a whole eternity of reflection, and wonder, and joy. But before we stop to let this truth sink in a little more fully, let's look at what Paul goes on to say next. "...in whom also we have been taken as an inheritance..."

[§] See the document at the beginning of this series titled "Translation notes"

II. “having been predestined”

In verse five we saw that God destined us before the foundation of the world to be His very own sons and daughters. Now Paul says that God destined us before the foundation of the world to be His portion and inheritance. After I typed out those words, I just got this feeling again that it’s *too much*. When we didn’t think we could feel any more loved, God reveals even more of how high, and how deep, and how wide His love really is. The sentence just keeps on going – and even when it’s ended, we know that it’s still not “long enough.” God *predestined us* to be His portion – His inheritance. Already this says so much, but then Paul just keeps piling on more words.

III. “having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will”

Read that again.

“Having been *predestined* according to the *purpose* of Him who *works all things* according to the *counsel* of His *will*.” What’s the point? Far from a chance casting of lots, or drawing of straws, or an “eenie meenie miny moe,” God took us as His portion and inheritance because of His very meticulous and careful and sovereign planning and working of all things. Paul says, “according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel [or, the careful deliberation] of His will.”

Now Paul could have said the same thing with far fewer words. And yet on the other hand, Paul would spare no amount of words if only to help us feel and know how *unchangeable, and how secure, and how certain* our salvation really is. It’s not based on the changing whims of human beings, but on the unchanging *will* and *purpose* of God. It’s not based on the insufficient planning of human beings, but on the all-wise and all-knowing *counsels* of God. It’s not based on the weak and inadequate efforts of human beings, but on the powerful and effective *working* of God. And so we can know just how unchangeable, and just how secure, and just how certain are all the blessings of our salvation – and we can *rest* and *rejoice* and be at *peace*. We can truly say to ourselves, “it is *well* with my *soul*,” *because* we have been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

Paul also spares no amount of words if only to help us see again just how unbelievably and undeservedly privileged we really are. When we try to explain our predestination by prying into the counsels of God’s will, we can only destroy ourselves. When we try to explain our predestination by basing God’s counsels on the counsels of men we rob God of His glory and take it for ourselves. But when we explain our predestination very simply and humbly as “according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,” *then* we can know, and we can rejoice in how undeservedly privileged and blessed we really are. It seems like for the thousandth time now, we’re set adrift in a “shoreless” sea of God’s love, and I remember again the words of the hymn – “lost in wonder, love, and praise.

So Paul has explained *how it came about* that we were taken as God’s portion and inheritance. Now he explains *why*.

IV. “so that we might be to the praise of His glory”

In verses 5-6 Paul says that we’ve been predestined to adoption as sons “to the praise of the glory of His grace.” In verse 14 Paul will conclude this long sentence by saying again, “to the praise of His glory.” But this is the only place where Paul explicitly says, “so that *we* might *be* (or *exist*) to the praise of His glory.”

Let me ask a question: How does it make us feel to hear that God’s portion is us? How does it make us feel to know that we are the portion God has allotted for Himself – that we are God’s inheritance? We could certainly say *loved* and *treasured*. But wouldn’t we also say deeply, and totally, and completely humbled? Whatever *my own* portion, or heritage, or inheritance may be in this earthly life, it exists *for me* – for *my* use, and for *my* happiness, and for *my* satisfaction – certainly not the other way around! So therefore, if we are God’s portion and heritage, if we are His inheritance, then we truly do exist for Him – for *His* joy and pleasure and satisfaction, and delight. See how the very thing that elevates us to such heights of glory is also the very thing that keeps us humbled to the dust in complete and total denial of ourselves. We are the portion that God has allotted for Himself. Listen to how this language was applied to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament.

- ✓ Deuteronomy 32:8–9 (cf. Psalm 33:12) — When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD’s *portion* is his people, Jacob his *allotted heritage*.
- ✓ Deuteronomy 4:20 (cf. 9:29; 1 Kings 8:51; Zech. 2:12) — The LORD has taken you... to be a people of his own *inheritance*, as you are this day.

But now in the New Testament, Paul takes this very same language and applies it to us. In verse 18 he’ll speak of “[*God’s*] *glorious inheritance in the saints*.” And here in verse 11 he says that *we* are the portion that God has allotted for Himself. God has taken us as His inheritance so that *we* might *be*—so that we might *exist*—to the praise of *His* glory – for *His* joy, and *His* pleasure, and *His* delight. The purpose of our existence is not first of all our joy, but God’s. The purpose of our existence is not first of all our pleasure and delight, but God’s. When we can surrender our minds and our hearts to this truth, *then* we can find *true* and *lasting* joy, and pleasure, and delight. It’s not at all the way that “makes sense” to us, but it is the way that God has revealed to us. I don’t exist for me. I exist for Him. That right there is the answer to so many of our questions, and objections, and frustrations, and struggles. So often, we’re living our lives completely upside down, and inside out, and backwards – and that can only be a recipe for disillusionment, and ineffectiveness, and defeat.

We are the portion that God has allotted for Himself. He has taken us as an inheritance...

V. “so that we might be to the praise of His glory – we who have already hoped in Christ”

So here’s a tension.** It’s wonderful and beautiful, but it’s still a tension. God’s master plan for the administration of the fullness of the times is to unite all things in perfect harmony around Christ (9-10). The fullness of the times is that day when history reaches the final moment of

** For the following, see especially Thielman’s very helpful treatment (pp. 72, 76).

“delivery” and Christ is all in all. But that day hasn’t yet come. And that’s *why* we still *struggle today* with living as though we existed first of all for our *own* joy, and our *own* happiness, and our *own* satisfaction. And that, in turn, is why Paul so strongly emphasizes the “alreadyness” of our hope. We have *hoped beforehand*(!!!) – before the fullness of the times. The fullness of the times may still be future, but our hope is now. The day when all things are perfectly united in Christ may still be the “not yet,” but our hope in this same Christ is “*already*.” Our hope in Christ is *already today*. And what does that mean? That *means* that even *today*, even as those who are still living in the daily grind and struggle with sin, we may, and we can, and we *do* exist every day of our lives not for our joy, but for **His** joy; for **His** delight and for **His** pleasure – to the praise of **His** glory.

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
who has *taken us* to be *His inheritance* in Christ.**

Ephesians 1:3-14

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.

Verse 3

EVEN AS HE CHOSE US

in Him
before the foundation of the world,
that we should be holy and blameless *before* Him *in* love,

Verse 4

HAVING PREDESTINED US

for adoption as sons
through Jesus Christ
to Himself,
according to the good pleasure of His will,
to the praise of the glory of His grace,
which He freely bestowed on us
in the Beloved.

Verses 5-6

IN WHOM WE HAVE REDEMPTION

through His blood,
the forgiveness of trespasses,
according to the riches of His grace,
which He lavished upon us
in all wisdom and insight,

Verses 7-8

HAVING MADE KNOWN TO US THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL

according to His good pleasure
which He purposed **in Him**
for the administration *of* the fullness *of* the times
to unite all things **in Christ,**
things in heaven and things on earth, **in Him.**

Verses 9-10

IN WHOM ALSO WE WERE TAKEN AS AN INHERITANCE

having been predestined
according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the
counsel of His will,
so that we might be to the praise of His glory –
we who have already hoped in Christ,

Verses 11-12

in whom also *you,* having heard the word of truth
– the gospel of your salvation –

Verses 13-14

in whom also, having believed,
**YOU WERE SEALED WITH THE SPIRIT OF PROMISE, THE
HOLY ONE,**

who is the first installment of our inheritance
until the redemption of the saved remnant,
to the praise of His glory.