

“God – our Life, our Eternity”
Ephesians 1:1-14
September 14, 2003
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On Thursday of this past week, we observed the 2nd anniversary of what is now known around the world as simply “9/11” – the destruction of the New York World Trade Center and the damage of the Pentagon and most importantly the loss of over 2700 lives.

I do not mean to be unnecessarily maudlin but I want you to get back in touch with some of your emotions in the hours and days following that catastrophe.

Show PowerPoint with audio track.

As I listened and watched that presentation, thoughts collided within me.

To me the words on one hand and the pictures on the other speak to two different worldviews.

A world view is a set of assumptions each of us makes about the way the world works.

We live out our lives based on our worldview.

If you believe this life is all there is, you live differently than if you truly believe there is a God who matters.

What you believe determines how you live and how you live reveals what you truly believe.

The **pictures** of 9/11 that you watched pulled at your heart and mind in a way that asks, “Why?” “How could this happen?” “How can this be?” “Where is justice?” “Can such pain and suffering be consistent with a good and sovereign God?” “Is nobody in charge?” “Is that life – you go to work one day and the building falls on you and its all over?”

The **audio** voice-over you heard called you to trust that God was still in charge, still dispensing his grace even in the worst of situations.

Which is it? What do you believe?

How do you fit such heartache and devastation into your understanding of how life is supposed to be?

It doesn't take a tragedy of that magnitude to make us think of such things.

- The death of a child or other loved one can trigger it.
- Frustrated expectations can set us off.
- Just the daily-ness of life can grind us down to the point that we wonder about life itself.

Matthew Arnold wrote,

“But often, in the world’s most crowded streets,
 But often, in the din of strife,
 There rises an unspeakable desire
 (For) the knowledge of our buried life;
 A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
 In tracking out our true, original course;
 A longing to inquire
 Into the mystery of this heart which beats
 So wild, so deep in us – to know
 Whence our lives come and where they go.”

Most of us don't talk about such introspection but we experience it – we are often trying to determine the meaning of our lives – who are we and where do we fit in the grand scheme of things.

For that matter, is there a grand scheme of things or is life simply a series of greater or lesser 9/11s?

Your worldview, your assumptions about life, answers some very basic questions:

James Sire in his book The Universe Next Door articulates these questions:

- What is prime reality? Is it the material universe, is it spirituality, is it God?
- What is the nature of the world around us? Is it created with purpose or is it autonomous. Is it chaotic or orderly?

- What is a human being? Is he a machine, a naked ape, a sleeping god or a person made in the image of God?
- What happens to the person at death? It is extinction, a shadowy existence somewhere else, a transformation to a higher state, reincarnation?

Again I remind you, what you believe determines how you live and how you live reveals what you truly believe.

When the Apostle Paul wrote the New Testament letter that we call Ephesians, he began with an emotional and content-laden statement of his worldview – a worldview given to him by God.

Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, wanted those first readers and us to understand and grasp the significance of this worldview.

He wants us to see how encompassing it is.

He wants us to see that it spans the ages – from eternity past to eternity future.

He wants us to have a totally new perspective on life – he wants us to see our lives and life itself as God sees it.

The letter of Ephesians describes what it means to be the people of God – as John R.W. Stott calls it – “God’s new society”.

Several times in the letter Paul will contrast the way we used to live with the way we live now – what it means to be a Christ-follower.

And it starts with a correct view of the world, of life, and eternity – a correct worldview.

After the opening salutation of the letter in verses 1-2, Paul writes one very long sentence in verses 3-14.

The sentence is 202 words long in the original language.

In these many words, emotion and reason are combined.

The reason is expressed in the substance of what he writes and the emotion is expressed in the style – it’s an outburst of thoughts and words.

It is as if he doesn't dare to end one sentence and start another lest we miss how comprehensive and awesome this work of God is in life and in us.

And Paul is not simply teaching truths, he is expressing his own emotional response to God for the grace of God to him and to us.

Consistent with the first word "Praise" or "Blessed", this whole sentence is called a eulogy – a blessing of God – not God's blessing on us but Paul's blessing or praise of God.

Paul is not caught up most with the gifts God bestows but with the God who bestows them.

I'm going to read it aloud and I want you to listen for what Paul is so grateful (underlined on the screen before you) and also I want you to listen to his **feelings** about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (**in bold**).

Ephesians 1:3-14

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. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. **In love** ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ **to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us** in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ **that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.** ⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. ¹¹ 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, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be **for the praise of his glory.** ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a

deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

This is a great combination of reason and emotion, of revelation and response.

Paul has grasped much of what those truths mean to him and for him.

That is why Paul lives, that is why he serves God, that is why he gladly puts up with hardship, that is how he faces life and how he faces death.

He belongs to the God that is all these verses proclaim and more.

I want to continue this morning with a look at what it is about God that causes Paul to erupt in this praise.

We will look at the truths about God's goodness that elicit Paul's worship.

But it is not my intention to camp long on these truths – other passages of Scripture actually teach these concepts more fully.

So then after explaining these truths briefly (which is all I see Paul doing in this eulogy), I want to come back to the implications of these truths and to the response that Paul has and I believe he wants us to have.

But first, what is it about God that causes Paul to think and write as he does?

Paul is going to list some things about God that you if you also know to be true you will have the same response to God that Paul has.

You can **say** you know and love God but if you don't know why, you probably don't know and love him.

By comparison, you say to a friend, "I hear you're getting married. Congratulations. Tell me, what do you love about your fiancée?"

"Well, um... I don't know, I just love her."

"What is it about her that makes you say you love her?"

"Well, um... I guess, um, I just do, that's all."

Listen to Paul's words about why he blesses, he praises God.

First of all he makes a general but important statement:

1:3 "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."

The "heavenly realms" are not just heaven where Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father but the "heavenly realms" is the entire unseen world.

The Bible teaches that what you see is not all there is.

God himself is "spirit" rather than material.

There are many other spirits that are not material.

There are in existence other realities that we can't see with our physical eyes.

I'm not talking about other dimensions, as some sci-fi people like to speculate on, I'm talking about the non-material spiritual realities that the Bible says are operating all around us.

And this is referring not only to non-material spiritual beings such as angels good or evil.

But here it is referring to other realities that you can't see such as forgiveness or redemption or election – they are spiritual and as such they are part of the "heavenly realms".

And Paul says God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

These blessings that he is going to name are spiritual but they are no less real or objective than material blessings.

In fact, spiritual blessings are not limited in the way material ones are.

But on to the blessings Paul focuses on:

1:4 "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

This word "chose" is also translated "elected" from which the doctrines of election and predestination come.

This doctrine is not popular today because some equate it with pawns being moved about on the chessboard of life by a capricious God.

But election doesn't cause New Testament writers any difficulty at all, in fact they find it supremely reassuring.

Leon Morris captures this truth well when he writes:

"We naturally think that we are completely free. If we are saved, we hold, it is because we have in our freedom decided to turn away from evil and to commit our lives to God... But the doctrine of election tells us that we can never do that in our own strength and wisdom. Left to ourselves, we would never make the motion of giving up evil and turning to God. It is only because God works in us FIRST that we come to him. And because he does this good work (of electing) us, we have a deep assurance that we could never have if it all depended on us." (Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians, 16)

Paul begins his praise of God by declaring that God's grace began in eternity PAST, long before we existed, so that our relationship with God is not dependent on us but on God.

To be certain, we respond, but God initiates.

He is so gracious that he didn't leave it to us.

And lest someone get the mistaken idea that being chosen means we have no responsibility and can live evil lives because we are "elected", Paul says the opposite is the truth – we are chosen to be "holy and blameless."

Those that God elects, he justifies, and those he justifies, he sanctifies, and those he sanctifies, he glorifies.

Election is one of the most positive doctrines I know because it makes me remember that it is all of God and he will not fail – as Paul said it to the Philippians 1:6 "(God) who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Praise to God because he started it all, 1:4 "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

Secondly Paul writes: 1:5 “In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...”

God not only does good things for us, he brings us to himself – he makes us his children – he adopts us.

Only fourteen times in the entire Old Testament is God referred to as father (Hughes, 26).

But when Jesus came, he did the unimaginable, he not only called God his Father, but he used the very intimate term, “abba” which a young child would use to refer to his earthly father.

And most astounding of all, God says in Romans 8 that he is our “abba”.

Without rival, this issue of being God’s child and him being my “Abba, Father” is the most significant element of my relationship with God.

Having my own children and seeing how intimate and unbreakable is that bond, and knowing how deeply and unshakably I love them makes me more aware of how intimate, deep, unshakeable and unbreakable is God’s love for me.

And my assurance of that love is built not on my worthiness (for I’m not worthy) but it is built on his character and action – he has adopted me.

In a “Reader’s Digest” story a young mother wrote:

“I was staying with my parents for several days after the birth of our first child. One afternoon, I remarked to my mother that it was surprising that our baby had dark hair, since both my husband and I are fair.

“She said, ‘Well, your daddy has black hair.’

“I replied, ‘But Mama, that doesn’t matter because I’m adopted.

“With an embarrassed smile, she said the most wonderful words I’ve ever heard: ‘I always forget.’” (Hughes 27)

There are no second-class children in God’s family.

We were chosen and predestined to be adopted into his family through Jesus Christ in accordance not with our worthiness but with his pleasure and will or as he says it at the beginning of this verse, “in love”.

God did it because he chose to love me and I'm his.

Thirdly, Paul writes, 1:7-8 "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."

In Paul's day, those captured in war were forced by the victors to serve as slaves unless someone from home could pay the ransom to purchase their release.

Other ordinary slaves might over a long period of time be able to save sufficient money to take it and deposit it in the temple of their pagan god.

The owner and the slave would then go to the temple and through a solemn ritual the owner would sell the slave to the god and the slave would then be freed to serve the god rather than his original owner. (Leon Morris, 20)

With this analogy as background, Paul uses the metaphor of "redemption" to describe how Christ paid the ransom to free us from slavery to sin and death and has purchased us for himself with his own blood.

Through his death on the cross, as I mentioned in the last message, Christ paid for our sin so that God could justly forgive us for our sins and make us his own.

Paul writes that is the kind of grace that God has lavished on us out of his wisdom and understanding.

Only God in his wisdom could conceive of such a plan and only God in his grace would send his own Son to die to implement the plan.

Fourthly, Paul writes, 1:9-10 "And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Not only did God choose us and adopt us and redeem and forgive us but he also let us in on what he is doing in the future.

We don't have to live life wondering what is yet to come.

Not only does God show us how life began with his electing grace and how life is lived with his adopting and redeeming grace but he also lets us see the end – how he will bring all of life, all of history and our lives to a marvelous fulfillment.

Usually when the New Testament writes refer to “mystery” they aren't referring to something we can't know as in mysterious, but they are specifically referring to something that formerly wasn't known but now is because God has revealed it.

And in the New Testament God has very clearly revealed what is to come.

Not the exact timing or every detail is revealed, but the outcome is clear and certain.

Here he writes that God in his grace will “bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

Elsewhere this is spelled out in more detail:

Romans 8:18-21 “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ The creation (the physical universe) waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation... itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

The physical universe will be transformed when Jesus comes again.

2 Peter 3:10-12 “But the day of the Lord will come... The heavens will disappear with a roar... and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare... But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth...”

Revelation 21:1-3 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every

tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Your eternal destiny is in the hands of the same gracious God that chose you, adopted you, redeemed you, and forgave you.

And lastly, Paul writes 1:13-14 "Having believed, you were marked in him (Christ) with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession

As we learned this summer, when we studied the person and work of the Holy Spirit, God did not save us and then leave us alone until Jesus comes again.

He has given his Holy Spirit to live in such close relationship with us that he is said to be "in" us.

And the Spirit of God reminds us that we belong to God.

Even right now, there are many in this place who are increasingly encouraged by the truths that Paul has laid out.

That is the Holy Spirit bearing witness to your spirit that this applies to you – that this is your God.

In these words of praise we see Paul's worldview.

He sees God in action in eternity past, in the present and in eternity future.

And what is the result of this reminder – this outburst of praise for God's specific acts of grace toward us?

He loves God and has absolute confidence in God.

Listen to how Paul's worldview affected him:

- He said and lived out Philippians 1:21 "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
- He said and lived out Romans 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..."
- He said and lived out Colossians 1:28-29 "We proclaim Christ... To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

- He said and lived out Romans 8:18 “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”
- He said and lived out 2 Timothy 1:11-12 “And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”
- He said and lived out 2 Timothy 4:7-8 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Paul saw all of life through the lenses of the grace of God.

It is no wonder that he bursts into praise as he begins this letter.

He wanted his readers and us to be captured by the same love for God resulting from the love of God.

Paul is past being only in love with what God does so that he now loves God.

And this results in praise and commitment.

I want you to hear that love, praise and commitment in the life Henriette Delille, whom I mentioned last week.

She was a free black woman who gave her life to finding and caring for the thrown away dying slaves of New Orleans in the mid-1800s.

She would go into the bowels of that wretched city and in the gutters or alleys find the near life-less bodies of these injured or sick slave women.

Henriette Delille had no money and no home but she found abandoned shacks where she made makeshift beds for the dying.

She washed others' laundry and begged to find some money to feed her patients.

For thirty years, from her early 20s until her death from exhaustion and disease at 50, she had nearly nothing to call her own or even to eat.

As a black desiring to start a mission for blacks she was ostracized by the mainstream missions.

At one point she found a convent whose leader would allow her to live there for three months to learn what a mission was like.

Toward the end of her three months in that place that seemed like heaven compared to the filth and hunger she knew in her work, she wrote the following in her journal:

“I have dreamed long and lovely dreams about coming to a place like this in my life and giving myself utterly over to God with the greatest pleasure, without the slightest reservation...

“And now that I am here and have found that kind of incredible peace, realized those fantastic dreams, am I able to accept and surrender? Can I ease back into the bosom of my Lord...and rest assured that I am doing the right thing, that I am following the fullest will of God?

“I am afraid I cannot. I love it here with all my heart, could happily, delightedly stay here the rest of my days, in the kitchen or wherever, and not give a thought to whatever lies beyond these walls.

“But I have been beyond these walls, and I have seen and heard and smelled and, God help me, grown accustomed to the evil that is out there, and I know I must return to it, face it, and fight it in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ.

“And I will, I shall, and I must prevail in his name. I wish and pray, as he did on the Mount of Olives, that this (cup) might pass from me, but it will not, and I must rise up, go forth and embrace it again with all my heart because...because that is God’s will for me and I will die tearing at that outer evil with all my strength, all my resolve and all my love.

“But dear God, how I would love to stay here, in the center of your heart, in the sweetness and joy of these cloistered sisters, their walls and their holiness. But I know I must go out amongst those others, back into the belly of the beast, and I shudder to think of it. Give me the will and the courage to go face it and fight it again dear God, because the time is coming, and I grow weak and faint, and I dread the day I must pass out through these beloved gates.

“Help me, Lord, to return to my cross and embrace it. Help me to carry it, as is my destiny in your divine plan, all the way up to the gates of heaven, where you will take it from me and say “well done”. I quake in fear that I might fail thee, and I make silent fist in the night and raise it to the devil and I say to him, ‘You will not bring me down, you will not snatch away my cross. You wretched demon, you will not seduce me from my true course, which is to live and dies in the arms of my slaves.

“Stand with me dearest Jesus. Stand with me against the beast and prevent him from turning me in any least way from doing your holy will. For I am not many things I should be, I am not brave, but heart and soul I am yours. Amen

Do you see God and life as Henriette Delille saw it?

Do you have the worldview that Paul describes in Ephesians 1 – that spiritual realities are greater than material ones?

Will you believe him that God that loves you, chose you, adopted you, redeemed you, forgave you, has given you his Holy Spirit and is coming again for you?

And will you rise up with Paul loving and praising God and recommitting your life anew to him?