

“To Live for the Praise of His Glory”

Ephesians 1:3-14

Christmas 2/Ordination & Installation/Sunday before Epiphany

Ephesians 1:3-14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

The Sermon

In Jesus, we have a savior whose nativity—whose birth—brings us into direct encounter, on this earth, with human feet, in our history,

with the eternal God, the Creator God who is present in this room, and every other corner of this vast universe, *right now*;

who made every atom in your body billions of years ago, and conceived of you, personally, long before then;

who “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love;

who “destined us for adoption as God’s own children through Jesus Christ.”

In other words, regardless of whether you were born into the bloodlines of the original Covenant People, you are now fully part of that family. You are the People of God.

Which was the intention for you, from the beginning, of the one who “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.”

Since before that mysterious moment that neither human theology nor all the laws of physics can fully comprehend, when from an absence of existence, an incomprehensible nothing—not even empty space—there was suddenly something,

God had already chosen you.

Before the most recent difficult decision you had to make, God had already chosen you.

Before the most recent mistake you made.

Before the last time you shed tears over something.

Before the incident in your life that changed your life.

Before your earliest childhood memory.

Before you were born.

Before your parents met.

Before the 20th century.

Before your ancestors came to this country.

Before Columbus arrived in the New World.

Before there were church buildings.

Before Jesus was born.

Before Moses.

Before there were animals.

Before organic life on earth began.

Before the one land mass, Pangea, split apart into the continents.

Before God created the earth.

Before God created the universe.

“God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before God, in love. God destined us [to become] children of God through Jesus Christ.”

And just as God chose you in Christ to be holy and blameless in love before the foundation of the world,

God has blessed you in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

The cosmic has come down to the mundane—in Christ, and in you.

We all have to decide for ourselves what that means we should be doing.

But every angelic voice in heaven is encouraging us to make that decision, and do it.

To be good for goodness' sake is nice. But you were chosen before the universe even existed to live for cosmic truths made real in this earthly world:

Love one another.

Turn the other cheek.

Feed my lambs.

Tend my sheep.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love your enemies.

Love one another just as Jesus has loved you.

Feed my sheep.

The power we have in our hands to testify to God's presence, to embody God's love, to enlighten and illuminate and bring light into dark places of primordial nothingness is indescribably powerful.

Seth Godin said, "It's hard to look right at...the possibility that lies before us..."

"Tempting indeed to avert your eyes, because staring into infinity means embracing just how small we feel. We avert our eyes because to realize how much potential we have to contribute puts us on the hook."

But whether we ignore it or not, the infinity of possibility remains.”ⁱ

As we finish off another Christmas season and enter into another brave new year,

what is God inviting you to do?

And what will it look like for you to live for the praise of God’s glory?

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Choral Anthem “The Work of Christmas” text: H. Thurman

*When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with the flock,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations;
to bring peace among people, to make music from the heart.
When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with the flock, the work of Christmas begins.ⁱⁱ*

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ⁱ Seth Godin, “A Box of Infinity,” in Seth’s Blog, January 1, 2020

ⁱⁱ “The Work of Christmas” Lyric: Howard Thurman (adapted); Music: Dan Forrest. Published by Beckenhorst Press, Inc., Columbus, Ohio (Capital University Choral Series), 2014.