

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

Grace Unleashed

PART

2

TITLE

We Are Adopted

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 1:3-6



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Well, good morning, Providence. It is my joy to be with you guys today to open the scriptures and look at a remarkable passage in the Book of Ephesians. If you're joining us for the first time this week, last week, we started the Book of Ephesians. We only got two verses in last week, and we're only going to get three more. Well, four more this morning, but I promise you, there's a ton packed in these four simple verses.

Before I get started, I do want to reiterate something that Thomas said. If you are a teacher of public school, private school, homeschool, college, seminary professor, you're an administrator, then it is our honor that you would be here today. We simply want to say thank you for your investment that you make. I have four children, three of which are school age, and I personally am grateful for how God has gifted you, for the way that you use your talents to help raise up a new generation. We simply want to honor you today by saying thank you. Thomas will speak more to that later on, but I did want to express my thanks on behalf of our people for what you do, and we'll have a time at the end where we'll recognize you as well.

If you're joining us for the first time, last week Pastor Brian did tremendous work laying the foundation for the Book of Ephesians. I'm not going to go into all the history because we've already done that, but if you are interested in knowing a little bit more about the church of Ephesus, then I would encourage you to go online and look on Providence's website. Thomas actually wrote an article this week that gives a little bit of a background of both the city of Ephesus, its importance, and likewise, laying the groundwork for the beginning of the Book of Ephesians.

What I can tell you is Ephesus was a remarkable city. It was a cultural seat and hugely influential at the time of the writing of this letter. We know more about the church in this city than we know about any other church that was birthed after the resurrection of Christ, mostly because it is talked about, written to, or leaders in that church were written to in seven of our New Testament books. That's pretty remarkable when you think about it, that this church and the leaders of this church and the people that made up the church at Ephesus would receive that much attention, and because of that, we know more about the city of Ephesus and the church of Ephesus and God's work there than we do about almost any other congregation that existed in the early church when the church was born.

We know a lot of the heart of Paul. Ephesus, because of its location, because of its influence, it also had some of the most well-known preachers of the early church's history. The church was founded when Paul was there, the apostle Paul was there on a missionary journey. Apollos who may arguably be the most verbally and most eloquent preacher of the early church, remarkable order, spent time in Ephesus, and then Paul's son in the faith, Timothy, was left there by Paul to lead the church at Ephesus. It had had much influence.

Today, we're actually going to look in the first chapter of Ephesians. We're going to look at verses 3-6, and if you want to turn there, it's in the New Testament, and it's in the first chapter. We'll get to the passage in a minute, but to set up what is going on with Paul, I want to share two pictures with you. I'm apologizing now for the pictures because on the big screen, they're really fuzzy, and that's operator error on the part of the person who took the picture, but about a week and a half ago, I was in southern Colorado.

I spent about a week there. Never been to southern Colorado. I don't know about you guys, but there are things that happen in life and there are places that you go in life that there aren't words that adequately describe what you see and what you experience, nor can pictures capture the depth and the beauty of what you see. For me, one of the things, I love the outdoors, and so being in the mountains of southern Colorado was that for me.

This first picture is a picture of ... It is terribly fuzzy, especially when it's big. Maybe it's because I couldn't breathe. It was so high elevation. It is a picture of part of the Rio Grande National Forest in southern Colorado. The picture doesn't do justice to the, just the beauty of that place.

Now, as we went though, I want to show you another picture. The second picture is a picture of a mountain range that ... I was spending time in the Rio Grande Forest, but as we went to that every morning on the west side, or on the left as we went south would be this mountain range. This is the Sangre de Cristo, which it's Spanish for the blood of Christ. It is one of the most remarkable mountain ranges I think I've ever witnessed in my entire life, and the pictures do not do it justice. They're incredibly rugged. They're beautiful. Most of the peaks go above treeline. You see either rock or snow depending on when you're there.

The reason that it's called the blood of Christ is because as the sun sets on this mountain, in the evening, the tops of the mountains turn red. That's how it got its name. It is remarkable. It's breath-taking. To be there, and all the emotions that well up in you, the awe and the wonder, the smallness for me when I stand in places like this ... In fact, I stood on a top of a peak this past trip, and we were about 10,400 feet. I looked at the guys I was with, and I said, "How many humans have ever stood in this place and seen this?" Surely, only in the hundreds if that because it wasn't on a trail. It was off-trail in the middle of the wilderness.

It's overwhelming when you think about it. It's similar, I think, to times, if you've ever been at a, I was going to say funeral, not a funeral, at a wedding, and you ... I've had the privilege of officiating some weddings, but also, when you're just there, one of the most, my favorite times in a wedding is when the groom is down front, and the door opens in the back, and he sees his bride for the first time. It is rare that I've ever been in a wedding where there's not been a man who stood there, and I'm talking about hard men, they don't cry or anything, tears will be coming down their face when they look at their bride. There are no words that can adequately describe that's going on in the heart of the husband at that moment, nor are there pictures that can adequately capture the depth of what's there.

Now, what is that important? Because that is what is going on here in Ephesians. When Paul, after he does the pleasantries of telling who he is and the salutation of his letter, he gets to this place where he is overcome with worship. It is from this heart of worship that he pins these next few verses. Here's the remarkable thing about these verses. We're only going to look at 3-6, but in the Greek, 3-14 are all one sentence. He's so overcome by what God has done that he cannot stop writing clauses. He writes for what we have as 14 verses in our scripture. I'm going to read all 14, but I'm actually going to breathe when I do it, but it is remarkable. In these verses, though, before we get there, I want to acknowledge what's in them because if you are familiar with the scripture at all, there is tension in these verses that could come into play, and I want to help dispel some of that out of the chute.

In 3-14, there's a remarkable depth of truth that Paul gets to. The breadth of what he's saying is astounding. He is in awe. It's also mysterious. In this passage we're going to look here in a minute, Paul tells us that if we're found in Christ, that we're chosen before the foundation of the world, that the work is completely God's. Also, in this one sentence though, in all of the language that he talks about God's sovereign work about saving us, how He is the one who moves the work of salvation in our hearts, at the same time, the very passage of scripture that we're asking you as a church to memorize with us in this sentence, verses 13 and 14, what he gets to is he says, "In Him, you who heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation and believed in Him, you were sealed with the promise Holy Spirit."

Paul says God is the author of salvation, but you must believe. Two things that, in human terms, we often find challenging. In fact, I would even argue that they create theological tension for a lot of people, and yet, Paul doesn't have that problem, and neither does God, that we could hold both in balance, that God, that the word of God speaks of God as the mover, and yet, the word of God also speaks of us as having responsibility to believe. Both go hand in hand, and to ignore one over the other would be to our detriment, to displace or dispel one over the other would be to our disadvantage, and we would not see God fully for who He is.

Paul's words though in all of that, in all of the tension that may exist there, here's the reality for me. I do not believe that Paul's words are meant to create a theological divide. Instead, they're meant to evoke wonder and worship. It is to this end that we're going to read these 14 verses now. This is what Paul says.

"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, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace with which He's blessed us in the beloved. In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us, in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things to Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

“In Him, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and you believed in Him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory.”

Let’s pray. Father, would we just, if we did nothing else and sit for the next 30 minutes and just marveled at Your work, it would be time well-spent. God, would You just let us look at wonder what You’ve done. Let us be humbled by the fact that it is done to us and for us, and may it lead our hearts to worship You. Thank You for Jesus, and we pray these things in His mighty powerful name. Amen.

These words, one sentence drip from a heart of worship. Paul cannot stand it. He can’t even get into his letter without breaking out into praise for what God has done, and that is His intent. He opens with an overflow of praise, and he opens with words that I want to look at before we get into what I think is the meat of these three verses. I want to touch on this idea of blessing.

Paul starts out, and he said, “Blessed be the God, be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul is telling us, bless God. What does it mean when we bless God? What is this idea of blessing in the scripture? Well, for us, in this context, what Paul is telling us is that when we bless God, what he’s saying is that we are calling to recognition the things that are true about God and focusing on them. We’re speaking them out loud. We’re turning our heart’s attention toward things that are true of God and that are leading us to worship. We bless God. We simply recount what is already true of Him.

Likewise, in the very beginning of this passage in the same verse, not only does he say that we’re called to bless God, but then he turns around, and he says that God has blessed us in Christ. What does it mean then for God to bless us? We bless God. We acknowledge what’s already true about God. We simply bring to light what is true, but when God blesses us, He doesn’t bring to light what’s good and true about us. He’s not looking at us and simply saying what is true over us. When God blesses us, He is speaking good over us. In other words, He is declaring what He has done and what He will do. When we talk about God blessing us, He is not acknowledging anything good in us. He is declaring goodness over us.

This is why Paul can’t stand it. He is moved to worship the God who does this. To that end, let’s look at the first four verses of this one long sentence. If you’re taking notes out of the chute, there’s no better way to say this than how Paul has said it. “God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” That’s what Paul says. What is every spiritual blessing? If Paul is saying, hey, God blesses us, and he’s saying He’s blessing us with these things, then what are spiritual blessings?

Now, when we talk about being blessed, man, we use all kinds of language. When we talk about being blessed, we'll say, "Hey, you're blessed," or, "I'm blessed," or, "God bless you," and usually, when we talk about blessing in human terms, what we're talking about is the stuff that we have. We usually attach this idea of blessing to stuff.

I saw a car just a couple of months ago when I was leaving church, and it was a nice car, and the license plate simply said "bless." I'm certain that there was purpose in that, but here's the deal. Paul could care less about stuff. The scriptures could care less about stuff. Now, that's not wrong to have things, and certainly, we could say God, that we could certainly say that that would be a blessing from God because the scriptures tell us that every good gift comes from Him, but when Paul talks about every spiritual blessing, if you look at just these verses between 3 and 14, everything that Paul attaches to this idea of every spiritual blessing, it is all birthed out of this one thing: the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Every spiritual blessing could be summed up in this one thing: salvation. How does he say it? Well, in verse 4, he says He chose us. In verse 5, he says He predestined us for adoption. In verse 7, he says we were given redemption and forgiveness, every spiritual blessing. In verse 12, he says we were given an inheritance. In verse 14, he says that inheritance was the Holy Spirit. Every one of these things that Paul attaches in this passage to every spiritual blessing, it all is tied to the saving work of Jesus Christ. All of these blessings are the direct result of what Jesus has done. In other words, we can be sure Paul is saying this, that every spiritual blessing is every good thing promised and every good thing received through the saving work of Jesus Christ. God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

In these four verses we're looking at today, what are the two things I think that Paul shows is, is those spiritual blessings. I think the first is this, that God chose us. It's what he says. God chose us. He did the work. It was His prerogative. He's the one doing the action. This is astounding for a whole host of reasons, but let's just simply look at the life of Paul to get a depth of why Paul is amazed at this: Paul did not start out loving Jesus. In fact, we know it was quite the contrary. Paul loved God, but he hated those who believed that Jesus was God's Son, and he was on the road to becoming one of the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community. In fact, Paul was on his way to a city called Damascus with orders from the religious leaders of the Jewish community to seek out people who claim to believe that Jesus was a Son of God and salvation was found through Him and to do one of two things: to imprison them, but also, to have them put to death. That's Paul, the guy who writes this letter.

Jesus meets him on the road to Damascus, knocks him off of his horse, blinds him, and radically changes his life. Paul was not seeking Jesus. Jesus chose him, and Paul knows it. Paul knows he didn't deserve it. In fact, if anything, when he came to recognize the truthfulness of who Jesus was, Paul knows that what he deserves is what he didn't receive, which is the very condemnation that he was trying to dole out onto the Christians that he was seeking to persecute, and God in His grace and mercy had a different plan. He chose Paul, and He set Paul on a course to lead others to understand who Jesus was. He chose us, Paul says.

Whatever role we play in salvation, and the scripture is clear, we do have responsibility. It never rest definitively on us. It can't. That's reserved for a sovereign God. It's a mystery. It's meant to be held in wonder. Regardless of your theological bent, you must come to terms with God's sovereignty and His saving work. It shouldn't lead you to spiritual frustration. It ought to lead us to amazement. We don't deserve it. There's nothing good in us. The scriptures say no one seeks God. God can both be the primary mover in our salvation and can simultaneously leave responsibility with us when it comes to believing. This leads Paul to worship because he knows that it was God. When did He do this choosing? Look at what the passage says. "Before the foundation of the world."

David writes in Psalm 139:15 and 16, "My frame was not hidden from You. When I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed substance, and in Your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me when is yet there were none of them." David says, "You saw me in my mother's womb, and You knit me together, and not only that, but every day that I was to live, You wrote it down in Your book before I breathe my first breath, and God, I will praise You for it."

David's heart in Psalm 139 is Paul's heart toward God in Ephesians 1. "I'm amazed. It's wonderful. It's mysterious. You're great. You deserve worship. You did this." Not only did God choose us, though, Paul says something specific in the next verse. "We were chosen for something specific. We were chosen for a preferred or a directed destiny. We were chosen for the destiny of sonship." Remarkable. He set His heart to make us His own. We were enemies with God, and He set His heart to make us His children. Not only does God choose us, but He predestined us for a purpose, and that purpose was sonship through adoption.

Now, if you guys know Ellie and I and our family, then you know that my son is adopted. Any time I come across adoption in the context of the scripture, my heart is moved in a unique way because we have experience being on the parent side of adoption. Though Asher wasn't carried in Ellie's womb like our other three daughters were, we love him the same as we love every one of our other children. There is no difference. We love him with the same depth, and we love him with the same intensity. We love him with the same resolve that he's ours. No matter what he does, no matter how he feels about us, he's stuck with us. No matter how angry he gets at decisions that we make, his position as our son will not change. He's granted the same inheritance that our three daughters are granted because he's our son by adoption.

Whatever bad picture we can create of that in human terms, God amplifies the greatness and the goodness of that very thing when He speaks of us as adopted sons and daughters, that He purposed to make us His own. Asher didn't come looking for us. We went looking for him. We don't go looking for God. God came for us, and He did the work to make us His son and daughter.



Romans 8:15 through 17, Paul gets at the heart of this, and he says, “You’ve received the spirit of adoption, as sons who cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ And if children,” then Paul goes on to say, “you’re heirs. Heirs of God, but not only heirs of God, fellow heirs of Christ.” The gift of God, the spiritual blessing that we receive because of His adoption of us as sons and daughters is that we are joint heirs with Christ. All the rights and privileges that are due to Jesus, our Lord and Savior, God bestows upon us by no choosing of our own and by no merit of our own. It is remarkable, and Paul can’t stand it. He’s led to worship, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who’s blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

How does He do this choosing and this adopting? Well, the passage tells us that He does it in Christ. You see, Jesus is always there. At every point in this process, He’s present. In fact, none of it is true if He isn’t. It was by Him that we were made. It was through Him that we were made, and it is for Him that we were made. The exclusive claims of salvation through Jesus that Christianity has make this unique among all other religions, and none of it is true outside of Jesus. Paul says this all comes in Christ. In other words, because we are found in Him, that everything that is true for Jesus becomes true for us, and through Christ, that everything good that we receive, God gives to us through Jesus. It’s in and through Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21 is probably my favorite verse in all of scripture when it talks about the depth of what Jesus has done. Paul writes it this way. “For our sake, God, He made Him Jesus to be sin who knew no sin so that in Him, in Jesus, we might become the righteousness of God,” the great exchange that God would look at us and that we do nothing to deserve our merit favor in Him. In fact, we rebel against Him. We turn against Him at every place in our life, that we’re constantly turning our wills to be in control. God looks down upon us, and He knows that our rebellion against Him deserves His justice because He is just, and that justice is separation from Him.

Eternity in hell, void of His grace. He looks at us, and instead of leaving us to that end, He also says, “But I’ve made a way, and I didn’t make a way because you sinned. I made a way before you sinned. Before the foundation of the world, I set this in place, and Jesus was there, and He knew it because I created through Him. Even then, I knew that you would rebel against me and that that would cause separation, and so I already had a plan in place. Jesus, the Son, He’s going to come to earth, and He’s going to live the life that you can’t, and He’s going to die the death that you deserve, and in turn, you’re going to get His righteousness.”

It makes no sense. No one does that but God. He’s the only one that can. Paul says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” because this is true, and we don’t deserve it. In and through Jesus, we’ve been given these blessings, and it’s all according to His will, Paul says. He purposed it. He wanted to do it, and He did it, and it becomes true.



We look at this, and we say, well, God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Christ, but why? Well, Paul says in verse 4, there's a reason. God blesses us for our good. Look at what he says in verse 4. Now, he says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that," here's the reason why, "that we should be holy and blameless before Him." Our good, holy, and blameless before God.

Now, I don't know about any of you all, but I'm not holy and blameless. In fact, truth be known, even this morning, I've sinned, and you have too. How can this be true? Because God is declaring us holy in Jesus. Jesus holiness is given to us. When He looks at us, He sees the work of His Son, and He is declaring over us what will be true. He is making us holy. That's His promise to us. He who began a good work in you is faithful to complete it.

Not only do we gain holiness, we're pronounced holy because of the work of Jesus, but God is saying, "I'm doing this in you, and it's for your good," because what's the alternative? If the scriptures are true, the alternative is punishment and condemnation, so it's certainly for our good, and Paul says, "I can't help but worship. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

One of my favorite Broadway shows is Les Mis, and for me, in Les Mis, the most moving scene of the entire show is when John Jean Valjean steals the silver from the bishop who, right after he's released from prison, he takes him in, he feeds him, he gives him a place to stay, and in the middle of the night, he gets up, and he saw where they put the silverware away and all the silver pieces and settings. He goes, and he steals it all, and he leaves under the cover of darkness.

When he leaves, he's caught by the authorities. The authorities bring him back to the bishop, and they bring him before the bishop, and they say, "We found this guy. Look at what he's stolen. Is this yours?" and the bishop says, "Yeah. Yeah, it's mine." In a remarkable moment, he says, "But Jean Valjean, I'm angry with you because you left the best. I told you to take the best, and you didn't do it. Here, take the silver candlesticks. They're the best, and you'll need them too."

In that picture, suddenly, we see a little bit of the grace and the mercy of God in our own lives, that we would steal from God if we could, that we do try on a regular basis to steal His glory, to make life about us, to pilage what is really God's, to misuse what He's given, and that God, in His grace and His love that He would look at us and say, "But take the best. Take the best. My son, broken for you that you might be reconciled to me." That's the picture of the goodness of what God has done. Paul says, "He makes us, He chooses us, and He predestines us, so that we might be holy and blameless, and that we might be called sons and daughters." What a remarkable gift of grace.

Paul says God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in Jesus, that those blessings are for our good, but ultimately, I think that Paul says God blesses us for His glory. If you look at what he says in verse 6, he does all of this according to the purpose of His will to the praise of His glorious grace with which He's blessed us in the beloved, to the praise of His glorious grace. God's grace unleashed on us, salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ is displayed in the saving of sinners. God is glorified. He is exalted through salvation. His wisdom, His power, His righteousness, the complete justice that He has, His perfection, His forgiveness, His timing, all of these things, they're put on display in the act of salvation through Jesus. They're meant to make us marvel at what God has done to be overcome with a sense of gratitude to make us worship and to make us praise.

When we understand what God has done, the depth and the breadth of His love and the lengths of which He went to reconcile us, it ought to evoke wonder, wonder, the ways of God who are not like us, and it ought to cause us to worship. Worship isn't a duty. It's not the begrudging giving of honor to an unworthy but powerful king. Worship, instead, is delight, the right response to the gift of grace unleashed on us by a just and righteous and gracious and merciful and loving God.

There's really two responses that I would like to lay before you, and they come this way. If you're sitting in this room, and you've never believed in Jesus for salvation, all of these things are true for you. If you believe, that's the work you're called to, to believe that God loves you, and He's done these things on your behalf so that you might be reconciled to Him, no matter what you've done or where you've been in life, no matter what is going on, even today, this is true. This is how I know this is a blessing to you. You are sitting in this room, hearing these words over you from the pages of scripture. God is saying to you, "I've done this. I love you. This is for you, chosen you. I predestine you to sonship if you believe." Because of that, I would call you to this application that you simply receive this blessing with humble thankfulness, amazed at what God has done.

Then for those of you who know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, this is what I would ask of you, that you would consider the heart of Paul in these few verses in Ephesians, and that as he speaks of the blessings of God that have come to us through Jesus Christ, that you might respond to God's blessings with wonder and worship, the only fitting response to what he's done, that we would look at God's ways and His Salvation, and that we would marvel and we would lift our eyes and our voices, and we would praise Him.

How do we do that here? Well, even today, we're going to invite you to stand in a minute and to sing to God, to bless God, to declare what is true about Him, to look at the salvation that He offers and be amazed and lift your hearts and say, "God, it's to You and for You. It's all for You," and it's why we would go to so much trouble, even to ask You to come back tonight for a gathering of prayer and worship because this is the end to which God has made us. It's the only right response to what God has done for us and to us through Jesus. Worship. Paul can't stand it, and he can't even get into the letter without breaking out into praise for God. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. He gives us a privilege of doing that and response to what He's done. May we respond appropriately. Let's pray.

Father, oh, how incredible You would do all of this. You are glorious, and You're powerful, and You're mysterious. You are not like us, and yet, You stoop down to become like us that You might save us, and it is remarkable. Salvation, it's a wonder. We don't deserve it, and yet You freely offer it. God, would You stir in our hearts a deep sense of gratitude and worship in response to what You've done. May we look upon the pages of the scripture and not be angry at who You say You are but be amazed at who You say You are and be amazed at what You've done for us and be amazed that we would even be offered the opportunity to be reconciled to You, and not to just be reconciled to You, but to be called Your sons and daughters. What a privilege that no one deserves except Jesus, and yet through Him, You extend it to us, and You declare it to be true when we believe.

Oh, God. Lead our hearts to worship, lead us to lift our voices to You. God, as we give our tithes and offerings, may it be out of a heart of gratitude and overflow that even the things that You've given us stewardship over, the money and the resources that we have of our time, that we would freely lay them back in front of You and say, "Thank You, God. This is such a small thing to do in response for what You've done for us." May our hearts, even in our giving, be an act of worship to You for what You have done for us through Jesus, and may He be exalted. We pray these things in the strong and powerful name of the one who saves us, Jesus Christ. Amen.



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