

“THE GOSPEL BEFORE TIME.”

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Scripture Texts: Ephesians 1:3-6; Matthew 25:34; II Timothy 1:9; Revelation 14:6

Introduction.

Until the last century most scientists believed time was eternal. Only in the 20th century with Einstein’s theory of relativity was it discovered that time had a beginning. In other words, there was a time when time was not.

Interestingly, if you read the religious books of most other religions they speak of time as eternal. Only the Bible claims time is not eternal but had a beginning.

People say the Bible is not scientific and not accurate, yet from the beginning the Bible has been uniquely clear that time has a beginning, and that God was active before time.

The reverse is the case regarding the Gospel. People think the Gospel had a beginning, maybe when Jesus was 30 years old and began proclaiming the Gospel. Or maybe in the OT, even as far back as Genesis 3:15 and the Gospel promise that the seed of woman would crush the head of the serpent.

I want to explore with you this morning that the Gospel is in fact eternal, it has no beginning, it was with God before time.

Revelation 14:6-7 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an *eternal gospel* to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

We are talking about preaching the Gospel to ourselves and I want us to see the fruit and value of understanding that that Gospel we preach is an eternal gospel.

Ephesians 1 is one of those mother lode kinds of texts that helps us unpack heavy boxes of doctrine and theology. This text uses some scary words that often are misunderstood. Words like predestination and chosen, words that point to doctrines like election before time.

Why does God do what He does when He does it?

Psalm 115:3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

God is God and He gets to do whatever He wants, whenever He wants, in whatever way He wants. “I am who I am. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.” He has reasons that are a mystery to us, that are according to the counsel of His sovereign will, and to the praise of His glorious grace.

We only have two options in response to this. We can worship Him in awe and reverence and humility, or we can rebel against Him and His authority.

Notice how strongly and positively Paul speaks about these truths. Paul is overflowing with exuberant joy over the incredible blessings of God poured out on us in love to the praise of His glorious grace. And all of this coming to us in Christ.

Paul is rejoicing in the Gospel, he runs on for twelve verses without stopping to take a breath or add punctuation. One long run-on sentence rejoicing in our redemption, our adoption, the gift of the Holy Spirit, our sanctification, and our promised inheritance in glory.

There is no hint of pessimism or depression or moaning about some sort of fatalistic determination or unfair treatment on the part of God. Why does Paul paint such an enthusiastically rosy picture of predestination and election?

Let’s look in the text for several reasons.

First, Paul rejoices because at the heart and core of this doctrine is the love of God.

Ephesians 1:4-5 In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ

Motivated by pure love the Father decided to choose some before creation ever began to be adopted as His children in and through Christ.

Psalm 18:19 He rescued me, because he delighted in me.

God loves you and has always loved you. God didn’t start loving you when you became aware of Him and chose to love Him. God loved you and planned for your salvation before history began. Before there was any reason to choose us. Purely out of His love.

God could see ahead. He could see that in Adam we would all be utterly lost. He could see that if He didn’t rescue us from perishing, then all that was ahead for us was destruction.

God would have been completely justified to do absolutely nothing for such undeserving and unworthy rebellious, stiff-necked sinners. There was absolutely nothing in us to motivate God to do something good for us.

God is eternal and His love is eternal, and perfect love casts out all fear.

Second, Paul rejoices because this is all about the grace of God.

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace.

II Timothy 1:9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began

Grace means getting what we don't deserve, unmerited favor. It is a gift. God is eternal and the gift of His grace is eternal, from before the foundation of the earth.

Third, Paul rejoices because this is all about Christ.

Ephesians 1:4 God chose us in Christ.

He chose us in Christ, meaning in something completely outside of us. There was nothing worthy in us, God went outside of us.

The Father sends the Son to rescue and redeem those whom the Father chose from before the foundation of the earth. Jesus came to die for specific people by name. Those chosen by the Father given to the Son, whose name were written in the Lamb's Book of Life from all eternity.

Listen to the testimony of Scripture regarding this eternal choosing.

Revelation 13:7-8 Also it [the first beast rising out of the sea] was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, 8 and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been *written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb* who was slain.

Revelation 17:8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been *written in the book of life from the foundation of the world* will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

Jesus is referred to as the Lamb who was slain from before the foundation of the world. The plan is an eternal plan. The names are eternal, the cross is eternal, the Gospel is eternal. The glory of God is eternal.

The Gospel was not some kind of Plan B, some quick alternative God cooked up after things went south in the Garden of Eden. God wasn't caught off guard by Adam and Eve's sin. God wasn't in heaven doing a facepalm over them eating the fruit, saying "I didn't see that coming, now what am I going to do?"

All the names in the Lamb's Book of Life were written down from eternity past. None are added or taken away. God is eternal and His plan of salvation in Christ is eternal.

And for all eternity into the future God will "show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

This has all kinds of implications.

First, we don't believe in Jesus in order to get our name entered into the Lamb's Book of Life. We believe in Jesus because our name is already written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

What does Paul say in our text? We were chosen not because we are holy, we were chosen that we might be holy and blameless. Our faith and belief are the fruit, not the cause.

This is not license to sin. We are saved and secure not to sin, but to turn from sin. Apathy about sin is not a sign of a person who is following Jesus. Because Jesus doesn't lead us into sin but out of sin. The evidence of our security is our desire for purity.

Second, this gives us complete confidence in God and utter optimism that He is God and He is in complete control. Nothing is random, accidental, by chance or fate. We can rest secure in the God of the universe who is also the God of our salvation.

My will is not sovereign, God's will is sovereign. He is the one who chooses and decides. Adopted children don't choose their parents, their parents chose them. So it is with God.

Third, if you know the truth about yourself and what you have done and what you deserve, then your response is a tearful acknowledgement of God's grace and mercy, and heartfelt gratitude and genuine worship and praise. We owe it all to Jesus.

Preaching the Gospel to ourselves.

Why are we talking about election and predestination in a season when we are talking about the Gospel and learning to preach it to ourselves?

Because the Gospel is about God's plan to save us from our sins in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross for the sake of unworthy sinners. And that plan, that great Gospel story didn't start with Jesus or in the OT but in eternity in the sovereign electing purposes of God.

When you wake up every morning and start your day you can do so resting in the absolute unchangeable grace of God and love of God. Nothing that will happen in your day or life that can hinder or alter that. Your joy in your salvation need never falter or diminish.

What is true about this glass never changes. It never gets half full or half empty. I noticed this week the water was evaporating. God's love and grace don't do that. The fullness of His goodness toward you was fixed in eternity before you ever did anything. It isn't measured out based on you, it is measure out according to the riches of God's glory.

This truth glorifies God and when you believe it and embrace it and live in the light of its truth, you are glorifying God. You are making God big and you small. You are keeping life and circumstances in their proper place. You are keeping the lies and condemnation of Satan at bay.

This truth deals with the big ifs we all struggle with. What if my sin and my bad behavior makes God back off on His love and grace? What if my sin is bad enough that God is walking toward the Lamb's Book of Life with a big eraser or bottle of white out? What if God's love for me is based on my *performance*, on my being good, doing good, trying harder? (Footnote. See last week's sermon.)

Are you one of those people who struggles to know if God loves you? Do you question it, doubt it? If God chose you on the basis of your performance, then your performance could cause Him to change His mind.

What did I say last week?

Of course, you aren't good enough, that's why Jesus came. Jesus came to rescue and save sinners. Jesus is good enough and He makes me good enough to God. Base your faith on Christ's perfect and finished work on the cross, not on your imperfect works on earth.

God's eternal Gospel says that He has loved you from before the foundations of the earth, while knowing everything there is to know about you, not based on you or your

performance, but in the absence of any performance. He loves you based on Him, not on you.

The cords of God's love for you are so strong they cannot be broken, He will never let you go.

Rejoice that your names are written in heaven, in the Lamb's Book of Life. That is where your true security and joy should be lodged, where nothing can rob or destroy. Rejoice in no earthly inheritance, its nothing compared to our heavenly inheritance.

This Gospel truth should profoundly humble us. We are not worthy of so great a gift, but He has given it to us anyway. It is absolutely free and unmerited. There should be tears of joy and gratitude. There should be no boasting, no strutting. Unable to lift even a finger, God did it all. When you preach this to yourself it should kill even the hint of pride or thinking ourselves better than others. It should make us want to extend as much grace as possible to others.

We should be humbled at how utterly dependent we are on God, and yet grateful that as children we have such a Father as our God.

We should be profoundly moved every time we sin that we have a God who doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, but one who is gracious and merciful, full of steadfast love. This Gospel truth above all others gives us hope in the face of all our great and many sins.

Are you still resisting God, are you still resisting submit to Him, are you resisting confessing your sin and repenting, of owning the truth that you are the worst of sinners? Stop, there is hope, God loves to magnify His love and grace to the worst of sinners, He loves to glorify the cleansing and saving blood of Jesus. Call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved.

Romans 10:9-11, 13 If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ... 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

"If confession of sin ends in sorrow, it hasn't gone far enough. Confessing sin is an opportunity to rejoice in the Gospel" (John Piper).

Rejoice because your name is written in the book of life. Praise God for the riches and glory of His grace which He has lavished on us from all eternity to all eternity.