

Date: July 15, 2018

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14

Title: OUR LIVES HAVE MEANING AND PURPOSE THROUGH GOD

Maybe you've noticed one of the words in vogue in society today is the word "blessed." The young lady in the drive through at McDonald's hands you your coffee and adds, "Have a blessed day."

A friend is talking about her three children. She says, "I am blessed."

A guy talking about his job says, "I received the promotion that I've been waiting for . . . I feel so blessed!" What does it mean to be blessed?

Paul says in the first chapter of Ephesians: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will . . ."

It would be impossible to explore in depth, the complete meaning of Paul's words this morning, but this is an important passage. Let's do a little exploring!

First, what does it mean that we have been blessed by God? Paul writes, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ . . ." What does that mean? Does it mean that everything's going our way? Maybe, maybe not. Maybe it means something entirely different.

A man named Al Keeney tells of a young man bagging groceries at his local super market. The young man is taking his job very seriously. You see, the young man has Down syndrome. As he bags Al Keeney's groceries, he does so very conscientiously. Keeney thanks him and moves to push the grocery cart out the door. But the young man insists that helping him to the car with the groceries is part of his job. So Keeney dutifully follows the young man to the car. He opens the trunk and the young man carefully places the grocery bags inside. Keeney says thank you. Then the young man does something that catches Keeney off-guard. He puts his arms around Keeney and says, "I like you!" Keeney, in turn, says the only thing he can come up with, "I like you, too."

Thinking about that moment Al Keeney writes, "Now, some will say that when I see that young man in Heaven, he will have been made whole. In other words, they think he will be like the rest of us. But I wonder, when by God's grace I am made whole, I won't be more like that young man, than he like me. You see, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 6:22-23). My friend the bag boy was blessed with all those qualities and none of the pride or meanness that so often afflicts me."

What a beautiful understanding of what it means to be blessed. Usually, when we think of being blessed, we think of things like being blessed financially, or being blessed with good health, or an abundance of talent, or an attractive appearance. Then we turn to

Matthew's Gospel and the first thing we run into are the Beatitudes:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad . . .”(Matt 5:4-12)

Is that what most people think when they say, “I am so blessed”? I really don't think so. In fact, you can be blessed financially and physically and in terms of such things as talent or intelligence or appearance . . . and lose your soul. Your financial abundance can blind you to the needs of others, your physical well-being may make you insensitive to those who are suffering, your talent or intellect or attractiveness can delude you into thinking that you are self-sufficient and no longer need others or need God. Can you begin to see that some of the things you count as blessings can turn out to be the worst thing that ever happened to you?

If you asked Chuck Colson, who was the aide to Richard Nixon and was sent to jail for Watergate, before June 17, 1972, the night of the Watergate burglary, if he were blessed, he probably would have answered, “Most certainly I am blessed. Look at my power. I'm one of the President's closest aides. Look at my affluence. Look at my fame. All over America people know who I am.” Colson was blessed in all the ways we normally think of blessings.

But then the house of cards came tumbling down and overnight Chuck Colson was totally disgraced. He went to federal prison for obstruction of justice. Just before Colson went to prison, he was converted to Jesus Christ. Many doubted his sincerity. As a result of his experience as a convicted felon, Colson founded Prison Fellowship, now the world's largest Christian outreach to prisoners and their families. Prison Fellowship has more than 50,000 volunteers working in hundreds of prisons in 88 countries around the world. Before his death, Colson received many awards for helping those who could not help themselves.

In *Born Again*, Chuck Colson wrote, “I found myself increasingly drawn to the idea that God had put me in prison for a purpose and that I should do something for those I had left behind.” Chuck Colson, after he lost all the things we normally call blessings, discovered what being blessed by God was really all about.

Are you blessed? Are you living to the best of your ability, in the center of God's will for your life? Paul knew what it was to be blessed, and he spent most of his last years in a Roman prison, not because of any wrongdoing on his part, but because of his deep allegiance to Christ. Yet he writes, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ . . .” So, we need to see: We are blessed.

And we have been chosen by God. Here again, being chosen may mean something different from what we may think. Paul writes: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **For he chose us in him**, before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in his sight . . .”

Again, that may mean something different than we think. Normally we think of being chosen as an honor or an award, we have won; Chosen for the tennis team . . . chosen to be a cheerleader . . . chosen for a sorority . . . chosen for a promotion. Usually, we’re chosen for some virtue or strength or attribute we have. We may even brag about being chosen. Just think, long before we were chosen by God, the children of Israel were chosen by God. How has that worked out for them? Talk about being persecuted! My guess is, that millions of Jewish people over the ages, wished God would have chosen someone else, because there have been few persecuted, as much as the Jewish people.

So, what does it mean to say, “We have been chosen by God”? Israel was chosen to be a blessing to the world, not to receive blessings, but to give blessings. Being chosen was an honor for that ancient people, but it was also a burden.

Being chosen, certainly doesn’t mean that God loved them or loves us more than any other people. We’re a prosperous people, but it’s a very dangerous thing to say we have been chosen for prosperity.

When we say “we have been chosen by God,” we’re being recruited, because we believe in Jesus Christ. Our task is to bring people into the family of God. God has in mind, a new world order. God’s new world order means that every person in this world will live in dignity and harmony as children of God under the Lordship of Christ. That’s God’s new world order. And you and I are the agents of God’s plan.

Paul put it like this in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We’re therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

We are blessed and we have been chosen to be God’s ambassadors, as Israel was, to be a blessing to the earth.

And where do we begin? We begin right here, right now, reaching out in love to everyone with whom we come into contact. When we as the church of Jesus Christ fulfill that one simple mission, the gates of hell cannot long endure.

But there’s one thing more we need to see: far beyond being blessed and being chosen, we have been adopted into God’s own family. Adoption is the process by which a person who doesn’t belong to a given family, is formally brought into it and made a full, legal family member, with the rights and responsibilities of that position.

A minister in Vermont tells about a Bible Class teacher who was registering the

children in Sunday school, and she asked two brothers their ages and birthday. One of the two boys said, “We’re both seven. My birthday is April 8, 1976, and my brother’s is April 20, 1976.”

The teacher was a little confused and said, “But that’s impossible!”

The other brother said, “No, it’s not, one of us is adopted.”

Before she was even aware that she had asked, the words came out, “Which one?”

The boys looked at each other and smiled. Then one of them said, “We asked Dad that a while ago, but he just said he loved us, and he couldn’t remember any more which one was adopted.”

It’s beautiful when it works that way. In God’s family we are all adopted, adopted to be children of God, adopted to be brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful thing it is to be blessed, to be chosen, to be adopted. It doesn’t mean that God loves us any more than He loves everyone else. It doesn’t mean that life is going any easier than it does for anyone else. What it means is, that our lives have meaning and purpose. What it means is, that we are ambassadors of Jesus Christ. So being ambassadors of Christ Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.