

## God Chose Us!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Epistle reading, Ephesians chapter one. **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places, even as he *chose* us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.** Here ends our text.

There once was an orphanage with children of all ages who were hoping for adoption. As it was a Christian orphanage, the director scheduled regular church services for the children on Sunday afternoon. She invited ministers from the surrounding parishes to take turns holding the service.

One Sunday the minister from the Calvinist church came to preach. He followed the teachings of the sixteenth century theologian John Calvin. He began to preach on the doctrine of predestination from Ephesians chapter one. He began, "Our God is sovereign. He's all powerful. Therefore, everything can only happen according to his will. From the beginning of time, from the foundation of the world God chose some to be adopted as his sons. He predestined some to salvation. But we know from the Scriptures that not all will be saved. For broad is the road and wide is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. On the Last Day Jesus will separate all people, like a shepherd separates sheep and goats. To the goats he will say, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' Now the Scriptures don't *say* that God predestines some to damnation. But since many do end up in hell, and since the will of our sovereign God is always done, from our own logic we must conclude that God does predestine some people to hell. He wills it. From the beginning of time, some he blessed and elected for heaven while others he cursed and elected for hell. Some he loves and others he hates. But of course, we can't determine which are which. That's part of God's hidden will. You may be the most unbelieving and unrepentant wretch today, but if God predestined you to heaven, by life's end you'll have come to faith. Or you may believe now, but if God has predestined you to hell, at your life's end you'll have fallen from the faith. For in either case God's sovereign will must be done. Therefore, the reason some are saved and some are not is because God chooses some to salvation, but he chooses others to damnation." The preacher concluded his sermon with the words, "The Lord's peace be with *some* of you."

The next week a minister came from the non-denominational church. Though it was "non-denominational", he followed the teachings of the theologian James Arminius. He told the orphanage director that he would be preaching on Ephesians chapter one. The director said, "Oh, dear. The Calvinist minister preached on that text last week, and it had a most disconcerting effect on the children. Some misbehaved badly and refused to come to the service today. They reason that since God has already determined their fate, good or bad, it doesn't matter at all what they do or believe. Other children despaired. They think that since they lost their parents that God must hate them and has already predestined them to hell." The Armenian replied, "Oh, that Calvinist teaching is a most vile doctrine." He rubbed his hands together and said, "Don't worry, I'll straighten them out."

He began his sermon, "Now while our text today does say that God chose us, that he predestined us for adoption as his sons and an eternal inheritance from the foundation of the world, it's really more like a divine foreknowledge. At the beginning of time, God looked into the future and saw that you would come to faith. God didn't really choose you, but he foresaw that you would choose him. There must have been something a little different or better about you that when you heard the message of the Gospel, you chose to believe it while others chose to reject it. Yes, you're saved by your faith, because you remain faithful to the end. Therefore, the reason why some are saved and some are not is because some choose God and others reject him." He concluded his sermon with the words, "The peace of the Lord be with the true believers."

The next week a minister came from the Lutheran church. He told the orphanage director that he too would be preaching on Ephesians chapter one. The director took a deep breath and said, "Are you

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Eph 1:3-14

sure? We heard that text for the second time last week and again it had ill results on the children. Some of them go about in an arrogant manner, proud that they're wise enough to choose God, and that their faith has earned them a spot in heaven. Others were distraught. They know that sometimes they disobey and aren't always faithful to God. They're unsure whether they've chosen God or rejected him." The Lutheran replied, "I think they need to hear the comfort of God's Word from this text."

The service began with the confession of sins. The pastor pronounced absolution. "By Christ's authority, I forgive you all your sins." He read the Ephesians text and began his sermon. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Dear baptized children of our Lord, I know that many of you feel cast off by the world, alone without your parents. For many years you've waited, hoping that some new parents would choose to adopt you, but everyday you've been disappointed. But today I have good news for you. For God our Father has chosen to adopt you as his children. And he chose you not because he saw something good in you, that you were wiser or better or more obedient than other children. For we're all born dead in our trespasses and sins and are even hostile to him. But God chose you because he loves you. He chose you before you were even born, before he even laid the foundations of the world. He predestined you to be his adopted children and receive the riches of his glorious inheritance in heaven. But his choosing you was not just a bare decree from the beginning of time. He also had a plan to bring your adoption about. God wants all people to be saved, and so God the Father sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die and take the punishment for the sins of the world. But in God's plan to adopt you, he also had a plan to bring this wonderful news to you. God the Holy Spirit, working through the means of baptism and his Word, gave you faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior. You didn't choose God, but he chose you. And so now God sees you, in spite of your sins, as his holy and blameless children." The pastor concluded his sermon, "The peace of the Lord be with you *all*."

As the pastor left the orphanage, the director stopped him in the hall. She asked, "You said that God wants all people to be saved, and yet some are not. How do *you* deal with the question why some are saved and some are not?" "Easy," the pastor replied, "we Lutherans refuse to answer that question. God has only revealed to us in his Word that he's elected some to salvation. But he hasn't told us that he's elected some to damnation. And in his Word it's certainly clear that we don't choose him. I just preach the Gospel that God has chosen us in Jesus Christ and let the Holy Spirit do the work. The peace of the Lord be with *you*."

Now maybe you've thought at one time or another, "Gee, I'm so lucky to be a Christian. Wasn't I fortunate to be born in a Christian country with Christian parents or married to a Christian spouse who told me about Jesus that I might be saved. What if I had been born deep in the heart of a Muslim or Hindu country? I would've believed that false religion and never known God's salvation in Jesus Christ. Wasn't I lucky." My dear baptized child of our Lord, this was no luck. This was God's plan. This is part of God's eternal election and predestination of you to salvation. Besides choosing you from the foundation of the world, besides sending his Son to die for you, he had a plan to bring you to faith in Jesus Christ. That you're here this morning, listening to his Gospel, is proof of that plan. But even if you'd been born among pagans in Africa or among Muslims in Iraq, as one of his chosen ones, he would've found a way to bring that Gospel message to you. Through the Holy Spirit, he even gives you the faith to believe it. This doctrine of election and predestination is not to be used to try to figure out why some people are saved and others not. It's not to be used to make Christians worry or despair that maybe God hasn't chosen them or question whether their faithfulness is good enough. But this doctrine is for your comfort. God chose you! And so your salvation doesn't depend on you and all your weaknesses. God decided to save you even before you were born. You didn't have anything to do with it. It's all a gift. It's all God's grace in Christ Jesus. Chosen by God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, led to faith in him through the Holy Spirit, you are now his adopted children who stand holy and blameless before him. And as his children you receive the glorious riches of his inheritance in heaven. What a comfort.

The peace of the Lord be with you *all*. Amen.