

Series on the Book of Ephesians
Ephesians 1:11-12
Sermon #7
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Take your Bibles, if you will, and turn to the Book of Ephesians.

As you look at chapter one, and I am saying this especially for those of you who are with us for the first time this morning, although it is good for all of us to be reminded, from verse 3 down through verse 14 we have what we could certainly call a hymn of praise to God. Paul's heart was obviously overflowing with thanksgiving to God for all of the blessings that were his because the Lord Jesus Christ was his Saviour. Surely he intended that all of us who believe can and should join with him in his praise to the Lord. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (1:3).

It was impossible for Paul, or anyone else, in the brief scope of these twelve verses to mention all of the blessings that we have through the saving grace of God. In going through these verses we have seen that as Paul talks about salvation he looks at the past, then he looks at the present, and then he anticipates that which is yet to come in the future. Verses 4 through 6 tell us a little bit about the past and what was done before the foundation of the world. Of course, everything about salvation was planned then, but God determined, as this passage shows, before man was created who would be saved and that they would become members of His family--we have that in verses 4 and 5--and that it would all be to the praise of the glory of His grace.

When we go on to verses 7 and 8, and it is a little difficult just how to break because one thought leads into another, we see that salvation means that we have been redeemed and that redemption carries with it the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace. We do not deserve to have our sins forgiven, do we? But the death of Christ made that possible. When God forgives our sins, it is wonderful to know that He does what we cannot do. He forgets them. It is no wonder that Paul's heart was lifted up in praise to God. This has to do with the present. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (v.7).

Then, verses 9 through 12 deal with the future. A couple of weeks ago, the last time we were in the Book of Ephesians, we learned that it is God's purpose to gather all of His people together in one in Christ. That has to do with the family of God in heaven and the family of God on earth. What a wonderful day that is going to be when all of our differences are gone and we all believe what we ought to believe and we are perfectly united in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second point, having to do with the future and eternity, is our text for today--verses 11 and 12. It has to do with our inheritance. Let me read these two verses for you.

"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ."

In the fifth verse we learned that we are in the family of God. Therefore, being in the family of God, it is reasonable that we would have an inheritance, is it not? That is the connection that brings us an inheritance. It is a family relationship. It should not surprise us to see that Paul includes this "that we have obtained an inheritance", that is, it is guaranteed to us. We have not come into the full possession of it, but our inheritance is ours.

There is a question as to the exact meaning of the expression "in whom we have obtained an inheritance." The language that Paul uses here could mean either one of two things. It can mean, as our authorized version suggests, that we have an inheritance, or it can also mean that we are God's inheritance.

The New American Standard Bible gives the marginal reading: "we were made a heritage." Actually, the Word of God teaches both, does it not? The Word of God teaches that in salvation we have an inheritance; but it also teaches that we are God's inheritance. In fact, you will find both of these truths in Ephesians chapter 1. For example, look at verse 14. When he speaks of the sealing of the Spirit, he says, "which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Then, when you run down to the prayer in the latter part of the chapter in verse 18, you notice that he says, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."

So, how are we going to take this expression "in whom we have obtained an inheritance?" It seems to me that there is not the discrepancy between these two statements that we, at first, might think. I am going to suggest, this morning, that we can take this both ways because what God is doing with us which makes us His inheritance is really what our inheritance is. Our inheritance means that something is coming to us, and in the process of something coming to us God is claiming something for Himself. I think you will see this as we look more closely at these two verses. I am sure that most of you have considered this subject of the inheritance of the saints on other occasions and you have noticed it in your Bible reading. You notice that the inheritance, as you read through various New Testament passages, is spoken of in different ways. Sometimes God is spoken of as being our inheritance. Our inheritance can also mean heaven. That seems to be the emphasis that Peter was making in 1 Peter 1:3-4 when he speaks of our being "begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away . . ." The context, wherever this expression "heir" or "inheritance" appears, always shows the special emphasis that this term has; but, to be sure, it has to do with the future of our salvation. We need to recognize that God has established a purpose that we should have an inheritance and that the realization of our inheritance in the time to come when we stand in His presence will bring great honour and glory to His holy name, "That we should be to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Christ."

I want to divide these two verses under two headings, if I may. (Some of you are interested in following the outline.) First of all, I want us to see the certainty of our inheritance. Paul mentions this in verse 11. Secondly, just what he has in mind by this term "or the nature of our inheritance" in verse 12--what Paul's special emphasis is in this particular passage.

Now. The certainty of our inheritance. Look again at verse 11. You notice that Paul uses four very strong words in this eleventh verse. He uses the word "predestinated," he uses the word "purpose," he uses the word "counsel," and he uses the word "will." All of these have to do with God. God is the One Who has done the predestinating. It His purpose, His counsel, His will, that we are concerned about when we think of this inheritance. Any one of these terms, if he had only used one--any one of them--would have indicated that this inheritance is absolutely guaranteed to us. It is certain that we are going to receive this. But, to have all four of these words in one verse shows that it is certain beyond any possibility that it could be otherwise. Heaven and earth may pass away, but God's word stands forever, and this, of course, is part of His Word. It is absolutely certain.

This is one fact that makes this a supreme inheritance, as my subject this morning has indicated. We are talking about an earthly inheritance. We all know that different things can happen so that the heirs would eventually receive nothing. A man's business can fail and leave him without any resources at all, or a person can make the wrong investments with his money, or some unforeseen event can take place and the inheritance can all be used up. I mentioned some time ago that bumper

sticker which you have probably seen, usually attached to some mobile home of some kind. It says, "we are spending our children's inheritance." A lot of different things can happen to an inheritance. There are times when parents are unable to leave anything to their children, so there is no inheritance to be given. Our heavenly inheritance is not like that. Nothing can possibly happen to do away with it. It was decreed by God in the planning of our salvation that we would have an inheritance. That is the meaning of the word "predestinated". He has decreed. He has ordered that we should have one. It is the plan which God deliberately resolved to carry out from the very beginning. That is the meaning of the word "purpose". Counsel means that this is something which God did deliberately and for specific reasons. Of course, "will"--He is working things out according to the counsel of His own will. Will marks the plan of God as absolute, unchangeable, irrevocable. God's will does not vacillate from one thing to another. He is not in the process of making up His mind about anything. His will is established.

You can see that we have a powerful statement here. The believer could not stand on better ground as far as the future is concerned. His hope is steadfast and sure. The purpose of God, deliberately and carefully laid out, has been decreed as the expression of His eternal and blessed will.

We as believers need to think more about God in connection with our salvation. The people who feel that they can lose their salvation, and many sincere Christians feel that, do not understand the greatness, the majesty, the sovereignty of God. It is inconceivable, is it not, that God would set out to do something which He is unable to accomplish. Therefore, salvation is upon the surest foundation. When you talk to some Christians, you would think that God is making up His mind even now and that He is just as surprised and pleased as we are when someone is saved. But remember that God is never surprised about anything. It is all according to His plan. He is pleased when people are saved, but He looks upon it as the further accomplishment of His divine will. These are wonderful truths in connection with salvation.

Think of Romans 8:28 in this connection, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." At the end of Romans 11, you remember, we have that majestic statement of Paul. He is really on a mountaintop of doctrine and teaching, and we have these words (Romans 11:33-36): "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! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." This is the way Paul closes that greatest of all sections in the entire Bible when he deals with salvation in all of its many facets.

There is another point that I want you to see in verse 11 before we go on to verse 12. It has to do with those words "him who worketh all things", He "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

When we talk about the sovereign, eternal purposes of God, we are not being fatalists. We are talking about the unceasing work of a mighty God by which He is seeing to it Himself that His purposes are being accomplished. It is not chance and it is certainly not luck. It is not right to say that things just happen to turn out as they do. The Apostle Paul wants us to know in this passage of Scripture that God is at work. God is at work. "In whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." This means that that working of the plan and purpose of God is not dependent upon us. God may use us, and God does use us, as instruments; but the work is His and the power comes from Him. Without Him there would be no inheritance for anyone. When you look at those words "He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will," it means that everything that touches the lives of God's people is so designed that it serves the purposes of God. Things can so suddenly change. Dean said to me, as I was talking to him in the hospital, "you know, just two or three weeks ago I was fine, as far as I knew. Now, I have received this word from my doctor." But, you know,

as we look at these things, and they can change quickly for each one of us, we do not know what a day may bring for us. We have no guarantee of this afternoon, do we? But we know that our lives are in the Lord's hands. Whatever trial, whatever testing, whatever upsetting thing may come into our lives, we know that it is all serving the purpose of God.

I like the translation of Romans 8:28 that renders it, "And we know that God works all things together for good to them that love him, to them who are the called according to his purpose." He has an inheritance for us, established by His will and decreed by God Himself and God is at work in all of the circumstances of our lives bringing us to that wonderful day when we are going to enter into our inheritance. It is wonderful to know, is it not, that it is not dependent upon us.

My heart goes out to some of these evangelists who are pleading for money saying that they might go off the air. They often say, "If we go off the air, there are going to be millions of people who will go to hell who otherwise could have gone to heaven." They obviously do not understand about the purpose of God, do they? God is at work and the work is dependent upon Him. It is the accomplishment of His purpose.

Now. What in particular did Paul have in mind as he spoke here about our inheritance? What is it that God is seeking to accomplish now in preparation for our entering in to that which is our inheritance because we are saved?

You see, the nature of our inheritance is in verse 12, "that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ." This is God's purpose in salvation. This is God's plan for your life and my life. This is His will for us. This is what He is working on every day of our lives, in all of the circumstances that He brings to bear in our lives. It is stated very clearly and very specifically by the Apostle Paul: "That we should be to the praise of his glory."

We often boast, do we not, I hope we do not do it too much, but it is a common fault among us as the Lord's people, about how much we are doing. Preachers can boast about how many sermons they preach, how many people are coming to hear them, how many people that they are supposedly seeing saved, how much money they are taking in, what large churches they are building, how many books they have written. We talk a lot about these things and we are often impressed about these. But, you know, it is never right for a servant of the Lord to boast except in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. If God is blessing a man or God is blessing a church, that is always wonderful, but the glory always belongs to the Lord. He is the One Who is working all things according to the counsel of His will. If a lot of people are really being saved, we all should be thankful; but it is God Who should be praised for what He is doing. I have never saved anybody. I am not even saving myself. You have never saved anybody. Whenever anybody is saved, God is the One Who is doing the work. Therefore, He is the One Who is to be praised. If hundreds of people are coming to hear the Word of God preached, let us praise God for the way He is moving upon the hearts of people.

Let me say this, and I hope that you are listening this morning, God is interested in our service. As we learn in Ephesians, we are saved by grace and it is not by works; but we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Our works are important, but God is not primarily interested in our service. Verse 12 tells us that the main thing that God is concerned about is what we are. Do you notice that word "be"--"that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ." The effectiveness of my service, the effectiveness of your service, as an individual Christian, is dependent upon what you are. I hope that we understand that. God did not save us because He needed a lot of servants. For a time I was in a church where I heard this continually, that we are saved to serve. This was the thing that believers were encouraged to do. I state again, service is extremely important. Most of us are not serving the Lord as much as we should, or as effectively as we should, but while service is important, true spirit-directed and spirit-empowered service, yet God did not save us because He wanted us to see how much we could get done. It is not our

responsibility to save just as many people as we can as though this were dependent upon us; He saved us so that we should be to the praise of His glory. This is our inheritance.

What is God's glory? Let us just take the verse apart and look at it. Let me answer that by reminding you of what the Apostle John said about the Lord Jesus Christ in John 1:14. He said, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.) full of grace and truth." What does that mean? It is a verse which speaks of the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ on the one hand and His deity on the other. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." John is saying that He was a real human being. He was a real man. But as we came to know Him, as we observed Him and as we listened to Him, we discovered--in all of this--we beheld His glory. We saw the evidence of His deity. It is the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John, at the end of his Gospel, says that he had written these things, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." When you think of God's glory, think of God Himself. Think of the manifestation of Who He is, the revelation of His glorious attributes. When the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds announcing the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, remember that we read in Luke 2, "And the glory of the Lord shown round about them." God was present there in the fields with those shepherds when the angel conveyed the message to them. Those shepherds were exposed to one of those marvelous manifestations of the very presence of God Himself. When the Tabernacle was completed, when the Temple was completed, you remember the glory of God descended upon the place. God was present there. The High Priest alone could go into the Holy of Holies once every year because that was where God was manifesting His presence. For us to be to the praise of His glory means--and I hope that you catch this in case you have not heard this before--it is the purpose of God in salvation for us to be like God is. If I am going to be to the praise of His glory then it means that in my very being and my very person I am manifesting and reflecting the glory of God Himself. This is what God is doing in our lives. This is the main thing that He is concerned about. This is the work of sanctification which ultimately is going to lead to our glorification.

Paul stated it this way in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "We all, with open face (meaning an unveiled face) . . ." Remember that he has been talking in that chapter about Moses putting a veil over his face because the people could not look at him because of the glory. Now he says that Christ has come we are with an unveiled face "beholding as in a glass (mirror) the glory of the Lord . . ." The mirror is the Word of God, and to behold the glory of the Lord is to see the Lord as He is reflected in the Word so that as we come to the Word and we read the Word and we learn about the Word--we hear it taught, we hear it preached. From Genesis to Revelation we see that this is a book given to us as a revelation of God Himself. Paul says with an unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we "are changed . . ." Here is where I especially like the Revised Standard Version which instead of just saying from glory to glory, it says from one degree of glory to a higher degree of glory. We are being changed "even as by the Spirit of the Lord." You see, only God can do this. You and I cannot even live up to our own standards. We are constantly failing, are we not? But God has undertaken a work in the hearts of all of His people that even now, and perhaps this is the reason that the Apostle Paul says, "we have obtained an inheritance." We are entering into that. God is getting us ready for heaven. therefore, as we are exposed to the Word of God and learning the Word of God, and especially seeing how the Word of God reveals to us our Lord Jesus Christ, we are being changed. You cannot be faithful in reading the Word and hearing the Word and being instructed in the Word without something happening to you. That is the way God works. God's Word does not return unto Him void. It accomplishes that which He pleases. It prospers in the thing whereto He has sent it. We cannot frustrate at all the marvelous purposes of God.

Just this morning I was reading in Isaiah's prophecy and thinking of these great words that we have in the 11 verse of Isaiah 46 where the Lord was speaking and saying, "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east (evidently referring to

Cyrus), the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it" (Isa. 46:9-11). That is wonderful, is it not?

We are "predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory." I have reminded some of you many times of what dear old Dr. Chafer, my theology teacher in seminary, used to say. I have never forgotten it and I hope that I never will forget it because it is just hitting the truth right on the head when he said that "God is so delighted with His Son that it is His purpose to fill heaven with people who are just like His Son is." We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. You and I may not always be conscious of the changes and the transformation that is taking place, but God is doing this. If you know Jesus Christ as your Saviour, I can say with absolute certainty that while you may not be what you want to be and what one day you are going to be, you are not what you used to be and certainly not what you would have been if God had left you in your sins. That change is taking place and that is the reason why it is so important for you to be reading the Word and seeing Christ in the Word and hearing the Word of God taught. This is God's purpose in salvation--that we should be to the praise of His glory.

Why should it be glorified for this marvelous work? Let me just mention four reasons why we are to the praise of His glory. We are not going to be there for our glory. We are going to be glorified. We are going to have a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. It is not going to be to our praise. He has been doing the work, you see. He has been working out His purposes. It is to His glory because God will have done all that He planned to do in the lives of all of His people. God has one hundred percent success in whatever He does. He may struggle with some of us. We may not be cooperative as we need to be; but the Lord is not going to have one instance of failure when we are going to stand in His presence and we will be like Him that includes the weakest saints and the strongest saint, does it not? Paul told the Philippians, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). There is no question about it. It is absolutely guaranteed. Therefore, He is to be praised.

Secondly, He is to be praised because He is the One Who does it. It is all because of His grace. It is all because of His power.

Dr. Johnson told us, you remember, about the man who said that salvation had a human side and a divine side. The man who asked the question said that he had had a part in salvation and God had had a part. When he was asked to explain that, he said, "well, I have done everything I can to keep the Lord from saving me, and He has done everything to save me in spite of everything that I have done against Him." God gets all the glory, does He not?

Then, He gets the glory because angels are going to be able to see and understand what we were when the Lord first saved us and the unlikelihood that such a change should take place. When you think of the work that is to be done in your heart, and I think of the work that is yet to be done in my heart, why He is to be praised for what has already been done. When the work is completed we are going to be there in glory to the praise of His glory.

Then, may I say finally, and I am sure that there are some other reasons for this, God is to be praised because of the permanence of the work. None of the Lord's people will ever finally revert to what he or she was before. We are going to be like Him for all eternity. Should we not do what Paul was doing when he wrote this? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What did he mean when he said that we are the ones who first trusted in Christ? He was not saying that salvation started with that generation because salvation is the same in the Old Testament as in the New. God has His people in the Old Testament as well as in the New. He is talking about His relationship to them. We were first before you and you followed, and we know this morning that others are going to follow. The very fact that we are here on the earth and not in glory, this morning,

is evidence that God still has a work to accomplish. Is it not wonderful to know that just as we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we today in a very limited sense manifest His glory, God in His wonderful grace is going to use the testimony of our lives to reach the hearts of others and He is claiming those whom He has ordained shall one day be with Him in glory and share the very same likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a wonderful salvation!

If you are discouraged by some trial or some testing, if the clouds are heavy over you this morning, remember that God is at work. God is at work. He has a purpose to accomplish. He is fashioning you more and more into the likeness of His Son. Someday, when we stand in His presence, that work is going to be complete and we will then, as never before, be to the praise of His glory.