

Chosen by God

By Pastor Matt Black

05 February 2006

Lord's Day morning

Ephesians 1:4

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love"

Introduction: Open your Bibles to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We will be looking today at how God has chosen us for salvation before the world's foundation, so the title of this morning's message is "Chosen by God." We will be dealing specifically with verse 4 today.

As we come to this passage this morning we must realize that we are standing on holy ground. We come to what has been called the eternal counsel of Redemption. We have often called it God's *plan* of salvation. There was a counsel, a plan, a compact in eternity past. The verses this morning actually bring us there into the mind of God before the creation of the world.

And at that time, God had a plan to create man. And He knew that once He created human beings that they would fall—they would sin against Him—they would be cut off from Him. He knew that. In eternity past He planned the way, and how we would be purchased back and be forgiven and redeemed. And there was a counsel in eternity past, and the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, all one God, three distinct personalities, equal members of the Godhead, met as it were together to determine how men and women would be saved and forgiven. And they agreed together; they made a compact together along these lines.

"God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'
so we read in Genesis 1:26

This is covenant language. There was an agreement. Obviously this counsel did not take place at a given time because God lives outside of time. He never had to decide anything, because in God all things are already decided. He lives in the realm of eternity. It was not as if God had to think of it and to stop and plan it. God doesn't operate this way. In God's mind this has always been. But this agreement was something like this—the Father would give to the Son Jesus Christ a people for His own possession, a people so numerous they cannot be counted (Revelation 7:9). Jesus spoke of this in His ministry:

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me."
--All the people that the Father gives me—all those He gave me in this counsel before time, in eternity past, before the foundation of the world. All of these people shall come to Me because the Father has given them to me. So Jesus says in John 6:37

And again in verse 39 Jesus says
"This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing."

Again we see a compact, an agreement to redeem a fixed number of people, of whom He would lose not even one. The Father gave a people to the Son, and the Son voluntarily made Himself responsible to the Father for them. They would be His people eternally over whom He would be “King of kings and Lord of Lords” (Revelation 19:16) forever. Christ for His part would in due time enter into this world, put on a robe of humanity, and suffer and die for them, take the punishment that they deserved for all eternity because of their rebellion against God and because of sin—He would purchase these people from the slave market of sin. He would be their representative. He would by His grace grant them faith and repentance. So based on all those conditions, the Father made an agreement to give these people to the Son. And the Son therefore came, and suffered and died for them. He substituted Himself for them and paid an immeasurable price. And He knew exactly the price He would have to pay all the way back in eternity past.

He is the
“Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”
Revelation 13:8

And so Jesus Christ was not shocked or surprised when He came to Calvary. He knew back before the foundation of the world what He would do. And it was all because the Father gave a people for His Son to redeem. And this is where our text begins.

We look at verse three and we bless God for “all” the “spiritual blessings” that we have “in Christ.” And last week we meditated on all these blessings. They all come from Christ. But this morning I want to take you on a journey to see where these blessings came from. We must go on a journey back in time. Back before there was time. “...God...blessed us...according as he hath chosen us in him *before the foundation of the world...*” We see it so clearly.

I. We were chosen by God before the Foundation of the world.
This literally reads “before the throwing down,” i.e. before God put things in their place. When we think about our salvation, we normally don’t go back that far.

A. God’s choice took place before Time. Before God said “Let there be light” God gave the Son a people for Himself.

1. We were chosen before we made any Decision.

Most of us go back as far as the decision we made for Christ at a certain point in time. That’s natural and valid and important. All that you have in Christ was made real to you on the day you were converted. Your heart became aflame for God—your eyes were opened. You repented of your sins. That’s what we first remember—experiencing the blessings of our new spiritual birth.

But our salvation was planned long before we made any decision for Christ. If you want to understand what has happened to you, you need to go farther back—back before you were born—before your *parents’* birth.

Others go back to the cross. And it is true. We were all saved at the cross. Abraham was saved, David was saved. You and I were saved at the cross. But we must go farther back.

2. We were chosen before the Cross, before the fall, before the angels! You've got to go to the *creation* itself, and then you've got to go before that. We've got to go so far back. Back when there was nothing but God Himself! And God has always been. And in that time when there was nothing but God, nothing but the fellowship between God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Back then, God chose us. Do we realize that our salvation was planned before even the world was planned?

B. God's choice was not based on anything God saw in Us. The language here is absolutely clear that this was God's choice based on nothing outside of Himself. His choice of us is not explained by any goodness he saw in us.

God says in Romans 9:13 that He loves Jacob, but that He hates Esau. It is no wonder that God hated Esau. We all deserve God's hatred. What is amazing is that God loved Jacob, and that God loves any one of us. But do you know why God loved Jacob and hated Esau? The Bible tells us so. Look at the verse right before it, verse 12—

"...the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth..."

So we come to the question—why did you believe and many before you did not? Why are there people in hell, and you are on your way to heaven? What makes you different from them? Why are you loved like Jacob, and others are hated like Esau. The answer in our text mirrors what we just saw in this passage. We are saved "according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." You are different because of God's grace and choice!

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a WRETCH like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.

You are a wretch just like those in hell. The difference between you being saved and you being lost is this: it is a gift of God! And God decided that you would be in the number of His children before the foundation of the world. It wasn't based on anything in you.

C. God's choice was not Arbitrary. There were reasons that were behind it, but God does not reveal those reasons to us. We know that the explanation for why we were chosen cannot be found in us. It is found in God. But we go about trying to understand why God chose us and not someone else. We cannot simply rest in the wisdom of God. Instead we have to challenge God in this.

The Bible anticipates that we are naturally going to get upset with this. It seems unfair. Why should I be chosen and not another? God answers this again in Romans 9 beginning with verse 14:

"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? [GOD'S NOT FAIR!] God forbid. 15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on

whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then *it is* not of him that willeth [OUR DECISION], nor of him that runneth [OUR WORKS], but of God that sheweth mercy [GOD'S CHOICE]."

The fact is, if you really think about it, we *really* don't want God to be *fair*. We want Him to get out of the category of justice and fairness and get into the category of mercy. If God was to be fair we would all be separated from God forever. We want mercy. Mercy supersedes justice. And yet God's mercy is not a free pass. There was a price that was paid. Jesus Christ died for the ungodly. Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price! So, no, we do not want God to be fair. We want God to be merciful. It is not as if we are innocent children in a burning building. It is not as if we were just minding our own business and here is this mean God sending us to hell. No, we were not minding our own business. We actually were quite into God's business—we were busy ignoring Him and at times even hating Him. We were His enemies. For all intents and purposes, there was nothing keeping us out of hell. Nothing, that is, but God's mercy. I don't think that is something to get upset over. I think it is something to thrill our soul—it's something to shout about.

- D. We also see that God's choice was not Generic. It was not a generic choice. God did not say, well I guess I'll save humanity, and we'll see what happens. No, God is not interested in some corporate generic mass. God doesn't work that way. He's the designer—He's interested in the details, He's interested in the individual. God chose specific people. God wrote down specific names before the foundation of the world.

We read in Philippians 4:3 about "Clement..." and other of Paul's "fellowlabourers, whose names *are* in the book of life."

We sing the hymn "There's a new name written down in glory." While it is wonderful to ponder that our names are written down in the Lamb's book of Life, that song, I'm sorry to say, is incorrect. It is not a new name at all. The names in the Lamb's book of life are either in there or not in there from the very foundation of the world.

Revelation 17:8 speaks of the names that are "not written in the [Lamb's] book of life [from what time period?] from the foundation of the world."

There are no new names written down in glory. The book was completed before time—it's not being added to. It's done. The people were chosen before time.

Acts 15:18

Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

When did the Lord choose you for salvation? He chose you before the foundation of the world. If you want to understand where your life in Christ all began, you have to go back to the time when there was nothing but God, and there God made a choice.

But we also need to see that...

- II. We were chosen by God because of the Work of Jesus Christ. God's choice for salvation required a work of redemption. We are chosen "in Him"—that is on the basis of the cross work of Christ.
- A. We should Rest in what Christ has done for us. All the requirements for redemption are on Christ. That is why we are saved by grace; we are not saved because our will is superior to others, or because we have a more tender heart. No we can stop trying to do it ourselves. All the requirements are on Christ. If you are saved today, then you are "in Christ." You were saved by Christ because you were "chosen before the foundation of the world 'in Christ.'" Christ submitted to the will of the Father.

We read of Christ in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 10:7

Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

- Christ came to earth to do the Father's will.

Matthew 11:27

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.

- Christ was on a mission to do the Father's will

John 5:30

I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

John 4:34

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

- And what was the Father's will?

John 6:39

And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

This required Jesus Christ to lay aside His glory. He as the Son of God rules the world. When God chose us, He chose us on the basis of what Christ would do. Christ stepped down from His throne to enter into the realm of humanity and put on the form of a man (Philippians 2). It required His perfect life which satisfied God's holy Law; it required His perfect substitutionary death which satisfied the angst of God's wrath. It required the resurrection, to show that this sacrifice was accepted by God. It required His ascension; it required His work of preserving us through his constant mediation where he continues His work today. God's plan of salvation could never be accomplished outside of the work of His Son. We were chosen in view of Christ's merits and righteousness,

not because of any merits of our own. We were chosen in view of Christ's work, not our own work. We were chosen because of God's decision, not because of our own.

Again, we think of Romans 9:16

So then *it is* not of him that willeth [OUR DECISION], nor of him that runneth [OUR WORKS], but of God that sheweth mercy [GOD'S CHOICE]."

- B. We should Realize that we don't have to figure it all out! We need to rest in the work of Christ and not in our own reasonings. Sometimes we try to figure out why God chose us. That is a mystery. Remember, God is not arbitrary, but that does not mean that God has revealed the wisdom behind all of His choices.

This gets to the foreknowledge theory. Some believe that God looked down the corridors of time and saw who would choose Him, and He chose those who would choose Him. There's really a lot wrong with that theory. Let me give you two to begin with.

- First, if that's true, God didn't make a choice. He just simply confirmed yours.
- Secondly if that's true, then it contradicts what God actually saw when He did look down the corridors of time. He didn't see any softness of heart or willingness in any one of us! In fact God looked down upon us, and it wasn't pretty!

Psalm 14:2-3

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God. 3 They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one.

So, we do not have to figure this out. We simply need to rest in the work of Christ that God has done for us. In fact, after Paul deals with the doctrine of election in Romans 9 through 11, he basically praises God because even *the apostle* can't figure God out! He says

Romans 11:33

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and *his ways past finding out!*

God's "ways"—the Greek word here is footprints. God's footprints are past finding out. They cannot be traced. What Paul is saying is, when it comes to digging into the mind of God and mining the reasons why He chose us—we should simply be in awe of God because we are too little to try to comprehend His wisdom! We need to rest in God and not try to think that we are smarter than God.

III. We were chosen by God despite what we Deserve.

- A. Notice the terms that God uses about Paul: He says first of all that before you Ephesians could even be reached, it took an act of the will of

God to stop Saul the Persecutor in his tracks and make him my servant. It took a work of grace in this man who calls himself “the chief of sinners.” Paul deserved retribution, but God gave Paul nothing but “grace and peace.”

- B. Notice also, the terms God uses about the Ephesians. He calls them “saints” and “faithful.” What is strange about this? Well, we only have to look to ourselves. Think of what it was like before you knew Christ. You were anything but a saint. You had no real saving faith. It took God to save the Ephesians. It takes a work of grace to save us.

Conclusion: Here you and I are, just like Paul, and just like the Ephesians. We are nothing but “miserable worms.”¹ We are full of pride and appallingly ignorant of God. We deserve nothing but to be blotted off the face of the earth. But God seeing our misery, and seeing what we deserve—seeing our ignorance of Him—looking down the corridors of time, and finding “none that seeketh after God, none that understandeth, none righteous, no not one.” What does God do? He “stooped to consider us and planned a way to redeem us” and to forgive us.

The Son of God said;

“I will be born as a babe, I will become a pauper, I will suffer insult in the world, I will even suffer insult in the world, I will even allow them to nail Me to a Cross and spit in My face. He volunteered to do all that for us, and at this very moment this blessed Second Person in the Trinity is seated at the right hand of God to represent you and me. He came down to earth and did all that and rose again, and ascended to heaven; and it was all planned before the [foundation of] the world for you and for me.”²

One preacher said as he came to see God’s plan for choosing us before time and all that Christ did for us in the transaction that took place in eternity past—he said, “it is the realization of this [truth] that makes a man stand on tip-toe and shout out praise to God”³ That’s what we ought to do! Praise God! Let’s stand with our heads bowed.

Appeal: Perhaps you are here and you have not yet become a Christian. And yet, you know you are here for a purpose. God has brought you here because He wants you to be saved. You need to repent today and believe the Gospel. You will stand before God—you’re works will not please God on Judgment Day. You are a liar, a thief—you’ve lusted in your heart, and one day all your works—even your secret thoughts will be exposed. Is there anyone here today you say, I don’t want God’s justice—I want His mercy. I need to be saved today. I need to become a Christian. Would you raise your hand right now?

Then Christian, you are here today, and you have lost the purpose for your life. You are in the world, but you’ve not yet accepted that God has a higher purpose for you. He’s chosen you. You say pray for me, that I will listen to Christ’s calling and not rule my life according to my own desires. Would you raise your hand so that I can pray for you?

¹ Lloyd-Jones, 55.

² Ibid., 55-56.

³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *God’s Ultimate Purpose* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003), 53.

The front of the church is open—come and pray before the Lord. If you need someone to pray with you, there are people waiting for you at the front. What are you living for today? Is your food to do the will of the Father? Have you been called out of this world because of God's counsel? What are you doing for Him right now? Are you walking with Him? Or have you grown calloused? How is your witness for Christ? Are you actively calling sinners to repentance? There is nothing that shows a cold heart than someone unconcerned for souls. Are you chosen in Christ today? You have been chosen to bear much fruit John 15 tells us. Are you bearing fruit today? Are you *praising God* for His choice before the foundation of the world?

Closing Hymn: 36 Stand Up and Bless the Lord