

# “A Pentagon of Praise”<sup>1</sup>

*Blessed! Chosen! Adopted! Redeemed! Sealed!*

Ephesians 1:3-14 <sup>2</sup>

As I may have told you, I’ve had a form of eczema known as Dyshidrosis since I was a child. These days, it’s relatively easy to treat; but in my youth, dermatologists weren’t very familiar with it, and misdiagnosis led to mistreatment. Mistreatment led to my being unable to walk some of the time, and unable to play as healthy children did most of the time.

This meant that during recess in elementary school, I mostly had to sit on the sidelines while the other children ran and played. On the rare occasions when I was able to play, if games were played that required choosing teams, I was always the last, reluctant choice. Jill went to the same elementary school, but she was several years behind me, and we didn’t meet until I was in college.

Many years later, she and I were able to return together to that same elementary playground where I had seldom been chosen for anything, and never gladly. Jill and I stood on that playground and she solemnly and joyfully told me, I CHOOSE YOU! That, my friends, was a Woo-Hoo moment!

Our Scripture this morning describes a Woo-Hoo! Moment as well. We’ve come to Ephesians in our journey through the Bible, and this letter is often called “The Queen of the Epistles.” It’s also my favorite book in the Bible, as you may remember.

Our text, Ephesians 1:3-14, is, in the Greek, just one massive, convoluted sentence. In English this passage is divided into eight sentences so that we can better track with Paul’s train of thought. This passage is structurally complex and theologically loaded. It is one long cascade of exuberance that one commentator described as “a state of controlled ecstasy.” Another described these verses as “doctrine set to music.” With that as introduction, lets experience these words together . . . .

*<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

*<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

*<sup>11</sup> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.*

*<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:3-14).*

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<sup>1</sup> A.K.A. “The Great Woo-Hoo!”

<sup>2</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancel, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on July 26, 2020.

It's hard to believe that this is just one sentence, isn't it? There are several ways to decipher Paul's exuberance, which is, as I said, a Great Woo-Hoo of Praise to God. The passage can be understood in the three tenses of past, present, and future, as Paul focuses on God's Eternal Plan from ages past, on God's saving action in the world today, and then his focus on the New Heaven and New Earth in God's New Creation yet to come.

Using another lens, the passage can be seen as a rudimentary depiction of what we call The Holy Trinity, with verses 3-6 focused on "**The Father's Choice**," verses 7-10 focused on "**The Son's Achievement**," and verses 11-14 focused on "**The Spirit's Ministry**." Some have discerned here (a) The FACT of God's Choice; (b) The GENEROSITY of God's Choice; and (c) The PURPOSE of God's Choice. But I want to examine these verses this morning using the idea of "*A Pentagon of Praise*."

Now I know that we live not far from a huge building known as "the Pentagon," and some of you even work there. But that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about five facets of praise to God that might be called "The Great Woo-Hoo!" Here are the five facets:

## **Blessed! - Chosen! - Adopted! - Redeemed! - Sealed!**

Let's think about these for a bit.

**Blessed** (v. 3). The word "blessed" can have various meanings. It can mean "favored" or "fortunate." It can mean "consecrated" or "holy." It can mean "worthy of worship." And there are other meanings.

In verse 3 of our text, Paul invokes a three-fold blessing. The first "blessing" is a "worthy of worship" blessing referring to God. The second and third instances are a mixture of "favored" and "consecrated," referring to us who follow Jesus. Some have suggested that verses 3-4 are the thesis of the whole letter, with everything else being explanation and commentary. Let's remind ourselves once more of that thesis:

***Blessed** is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed** us with every spiritual **blessing** in the heavens in Christ. For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him.*

The idea here is that God has favored us by giving to us an overflowing profusion of amazing gifts, gifts of God's amazing grace, gifts that change our lives dramatically and forever. We often use the word "blessed" today with respect to material resources or physical health, and there's nothing the matter with such use; but Paul is not talking about a "health and wealth" gospel.

The fact of the matter is that the New Life God gives to us frequently includes persecution and suffering, because following the ways of God's Kingdom frequently puts us crosswise with the powers of this world. Paul was well acquainted with such suffering,<sup>3</sup> but even so, the blessings Paul describes result in the exuberant joy he expresses here.

The phrase, "in the heavens," or "in the heavenly realms," or "in the heavenlies" also bears comment. This phrase, found only in Ephesians, doesn't refer to a physical location so much as to another dimension of Reality. The Eternal Realm that God inhabits is beyond both space and time. It is the Realm from which the New Heaven and the New Earth will come, and it is that

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:23-33

Realm where Christ is King even at this moment. Paul had already had at least one transcendent experience in that Realm, and as he remembers it here, he does indeed border on ecstasy.<sup>4</sup> And one day, my friends, we'll be there, too!

**Chosen** (v. 4).<sup>5</sup> Verse 4 introduces the idea of being “chosen,” an idea similar to the story I told earlier about my elementary playground. If you'll imagine yourself in such a situation, where persons are called out of the masses to serve on a particular team, you'll have Paul's idea pretty accurately, because that group of persons—that “team”—that we call “the church,” literally means “the called out ones.”

You'll notice as we go along that while the five facets of our “Pentagon of Praise” are distinct, there is also quite a bit of overlap between them. For example, it is a “blessing” to be “chosen,” and being “adopted” requires being “chosen” first.

While the Bible tells us that God “*wants all people to be saved,*”<sup>6</sup> the Bible also tells us that “*many are invited, but few are chosen.*”<sup>7</sup> So here's the deal. “*Before the foundation of the world,*” God determined that all who place their trust in Jesus of Nazareth, God's Messiah, would be saved, and all, without exception, are invited to that salvation.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, while God's Spirit beckons every human person toward Jesus, we each have been granted the awesome freedom to ignore or to reject that invitation. And that brings us to “adoption.”

**Adoption** (v. 5). In the ordinary process of adoption, the prospective parents first choose the child they wish to adopt, and if all goes well, there is a legal transaction that results in a change of status, or “adoption.” The idea of “adoption” is a beautiful one, indeed. As one girl told her best friend, “Being adopted means I grew in Mommy's heart rather than in her tummy.”

Being adopted means being chosen. Being adopted means that we have a new identity. We have a new family. We have intimate access to a new parent.

I've probably told you this before, but I think of it often, and it fits here. When my Dad retired from the government, he was the Director of the Cotton Classing Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In order to get to his office, it was necessary to pass several levels of secretarial protection, and for most people that wasn't easy to do. But when I came to the office to see my Dad, I got through all those levels easily, because I was his son. Intimate access had been granted to me.

When Jill chose me on that playground, as she had previously chosen me to be her husband, she wasn't just giving me her acceptance and her blessing. She was giving me *herself*. And that's what God does, too.

And so it is that God's invitation to adoption is larger than merely the invitation to be “born again,” though it is that.<sup>9</sup> God has two central purposes in your life and in mine. First of all, God desires to so transform our character through the new birth that we are willing, ready, and eager to spend eternity with God in the New Heaven and the New Earth. And while that is the essential starting point, God's second purpose is even more important: God desires to adopt us into God's own family of “the called out ones.” God is busy—right at this moment—building

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<sup>4</sup> See 2 Corinthians 12:1-7

<sup>5</sup> This “choosing” has to do with the theological doctrine of “election,” which is more complex than we can examine here.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 7:13, 22:14

<sup>8</sup> Romans 10:13

<sup>9</sup> John 3:3

an amazing, transforming, redeeming community that only God can build. And we get to help. And now we've come to "redeemed."

**Redeemed** (v. 7). You and I don't use the word, "redeemed" much these days. If we use it at all, we're probably referring to using some sort of coupon; but the word is much richer and deeper than that.

Redemption has to do with releasing someone from that which binds him or her. Historically, the word has had to do with the emancipation of slaves or prisoners. To redeem means to purchase or to buy back something that or someone who would otherwise be lost or destroyed; and the value of that thing or that person is represented by the price paid for such redemption.

As most of us know from selling cars, houses, or just something on *eBay*, the real value of something is the price someone is willing to pay for it. And Paul tells us here that "*In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of [God's] grace that he lavished on us.*" The word used for "lavished" is really rather like our word, "inundated."

God has inundated us with His love and grace, and this redemption was accomplished while we were still opposed to God, ignoring God, fighting God. Here's how Paul described this redemption in his letter to Rome: "*For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. **But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us***" (Romans 5:6-8).

My friends, the Blood of Jesus is the value God puts on spending eternity with you. That's the price that was paid. Can I get a Woo-Hoo? **Blessed. Chosen. Adopted. Redeemed.** And now, "**Sealed.**"

**Sealed** (v. 13). Back in the seventies, during my seminary days, I paid the bills by loading tractor trailer trucks at a huge bakery. I loaded eight trucks, by myself, every night, and when a load was complete, a small metal seal was placed on the closed door to the trailer to ensure that the load would still be complete when it reached its destination.

When we have a document notarized, the notary's seal is a statement that this document is trustworthy, legal, and enforceable. The seal is a guarantee.

When we enter into a contract to buy a house, we make a down payment against the debt that is a promise to pay what remains of the debt. What Paul is saying here includes each of these ideas.

In the mystery of the Trinity, God the Father *chooses*, God the Son *redeems*, and God the Spirit *seals*. The presence of God's Holy Spirit in our lives is the "down payment" on our inheritance in God's New Heaven and New Earth.<sup>10</sup> God's Spirit is the "deposit" that guarantees our eternal inheritance until the final glorification of those whom God has redeemed.<sup>11</sup>

Well, that's our "Pentagon of Praise," but there's more. In addition to verses 3-4, verses 9-10 can also lay claim to being the thematic verses of this letter. Let's hear them once more:

<sup>10</sup> Romans 8:9. See also Ezekiel 36:26-27; Joel 2:28.

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 1:14; see also 2 Corinthians 1:20; Hebrews 11:39-40

*[God] made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ as a plan for the right time—to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth.*

In his letter to Philippi, Paul expanded on this idea:

*[Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:8-11).*

So what do you think we mean when we say that “Jesus Christ is Lord”? Dr. Duane Litfin was President of Wheaton College when he wrote that “From a biblical standpoint, human language can scarcely craft a more profound declaration than this one: **Jesus Christ is Lord.** . . . What do we mean by the Lordship of Christ? We mean that He is the Creator of all things, the Sustainer of all things, the Goal of all things, the Redeemer of all things, and the Judge of all things.

“This is an outrageous claim—unless it is true. But if it is true, as Christians do affirm, then it means that the person of Jesus is utterly central to all that humans can know or experience. There is nothing imaginable that is irrelevant to him or to which he is irrelevant. There is no quarter of human learning in which he is not the central figure.”<sup>12</sup>

“Jesus Christ is a scandalous stone of stumbling to the world,” Litfin wrote. “The all-encompassing nature of the Bible’s claims for Jesus renders him unique. He is not merely one Lord, one Savior, among many; he is the singular Sovereign of the universe, the only-begotten Son of the Father, the once-for-all-God-man. If he is truly the universe’s Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, the very Goal of all things, then there can be no other.”<sup>13</sup>

If Jesus is Lord, Dr. Litfin wrote, then He is “the unifying key to all that humans can know or understand, such that in the end nothing can be adequately grasped apart from him.”<sup>14</sup> Can you sense the “Pentagon of Praise”?<sup>15</sup>

Over and over in his writings, Paul reminds us that what God is up to in the universe is all about Purpose. Jean-Paul Sartre, a major twentieth-century existentialist, wrote that if there

<sup>12</sup> Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 38-44.

<sup>13</sup> Litfin, p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> Litfin, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Every worldview is asking and trying to answer the following nine questions:

1. What is prime reality? What is the “really real”?
2. Who or what are we? What does it mean to be a human being?
3. Is there such a thing as “morality,” right and wrong? If so, what is its basis; how does one know the good and the bad?
4. What is the meaning of history? Or, is there any meaning?
5. What is wrong with us? Something is off—what is it?
6. Is there a solution; can things be fixed? By whom? How? How quickly?
7. Is there a God? If so, can this God be known? And is this God involved in the world, especially relative to human suffering?
8. What happens to a human being at death?
9. What time is it? Where are we in the flow of history?

Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching* (InterVarsity, 2009), 67-68; Johnson credits James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* and N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, saying, “My compilation is inspired by those proposed by Sire and Wright.”

really were a God who had created humans, then human essence would precede human existence.

That is, if a builder builds a house, there must first be an idea or a plan for that house. Similarly, if God exists, and created us, then God must have had an idea of what we were intended to be. This idea would be our essence, and our purpose in life would be to become what God intended us to be. But, said Sartre, there is no God, and thus no purpose, no hope exists. There is no objective meaning for human life, and we are adrift in the darkness of the universe with no star to guide us.<sup>16</sup>

Rick Warren put it memorably when he noted that “if there is no God, if you’re really just a freak chance of nature, then you’re really just complex pond scum – and guess what? – your life doesn’t matter.<sup>17</sup> The inescapable truth of our existence is that without a personal God who reveals Himself to us, there is no “good,” and there is no “matters.” Without a personal God, a God Who really is there and Who is not silent, you and I are adrift in a sea of meaninglessness, going nowhere, living toward no purpose, dying toward no end.

The Good News, of course, is that the God of the Bible, fully revealed in Jesus Christ, celebrated in Paul’s “Pentagon of Praise,” really is there and is not silent. You and I do not live in a closed and meaningless system, but in a cosmos that is entirely open to the purposes of God.

The Good News is that God has given us a great deal more help about finding our life’s purpose than the existentialists have been able to offer. As Rick Warren puts it in his famous book, *What on Earth Am I Here For*, “It is only in God that we discover our origin, our identity, our meaning, our purpose, our significance, and our destiny. Every other path leads to a dead end.”

Oh, my friends, this God whom we worship is not a remote God. God is a Father, a Heavenly Parent, to us. God has chosen us, adopted us, redeemed us, sealed us, and blessed us. And God’s intention is to positively inundate us with grace, purpose, love, and hope.<sup>18</sup>

My friends, when the time is right, God is going to bring everything in heaven and on earth together under the magnificent authority of our Risen Lord, and in preparation for that coronation God intends to teach you, to train you, to shape you, so that you become more and more like Jesus, our risen and coming King. Our salvation does not come from believing the “right things,” but from choosing to enter the wonderful, joyful, eternal relationship that God offers us. And here’s the best part of all:

*God is **like** Jesus.*

*God is **exactly** like Jesus.*

*God has **always been** exactly like Jesus.*

*Let your heart be **glad!***

And let the **Pentagonal Praise** begin!

<sup>16</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism,” in William V. Spanos, *A Casebook on Existentialism* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1966), pp. 278, 282.

<sup>17</sup>Rick Warren, *What On Earth Am I Here For? The Purpose Driven Life*, expanded edition (Zondervan, 2012), p. 22.

<sup>18</sup>John 10:10, 15:11