

## Sermon for July 14, 2024 – 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 1:3-14 EHV

### Theme: Who are you in Christ?

- 1) You are a child of God, chosen by the Father from before creation (3-6).
- 2) You are a child of God, washed clean by the blood of the Son in time (7-10).
- 3) You are a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit for future glory (11-14).

<sup>3</sup>*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.*

<sup>4</sup>*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 <sup>5</sup>he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup>and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves.*

<sup>7</sup>*In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight. <sup>9</sup>He made known to us the mystery of his will in keeping with his good purpose, which he planned in Christ. <sup>10</sup>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.*

<sup>11</sup>*In him we have also obtained an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in keeping with the purpose of his will. <sup>12</sup>He did this so that his glory would be praised as a result of us, who were the first to hope in Christ.*

<sup>13</sup>*In him, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and in him, when you also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. <sup>14</sup>He is the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession, so that his glory would be praised.*

Have you ever asked yourself, “Who am I? Why am I here? What purpose am I serving? Would anybody care if I were gone?”

Modern psychology sees such questioning as a symptom of low self-esteem and encourages us to combat such feelings with self-affirmation. “Think about the positive impact you have on the people closest to you. Concentrate on the good you do. Have confidence in yourself.”

The problem I have with such encouragement is that I know my sinful heart. Even the good I do is never purely good because, outside of Christ, there is always some ulterior, selfish motive driving me to do what I do. No, it's not always apparent, but when I take time to examine my heart thoroughly in the light of God's Word, I must confess: *Indeed, I know that good does not live in me, that is, in my sinful flesh.*<sup>i</sup>

Where, then, can we Christians find our true value and purpose? With the apostle Paul as our guide, let us learn to find it in Jesus, under the theme: **Who are you in Christ?** 1) You are a child of God, chosen by the Father from before creation. 2) You are a child of God, washed clean by the blood of the Son in time. 3) You are a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit for future glory.

Part 1: You are a child of God, chosen by the Father from before creation.

Our sermon text begins: <sup>3</sup>*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.* Yes, we Christians have every reason to praise God. Why? Because God the Father has not withheld any good thing from those who have faith in Jesus. Instead, He gives us every spiritual blessing in Christ. How so? Paul says:

<sup>4</sup>*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.*

Just think: from before creation, God foresaw you, dear Christian, and loved you - despite your sinfulness and rebellion against him. God is not ignorant. Even before He created Adam and Eve, God was aware that they would exchange their holiness for sin at the devil's coaxing. Not only that, but he also foresaw all your wickedness. Yet, despite it all, God not only chose to proceed in creating us, but He also planned a way for us to regain the holiness and righteousness humanity would lose through Adam's fall.

*In love* <sup>5</sup>*he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.*

Take a moment to stand in awe at Paul's words: the almighty God loved you so much, dear Christian, that He chose to adopt you as His child before creation! The word translated as "son" in our text also means heir. Think of what that means: all the love and blessings God the Father intends for Jesus; He also intends to give to you in Jesus. Out of everything in creation, the LORD chose to adopt you as His child – making you a coheir with Christ over His infinite Kingdom.

Why? Paul tells us:

*He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup>and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves.*

Take careful note of Paul's explanation. We did absolutely nothing to deserve God's love any more than the demons that rebelled against Him; yet the LORD chose to love you, dear Christian. Why? What moved Him to do this? Nothing but pure grace. The only reason God the Father loves you is because He chose to do so in Christ — that's it! And consider how great that love is: He, together with the Son and Holy Spirit, planned out a special way to save you – which we will soon consider.

But before we do that, let's go back to our original question: who are you in Christ? Even though we don't deserve to be anybody because of our sinful rebellion against God, God the Father chose you to be His dearly loved child from before the world's creation – and that, dear Christian, is who you are!

Part 2: You are a child of God, washed clean by the blood of the Son in time.

St. Paul continues: <sup>7</sup>*In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace,* <sup>8</sup>*which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight.*

Just as pledging money to a charity does not do the charity any good until you give them your donation, so also God's pledge to save and adopt us would not have done any good had He not put His plan into action.

So, how did God make good on his pledge? He sent his Son into the world, born under the law to redeem all of us who are under the law.<sup>ii</sup> He was tempted in every way, just as we are, but did not sin.<sup>iii</sup> But, even though Jesus was perfectly innocent, he nevertheless died as the world's worst sinner. Why? Because Jesus took on all our sins and allowed himself to be punished for them as if they were his own. By doing that, Jesus redeemed us – that is to say, he bought us back for God the Father by paying for our sins in full. He offers us His righteousness and holiness as a gift that we wear through faith in him. Just think: whenever God looks at a believer, He sees His Son and loves you as much as He loves Jesus.<sup>iv</sup>

But God didn't stop there. St. Paul continues: <sup>9</sup>*He made known to us the mystery of his will in keeping with his good purpose, which he planned in Christ.* <sup>10</sup>*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.*

God has revealed to us Christians the great mystery of how sinful humanity is saved through the Gospel of Jesus. Sadly, to many of the world's powerful and intellectually elite, the Gospel remains a mystery. Why? Because they want to think that they know better than God – that they are more evolved and educated – not really needing anything from God because they believe humanity can provide for itself. Their pride prevents them from submitting to God's Word and receiving it in humble faith. Therefore, they miss out on the absolute beauty of what God has done and continues to do for His chosen loved ones. But to people like you and me - simple people in whom the Holy Spirit has awakened a childlike faith - the LORD has revealed the mystery of His will.

Yes, even if you (like me) are not smart by worldly standards, God has blessed you with an understanding that surpasses that of the world's greatest intellects. For example, while so many scientists are trying to discover the universe's origins, you already know the answer: It is written in the first chapter of Genesis! While great philosophers are trying to figure out life's meaning and purpose, you are living it in Christ! While people are trying to figure out what the future of humanity will be, the Holy Spirit has revealed that to you in Scripture as well – so much so that you do not have to be afraid of pandemics, floods, wars, drought, or climate change. All those things are signs that Christ's coming is near. Best of all, you know God and the everlasting future He has purposed for you in Christ. Why? Because you are a child of God in Christ, washed clean by the blood of the Son.

Part 3: You are a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit for future glory.

Paul continues: <sup>11</sup>*In him we have also obtained an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in keeping with the purpose of his will.*

*<sup>12</sup>He did this so that his glory would be praised as a result of us, who were the first to hope in Christ.*

God the Father has predestined you, believer in Christ, to be his heir from before the creation of the world. He accomplished His plan of personally redeeming you through Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus' resurrection is God's universal declaration that all your sins have been forgiven. You are at peace with God.

The LORD planned and accomplished all these things for you so that you might share in his everlasting presence to the glory of His saving name. And how do we become partakers of the everlasting glory God purposed for us in Christ? St. Paul tells us:

*<sup>13</sup>In him, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and in him, when you also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. <sup>14</sup>He is the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession, so that his glory would be praised.*

The moment He created faith in our hearts through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit made us partakers of all God's blessed plans that He purposed for us in Christ. For many of us, this happened at our baptisms as infants, when God the Father declared to all the saints and angels in heaven: "He is my son; she is my daughter whom I love and adopted for myself in Jesus." Others of us became included in the body of Christ later in life when the Holy Spirit moved us to repent of our sins through the preaching of His Word. Yes, just as a shepherd does not stop searching for his lost lambs until he brings them home, so the Holy Spirit did not stop searching for you until He awakened repentance and faith in your heart through His Word and Sacraments.

Yes, through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, God has given you the Holy Spirit as a "down payment." "Of what?" you may ask. As a guarantee that He will bring to completion what He planned for you from before creation: your everlasting redemption as His holy child.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, who are you? Why are you here? What is your purpose on this earth? Praise be to God that He offers you an amazing answer to these questions through His Gospel: 1) In Christ, you are his dearly loved child whom He chose to adopt from before the creation of the world. 2) In Christ, you are God's dearly loved child whom Jesus purchased and washed clean from all sin through His sacrifice on the cross. 3) In Christ, you are God's dearly loved child – holy and blameless in God's sight because the Holy Spirit has clothed you with Jesus' righteousness through the faith He created in your heart.

Confident of who you are in Christ, live to God's glory: using your words and actions to confess Christ to the world so that many more might believe in Him and share with you in His everlasting glory. Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Romans 7:18a EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Galatians 4:4-5

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. Hebrews 4:15

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Galatians 3:36-27