

GOD'S PLAN AND OUR PLACE: Ephesians 1:1-14

Introduction:

I picked out 'Top Ten Stories' for the week, on the internet via Google.

1. Minimum Wage Earners Can't Afford Any Level of Rent in Peterborough.
2. Victim of Fatal Havelock Home Fire Identified.
3. BC Announced One Hundred Fifty-five New Covid-19 Cases: Outbreak at Tim Hortons in Merritt.
4. Justin Trudeau Hits Back at China After Threat to Canadians in Hong Kong.
5. Trump and Biden Go At It From a Distance in US Town Hall Events.
6. Azerbaijan Says at Least Ten Killed in Latest Rocket Attack. Blames Armenia.
7. Police Arrest Nine After Teacher Beheaded in Paris Suburbs.
8. Europe Braces for Impact of Second Wave Pandemic Restrictions.
9. Japan to Release On Million Tons of Contaminated Water into Sea From Fukushima Power Plant.
10. WWII Fear surge as Trump Rejects Russia's extended Nuclear Deal.

Take this in for a minute.

So, we all have questions about what is happening, what is going on. Which presidential candidate is going to save us? Which political party will secure our future? Will the Supreme Court now rule for what is right and God honouring? Some may think that the private sector will save us, while others are sure the invention of some medicine will be the solution, and others still will argue for it being renewable fuels or communication. And with the US elections at hand, and the Covid-19 uncertainties affecting the economy and society, and having fallout effects on the Church and church families, what in the world is going on? Who or what has a plan?

We gather here at the Church. We sing songs, take communion, hear a sermon, and leave through the doors again. Have these problems been resolved? Have the nuclear issues been cleaned up? Has world peace been attained? Has the Corona Virus been eradicated? How has coming here today done anything about these issues? What is our role in all of this?

We will consider, today, Ephesians 1:1-14, to help us direct our minds to answers on these matters. We will look at it via three points.

1. GOD'S PLAN.
2. OUR PLACE.
3. OUR RESPONSE.

Jason will be continuing to work through Exodus, and Jerry will be completing a series of twelve sermons on the book of Ephesians, to be interspersed along the way, the first today, and the second in December.

Ephesians Chapter 1

I GOD'S GRAND PLAN:

The book of Ephesians begins with a greeting from Paul to an audience. He calls them holy and faithful.

Ephesians 1:1

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

The whole book of Ephesians focuses on the second verse, for in this verse lies the 'thesis line' for the book's content. On it hangs the message that GOD 'GIVES GRACE TO YOU, AND PEACE, THROUGH JESUS, TO ALL THE FAITHFUL ONES'.

Ephesians 1:2

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Verse three expresses the first point under this heading of 'grace and peace', that being, the word 'BLESSED'. The verse is one long sentence, with truth linked to truth, linked to truth. The word 'blessed' is the engine of this train. God is 'blessed'. He, in turn, 'blesses' us with every spiritual blessing.

Ephesians 1:3

"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."

We look at 'blessings' as something good, and pleasant. It is a 'blessing' to spend time with the family, for example, or it is deemed a 'blessing' when one comes out of a car crash without a scratch or is rescued from danger, and we would consider it a 'blessing' to come into ownership of a new Rolls-Royce. And when we speak of God's 'blessings' and 'Providence', in a sense this idea holds also, to a point. But Paul has a slightly different idea when he refers to "blessed be the God" (vs 3). He, Paul, reaches back to the Old Testament, to the Hebrew reference to 'blessing'. He speaks of a 'blessed' God who providentially 'saves' His people.

By age eighty, it is determined that we have made two million decisions in our life. Decisions are everywhere. What side of the bed to get out of. What time to wake up. What to eat for breakfast. What to wear.

Jerry tells a story about his decision-making one day. He was parked in the Norwood diner parking lot, and he intended to pick up his family at a door around the other side of the building. A few minutes later he found himself in front of a different house entirely (important to his family, but not where his family was currently waiting for him). He realized the problem and questioned himself. 'Why am I here?' Arbitrarily, and absent-mindedly, he had gotten into his car, with one intention in mind, but then had, in his inattentiveness, and without reason, ended up leaving the parking lot and driving elsewhere.

But, Jerry points out, God's decisions are not arbitrary and are not absent-minded decisions. God's decisions are 'purposeful and complete'.

Paul says God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing" (vs 3). They are a particular set of decisions. He is very 'focused' when making this set of decisions, having particular motives in His actions in 'blessing' us.

Ephesians 1:4-14

"even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

Let us consider 'why' He has done all of this.

(vs 5) For the good pleasure of His will - "according to the purpose of his will."

(vs 6) "To the praise of his glorious grace."

(vs 9) According to His good pleasure and purpose - "according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ."

(vs 11) It was the purpose of the One: -"according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."

(vs 12) "To the praise of his glory."

(vs 14) "To the praise of his glory."

God's plan of 'blessing' His people are pointed to one person's 'glory and purpose', that of His Son, Jesus Christ. The 'blessed' Father, God, 'blesses' us through Christ, through Jesus Alone, for His glory and purpose alone. The Father pointed to Him, to His glory, to His purpose, Through one person, His very own Son, Christ Jesus, God has thereby 'blessed' us.

Paul shares what these 'blessings' in Christ are: (Consider the Words)

(vs 4) He chose us: "He chose us ... that we should be holy and blameless."

(vs 5) He predestined us to adoption: "He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons."

(vs 6) He bestowed grace: "His glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

(vs 7) He redeems and forgives: "In him we have redemption ... the forgiveness of our trespasses."

(vs 8) He caused these 'riches' to abound: The riches of His grace, "which he lavished upon us."

These are the actions of God. God's actions show that they are DETERMINED ACTIONS, PLANNED ACTIONS, PREDETERMINED ACTIONS. We can clearly see that God had a plan, that it was predetermined by Christ, 'before the foundation of the world', that we were to be united with the Son, so that we would be 'holy and blameless'.

Ephesians 1:4

"Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."

This was God's Plan 'A' ... This was His Plan from the beginning, even before Creation. This is not a changed plan. It is not a replacement plan. It is not Plan 'B'. God has CHOSEN you and me. We do not need to be concerned that in Genesis, when the snake brought on the Fall that he messed up God's perfect plan. No. God is still working on Plan 'A'.

Ephesians 1:5

"He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."

It was God's will that all of this should happen. He 'predestined' us to adoption. He determined that 'believers' (vs 13) would be adopted into His family, that you and I would become His children, sons and daughters of God. He did this before the time of Creation. In advance of the events, He determined, He willed, that this would happen. (Some people do not like this, and find no joy in this; He chose before we could choose. It feels like He is forcing us. It leaves us feeling like we are pitiful and need His charity. Indeed we are pitiful 'sinners', and we are, indeed, in need of His Plan.) His Plan was made

by the counsel of His will, that we should 'obtain an inheritance' (vs 11), that we should become sons and daughters. He did not do this because He had 'pity' for us. Scripture clearly states that He made this plan because it 'pleased God' to do so. He acted in 'love' (vs 4), 'freely' (vs 6), and with 'kind intention' (vv 5,9). He willingly 'chose' us, an unholy and guilty people; and it pleased God to 'adopt us as His children.

Put another way, before anything was created, God the Father, and God the Son loved each other 'eternally'. In that love of the Godhead, He, God the Father, determined to choose us to be sons and daughters, in the Son, whom He loved, because it pleased Him to have us join them because it pleased Him to invite us into that eternal love. He adopts us for pleasure in His Son.

His act of Creation was an 'execution' of this Plan. Creating heaven and earth was part of this Plan. God's Plan comes to be: executed in His Son, by His will, for His glory, and His pleasure. And He gives His Plan to us, in His Son.

But not everything in the Plan was pleasing, in the way that we see pleasure.

Ephesians 1:7

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."

EXECUTION OF THE PLAN WAS ONLY POSSIBLE BY THE EXECUTION OF HIS SON. THE BLOOD OF CHRIST HAD TO BE SHED SO THAT GOD COULD PURCHASE HIS PEOPLE. His Plan for 'adoption' could only be done by the means of the 'suffering' of His Son.

Paul uses the words redemption, forgiveness, and grace. It took, not only love, for this plan to unfold, but also took 'grace'; "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (vs 6). It was a deliberate act of grace, but 'grace' was not an add-on, 'grace' was not like one would add peas beside mashed potatoes on a plate. No. 'Grace' proves to be the 'whole package', the whole Plan. We read, 'THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE' (vs 7). As believers we receive not just one aspect of the Plan, we are not given one part and denied another. No. We receive the whole package, 'all of the riches of His grace'. We are chosen, pre-determined, adopted, redeemed, and forgiven. This is most amazing. All of this is given, all of this to bring about the Plan, to fulfill the Plan, to make the Plan known. God has shown us the 'riches of His grace', the fullness of His grace. There are no other words to be said.

So, how does this 'Grand Plan' fit, and connect' with the ten headlines? God has a Plan, but how does it match up with what is happening in the world?

Speaking of the 'riches of His grace':

Ephesians 1:8-9

"Which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ."

One more thing pleases the Father, and that is 'to make known His Plan'. 'HE MADE KNOWN TO US THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL' (vs 9). He has shared with us the 'heart' of His Plan. It pleases Him to 1. adopt us, and 2. forgive us.

But this 'mystery' that has been revealed 'shattered' most Jewish expectations. They were expecting a Messiah, yes, but a Jewish king, a mighty and powerful Jewish king, one who would overthrow the Romans and establish a 'Jewish state', cleanse the land, and then rule. They did not understand the revelation of 'the riches of grace'. It totally did not fit 'their plan'. And then comes 'the cross' which further points away from what they are expecting. Yet there exists 'irony' in this situation, for God's Plan has many dimensions. God is not just working in Jerusalem, or just in Galilee, or even just in the Middle East or Rome. God is at work both in heaven and earth. And He is working among spiritual beings (angels and demons) and physical beings (mankind). Everything is being ordered and arranged, in heaven and on earth, under Christ. It is not just Israel that is being arranged for. No. Every planet, pumpkin, amoeba, asteroid, and human being, is being arranged under the headship of Christ. Everything will be given its rightful place. All evil will have its rightful place, and all that belongs to Christ will have its rightful place.

Ephesians 1:10

"As a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.... "

The 'fullness of time' has not yet happened, but must be accomplished. God is doing something now, and in the future of time, and all will be under Christ. Everything outside of Christ will be death, destruction and chaos. Demons will have no influence. Violent and evil men will be sent from God's presence for eternal destruction. Disease will no longer exist. Pollution and destruction of the ecosystem will come to an end. Earth will stop its groaning. He will eradicate disease and death.

We talk about curbing violence, and gun control, but get nowhere in solving the problem. But God's plan will destroy evil, and the evil one, and will restore Creation. Through the ages, there has always been the seeking for a saviour. The Jewish leaders and people looked for a 'national' saviour. The Greeks looked for a 'person of wisdom'. And we look for the right political party, the right corporation, the right candidate to save us. But God's Plan shatters our expectations because His Plan, His agenda, is 'universal' not local, and He is ordering both the physical and spiritual worlds 'UNDER CHRIST'.

God's Plan:

He is done choosing. He has predetermined, adopted, forgiven, and redeemed, to bring all under Christ. So, what is our place in all of this?

II THE BELIEVER'S PLACE:

Let us look at God's Grand Plan, noting the words from the text.

- 'blessed us' (vs 3)
- chose us (vs 4)
- we should be holy (vs 4)
- predestined us (vs 5)
- bestowed on us (vs 6)
- lavished upon us (vv 7-8)
- you also (vs 13)
- you ... having also believed (vs 13)
- you were sealed (vs 13)
- our inheritance (vs 14)
- us, we, our, you, you also, your (vv 2-14)

This is God, co-opting YOU and US into the Church, into His Grand Plan. This is Him setting everything in order, and He has involved us, putting you and me into the framework. We look to political parties, city councils and councilors, supreme court nominees, geniuses, and Nobel prize winners; then we all come to church to exalt Christ, and then leave again and look elsewhere for the ones we expect to save us. But God hasn't called 'them' to partner in His Grand Plan. No. He has called 'us' to partner with Him in His Grand Plan. He predestined 'us' into His Plan in time past. He deliberately chose 'us' to be found in Christ, and has brought 'us' to this place, in this time, both physically, and spiritually. He has chosen 'you', before heaven and earth were created, to be holy and blameless before Him, and he chose 'us' to have access to His presence. And if we circle back and consider verses 1-8 of the Ephesians 1 text, we see clearly that where we are today is not a matter of chance, and had nothing to do with some lucky draw. God Himself has 'chosen' 'us' to be partners with Him in His Grand Plan.

And 'He purposed in Him', that all should come under Christ's authority, therefore, we can look forward to a time when everything will be brought together under the headship of Christ. While this world is seemingly confused and troubled, and chaotic, we can be assured that a meaningful future lies ahead, for Christ is in the center of God's plan, and in the fullness of time, this shall all become apparent.

Ephesians 1:10

"As a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

Ephesians 1:11

"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."

This is Paul, using Old Testament language, stating how the Father brings all things under, and through Christ, and has determined that you and I will be with Christ. Joyfully, Paul makes this known to us, that God has purposed all things through Christ. And, we can also take note, that Paul uses a passive voice to express how we've been 'chosen', saying, "we have obtained an inheritance" (vs11a), which is good news; for it means that we are already God's precious possession. It is not something to come; we are already His.

Those nations who have listened and obeyed false gods remain connected to those false gods, and their fate ends with the same fate as the false gods, without an inheritance, for the inheritance is for those whose hope is in Christ. Both the Jews, and the Gentiles, those who have hoped, heard, and believed have obtained the guaranteed inheritance; the believers of yesteryear, and the believers of today also. And given the inheritance, we are 'sealed in Him', sealed by the Holy Spirit, not to be removed; this is God's promise, of His ownership, and our security in Him.

Ephesians 1:12-13

"To that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit."

To recap then, our place is not to 'order things'. No. It is God's Plan, and He, Father God, orders the Plan, and orders the things in the Plan, and places them all under Christ, in His fullness of time. It is not our place to put things into order. No. Our place is to HOPE, HEAR, and BELIEVE. It is God who gives Christ to us, and God who gives us the inheritance, and it is God who seals us with the Holy Spirit. It is He who makes us holy and blameless, and He who gives us access. By Him, we are chosen, by purposeful predetermination, to be God's children, and to be found in Christ, and all this has been done according to God's will, in Christ Jesus, and all for God's pleasure and glory.

III OUR RESPONSE:

Ephesians 1:3a

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the end, the Father is 'blessed'. The end of The Plan shows us this. The purpose of The Plan was to bring Him 'praise and glory'. We learn from the Scripture passage, that indeed, this occurs.

Ephesians 1:6

"To the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

Ephesians 1:12

"So that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory."

Ephesians 1:14

"Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

The end purpose is that PRAISE is made to His glory. Therefore, PRAISE HIM! His Plan is already worked out in Christ, and He has already involved us, and therefore, all that remains is our own response, that is, for HIS SONS AND DAUGHTERS TO PRAISE HIM. God chose us to 'praise Him'. God chose 'us' sinful humans to be the recipients of His inheritance, and He chose 'us' to please Him, to 'praise Him'. He allowed His Son to suffer, to be a sacrifice. Why? TO PRAISE HIM. He gave His Son to complete The Plan. Why? TO PRAISE HIM.

We are anxious about the things we see on TV, have fears about persecution, and death. We've grown comfortable with the well-being and luxuries of our lifestyle. Yet we are growing to love a life that will not last, will not exist tomorrow (Covid has shown us how overnight life can change.) Biblically, we are left with examples that show us how important 'rightful priorities' are, of understanding about The Plan of God and His priorities and expectations, and our response to it. We are reminded, for example, of King Nebuchadnezzar, who was praised and worshipped, yet his kingdom is no more, for his priorities were wrongly established, and his son after him did likewise. Daniel, explains the error of their ways to Nebuchadnezzar's son.

Daniel 5:18-23,26b

"O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored. ... God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end."

History reminds us likewise, for Caesar, ruler of the known world, was also 'praised', yet his empire is no more. And Lenin, Marx, Stalin and Hitler were also 'praised', yet are no more. Only one name has

been 'praised' from the beginning, and continues to be. God the Father is He who is to be 'praised' and lives on in 'His glory'.

Rather than attending to the TV, and fretting over elections, or fussing with opinions from friends and family, turn to Ephesians 1, and 'PRAISE HIM', for the Father has determined that ALL THINGS will be subjected to Christ, to the 'praise of His glory', and He will give them their rightful place.

Our response: LET US 'PRAISE THE NAME OF GOD'.