

Ephesians 1B

- After our long introduction last week, we're ready to dive into Paul's letter
 - And since we spent an entire lesson on the letter's background, I think we'll just go directly to the text beginning with Paul's salutation

Eph. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Eph. 1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Paul introduces himself in his customary fashion, identifying himself to his readers as an apostle by the will of God
 - You'll almost always find Paul beginning his letters in this way
 - First, he identifies himself to his Greek audience by his Greek name
 - His Jewish name was Saul, which when translated into the Greek becomes Paul
 - Paul was the Jewish apostle sent by Christ to the Gentile world and Paul embraced his calling wholeheartedly
 - So he identified with his Greek audience by calling himself Paul
 - Next Paul reminds his audience that he possessed the authority of an apostle
 - An apostle is a special member of the body of Christ
 - He is a man commissioned by Christ personally, though a personal appearing of the Lord
 - Apostles had unique authority and power to bring the Gospel to unreached areas
 - They authored New Testament scripture and they could perform supernatural acts of healing as proof of their special calling
 - The first apostles were those who followed Jesus before He died, and then there were a few more who were commissioned by the risen Lord
 - Paul was one of those apostles commissioned by the risen Lord

- Before Paul was commissioned and began to serve the Lord, he persecuted the church
- And it was Paul's history as a persecutor of the church that gave his critics opportunity to accuse him of being illegitimate
- So Paul frequently defended his position of authority
- Furthermore, Paul adds that he is an apostle "by the will of God"
 - Remember how Paul was traveling to arrest Christians in Damascus when the Lord appeared before him
 - Jesus blinded Saul and sent him to a believer in Damascus
 - That believer, a man named Ananias, expressed concern to Jesus about coming face-to-face with the man known to kill Christians
 - And to this Jesus replied:

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 9:16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

- So Paul didn't volunteer for his job...God thrust it upon him
- Jesus says Paul was a "chosen instrument"
- Paul wasn't a volunteer, Paul was recruited, Paul was chosen
- What's more, Paul became a believer in Jesus Christ in this same way
 - Paul didn't get a chance to choose to be a disciple of Christ
 - I imagine had someone asked Saul if he was interested in becoming a disciple of Jesus and suffering for the benefit of Gentiles, he would have spit in their face
 - God didn't put the question to Saul because Saul would have refused
 - And so the Lord arrested Saul on the road, God gave Saul a debilitating condition and then sent Ananias to explain the situation
- Consequently, Paul often opened his letters by explaining his role and authority as something God has willed, not something Paul willed

- It silenced those who claimed Paul wasn't to be trusted since his ministry began after the other apostles and he was a persecutor of the church
 - Paul doesn't defend himself on the basis of self-worth or merit
 - He doesn't give excuse for his persecution of the church
 - Rather, he says the Lord selected him for the role and therefore the Lord was responsible for the timing of his conversion
- This was an especially important point in light of Paul's purpose for writing to Ephesus
 - He's going to explain the Lord's sovereign hand in our relationship with Christ
 - And what better way to prepare them to hear about God's sovereignty than to remind them of how he himself entered into that relationship according to God's choice
- At the end of v.1 Paul addresses the letter to those in Ephesus who are faithful and in Christ Jesus
 - They were "in Christ" which means they were a part of the family of God by faith
 - This was their true identity
 - Before they were Roman citizens or residents of Ephesus, their identity was found in Christ
 - And beyond their identity in Christ, they were faithful in Christ
 - To be faithful doesn't mean to merely have faith
 - A Christian can fail to be faithful to the Lord
 - But those in Ephesus were faithful, as we learned last week
 - They remained faithful to the truth and to the apostles' teaching
- Paul greets this church in v.2 with grace and peace from the Father and the Son
 - This is the classic greeting from Paul
 - He never failed to remind his readers that they were recipients of God's grace and at eternal peace with God

- Before faith they were due judgment, and so they knew the fear of death and what came afterward
- But God's favor, His grace, leads us to eternal peace
- Of course, the church had grace and peace spiritually, but that doesn't mean they experienced grace and peace in their lives
 - We've received God's grace, but do we live knowing we are forgiven?
 - We have been reconciled to God in peace, but do we trouble ourselves with unnecessary fears and worries and struggles of this life?
 - Many Christians do by allowing the things of this world to determine our happiness, security, contentment and fulfillment
 - But we should seek all those things through our relationship with Christ
- As I mentioned last week, this church was especially troubled by worldly temptations and distractions
 - They were leaning too heavily on earthly concerns for validation, for satisfaction
 - And they were overlooking the surpassing riches of God's mercy which was already theirs by faith
 - So for them, Paul wishes they would experience the grace and peace they have received
- Paul then launches into one of the most powerful theological declarations in all the New Testament, intended to remind the church of all they received in Christ
 - The doctrine Paul will teach is found in Chapters 1-3
 - Remember, we study doctrine so we can know how to live in response to these truths
 - So in these chapters, we get a steady stream of truth by which we may live
 - Later in Chapters 4-6 we'll receive the application of these truths
 - The chapters of doctrine take a unique form in Paul's letters, reading almost like a prayer or a praise letter to God Himself

- The teaching opens with a single Greek sentence running from Chapter 1:3-14
- This sentence is a continuous praise to the Lord for all He's given to the believer by His grace
- So imagine you receive a letter informing you that you've been invited to join the most exclusive country club in town
 - You never applied, and you certainly didn't pay the membership fee
 - Neither do you meet the qualifications for membership
- Nevertheless, you received the acceptance letter, so you go to the club office to receive your welcome initiation
 - When you arrive, the club owner presents you with a list of the privileges enjoyed by club members
 - Imagine being overwhelmed by the many, many benefits that come from membership at this exclusive club
- That's one way to understand vs.3-14
 - Paul knows he's writing to a group of status-conscious, wealth-seeking sophisticates living in worldly circumstances
 - They are Christians, and they are faithful to the true teachings of the church, but their affections are divided
 - So Paul is reminding them that membership in the family of God has privileges that far outweigh what they seek in Ephesus
- We'll study these benefits one at a time, but since these verses (3-14) are one long sentence, we will have to divide it up as we go through it
 - By the way, I think Paul's choice to write only one sentence is not an accident
 - It think it's a result of Paul's being carried forward quickly by the Spirit from one thought to another
 - As Paul considered one spiritual benefit, it led him to contemplate another and then another
 - Producing a chain of connected ideas

- So we begin with v.3, which is an overview

Eph. 1:3 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,

- Paul begins where all things begin: God the Father
 - Paul says the Father is “blessed,” and he uses the word in the sense of “speak well of”
 - So Paul says speak well of the Father
- And do so because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
 - Jesus is a member of the Godhead, and His coming to dwell among men was the plan of the Father
 - In the mystery of the Trinity, we know the Lord Jesus Christ was not “created” by the Father
 - Nevertheless Jesus Christ came forth from the Father, taking the form of man
 - In that sense Paul is saying speak well of the Father for sending us our Lord Jesus Christ
- And furthermore, our Father has blessed His children by faith with “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”
 - Paul begins his list of privileges for those in the body of Christ with this general statement
 - There are three parts to the statement, so let’s look at them one at a time starting with the final thing Paul says
 - What we have we receive because we’re “in Christ”
 - Our opportunity for blessing is a result of our relationship with Christ by faith
 - Truly, nothing we’re going to discuss in this letter will make any sense for a person unless he or she is in Christ
 - Because Christ Himself is the Blessed One of God
 - You and I aren’t “blessing-worthy” based on our own merits

- Our opportunity for blessing from the Father is entirely based on Christ's work on our behalf
- So whatever we receive from the Father comes because the Son deserves it, not because we do
 - It's because the Father blessed the Son that we too are blessed
 - And that should give us great comfort
 - Knowing that your blessings are the result of Christ's goodness and His work, not your own, gives us confidence in that future
- Also notice that v.3 is written in the past tense
 - The Father has *already* determined to bless us because of Christ
 - Yes, the Bible teaches of heavenly rewards based on our service to Christ
 - But it also teaches that our relationship with Christ alone assures us of unimaginable blessing apart from anything we do
 - Therefore great and eternal blessing will be ours as a result of our faith in Christ, and this is without question
 - We'll talk more about these blessings as we go further in the letter
 - For now it's enough to know that the Lord has plans to bless all his children because of Christ
 - On the other hand, if you have not yet placed your faith in Christ as your Savior, then nothing Paul's talking about applies to you
 - These are things the Father has reserved for those who are in Christ, because Christ alone deserves them
 - Yet He shares them with those who are His by faith
- Which leads me to the second part of Paul's statement:
 - We have received *spiritual blessings*
 - It's become vogue in the church these days to talk about blessings, to claim blessings, to name blessings, etc.
 - Preachers and their congregations throw the word around frequently and casually these days

- A new car is a blessing, a new job is a blessing, a tax refund is a blessing
- A good hair day is a blessing
- And the Lord certainly grants us earthly blessings in various forms, but Paul has spiritual things in mind
 - The kind of spiritual blessings we can experience today are benefits for our spiritual well-being
 - Things like peace, contentment, holiness, patience, sacrifice, courage, boldness, joy, compassion, humility and the like
 - The Bible calls spiritual blessings the fruit of the Spirit, and they are the manifestation of God's love in our hearts
- Some Christians are so focused on gaining material blessings that they're overlooking the superiority of the spiritual blessings found in Christ
 - Perhaps that's you
 - Perhaps you have trouble understanding how spiritual blessings are of much value when you're struggling just to pay the bills
 - Or you're trying to survive the next layoff or repair a broken relationship, or fight an illness
 - If that's you, then let me encourage you to talk to a Christian who has learned to value spiritual blessing in a fallen world
 - Talk to the one who knows true contentment in a world of keeping up with the Joneses
 - To someone who has learned to forgive in a world of hatred and vengeance
 - Talk to the Christian who has found peace in knowing Christ and waiting for the Kingdom
 - They'll all tell you...they've gained something much more valuable by walking in the Spirit than anything they sought in this world
 - And remember Paul started the verse saying that we have received every spiritual blessing in Christ
 - In other words, you can't find these blessings anywhere else

- You may pursue peace on earth, but you won't find it...you already have it available in Christ
- You may seek contentment or security or love or joy or solace any number of ways, but none of those ways will work in the end
- Whatever they give will be temporary at best
- But true lasting spiritual blessing is found in walking with Christ by His Spirit
- Finally, Paul says these blessings are in the heavenly places
 - Beyond the spiritual benefits that we derive here on earth as a result of walking in Christ, there is even greater blessing awaiting in the heavenly realm
 - This will be a central tenet in Paul's teaching to Ephesus
 - He's going to tell them they are richer than they could possibly know
 - They possess more than their unbelieving neighbors ever will
 - While they were distracted trying to earn the wealth of Ephesus, the Father had reserved heavenly blessings for them like nothing else
 - The sooner you realize how rich you truly are in heaven, the sooner you relinquish the thought of gaining the wealth here
 - It reminds me of Aesop's fable of the dog holding a bone in its mouth
 - It looks at its reflection in the river and thinks it sees another dog with another bone
 - It snaps at the other bone it sees in the reflection, only to lose the bone it was holding in its mouth
 - Likewise, Christians trying to grasp for this world are forgetting that they already hold heaven in their mouth, so to speak
- So in just v.3 Paul has established the thesis for the doctrine of his letter
 - That spiritual riches are assured for all who are in Christ, and these riches surpass all that the world holds

- But this is merely Paul's opening salvo
- It's not a recipe for Christian living, nor does Paul expect us to simply rest in this statement without support
- Think of v.3 as Paul's thesis statement, his overview
 - But we've just begun a sentence that runs for 11 more verses, so there's much more coming
 - Next Paul begins to explain how each member of the Godhead worked to secure these blessings for us
 - Beginning with the Father

[Eph. 1:4](#) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

[Eph. 1:5](#) He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

[Eph. 1:6](#) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

- The opening word in v.4 is translated "just as" in English, but that doesn't really convey the Greek meaning well
 - The word in Greek is *kathos*, which is better translated "in as much as" or "accordingly"
 - The word means, here's how we gained these heavenly blessings
 - So in vs.4-6 Paul explains the Father's role
 - The Father's role in assuring us heavenly blessing was choosing and predestining us to our relationship with Christ
 - Paul says the Father chose us in Him
 - The "Him" in this phrase is Christ, so Paul is saying the Father chose us to be in Christ
 - We know the term "in Christ" is a uniquely Pauline way of describing someone who is saved, a Christian
 - So without a doubt, Paul says the Father chose us to be saved by our faith in Christ

- Paul says the same thing in numerous places including 1 Corinthians

1Cor. 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

- Paul says we are in Christ Jesus by the Father's doing
- Because the Father chose us, we were found in Christ
- For many believers, the word "chose" causes us to pause
 - We ask what does it mean that the Father chose us?
 - Does it mean he chose us over someone else?
 - Does He choose everyone? Does He not choose some? Why?
 - I won't try to address these questions here today, not now
 - But the Bible does answer these questions, patiently and specifically
 - And we will find our answers as we move through this study
- Meanwhile, we can't let our questions lead us to change the basic meaning of words or ignore them altogether
 - Paul says plainly that the Father chose us to be in Christ
 - The words mean exactly what it seems to mean...God selected us to be followers of Jesus Christ
 - Just as He chose Paul to believe and follow Jesus
 - Just as Jesus chose His first disciples

John 6:66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

John 6:67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

John 6:69 "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

John 6:70 Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?"

- While you may not yet understand all the implications of this statement
 - Don't let your questions become reason to dismiss God's words out of hand
 - You can accept the truth of what God's word says even before you understand all it implies
- For example, can you understand that God is One and yet is also Three?
 - No one this side of Heaven can understand it adequately
 - Even as we try to explain it with analogies or other comparisons, our words inevitably fall short
 - But we can accept it as true
- Can you explain how God could exist from eternity? Or how God can become born of a woman?
 - Explanations of these things fail us, yet we still accept these things as true
 - Likewise, we accept the fact that the Father chose us even if this truth raises difficult questions
- If you're tempted to think that God's choice was for something less than our salvation, then Paul's words at the end of v.4 end the argument
 - Paul says the Father made this choice on our behalf so that we would become holy, and blameless before Him
 - To be holy and blameless means to be without judgment for sin
 - To be justified by the atonement of Christ on our behalf
 - This detail eliminates any other interpretation of Paul's words
 - If the result of the Father's choosing us was that we would become holy and blameless, then we must say that the result of the Father's choice was that we would be saved
 - We can't conclude Paul is saying the Father merely chose to offer us the Gospel
 - Offering someone the Gospel doesn't result in that person becoming holy and blameless

- Many people are offered the Gospel in human terms, but most of them die in their sins
- No, the only conclusion we can make is that the Father's choice directly resulted in us being made holy and blameless in Christ
- The Father chose us in Christ because this is the only way we could stand before a holy and just God
- And as it turns out, the timing of the Father's decision is all-important
 - Did He choose us at some point during our life?
 - Was it the moment before we confessed Christ?
 - Was it the moment we confessed, or perhaps the moment immediately after?
 - Perhaps we did something extraordinarily good
 - Or perhaps those who God does not choose forfeited their opportunity to be in Christ because of some terrible sin
 - If He chose us at some point in our lifetime, then we might rightly conclude that His choice was a response to something that happened during our life
 - And the Lord didn't want us to misunderstand how we found ourselves in Christ
 - It wasn't something we did, whether good or bad, it was God's choice alone
- So in v.4 Paul says the Father chose us before the foundations of the world
 - The foundations of the world refers to the start of God's creative work in forming the universe
 - Paul imagines God's creative work as a massive construction project
 - Before the superstructure of our skyscraper can begin to rise from the pit, a foundation must be laid
 - And even before that foundation is poured, an architect has drawn up the plans for every step of the construction

- Those plans show in detail how the final work will appear, yet the plans themselves are not the work itself
 - They represent the mind of the architect prepared in advance of the construction project
 - But as time moves forward, the plans in that drawing will take shape as a building, beginning with a foundation
- So Paul says that the Father had you and me in His architectural drawings for salvation in Christ
 - And He drew up these plans even before the Lord began the creation of the world
 - Go back to Genesis 1:1, read that verse, and then consider that the Lord had you on His mind even before that verse took place
 - Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Lord had already placed a check mark next to your name: “Chosen for salvation”
 - Then on a day, in the course of time, God’s plan unfolded and you were born and then you were born again
- Why did the Lord make His choice before Creation itself?
 - So that we couldn’t attribute His choice to anything inside His creation
 - It wasn’t a result of your family line
 - It wasn’t the result of your parents
 - It wasn’t the result of your choices or decisions
 - You didn’t earn it, you didn’t even know it was coming
 - Just as Paul wrote when he explained why God blessed one twin of Rebecca and not the other

Rom. 9:10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac;

Rom. 9:11 for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,

Rom. 9:12 it was said to her, “The older will serve the younger.”

Rom. 9:13 Just as it is written, “Jacob I loved, But Esau I hated.”

- God announced His choice of the younger son in Isaac's family above the older son
- And He announced it before either had been born to ensure that we couldn't say it was the result of what they did
- It wasn't based on merit; it was based solely on God's purposes in choosing
- It's no different for us as believers in Jesus Christ
 - We were chosen by the Father and His decision came long before we were born
 - And though we've only just begun to understand this important point, we can already see why this point is important to Paul's argument
 - We can be assured that we have spiritual blessings in the heavenly realm, because God has chosen us to have them
 - If God's plan to bless us began even before the Creation itself was formed, then what could possibly deny us our blessings?
 - What *inside* Creation can challenge a decision God made *before* Creation?
 - So the fact that we were chosen by the Father is immense comfort to every believer who has come to understand and rest in this truth
 - In coming weeks we'll explore the concept of God choosing us in greater depth
 - But even now let the power of this truth begin to comfort you
 - As Paul says:

[Rom. 8:31](#) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?