

Chosen

Building a Christian Mind

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It's very encouraging to see you all out here, and it's very encouraging to enter into the pulpit with the lyrics of a song about the faithfulness of God echoing inside my head. I say that for a particular reason. I happened to look at the preaching logs that I keep today or yesterday, and realized that according to my log, this is the 1,000th message that I have preached since we first started Truth Community. And so those round numbers always stand out to me and I think I'm the only one that has been here for every single one of those. I'm pretty sure that that's true. Even Nancy was away a time or two. But I'm grateful to the Lord for that privilege. I'm grateful to the Lord of ministering to such sweet-hearted people, and grateful to the Lord for all that still lies ahead, for the best is yet to come at Truth Community Church, and I believe that with all of my heart.

We are starting a final sub-series in our big mega-series called "Building a Christian Mind." If you are new with us, we've gone through a number of things that are essential to Christian thinking, principles, biblical principles that are absolutely foundational for the right operation of a Christian mind and without which no one has a biblical or Christian worldview. And so we've gone through and over a course of 40 or 50 sermons themes like how to know God exists, how to know that the Bible is true, how to know that Jesus is Lord, how to know that God rules over all, how to know that Christianity is true, how to know that truth exists, and all of that has kind of built a lot of momentum for this final sub-series that we're going to call "How to Know True Salvation." How to Know True Salvation and this is, it's really impossible to set one series against the other as to which is most important, so let me just put it this way, this series is so important that we are going to devote Sundays and Tuesdays until close to the end of December to cover it. This is a great time for those of you that have unsaved friends, unsaved loved ones, to try to make an extra effort to invite them to be with us because the very nature of the topic itself is evangelistic in everything that we'll be saying. And as we teach this, we're going to be making some distinctions from what other traditions that are supposedly Christian teach, and for those of you that are newer to our church, I'm going to give you things from Scripture that are distinct and you will recognize the difference from that with which you were raised and that's all going to be really healthy. And it's important for us as we come to a series like this, How to Know True Salvation, it's important for us, so important for us that I'm going to go to a text that I hadn't planned to open with, but I want you to turn to Matthew 7 with me so that you will have a sense of urgency, a sense

of the strategic nature of what we are about to consider as stated by the words of our Lord himself. You could say this, others have said this, this is not original with me, not everyone that's talking about heaven is going there, not everybody that names God loosely or Jesus loosely on their lips is actually a true Christian. We need to know what true salvation is and what it looks like and Jesus himself emphasized the importance of being careful to think about these things rightly and to exercise the time and the effort and the spiritual commitment it takes to make sure that you are on the right path that actually leads to heaven because so many aren't. Those of us that are truly in Christ and have truly been born again are comparatively the minority compared to the overall picture that Jesus paints for us in Matthew 7.

Look at verse 13 with me. Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Now if Jesus is teaching us anything in this passage, he's teaching us that it is important to exercise a discriminating discernment about the teaching of salvation that you believe to make sure that you are going to heaven because there is no excuse, there is no second chance if you die and you find yourself separated from God. Luke 16 is very clear about that. The rich man died, he woke up in Hades and he found that there was a chasm fixed between him and paradise over which he could not pass and he could not depart from the suffering that he was in.

We need to take these things seriously and we really, look, really, we have absolutely no excuse if we don't. The Bible says to test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world, 1 John 4:1. And immediately, watch this, the context of the Sermon on the Mount, which is just remarkable, Jesus emphasizes, he reinforces the importance of what he said, the command that he gives to enter by the narrow gate, he reinforces it with reasons. He says you need to make sure that you're entering through the narrow gate because the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction. It's easy to go to hell. That's the default result for all of humanity. The default is there. You don't have to opt in to hell because you're just going there naturally and it's easy to just go with the flow and end up there and find yourself in destruction and with the many.

So he says, the gate is narrow, verse 14, the way is hard. It's not easy to find the way. You know, you're raised in certain religious traditions, and so it's hard to overcome false teaching. The older we get, the harder it is to change, harder it is to think in new ways. You have the opposition of the world, the devil, and your own internal sin. These things are not easy. In fact, it's impossible to find the way to salvation in your own power. That's one reason, or multiple reasons, to consider the nature of true salvation but notice what follows as you read on in the very next verse in verse 15, just after Jesus had said, "Enter by the narrow gate, the way is broad, the way is narrow, many, few," just after he says that on the nature of true salvation, his very next warning jumps off the page in verse 15 when he says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." There is a warning against false teachers. It's not just that the way is narrow, it's that there are an abundance of false teachers in the world

throughout all the course of time and history, there's a number of false teachers that add to the problem. It's already hard and narrow to find true salvation and then you have to, as it were, you have to pick your way through a thicket of false teachers in order to avoid the destructive heresies that would doom your souls. And on and on we could go. No wonder Jesus says in verse 24, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock." Jesus said strive to enter the narrow gate and if you act on his words as you seek the narrow gate through Scripture, then you're acting like a wise man who is building his house where it needs to be built. But to neglect the word of Christ, to dismiss it as something that's not worthy of your time, "I'm a busy man. I'm a busy woman. I'm a busy mom." Oh, you can just make all of the excuses. We're all busy. And yet, Jesus says that if you're too busy to take what he says about the narrow way seriously, there's a word for you, there's a word for people like that. Verse 26, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew," all of that's a picture of God's judgment on the final day, God's judgment raining down, blowing upon the one who ignored the words of Jesus and that person being pictured like a house. What happens to that house? It falls and great is the fall of it.

So we have no excuse because Scripture has told us it's important that not many find it, these are matters of eternal consequence and we're warned to seek after it, and so we are considering a theme here over these next few weeks that is of utmost importance and I'm glad you're here for it, and I encourage you to be in much prayer for your own soul and also for those that will come. Why not, I ask you, I plead with you, my friends, as we enter into this particular time, that you would have a particular room in your prayers, a particular space in your prayers for the work of this pulpit over the next couple of months that the Spirit of God would fall down upon us and open the eyes of the blind, touch the ears of the deaf, awaken the hearts that are dead, that the culmination of all of this series would bear forth in spiritual fruit that is visible to us all, not to our glory, but to the glory of God and for the eternal good of the souls that would come under the sound of our ministry. I ask you to help. Join with me in this ministry by your prayers, helping us that the word of God, that the Spirit of God would be pleased to have his word go forth with power, that it would run, that it would spread rapidly, and have the effect that the gospel has when God is working and with the proclamation of his own word. This is important.

So what we're going to do, just so you have a sense of the structure of things, it's a little bit different, but that's never troubled me before to do something just a little bit different than the pattern. What we're going to do is this, on Tuesdays this week and following, we're going to be preaching out of some texts from Ephesians 1. We'll kind of go through Ephesians 1 on some key themes on Tuesdays and then, advancing the same theme, on Sundays we're going to be preaching through Ephesians 2. I know how different that sounds, but I think it's all going to come together rightly in the end. So we're going to look at Ephesians 1, a few texts in Ephesians 1 for the next several Tuesdays, Ephesians 2 on Sundays, so that you know exactly where we're going. We're not making this up as we go along and trying to figure it out slot to slot. This is the culmination that the Lord has

brought us to, and I'm privileged to share it with you and to watch with you as we see how the Lord uses it in the days to come. We're going to have a couple of baptisms on Sunday which I'm looking forward to, another couple being baptized and sharing their testimonies of the Lord's work in their lives, and we've had a number of baptisms recently, which I'm grateful for, but look, we should be thinking about it this way: there's a lot of water available for that baptistery, and we're not making nearly good enough use of it. By which I mean that none of us should be satisfied with the level of conversions that we see. None of us should be content with just how things are. We should be longing for the expansion of the kingdom of God, to see more and more sinners genuinely, truly converted. We're not here for a social club. We're not here for social reasons. We're not here to just because these are the people that we like to hang out with and nothing more. We should have an earnest desire to see an advance of the kingdom of God, praying as Jesus taught us to, "Thy kingdom come." Not simply, "Lord, may you hasten your return to earth, but while you tarry, may your kingdom expand rapidly evangelistically and we see the conversion of souls." I love our church. I love the people that are here. I'm grateful for everything that the Lord has done in the past 11 years, but I'm not at all satisfied. I'm not at all satisfied until we run that baptistery dry from having used so much water baptizing new converts and that's the way we should be thinking as a church. There's much, much more to be done. The time is short in so many different ways. The days are dark. Let's ask the Lord to make the light go forth for his glory and for the eternal good of many, many souls, all right?

Now, with that in mind, with that introduction out of the way, "Building a Christian Mind, How to Know True Salvation." Okay? One of the themes that we looked at was the knowledge that God rules over all. That's a general principle that God rules over all. And as we expounded that theme, we talked about the doctrine of the divine decree, that God planned everything in advance that would take place. After establishing the divine decree in eternity past, he created the heavens and the earth and thus he began to act upon the plan that he had established before the beginning of time. And so in six 24-hour days, just a few short thousand years ago, God spoke creation into existence and began to execute the plan that is comprehensive over everything that would ever happen in the universe, he created and began to execute that plan and since creation, he has been working out his intentions by the operation of his providence, by which God causes all creatures and all events to work together to accomplish what he decreed in eternity past. You can listen to those messages. That's a two-minute summary of probably 200 minutes of preaching or more, words to that effect.

Now, those things are established. That's the broad overarching principle of everything. God is God. God rules over all. God causes all things to work according to the counsel of his will, we read in Ephesians 1. That's established by what we've taught in the past year. Now, beloved, those of you that grew up in Catholic backgrounds, Nazarene backgrounds, charismatic backgrounds, and all of that, now the force of those biblical truths now come to bear on the doctrine of salvation. One last little piece of foundation here. It just takes time to establish context so that we approach it with the right sense of urgency and desire and that we approach it with the right sense of biblical context in our thinking so that we can process what the word of God has to say to us rightly. We need to

process it rightly. Last bit of context before we get into our text for tonight is that the past two Sundays we incidentally laid a very important aspect of the foundation to our consideration of the nature of true salvation. Two Sundays ago we looked at the text that says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and we looked at the blood sacrifice of Christ by which he offered up in death his blood as a sacrifice to God to take away the sins of everyone who would ever believe in him. We can call that loosely his passive obedience. Christ yielded his life up on the cross at the will of his Father. He voluntarily gave himself. He stood in the place of sinners at the cross, and he took on the punishment that their sins deserved, the just for the unjust, so that our sins could be washed away. "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The blood sacrifice of the cross is at the center of true salvation. The penal, substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ is at the center of everything. What we're going to see about true salvation is we're not telling you how to save your own soul. You cannot save your own soul. You are lost apart from Christ. True salvation is about how God saves sinners, not how sinners save themselves for God. Nothing could be more important than to understand that basic principle. Blood sacrifice at the cross, foundational to that.

Two days ago on Sunday, we considered the obedient Son. We looked at Matthew 3, and we saw how not just the death of Christ was substitutionary, and he acted as a representative on behalf of his people, but throughout his life, he was fulfilling righteousness; he was obeying the law of God, not to advance his own righteousness, but to establish the basis of righteousness by which his people could be saved, so that when God saves you, and in that moment of justification, when he saves you, you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, what God credits to your account is not simply the shed blood of Christ that washes away your sins, he credits to your account the obedience that Jesus Christ rendered to the law of God in perfection so that you are, the state that you have before God as you go before the courtroom of God is that your sins are forgiven, your sins are pardoned, and most importantly, God declares you righteous by crediting to your account the obedience that Christ rendered to his law, which was perfect in every respect, so that your status before God as a justified Christian is permanent, it is sealed, it cannot be changed. You cannot add to it, you do not add to it with your own obedience, with your own sanctification. What secures your position before God is fully the obedience and shed blood of Jesus Christ and nothing else and because Christ is perfect in his obedience, because his sacrifice was accepted by God as shown by the resurrection, everything necessary for your justification and your standing before God has already been provided for you. And these words are just, they astound me every time I say something like this, your status before God as one who has been justified is the exact same status that Jesus Christ himself has before God. And the reason that's true is because your status has nothing to do, your legal status before God has nothing to do with your own obedience. Your own obedience can't add to it, your disobedience cannot subtract from it because in a reckoning that God does, in an imputation that God does, he counts your sin against Christ and punishes Christ in full for it. and he takes the righteousness of Christ and credits you with a life that you did not live. That's foundational to everything, beloved, and it is gloriously liberating to realize that we're not trying to keep our salvation by our obedience. We're not contributing anything with our

obedience. That belongs to the realm of sanctification. That's important, but it's not the issue in justification. And so we have this broad sweep that God rules over all. We have a foundation in Christ laid for us in the prior teaching and now that gives us what we need to know true salvation.

So the Christian mind understands that God rules over absolutely everything and you can view it this way, biblical salvation, deliverance from sin, eternal life, those things are a subset over which God rules, and so we're not changing the principle by which the universe operates when we come to true salvation, rather, we find that there is a consistency between the God who decreed, the God who created, the God who orders by his providence, the God who will culminate it, there is a consistency between that overarching principle of his sovereignty and what we find when we see what the Bible says about salvation. It's all perfectly consistent. It's all perfectly biblical. And it's only when, here's the problem, it's only when men want some of the credit that this gets muddled up. It's when men want to take credit for their salvation, at least a part of it, you know, they're content to give some of the glory to Christ, but they want the prerogative of saying, "I made the final choice." Uh-uh. No.

And to frame this theme, let's remember a basic principle laid out in Scripture. Turn to Psalm 3. Psalm 3. The basic principle that we want to remember, the starting point for everything over these next couple of months, or at least six to eight weeks, is this, beloved, it all starts right here on the basic principle, and we go astray because we do not start with first principles in our thinking. We want to run to details that we have a particular interest in to the neglect of broad principles. Well, this is a basic principle in how to know true salvation. You could say it starts here: salvation belongs to the Lord. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Look at Psalm 3:8. That's exactly what it says. "Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people!" When Jonah prayed within the belly of the fish, he said the same thing in Jonah 2:9. He was confessing his sin. He was in a desperate situation. And as he concluded his prayer, he committed himself entirely to God and he said salvation belongs to the Lord. Beloved, stop and think about that for a moment. Salvation, whatever salvation is, whatever spiritual salvation, the forgiveness of sin, eternal life, whatever it is, it belongs to God, not to us. It's his. Let me say that again. It is his. It belongs to him.

Look over at Ephesians 2. You say, "I thought you were going to do Ephesians 2 on Sundays?" Well, that doesn't mean I can't turn there on Tuesdays. Ephesians 2, same principle, same point, slightly different language and you should know Ephesians 2:8, and 9 by heart. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Not of works. It doesn't come from you. It's a gift of God. It's God's gift to give as he sees fit. And it's not as a result of works. It's not something that you earn. In John 4:10, Jesus said something similar, you don't need to turn there for the sake of time, but in John 4:10, Jesus was speaking to the Samaritan woman by the well and he said to her, he said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." And the Lord proceeds to lead her to saving faith. He says, "We need to talk not about where the right

mountain of worship is, we need to talk about the gift of God, the gift of God that is like living water and satisfies the thirst of your soul and provides everything that you need." He says in verse 14, "whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again." He's talking about eternal life and notice what he says, "I will give it to him." Christ is in possession of the living water. God is the owner of salvation and he gives it to people as a gift, not as something that they earn.

Now, what I'm about to say, again, it's just vitally, vitally critical. If you and I are going to think rightly about true salvation, we must start right here, at this point that we are dwelling on this evening. If we were to think rightly about it, we must understand that the realm of forgiveness of sin, redemption by blood sacrifice, and the realm of heaven where the throne of God is, that those realms belong to God alone. There is no name of man on the title deed to any of those things. We're not co-owners with God of heaven. We're not co-owners with him of redemption in the sense of the source that provides redemption. And Scripture is clear in the matter of forgiveness that no one can forgive sins but God alone, and thus, the Catholic priesthood is permanently and completely repudiated by the most simple and basic principles of Scripture. No priest, no Lutheran leader should presume what they presume to say, "Your sins are forgiven," as if they have the power to impart forgiveness of sins. It's blasphemy. For our purposes tonight, salvation belongs to the Lord. It is the gift of God. And as a result of that, my friends, there is no human entitlement to salvation whatsoever. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no not one. There are none who seek for God. Every mouth is closed, Romans 3:19 and 20. The whole world is silenced and held accountable to God because of their sin and people who are in sin make no demands. They make no demands on God for what he must do for them.

There's no human entitlement to it. We're all guilty, vile rebels before him and as a result of that, let me back up, we're guilty, vile sinners, and therefore by the stain on our hands, we can't begin to raise it up and tell God what he ought to do and give us blessings. We can't do that. On the side of deity, salvation belongs to him. It's a gift of God. And so the gift is entirely God, the realms are entirely God's, and we have no claim on them because we forfeited everything when Adam fell and we joined in the rebellion in our own lives. We have no entitlement to it. And so, beloved, God has the exclusive prerogative as the Creator to give what is his to whom he wishes. God has the exclusive prerogative as Creator to give what is his to whom he wishes.

Now, let me give a really crass example a crass illustration that all of you will immediately identify with and say, "Yeah, that's right." Most of you, you adults anyway, you have a wallet or a purse that contains your personal belongings, your credit cards, or whatever cash you might carry and all of that, and that stuff belongs to you. Now if you want to be generous and give some of that to someone else, perfectly your prerogative because you're the owner of that property. But you would be rightly offended if someone came up to you and said, "You are obligated to give me what is yours. You must give that to me." You would say, "By what right do you say such things?" You know, I mean, I realize that Marxism's taken over the world, but we still live in a realm where we believe in private property. What's mine is mine. If I want to give it to you, I can, but you can't

demand it as though I must give it to you because you don't have that right, you would say to someone. If you were thinking clearly enough after being stunned by the hubris that would force someone to say something like that, say, "What's mine is mine. I have the final decision over what I'll do with mine. You can't make that decision for me, especially to your own benefit." I told you it's a crass, simple example, but we understand something about that.

Well, multiply that by infinity and multiply it by perfect holiness, and by total depravity, and you realize how utterly inappropriate it is for men to think that God owes them anything in the realm of salvation. God is God. It belongs to him. He can do with it what he wants. We must recall that as we come to our text this evening, as we come to our text, you know, after a 30-minute introduction. Ephesians 1. Ephesians 1. We read this in verses 3 through 6, which will be our text for this evening. Ephesians 1:3 through 6. As Paul writes to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus, he says,

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, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Now my friends, before we get any further into an exposition of this, notice the verbs, notice the verbs and the time references. He chose us before the foundation of the world. Verse 5, he predestined us. This was according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In every aspect of this text, God is the actor and we are the recipients and this is a cornerstone text for the biblical doctrine of election.

The biblical doctrine of election. Let me just give you a brief definition of election. Where the title of tonight's message is "Chosen," it could have just as easily given it one word title, "Election." This is central to an understanding of true salvation. Election is the act of God before the foundation of the world. Election is the act of God before the foundation of the world in which he chose some individuals in Christ to receive salvation. I'll say it again. Election is the act of God before the foundation of the world in which he chose some individuals in Christ to receive salvation. God, still continuing the definition here, God chose those individuals based solely on his purpose, not on any merit or foreseen faith in men. God chose those individuals based solely on his purpose, his loving purpose, you could say, not any merit or foreseen faith in men. What that definition says in an expanded form, is that salvation belongs to the Lord. It's his to give as he sees fit and man cannot question him in what he does with a gift that belongs entirely to him.

Now what we want to see this evening in our remaining time, we want to see four aspects of this biblical doctrine of election and to understand, beloved, as we go through, probably a little bit rapidly now at this point, understand that we're devoting six, eight

weeks, Sunday and Tuesday, to cover the whole realm of salvation. So if some things don't immediately click in your mind, be patient. Be with us Sunday, be with us Tuesday, listen to the messages again, time or two or three, and it'll come together. I know that the Spirit of God will be at work in our midst and help you, but be patient, and we're not going to try to answer every question that could be asked tonight, we're just laying out the contours, the outline, the scaffolding, the engineering blueprint, by which we'll understand the rest. Four aspects about the biblical doctrine of election for this evening.

1. The praise for election. The praise for election. Paul starts this section of Scripture, verse 3 through 14 is all a unit, it's one long sentence in the original language, 202 Greek words all in one sentence. It's amazing to try to diagram that. But that's important to understand the context of what Paul is doing. What Paul is doing in this broader section of Scripture in verse 3, he is praising God. He is offering worship to God as he instructs the church of Jesus Christ and as he gives worship to God, he tells the church of Jesus Christ, "This is what you are to do in response to your salvation. This is what you are to do in your understanding of the gift of God in salvation. You're to worship. You're to worship." And so he starts on this note of worship as he exalts God and calls the people of God to join in with him. Verse 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." What Paul does here in verse 3, is he states the theme in a very broad stroke. Verse 3, he states this theme really, really broadly, as broad and as comprehensive as it can possibly be stated, and then in the subsequent verses, he starts to unpack it. It's like seeing a vast wall mural that's just spectacular in the impression that it makes and then you go up and you start to look at individual aspects of it and you realize the intricacy of the way the artist has put things together. Here Paul looks at the whole tapestry as a unit, praises God for it, and then he starts to unpack individual aspects of it as he goes along in the remainder of the passage.

He states it broadly and then he explains and what we see here in verse 3, what we see is that he gives all of the credit to God for the spiritual blessings that we have and he thanks God, he thanks God and he blesses his name because God first blessed us in Christ, and he not only did it first, he not only blessed us, he did it super-abundantly, he did it abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think, he has given us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He left nothing out. God came to us, he blessed us with salvation, and he gave us everything, as it were, that he had to give in Christ so that we are joined together with Christ, we are co-heirs with him, we are a brother with Christ, we have a brother in heaven at the right hand of God interceding for us as I speak and, beloved, I want you to know that's unspeakable blessing. We're co-heirs with Christ. He hasn't dribbled out a couple of acts of kindness. Out of sheer kindness, sheer love, unprompted goodness, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

And he goes on and explains it. God has provided for us in Christ election unto salvation, adoption into his family, redemption from the slave market of sin, and eventual glory in heaven, and that's just the broadest of outlines. Beloved, notice, notice, in contradistinction to the false health and wealth gospel that is so easily peddled to selfish

people in the name of Jesus, notice that Paul is talking about spiritual blessings here. He's not talking about comparative differences in physical blessings that God gives us. The emphasis that Paul is making here is on the spiritual aspects and the different aspects, the different elements of our salvation. Election, again, I repeat myself, election, adoption, redemption, and eventual glory in heaven. Now why does Paul say this? Paul is giving the grounds upon which we bless the name of God. Blessed be God. Someone might say, "Why do we bless God?" Well, why do we bless God as his people? Because he chose us in love, because he adopted us in love, because he redeemed us in love, because he's taking us to heaven in love. And you say, "But I don't deserve any of that. I'm bankrupt in spirit. I'm a sinner against God. I sinned today," some might say. And Paul would say, "Precisely. Do you see the goodness of God in all of these spiritual blessings given to you when you didn't even deserve it?"

We give thanks because God in Christ has freely given to us everything that we need for our spiritual benefit and as a result of that we ascribe glory to him. And Paul's heart is so full of gratitude to God that 202 words later he's finally done with his sentence. That's 202 words in the Greek text. I counted them. He's so full that all of the praise and the worship just comes tumbling out and once he gets started, he can't stop. And so he ascribes glory to him. Look, this is all about giving glory to God, this whole text, through verse 14. Look at verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Verse 6, "to the praise of his glorious grace." Verse 12, "to the praise of his glory." Verse 14, "to the praise of his glory."

Now, beloved, and all of this begins to make sense when you say salvation belongs to the Lord and he's given it to me, unworthy me. Well, praise his name, praise his name, praise his name. Blessed be the name of God. And as you read through that text, you'll find it's a Trinitarian text. God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, all participating in the gift of salvation to his people. It's not just, I mean, I can understand a little bit how Paul just loses any sense of syntactical structure and it all just kind of comes falling out of his heart. I understand it because there's just so much here. It's not just that God blessed us with salvation. That would take us a long time to explicate. It's not just that we were unworthy. That would take another long time to explicate. But it's the fact that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the glories of the Trinity, the Triune essence of God are wrapped around every aspect of this. And so we just realize that, as it were, I speak metaphorically, we are standing before the great pillar of Shekinah glory and gazing on the glory of God as we look at these things about salvation. And so, as Paul is praising God, he starts by highlighting the fact that God chose us in Christ, and that choice of God becomes the first basis upon which we praise him. Look at verse 4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," verse 3, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world." God the Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

We are dealing with matters this evening of such great ineffable glory that it does us well to just stop and recognize that. My friends, if you are a Christian, praise God if and that you are. If you are a Christian, what this passage is explaining to you is that God chose you for salvation long before you ever existed. Before there was a heaven and an earth,

God had predetermined that you would one day belong to him in Christ and that you would be in his kingdom, which means that he made that choice before you had done anything good or bad, prior to creation, the one true God, the uncreated God, the self-existent God, the mighty God, had settled and determined his purpose to bless you in time and in eternity future. Before you had done anything good or bad. The sheer sovereign majesty of his love being bestowed on us when he knew that we were going to be unworthy sinners is just inexhaustible in its majesty. And the fact that God has the sovereign prerogative to do exactly whatever he wants because he created the world, it's his gift of salvation, just adds another ineffable magnificent reason to bless his name. Such unhindered sovereign majesty to determine the course of the universe, including who would be saved, without having to consult with anyone, without needing anyone's permission, he just does it because it's his to do. And then to realize that from that sovereign purpose, he exercises undeserved love and grace upon us to share all of his riches in Christ with us. What can a man do, what can a woman do except humbly put our hands over our mouths and hush before him and say, "These things are beyond my understanding. These things are too great. They are too good for a sinful mind like mine to contemplate, for a sinful tongue like mine to declare, and yet it's true and it belongs to me by grace. Blessed be God. Praise be to the glory of his holy name."

Now, the time will come in the next few weeks where we'll talk deeply about the doctrine of sin, total depravity and all of that, but just for now, let's presuppose that we have some inkling, some sense of conviction of sin. It shouldn't be too far removed from our minds. It wasn't that long ago that we preached on, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God," the spiritually bankrupt who have no claims, no money of their own to purchase salvation and come to God as bankrupt sinners asking for mercy and mercy alone, declaiming, disowning, disavowing any claim of personal merit for salvation. From that perspective of a humbled, chastened, convicted heart, and we hear these things of the sovereign majesty of God in election, the sovereign love of God in election, and we realize, "God, salvation is your gift. Why are you good to me? Why have you been so good like this to me?" And the one who truly understands his sinfulness, her sinfulness, should immediately be able to conclude, "Whatever the explanation is, it can't be anything in me. It could never be about me because there's nothing in my sinful, guilty self that could possibly deserve an earthly blessing from God, let alone the endless, eternal blessings that he's given to me in Christ. I couldn't possibly deserve it." And where it leads us, why has God been good to you in saving you, beloved? There's only one answer. Whatever the reason is, it rests in him. It's something about him and his goodness, not you or me in our goodness, because we don't have any goodness to offer to him. God's salvation is your gift. That's the praise for election.

2. The proof of election. The proof of election. Beloved, as we're teaching these things, I fully understand and realize that a lot of people don't like this doctrine. A lot of people hate it. A lot of independent Baptist preachers will call it heresy. Some of you have come from those kinds of backgrounds. I had someone ask me recently about attending an independent Baptist church that thinks Calvinism is heresy, "Do you think that's a church I should attend?" I said, "No, I don't. I think you should get out of there as quickly as you can and not look back." Not everyone likes this doctrine. I get that. But Scripture teaches

it often and throughout Scripture. God chose the nation of Israel, not because they were great and mighty, but according to his sovereign purpose, they were small and insignificant. God chose Abraham, called Abraham out. God chose David, the least of the children of Jesse. And on and on you could go in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we see this idea of unconditional election woven throughout the fabric of God's word. You cannot take out the doctrine of election as we've described it here, you cannot cut it out of the Bible and have anything left except something that looks like one of those cheap, cheap pieces of snowflake artwork that people have cut all up and you look at it and there's just holes everywhere. No, unconditional election is woven in the fabric of God's word.

Let me just show you a small handful of passages here. John 15. John 15. John 15:16, Jesus is speaking to his twelve disciples in the Upper Room, or the eleven that are left after Judas defected, and what he says applies by extension to those that the disciples would lead to saving faith in Christ as well. Look at what he says in verse 16 of John 15. He said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." I chose you. Subject, verb, direct object. Direct object being the one that's on the receiving action of the action in the verb. I chose you. You did not choose me. If you're a Christian, it's because God chose you, not because you chose God. We'll talk about that more later.

Acts 13:48. Acts 13:48 says this, Acts 13:48, "when the Gentiles heard this," the message of the gospel that Christ would save them too without them having to become Jews first, "when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Before they heard the gospel, there were those that had been appointed to eternal life. When they heard the gospel, they believed in response to the gospel and in response to that prior appointment that God had made before the foundation of the world that they would receive eternal life.

2 Thessalonians 2. 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 13 we read this, "But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord." Well, Paul, why should you always give thanks to God for us? Why would you give thanks to God for us? He gives the reason, "because. I give thanks to God," Paul says, "for you, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." Do you see it? It's the same order. Subject, verb, direct object. Subject, God, who's doing the action of choosing, and the direct object is us who believe.

One more in 2 Timothy 1:8 and 9. In verses 8 and 9, Paul says, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling." Once again, beloved, subject, verb, direct object. God saved us. God called us to a holy calling. And on what basis did he do it? "Not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began." It's all there. What did God do? He chose us. Why did he choose us? Not because of our works, but

because of his own purpose and will. When did God do it? He did it before the ages even began.

This is revealed truth. This is not something that you can figure out through general revelation. This is not something that the mind of man can reason out in its fallen condition. This is a revealed truth, God saves us and then as we come to Scripture, he has given us in Scripture the explanation of the miraculous transformation that took place in our hearts when he saved us. How did this happen? What were the forces at work? We come to Scripture and Scripture alone to find this and what we find is, it wasn't anything I did. It wasn't because of anything God saw that I would do. It was according to his purpose that he chose me in Christ. Beloved, God is the moving cause in salvation. He is the initiating cause in salvation. If you are a Christian, if you have believed in Christ, understand that you believed in response to his prior choice of you. He did not choose you because you would believe, you believed because he had previously chosen you before you had done anything good or bad. In other words, election was unconditional. It was based on the purpose of God, not because one man was better than another.

Think about it. This is really important and I'll say a few more words and then we'll close and we'll leave the second half of this message for next week. Think about it this way. Oh, this is just so critical. We saw, didn't we, in Ephesians 1, four different times it says, "Blessed be God, salvation is to the glory of his grace, to the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glory." Four different times. We saw that it's before the foundation of the world, according to his purpose and all of it. I mean, this is just abundantly clear and it's all to the glory of God. Now imagine, let's assume for a moment that what a lot of other people say about this is true, and that God chose us because of something that he saw in us. He looked down the corridors of time, he saw that we would believe and that others wouldn't, and so he chose us. He looked down the corridors, he saw that we would believe, and then he elected us based on our belief that he foresaw. What does that do? That totally dismantles the glory of God in salvation and it dismantles the glory of God in the doctrine of election and it injects a reason for man to boast over against other men and even boast against God if you hold to that unthinkable position because the electing choice on that understanding that God looked down the corridors of time and saw that someone would believe and said, "I'll choose him," election then becomes based on what man did, what man would do, and it's no longer to the glory of God. Man has a reason to boast because, "God saw I would have faith and therefore he chose me. My foreseen faith forced the hand of God and he had to choose me. Others got left out because they weren't as good as me. They didn't believe like I did. God left them behind, but he chose me." And it interjects this unthinkable, deplorable, nauseating element, controlling element of human pride in it so that man is now boasting in what God did, in the gift of God. It's unthinkable and I'm sure in a room like this that there are some of you that have still been thinking about these matters like this, let me encourage you two things: go back to the word of God, read it for what it says, subject, verb, direct object, and ask for the Holy Spirit to help you understand and illuminate it for you, and once the Spirit grants you the understanding to know the true nature of salvation as Scripture explains it, do this, repent of the way that you used to think about it and how you used to take glory for your own salvation. The whole teaching of the Bible on this is to exclude the boasting of man. "Not

of works lest any man should boast." And the foreseen faith view of election invites men to boast. It teaches men to boast. God chose you because you were going to be so good as to believe in it. He didn't know beforehand, exercised omniscience, looking down the corridor at times, saw it, said, "Oh man, look at Austin, man, look at him believe. I'll go with him," rather than Austin looking back toward eternity and giving glory to God, that God chose him when he had nothing to offer him and just by sovereign grace, sovereign love, chose him for God's own purposes.

Now, others will say, you've heard all of this, these kinds of objections, some state it a little more articulately than others. Some people will say, "But that's not fair. That's not fair. What about those that were not chosen? What about them? How can God do that? That isn't fair." That objection forgets two really critical things among others. That objection forgets the very place where we started, that salvation belongs to the Lord. Salvation does not belong to man to determine how it should be distributed according to the distorted biases and the distorted prejudices of man to determine how it should be divvied out. It's not ours to decide. It belongs to God. It's his gift. He gets to decide. If he had decided that only one would be saved, he could have done that and been perfectly just. He could have decided that no one would be saved because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. He could have rightly judged everyone and there wouldn't have been a single voice raised against his justice and his righteousness. Not one. Not one righteous voice. Salvation belongs to the Lord. It's his to do with entirely what he wants and that objection that it's unfair because, you know, they don't have a chance, it ignores the biblical teaching that all men are corrupt. All men are enemies of God, all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. It ignores that all men have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. It ignores the fact that they don't even honor God for how he's revealed himself in creation. By what basis, beloved, by what basis does anyone dare to make accusation against a holy God that he is unfair in what he does with that which belongs to him? On what basis does a guilty man accuse the judge of unrighteousness because he didn't just outright pardon him on no basis? No. The way that people respond to the doctrine of election exposes their own guilty hearts. To accuse God of unfairness is unthinkable. "Shall not the God of all the world, the Judge of all the world, do right?" Only a sinful heart could accuse God of unrighteousness in giving a gift that belongs to him to whomever he wants. That's unthinkable. It's truly unthinkable. And if you've been thinking it, you need to repent of that kind of thinking. And it also ignores the fact that, you know, we're all sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God.

No, beloved, that God saves anyone testifies to his abundant grace, undeserved favor upon those who deserve judgment instead, that God saves many testifies to his super-abounding grace upon creatures that had nothing to offer to him, that add nothing to his intrinsic glory. God in love and kindness and mercy has chosen to shower, to deluge undeserved grace that we will benefit from and enjoy throughout all of eternity, we who are guilty sinners who deserve nothing but judgment on our guilty heads. That he saves any testifies to grace. That he saves many testifies to abundant grace. My friends, my Christian brothers and sisters in Christ, here and through the camera, that he saved you, if he saved you, should bring you to praise. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see.

Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious that grace appeared the hour I first believed. When we'd been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun."

Next time, we'll look at other things that we can see from this text, the power of election, the purpose of election. For now, we're content to have seen the praise for election. It's all to the glory of God. The proof of election. It's woven throughout all of Scripture. and our hearts are humbled before the glorious majesty of a sovereign God who owns salvation to dispense as he wills, and a God who gave it to sinners and gave it to us to the praise of his glory.

Let's pray together.

Gracious God, holy Father, loving Lord, sovereign Spirit, we ascribe all glory to you and declaim any merit of our own. We pray that your Spirit would illuminate our hearts and enlarge our hearts to understand these things and to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. If we have been misled by prior or poor teaching on this issue, Father, cleanse it all away, renew our minds after the truth, and help us to see that this is for your glory and it's actually strengthening and ennobling in our Christian lives. Father, we can't speak for everybody here, but we can speak for many in what I'm about to say. We don't want any credit. We don't want to boast in ourselves. We want to boast alone in the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord. We want to boast alone in your goodness. We want to boast and proclaim you. You must increase, O God, and we must decrease. And this doctrine of sovereign, unconditional election points us in that direction.

Father, I pray that as we look at these passages in Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 2 over the next several weeks, I do pray, Father, that your Spirit would fall upon us with power and with power upon those unbelieving, darkened, closed hearts that you would open hearts, open eyes, open minds to understand that they might see and believe and that, Father, we would see the proof of your power with us and the proof of your blessing upon the gospel of Jesus Christ that you would give us evidence of that in the salvation of souls and what comes and follows. But Father, even if you don't, even if there is no visible result to any of this in December, in days and months and years to come, even if there's absolutely no visible result whatsoever, we will continue to preach this glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. We will continue to praise you. because your word reveals it to be true and that is enough to elicit our unconditional love and loyalty whether we see anything externally affirming to what we do or not. We love you, we honor you, we exalt you as God, and we plead for the manifestation of your power not for our sake, not for our glory, but for yours alone. Father, testify to your own approval of your own gospel by the fruit that you bring forth in days to come, even upon some hearts inside this room this evening. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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