

Pastor Kyle Mercer
We Are Blessed

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Series: The Church and the Home

Ephesians 1:3-14

BIG IDEA – WE BLESS GOD BECAUSE HE FIRST BLESSED US

One of the most amazing things about the Christian message and the good news of Jesus is not just that we're forgiven but that God invites us into his family. It's not just that he cancels the record of debt that stood against us, but he makes us children. I mean, God could have forgiven us and said, "Okay. I forgive you, and you get to come to heaven with me forever, but you're going to be subjects and servants."

That's not what he did. He said, "Instead of being subjects and servants, your primary identity is going to be as sons and daughters." What an incredible story. Guys, adoption is hard. I don't know if you've ever been in that process. Obviously, some of you have, or you've known somebody.

Let me give you two words. When you think of adoption or foster care (I'm going to put those together)... Let me give you two words: *costly* and *complicated*. I don't mean to be too negative, because there's a lot of joy on the other end, but it's very costly. Did you hear how emotionally costly is? In fact, you have to tell people this.

If it's the first time they've ever gone through the adoption process, you have to say, "Hey, listen. This may not work out. You may think you're getting a child, and you may have bought the crib. You got the bunk beds, and it's minutes and moments away, and you get a phone call that he or she's not coming." It's emotionally costly.

It's also financially costly. It costs tens of thousands of dollars to adopt. So, we said, as a church leadership, "I think we can do something about this. We want to help families, and we want to be like Jesus who said, 'Let the little children come to me.' We want to be like James, and we want to care for widows and orphans."

So here's what we did. We said, "Let's take 100 grand from our missions budget and set it aside for the sole purpose to help fund and fuel families that want to do adoption and foster care." So, if you're a member in our church, and you want to adopt, we will help you with 25 percent up to \$10,000 to adopt. It's unbelievably exciting. If you want to get into the foster care pipeline, we're going to help reimburse your expenses up to \$2,500. So, I hope you know we're serious about this.

Christians have always cared about adoption. Do you know when, historically, adoption became popular in America? When Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie did it. "Oh, look. There are beautiful, rich celebrities who are adopting. Honey, maybe we should adopt." That's what happened. But for Christians, it was cool long before Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie made it cool. In fact, it wasn't just cool; it was biblical.

We adopt because God first adopted us. The gospel is not just our message; it's also our motivation. Let me just speak personally. I have not talked about this a lot because I don't want this foster care and adoption thing to be tethered to me or my family. We have gone through the foster care process. We do respite care, which means we're in the shallow end of the pool.

We will take foster kids for the week or the weekend to help foster families. That's how I got sick recently. It's just what happens as you invest. It's actually a picture of the gospel. Sometimes it makes your life a little bit different and more difficult. But it has been an unbelievably huge blessing to my wife and me and to our kids. So, I'm going to pray for us about this whole adoption and foster care initiative in our church, and then we are about to dive into the deepest text I've ever preached on in my entire life. Let's pray.

Lord, we are here together as a church family. It's great to laugh together. The church is a family of families. God, you're our Father if we're in Christ. Jesus is our great older Brother, and we're just brothers and sisters. When we understand that the church is a family, it makes all of the "one another" commands in Scripture make a lot of sense.

Lord, I'm guessing in a room like this, in a church like ours, there are maybe a dozen people right now in this room who have considered adoption or foster care, and into the complexity and the costliness, we want to simplify it and streamline it. I pray that people would take their first step and their next step in regard to what you might be calling them to do in adoption.

I pray for all of us, because every Christian isn't called to adopt, but every Christian has a heart for adoption and understands the biblical basis of it. So, would you help us as we dive into a deep text today? In Jesus' name, amen.

Have you ever wanted to know what somebody else was thinking? It's kind of frustrating sometimes when you're like, "What are they thinking?" A lot of times, wives are like, "What is my husband thinking?" Let me tell you, ladies: not much. You know, "What club should I hit on number 7?" That's what we're thinking about. Okay? The guys are so frustrated. They're like, "What is my wife thinking?" And all of the wives are like, "Well, you should know. I told you." We don't know. Okay? We don't know unless you tell us.

If you'll type to or turn to Ephesians 1, we're going to get to see how God thinks. Interesting. We wouldn't know how God thinks if God didn't tell us, "This is how I think." You know this, because anytime you're trying to get to know somebody, it's always more dependent on the person being known. They have to open up. They have to reveal themselves.

What we have with the Bible is what we call *revelation*. I'm not talking about the book of Revelation; I'm talking about Genesis to Revelation. That's God's revealing of himself, his forfeiting of his personal privacy. If we don't have revelation, then all we have is speculation. Revelation is "This is why God has done what he has done," and he tells us.

If we don't have that, then we have speculation. "Well, this is what I think, and this is how I feel, and this is what I guess." Not as helpful as revelation. Here's what happens in the Bible. In the Bible, God reveals himself in what is called *progressive revelation*. It's not hard for you to understand. It basically means God tells us more across time and builds on what he already told us.

This is what you do with kids. You're like, "All right. You have to learn your basic math. You have to learn your numbers, and then you have to learn addition and subtraction. Then you have to learn multiplication and division. Then you can do algebra, and then you can do calculus." Okay. Duh. That's how it works. It's called *progressive revelation*.

Well, if you'll look in verse 9, he says, "The mystery of God's will." Today we're talking about the mystery of the counsel of God's will. It's like, "Wow! My head hurts." What is a mystery? In the Bible, a mystery is not something you cannot understand. It's not like, "Ooh, got you! Mystery." In the Bible, a mystery is something we did not understand in the past but God has now revealed to us...progressive revelation.

So, here's what we're going to do today. There's a reason, by the way... I actually do think about these things. There's a reason I waited seven years to preach through the book of Ephesians. I wasn't ready, and we weren't ready to go through Ephesians until now. This is why I probably need at least another couple of years before we're

ready to go through Romans. We're going to deal today with the deepest things in the mind and heart of God.

Here's what we're going to deal with today. We're going to deal with why you are a Christian, and you're going to have to ask yourself if you want the 5-year-old answer or the 15-year-old answer. Most people (and it's okay) and most churches give you the 5-year-old answer. "Oh, you trusted Jesus. You prayed to accept him into your heart. You said the Sinner's Prayer, and you believed in him, and you repented of your sin."

That's the 5-year-old answer. Today, I'm about to give you the 15-year-old answer. Here's what it's like. You know, when your kids are 5 or 6, or maybe younger, they look to you and ask, "Mom, Dad, where do babies come from?" You're like, "Yikes!" and you give them... It's not a lie, but you give them an age-appropriate answer.

You say something like, "Well, God put that baby in Mommy's tummy." Or maybe you say something like, "Well, when a daddy loves a mom..." You know, whatever. You're not going to go into great detail. You might say a little something about marriage, and you might say about love, and you might say... Whatever. That's what happens when you're 5 or 6, but then...

It's all different ages for us, but there's usually that moment growing up where you're 10 years old, and you're in the back of the bus, going to school, and the fifth or sixth grader says, "Let me tell you how babies really happen." And you go, "Oh my goodness!" You're scared, and you're shocked, and you're interested, and you're surprised, and you're overwhelmed.

That's exactly what's going to happen this morning. I'm going to tell you why you're really a Christian, if you *are* a Christian, and it's going to be the same as you felt when you first heard about how a baby is really created.

01 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BLESSED?

So, let's go to verse 3. We'll start there. Here's what it says: ***"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..."*** So, here's what we're going to do today. I'm going to give you the deepest doctrine in the Bible. Maybe the only places there would be deeper doctrine than what I'm teaching today would be Romans 9 and 11.

But I am not giving you this doctrine so you will only be deeply doctrinal people. If you ever meet deeply doctrinal people, they're strange, as a general rule. Paul says,

"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..."

He's saying the purpose of doctrine is doxology. The purpose of understanding the Word is worship. The purpose of going deeper is so I can reach higher to God. What I'm trying to do today... The goal is not to give you a bigger brain; the goal is to, hopefully, give you a bigger heart.

The first thing Paul does is he praises God. He says, "Blessed..." Do you see the word *blessed* in there three times? Now, we have to understand the word *bless*. You know, today you'll see on social media... Someone will say something. "Got a new job. Got a new home. Got married. Got into the school. #blessed." Or, if you really want to make a long hashtag, #tooblessedtobestressed. That's a real hashtag.

Here's what most people mean by *blessed*: a kind of luck with a nod to God...a little bit. You're probably not going to have an atheist say, "Blessed," but it's kind of a general... Like, there's luck but a nod to God. It kind of has something to do with God. By the way, if you're new to the South, and someone says, "Bless your heart," that's a different kind of blessing. That's a "You don't have a clue, you poor soul."

This is so simple. What we find out here is that every blessing is from God and (this is deep) every blessing is blood bought. What do I mean by that? Every blessing, it says, is in Christ. Every good thing is not just a nod to God. This flows from the cross of Christ. Why is God able to be good to sinners like you and me? Why are we able to have food, drink, family, beauty, health, and all of the spiritual blessings we're talking about? The answer is: because of Christ dying on the cross for us.

Now, the first thing he says is that we bless God because God blessed us. By the way, when it says, "Bless God," it just means celebrate, be thankful for, worship. Here's the truth: *you will bless whoever or whatever you think blesses you*. The problem in America is most of us think we bless us. So I thank me for all I've done for me.

At the end of the day, why do you think you have money? Is it your job? Is it your skill set? You will bless whatever you think blesses you. Why are some people obsessed with politics? Why do they celebrate and bless certain political candidates to an extreme? Because they think those candidates bless them.

Notice in verse 3 he says there are heavenly blessings. Now, let me talk for just a moment about *earthly* blessings. Earthly blessings are also blessings from God. In the Old Testament, there's actually more of an emphasis on earthly blessings than heavenly blessings. Job is super wealthy, and he has 10 kids and all of these servants and all of these cattle. God blesses Abraham, and guess what Abraham has...a lot of money, a lot of stuff. God blesses David and Solomon. You get the idea.

Here's the problem with our earthly blessings. I don't know why this is, but we're not very thankful even for our earthly blessings. Here's why I think we're not thankful for our earthly blessings: because we're looking around and comparing our earthly blessings with everybody else's blessings. We don't feel very blessed because we're comparing our unfiltered life with other people's filtered lives.

I have an average home, but the other day, my kids, my wife, and I went over to a friend's house. We were there for a couple of hours. They have a really nice, really big house. We come home, and we pull in the driveway, and one of my kids says, "Dad, our house is small." I was going to correct them, but I was like, "I know." I wanted to call one of my friends with a smaller house and be like, "Can we come over? I need to spend time at your house so I'm thankful for *my* house."

We are not thankful for our earthly blessings because we compare them with other people's. We're not thankful for our earthly blessings because we don't realize until they're gone. "Youth is wasted on the young," they say. You turn 40, you turn 50, and you have to get up and go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. You look at yourself, and you're like, "I had hair, and nothing was gray, and I had energy. I didn't even realize it."

You don't realize how good it is to be healthy until that's gone. I've had food poisoning once. Have you ever had that? You want to die. I never realized how good it is just to feel good. You don't realize how blessed you are to be able to call Mom or Dad at any moment until, well, you can't call Mom and Dad anymore because they're not here.

You don't know how blessed you are to have your kids in the home... I know it's crazy, and you can't wait to be an empty nester, but then you get there, and the home is a little quiet. Of the time you have with your kids, you'll have 95 percent of it in the first 18 years of their lives. The next 5 percent of your time with your kids will be the rest of their lives.

We don't realize our blessings until they're gone. Partly, we don't realize our blessings because we don't articulate them. We don't talk about them. We don't say what Paul said. He would often say to people, "I thank God for you." But we're not here to talk about earthly blessings. We have to talk about *heavenly* blessings, or *spiritual* blessings.

Look at verse 3. He says that God has blessed us. By the way, it's so sure it's talked about in the past tense. "God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing." Here's what you need to know. Every Christian has different earthly blessings. It's not worth trying to compare. You have more money, but they have a better family. You have a better job, but they have a better marriage. It's not worth comparing.

Everybody has different earthly blessings, but here's the encouraging thing: every Christian has the same spiritual blessings. Do you see that? You have every spiritual blessing. Paul is writing this so you would know how much money is in your spiritual bank account, because you can't be thankful for a blessing you don't know you have. You cannot embrace a blessing you don't know is yours.

So, here's where we're going to go with the rest of the time. We're going to go really deep three different times here. We're going to look at our blessings in *eternity*, our blessings in *history*, and our blessings *today*. Our blessings in eternity are from God the Father, our blessings in history are from God the Son, and our blessings today are from God the Holy Spirit. Isn't that beautiful?

I'm going to take you right through the text, and you're going to see the unity of our triune God. Let's not waste any more time. We have to go into the depths here. Here we go, guys. We're going to go out into the deep waters together for a second, and there's no lifeguard on duty, so learn how to doggy paddle. Let me take you here.

02 BLESSING IN ETERNITY (FATHER)

Verse 4: **"...even as he [God the Father] chose us in him [in Christ] before the foundation of the world..."** That's eternity past. It's hard for us to think about the time before there was time, but that's where he's taking us. **"...that we should be holy and blameless before him."**

You go, "Okay. Thank goodness that whole 'chosen' stuff is over." Then he says *this*: **"In love he predestined us..."** I don't want you to worry about that word, because what it means is predestined. That's what it means...predetermined, pre-decided, foreknew, foreordained. We'll get there.

"...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." Here we go. We're going to talk about the first blessing. It's not meant to be scary. It's not meant to be something Christians disagree and debate and divide over. It's our first blessing.

The first blessing is the blessing of *election*, or the blessing of *predestination*, or the blessing of being *chosen*. My thing is I don't think most Christians have ever been told this. Now, if this was a super-small, insignificant little theme in the Bible, I wouldn't talk about it, or I'd talk about it really quickly. I'd be like, "The word *chose* shows up one place, and this is it, and here's something unique about it."

This is not a small theme. I'll show you. When the apostle Paul mentions the angels, and he talks about the angels that know and love God and worship God, he calls them the *elect angels*. We don't really care because we're not angels. Who cares? I guess things work differently with angels. But he says there are elect angels. Okay, we don't really care. That's the first use of the word *election*.

The second use of the word *election* is people are elected to certain offices in the Bible. God chooses Noah. Why does God choose Noah? He ends up being a drunk. Why does God choose Abraham? Did Abraham go to God and go, "Hey, listen. My dad is worshipping idols, and I'm living in my mom's basement. I have an idea. What if I went out and started a people, and you created a whole nation from me?" That's not what happened. God chose him.

What about Moses who has an anger problem? What about David who's forgotten by his dad. How sad is that? What about Saul who's killing Christians? See, what happens is we read these stories, and it goes, "God chose that person," and we're just like, "Great. I guess God chooses people." It doesn't really bother us.

Then how about *this*, guys? God chose the nation of Israel. You never got upset about that. You never read the Bible and said, "God, why not the Jebusites?" Just think about it. You read it, and you go, "I guess God can choose." God chooses angels. God chooses people to be different prophets and priests and kings.

God chooses the nation of Israel. In fact, in Deuteronomy 7 and 8, God writes to Israel through Moses and says, "I want you to know why I chose you." They're probably sitting there going, "Well, tell us." He says, "I chose you because you're the least and the worst and I would look the greatest by choosing the least. That's why I chose you." Then he goes on and says, "I didn't choose you because you're good, because you're actually a very stubborn-hearted people."

We don't care about God choosing Israel, and we don't care about God choosing the angels, and we're not angry about God choosing people to office. Then how about God chooses Christ? I mean, that's what he's called: the *Chosen One, anointed, appointed, Messiah*. None of us go, "Well, that doesn't seem very fair." No. Someone had to pay the price for our sins. God chose his only beloved Son. We're not bothered by that.

What we're bothered by is the type of election we're seeing today, which is God chooses individuals to salvation. Now, there's a mystery here. What I'm doing today is taking a Dixie cup, which represents your brain and my brain, and we're going down to the ocean and going like *this*. That's all we're doing.

I'm not going to be able to answer all of your questions. It's supposed to create a certain response when we realize, "Wait a second. God chose me?" I love what

Charles Spurgeon said. He basically said, "I'm glad God chose me before I was born, because he would have never chosen me after."

It brings up a lot of questions. Here's what this means. You have to ask this question. People get uncomfortable with some of this language sometimes, and we'll get into some of the questions, but most Christians agree, if you just bring it down and go, "Why, ultimately, are you a Christian?" Like, you're in heaven, and God says, "Why, ultimately, are you a Christian?"

Are you going to say something like, "Well, you know what? I never really noticed this before, but I had more faith than my non-Christian neighbor"? Is that why you're in heaven? Are you going to go, "You know what? I was just a little more...I don't know why...a little more spiritually sensitive than my non-Christian friend"?

Are you going to be like, "You know what? My IQ is a little higher. That's what it was. I'm a little smarter. I was kind of able to put the whole gospel thing together. I kind of understood the whole Old Testament and New Testament thing"? No. You're going to go, "Ultimately, the reason I'm here is because of God." Yeah.

In fact, if you look at the condition of man before... We'll get into this in Ephesians 2 in a few weeks, but you realize... The Bible says we're ignorant. The Bible says we're lost. It's not like we were stumbling around lost and we found God. That's not the picture. The picture is we're lost. Have you ever been really, really lost? You're not getting out and you're not finding... You're like, "Would somebody come get me? I'm lost." That's what we're talking about.

The Bible says we're dead. Now, can dead people vote? They shouldn't. It's not supposed to happen. The Bible says we're blind and we need to see. God opens our eyes. The Bible says we're in darkness and we need light. Now, it brings up a lot of questions. I don't have time to deal with all of them, but Pastor Dave said he would stay as long as possible after service.

It brings up a lot of questions. Let me just give you the two questions most people ask when they first experience this teaching. First, "*Why me?*" If you're asking that question, you're actually asking the right question. It really is. If you come to the place where you ask, "God, why me...?"

I mean, there were 297 kids who graduated in my high school class. There were probably fewer than 10 of us who were Christians. So I ask, "Why me?" The answer is very deep, actually, but also still mysterious. The answer is: it's not random, but it's not ultimately about you or how good you are or what you've done. It's not random. God is not like, "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe...*you*."

But it has nothing to do with how good you are. It's not like God looked down and was like, "Kyle has potential. We have to get him on the team." That's not what happened. It's not random, but it doesn't have anything to do with how good or great or special or different or elite I am. In fact, that's why the number-one effect, if you understand this blessing, is humility. "I cannot believe God chose me."

The second question people ask is about free will. It's like, "Okay. This is a deep question." Do we have free will? Yes, you have free will. You have the free will to do whatever you like and whatever you want, but here's the problem. I don't like kale. Some of you have told me I need to eat kale. Kale is healthy. Look. I can't make myself like something I don't like. I can't make myself want something I don't want.

What the Bible says is in our natural condition, apart from the quickening work of the Holy Spirit, we would never want God. It's supposed to humble us. By the way, people sometimes experience this teaching as scary, like, "Big God; little me." Okay, I get some of that, but it's supposed to be about security.

I've told you before I became a Christian at 16, but I'm not like, "Okay. I made a decision. This is all depending on me and what I decided when I was 16." No. This is depending on what God has been thinking about in eternity past. God loved me before I was born and has been thinking about me forever, and he's going to finish what he started.

It's also actually, in a strange way, a massive motivation for evangelism. You might go, "How?" Well, almost every missionary I know loves this doctrine, because if you go to Laos or Mumbai or Turkey or London, how do you know if anyone is going to believe? It's because God says he has people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

In Acts 18, Paul is discouraged, and he's suffering. In Acts 18:10, God appears to him and says, "Paul, be strengthened. I have many people in this city." In other words, "I have people who are going to believe. I have chosen people in this city. The only way you find out who they are is by indiscriminately preaching the gospel."

So, embrace the mystery. Embrace the wonder. This is not meant to be something you think about all the time. I see two extremes. Either people want to avoid this issue, and they want to explain it away and go, "Well, *predestined* doesn't really mean predestined. What it means is that God saw that we would believe..." It's like, okay, now it doesn't mean predestined anymore.

"Well, *chosen* doesn't mean chosen. *Foreknow* doesn't mean foreknow." Sorry. We go for the simple, plain reading of Scripture. But some people get weird about this. They think it's the most important doctrine ever. This is the conversation on the back of

the bus about how you were really born and what your mom and dad really did. That's what this is.

03 BLESSING IN HISTORY (SON)

That leads to the second thing. The second blessing in eternity is *adoption*. Now, adoption is an answer to a problem. I mean, it is today, but it was then. Back then, there was no IVF. Back then, adoption was an answer to a problem, which was, "I don't have a son." That's what it was.

There were two options if you didn't have a son. There was polygamy, which was usually option one for people. "I will take another wife," which was normal back then. "I will have several wives, and I will find a way to get a son, because the son is how my legacy is going to go forward. He's going to be who stewards the property and the possessions." But sometimes you have a couple of wives, and you can't get pregnant. Then they would go to adoption.

Now, we think of adoption as cute. We think of a little baby, a little kid getting adopted. That almost never happened in Roman culture. Roman culture almost always adopted people in their late teens and early 20s. Why? Because the people who adopted them were old. They had already tried to get pregnant many, many times. They tried to have natural birth.

They were getting old, and they were worried about their legacy, their lineage, their property, their possessions, and their responsibilities, so they would adopt. In Roman culture, by the way, there was a deep respect for adoption, and adopted children were seen the exact same as biological children with all of the rights and responsibilities.

Now why was that? Because several of the emperors of Rome were adopted. Marcus Aurelius was adopted. So, adoption is about saying (we said this at the beginning), "You're not just a servant or a slave; you're a son." What's interesting is today with adoption... When you see adoption videos, like we just saw there... When we think about adoption, we tend to have a romantic, "rose-colored glasses" view of adoption.

You know, you see some couple, and they can't get pregnant or can't stay pregnant, and you hear that they're going to adopt, and you go, "This is so great. You're going to get to be a mom and a dad, and that baby is going to have a home." We love that. Or you see the video there, and you're like, "Come on! A godly family. Give them another kid." We just love it, and it's beautiful. That is the one side of adoption.

Do you know the other side of adoption? "What happened that this 2-year-old doesn't have a mom or dad? What happened that this kid needs to be adopted? Did someone die? Did someone not want this child?" In the same way, you have to ask, "Why did we need to be adopted?" That's where he's going to take us in verse 7. He's going to tell us how we were adopted and the price Christ paid.

Look with me at verse 7. ***"In him..."*** Now we're moving from God the Father to God the Son. ***"...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..."***

Very quickly... (This is so important, but we talk about it all the time. I want to take us somewhere else.) I want to talk briefly about redemption. *Redemption*, to us, is a religious word. Back then, it was a very normal word. It means to set someone free from bondage; primarily, to set a slave free from bondage by the payment of a price or a ransom.

Now, here's why this is important. Back then, you became a slave two ways. *This* slavery in the Bible is very different than the American experience of slavery. Back then, you went into slavery for two reasons. First, military defeat. That's just what everyone did. It was like, "Well, we beat you. Free labor for us now." That's what happened.

The second way you'd become a slave... They didn't have Chapter 11 for bankruptcy, so if you couldn't pay your debts or you owed bills, you would sell yourself voluntarily into slavery. Someone could come and release you from slavery by paying a price. What we see here is Christ paid the price with his blood. Whenever you see blood in the Bible, think that's shorthand for the giving of life.

The principle with physical life and with spiritual life is *something must die for you to live*. Think about this this week. For you to continue to live, just physically, something must die. I think about this every time I eat a rib eye. "This poor cow had to die for me to live." If that offends you vegetarians, all of the cows I eat are vegetarian...*all* of them.

We understand this in the physical world. Something must die so I can live. In the same way, Jesus Christ had to die and give his life so we can live. The Bible says what we get is forgiveness. The main problem is we have sin that needs to be forgiven. Good people don't go to heaven, forgiven people do.

If you'll continue on, in verses 9-10 is the second... It's not quite as deep as what we talked about earlier, but I want to show you something very deep in verses 9 and 10. Here's what it says: ***"...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."

Now, what in the world does that mean? "The mystery of his will and the fullness of time to unite everything under him." Let me try to unpack it. The *fullness of time* does not mean *chronos* time. So, there's *chronos* time...tick-tock, tick-tock, day by day, week by week.

Fullness of time is used to talk about a unique moment in human history. It's used two ways in the New Testament. It's used to say, "God, in the fullness of time, sent forth his Son, born of a virgin." What is that talking about? The first coming of Christ into the world. What is *this* "fullness of time" talking about? The second coming of Christ.

"In the fullness of time, in the second coming of Christ, God is going to unite all things." Now, what does *all things* mean? Everything. He's going to unite all things in Christ. Then he just clarifies. "In case you didn't understand *everything*, I mean all things in heaven and all things on earth."

What does this mean? Well, it's probably helpful to know that the word *unite* is better translated *summed up*. It's actually a math term. One of the things you can do, if you're ever like, "What does this word mean, and how is it used...?" This is not that hard to do with the Internet today. You can just go, "Does this author in the Bible use this word anywhere else?"

There's one other place Paul uses the Greek word *summed up*. In Romans 13, Paul says, "You heard *this* commandment, and you heard *that* commandment, and you also know *this* commandment, and you know *that* commandment." Then he says, "They're all summed up..." Same word: *united*. "They're all summed up in 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

In other words, he says, "Let me simplify and summarize and tell you what all of the laws were about: love." We go, "I get that." What is he saying? At the end of time, you're going to realize everything is about Jesus. Like, *everything*. That's not Christianese to sound overly spiritual. What's going to happen at the end of time is we're going to realize, those of us who are Christians...

When we get to heaven, we're going to realize (in fact, everyone is going to realize it) everything was about Jesus. Let me give you a couple of examples. *Marriage*. Marriage is the most intimate relationship on earth. For many people, it's one of the greatest joys of their life, yet it doesn't exist in heaven. Why? Well, I guess it *does* exist, but it's between Christ's church and Christ. The body of Christ is the bride and Christ is the groom.

Marriage is about Jesus. We know that. But marriage isn't about Jesus in *this* way. Try to understand this because there's a world of difference between these two things. Marriage is not about Jesus in the sense that God looked down and said, "How am I going to explain the relationship between my Son and the church? Oh, there's marriage. Okay, that's good. Marriage is a great picture of my Son and the church."

That's not how it happened. God knew from eternity past that Christ was going to suffer and die for his bride and unite himself to her in a lifelong commitment, so God decided to give us marriage so one day we could understand him. Totally different. It's not that God said, "How do I describe my relationship to humans? Oh! Jesus, come over here. Look at this. Family. That's a great example. That's what we should do. We're kind of like a family." That's not what happened.

What happened was God gave us family so we could understand him. It started with him. Even things that might make us uncomfortable... Even sex is ultimately about God. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 6, "Don't be united to a prostitute," and the next verse says, "Instead, be united to the Lord." Whoa! Did you just use sexual imagery to talk about my relationship with the Lord? Yes.

God was like, "I need something that will express an unbelievable amount of physical pleasure and intimacy, at the same time, that will ultimately point to me. Let's create sex." God could have sustained your life any way he wanted to. He's God. Why food and drink? "Because one day I need to explain to people that Jesus is the Bread of Life and the living water." If you're not overwhelmed, you're not understanding.

Everything... We're going to figure it out one day. "Why sports? Why beaches? Why mountains? Why suffering? Why evil? Why did you create the world when you knew Adam was going to sin?" It's all going to be summed up. Here's the way to think about it. If there was a big blackboard back here, I'd write on *this* side of the equation, "The creation of the world" and "sin" and "evil." Then I'd go way over *here*, and I wouldn't know what's in the middle, and I'd put "Equals: summed up in Jesus Christ."

It'll make sense one day. I remember I was a freshman in college. I was at Elon University. I was sitting in my friend Tim's dorm room. Tim was from Philadelphia, and his dad worked at Westminster Seminary, a great seminary. Tim was about the deepest person I knew at the time. Tim said to me... I remember it was late one night. We were in his room. We were talking about God and theology.

He said to me, "Did you know that Elon University exists for Jesus Christ and his purposes?" I was like, "I thought we were here to get an education. I thought this place existed to make money. I thought this was about making us economic citizens." Those are the secondary purposes. We'll find out one day. I don't know how it all works out. It's all going to be united in Christ.

Wake Forest University exists for Jesus Christ and his purposes. It will be obvious one day. The hospital system here exists for Jesus Christ and his purposes. Who knows how? Maybe it was how he decided to heal us in the meantime. It'll be made clear one day. Truist Bank and its purposes are for Jesus Christ, and, yes, even Krispy Kreme Doughnuts.

04 BLESSING IN THE PRESENT (SPIRIT)

That leads us to the present. Here's what he says. Turn with me to verses 11-14. ***"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..."*** Do you see the depth? ***"...so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory."***

Here's where we get the present experience of salvation. Here's where we go back to the 5-year-old answer. We were in the back of the bus, 15-year-old answer. Now we're going to the 5-year-old answer. We're going to what you tell your kids. We're going to what we tell somebody. "Okay. How do I become a Christian?" Look.

"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."

He basically tells us... How do you practically become a Christian? You have to do two things. You have to *hear*, and you have to *believe*. This is why we send missionaries. The sovereignty of God should not make us the "frozen chosen," as has been said. It should motivate us.

In fact, what's interesting is chapters 9 and 11 of Romans (read those some night) are the deepest chapters in the entire Bible (deeper than what I just taught you) on the sovereignty of God in salvation. Chapter 10 in Romans is the most evangelistic chapter in the whole Bible.

That's where it says, "How can they believe if no one is sent? How can they have a preacher if no one sends them? How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." That's chapter 10 of Romans. So, this is why we plant churches. This is why we send missionaries. This is why we share the gospel with people who are far from God and close to us: because people need to hear, and then they need to believe.

For some reason, you got nervous and said, "I don't know. How do I know if I'm chosen?" Do you believe? If you go, "I believe," you're chosen. If you go, "I don't

believe," well, then you're not chosen. "Okay, I believe." Well, then you're chosen. I don't know how it all works.

Notice he says you have to believe *in* Jesus Christ. That's very different than believing *that* Jesus Christ. My concern in our church and in our city is that people believe *that* Jesus Christ, and they don't believe *in* Jesus Christ. Let's pray for our kids. Growing up in kids' ministry, they can believe *that* Jesus was born. They believe *that* Jesus died.

We can raise a generation of people who are convinced and not converted. They believe *that*, but they don't believe *in*. In fact, the Greek word for *believe in*... It's a little awkward, so we don't translate it this way. It's *believe on* or *believe into*. The classic example... I didn't bring a chair up here, but if I put a chair here, I could say, "I believe that the chair can hold me." Well, do you? You believe *in* the chair when you sit down on it.

The way you become a Christian is when you transfer trust to Jesus. You're born again, and you believe. The Bible says when you do that, you're sealed with the Holy Spirit. Ephesus (I don't think I said this last week) was a commercial port city, so they were getting stuff in and out all the time. What you were looking for (today, as well, but also back then) was "Whose seal is on this?"

The seal was what authenticated things. The seal was what showed ownership. The seal was what protected it. It was like, "Oh, this belongs to the king? This belongs to this wealthy family? We'd better make sure this gets to whoever it needs to get to, because I don't want to deal with that family. Their seal is on this."

Well, God says, "My Spirit is the seal. I'm going to give you myself." Then he says, "I'm the guarantee of the inheritance." Here's how we would say that today. Here's what it would mean in modern lingo: the down payment or the earnest money. If you put an offer on a house, what do they want? They want a little money to let them know you're serious. The more expensive the house, the more money they want down.

What earnest money is... It's basically saying, "Here's enough money that you know I'm coming back to pay the rest, because I don't want to walk away from this." God said, "Instead of money, I'm going to give you my Spirit as the down payment." This hurts my head theologically, but God is saying, "I'm giving you some of me. The rest of me is coming later."

You live in the "Already, not yet." That's why the Bible says there *inheritance*. *Inheritance* says you're not just a son; you're an heir. In the Old Testament, the inheritance was the land. You read the Old Testament, it's all about the land, the land, the land. You get to the New Testament, and it explodes. You inherit the kingdom.

There's this one moment in 1 Corinthians 3 where Paul goes, "Guys, why are you fighting?" Read this tonight. Paul goes, "Why are you fighting? 'Who's of Apollos, and who follows Paul?'" He says, "All things are yours. You're a coheir with Christ. Everything is yours. Everything!" It's unbelievable. We are going to inherit an entirely transformed universe because we're coheirs with Jesus Christ.

That leads to the final thing I need to show you. Verse 14. This is the third deep thing we're looking at together. Look at this. **"...who is the guarantee of our inheritance..."** That's the Holy Spirit. **"...until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."**

Now, if you look in verse 6, you'll see that phrase, and if you look in verse 12, you'll see that phrase, and if you look in verse 14 (what I just read), you see the phrase. You're like, "Okay, Paul. I get it. You're repeating yourself." "To the praise of his glory." So, you start out praising God, and you end praising God. There are four times you praise God. Three of them say "Praise of the glory."

Now, here's what this means. Why did God do this? In some sense, what I'm about to say is maybe the deepest thing. Why did God do everything the way he did it? So that he would be seen as great. We live in a world that was created to show the absolute greatness of God. Theologians say there is not a world that could be imagined or created in which God would get more glory, because if there was, he would have created it.

You and I live in a world in which everything is designed to be united in Christ and to glorify God. So, if you ever ask the question, "Wait a second. Why did God create the world even though he knew Adam was going to fall?" the answer is: because, in some way, God will get more glory, because we're going to know him not just as Creator, but we're now going to know him as Redeemer and as Father.

We're going to get to know God more deeply than Adam ever could because sin and evil entered the world. God created the world in such a way that we would see how great he is. So, as we close... Sometimes when we close I have three things you need to do and four steps you need to take. Today, I think we just need to think about it. I think we need to just take some time and think about how great our God is.

In fact, this may sound like a strange way to close, but as I think about the mind of God and the plan of God, do you know what I think of? The NCAA March Madness tournament. This just happened a month ago. Remember how a bracket comes out for these tournaments? This year was the first year I took my kids and said, "All right, guys." They're 11, 9, and 6 years old.

I think I said something like, "All right. Twenty bucks if you get the Final Four right," which I didn't realize even how difficult *that* was. My daughter is pretty smart. She goes, "Dad, this is easy. The 15 seed is going to lose to the 2 seed." I'm like, "Not always." She's like, "Well, definitely the 1 seed beats the 16 seed." I'm like, "Uh, usually." But not *this* year, we found out.

What you find out is when you... There are only 63 games in the March Madness tournament. No one has ever gotten all of them right. The chance of getting every one of those 63 games right is one in 9.2 quintillion. That's 9.2 with 18 zeroes after it. Guys, we can't even get the 63 games right. God has been architecting the salvation of every person from before time.

So, here's what I think we need to do. We're not a deep people. Our nation is not a deep people. You need to think about your blessings. My grandma used to say, "Count your blessings." Count them. Some of you need to go home and make a list of your 10 earthly blessings. Your marriage needs to have a lot more affirmation and appreciation, and you need to go home and say, "I thank God for you."

You need to tell your kids, "I thank God for you." You need to start looking at all of your earthly blessings and say, "God, I thank you for my job, and I thank you for my health, and I thank you for the time I have here. Lord, I thank you that I can still call my parents" or "I thank you I can call one of my parents."

When you finish making that list, you start thanking God for all of your heavenly blessings. "Oh my gosh, Lord. Thank you. Why me? I can't believe I have an inheritance. I can't believe I'm part of this family." Some of you need to walk in a spirit of sonship, not a spirit of slavery anymore. You need to say, "I know no one knows me, but God has known me since the beginning of time."

You may say, "I don't have much to look forward to with a real inheritance." I had a guy one time... His dad died, and he said, "You know what's sad? My dad left me nothing. We already didn't have a good relationship, but my dad left me nothing." God is saying when you die, you're about to inherit the kingdom of God because of what Christ has done.

So, what do you do in response? The Bible says we're always blessed to be a blessing. We are so blessed, earthly and heavenly, so we could be a blessing to others. What does it look like, for every environment you walk in, to go, "I want to be a blessing because my heart is so full of the earthly and heavenly blessings God has given me"? Let's pray.

Lord, your first word to Adam and Eve was not a command. "Be fruitful and multiply," if we read carefully, was not a command. It says, "God blessed them." Lord, your first

word to humanity was that of a blessing. Lord, when you took Abraham and blessed him, and you said you were going to make him a great nation, you also said, "And through you I'm going to bless the whole world."

Lord, would you help us? We just confess that we are a people who often are more concerned about what we *don't* have than what we have. Would you help us thank you for our earthly and our heavenly blessings? Would you help us to be a blessing wherever we live, learn, work, and play? We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.