

All You Need is Love – Part 6

by Rev. Robert Griffith

I want to ask you to read this aloud:

“In the kingdom of God, the quality of my life depends firstly not on what I do for God or for others, but on what God has already done for me, and continues to do *for me*, in me and *through me*.”

So in light of this truth, I want to ask and answer a question today: ‘what has God done for us?’ We would need many hours to answer that fully, but Paul’s words in Ephesians 1:3-14, which I regard as some of the most profound in the entire Bible, are a great place to start. I’m reminded here of that famous poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *“How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Ways.”* My today question is, ‘How does God love us?’ and the Apostle Paul will count the ways, as run some commentary as we go.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ ...

God loves us in a myriad of ways, however the pinnacle of His love, the magnitude of His love, the depth of His love is revealed in Christ; in the spotless life, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Christ, in Whom we are raised to new life also. ‘In Christ’ is Paul’s most repeated phrase in all his letters, for good reason. God has blessed us ‘in Christ’...

... with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places ...

Notice the past tense leading into this amazing promise. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. It’s a done deal. This is not a promise of what’s to come. The only reason we may not have experienced every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places yet is because we have not yet fully embraced the power and reality of *“Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* The more we pray that prayer and press into God and believe His Word, then the more we will experience what He has already given us in Christ ...

... just as He chose us ...

Three simple words, but three of the most defining words of our entire Christian life. He chose us. So when we say, *“I made a decision for Christ,”* or *“I accepted Christ,”* or *“I asked Christ into my life.”* Those statements actually distort the true gospel and reveal an ignorance of the very foundation of our faith and Christian life, which is: **God chose us**. Whatever it is we did, or do now, day by day, can only ever be a response to God choosing us. Why did God choose us? The answer is love – an incomprehensible love. This Love, this God, chose us...

... in Christ before the foundation of the world ...

Not only did God choose us, but He chose us before the foundation of the world. God didn’t choose me in 1973 as a youth leader prayed over me. My salvation was a reality long before Adam was created and then one night in back in 1973 the Spirit of God opened my eyes to that truth and I began to walk in that reality and my life has never been the same since. God chose us before we had a chance to do anything to mess it up and He chose us ...

... to be holy and blameless before Him ...

He chose us to be: holy and blameless before Him! But when we look in the mirror we scratch our heads, because what we see in there is surely not holy or blameless. That's because we are looking in the wrong place. Do you remember Paul's favourite phrase? '*in Christ.*' This wonderful salvation is ours in Christ. We are already holy and blameless in Christ – we have to be - otherwise we are wasting our time praying and trying to enter into the holy presence of God in worship and praise. Unholy vessels cannot be in the presence of a holy God, they will be burned up in the purity of His holiness. So we pray to God - in Christ. We worship God - in Christ. We are holy and blameless before God - in Christ. Then, just in case we are too thick to work it out for ourselves, Paul tells us that all of this is done by God...

... *in love.*

This is love. This is God. God is love. Then Paul shows us what this love, this God is really like, when he says:

He destined us for adoption as His sons and daughters ...

... not just His disciples, His subjects or His servants; and certainly not His pawns on some great celestial chess board - we are God's adopted children - and like all adopted children, we are loved with an extra special love ...

... *through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will,*

God actually takes *pleasure* in us. He *enjoys* us, as any parent enjoys their children. His calling, saving, redeeming and reconciling work in Christ is all according to His good pleasure, and it is ...

... *to the praise of His glorious grace*

It all comes by grace: loving restoration, renewal, salvation and sanctification is by God's grace alone. None of us deserve to even breathe, let alone enjoy the company of a Holy God as His adopted, much loved children! This is the grace ...

... *that He freely bestowed on us ...*

Let me ask you something. How much does something cost that's 'free'? Nothing? Are you sure? Are you really sure? When I observe the behaviour of Christians across the centuries and still today with so many of us, I could be forgiven for thinking that we have to *pay* for the greatest free *gift* known to mankind.

That's what *religion* is friends and I beg you in Jesus' name to never use the word *religion* again to describe anything to do with the Church Jesus is building! **God hates religion!** Religion gives you rules, requirements, expectations and obligations on behalf of God. But our God, the One and only true God, only gives freely and unconditionally.

Is it any wonder that God hates religion with a passion? That's why Jesus castigated the Pharisees of His day for creating qualifying criteria for the people of God. They added law after law which needed to be obeyed in order to please God and earn His favour and enjoy His blessing. That's a lie! We cannot buy God's grace or love or blessing or gifts or power or presence with our obedience or our service or our attempt at living a holy life or by giving more money or time or passion or whatever currency we choose.

God has nothing for sale! (And if He did, we could never afford it anyway!) God only gives freely, unconditionally and without obligation. We are never “much obliged” in our relationship with God. That very concept is an offense to His free grace and love.

We don't come here each week because we are 'obliged' to come. We don't worship because we are 'obliged' to worship. We don't give because we are 'obliged' to give. We don't follow God's Word and plan for humanity because we are 'obliged' to. We don't pray out of 'obligation.' We do all those things and more because we *choose* to - in the freedom God has given us in Christ and if you do feel 'obliged' to be here then you should go and do something you really *want* to do and *choose* to do, because God is not interested in our obligations. He wants our free, love response - to His free love and grace. Any other response to Him is religion, not a love relationship, and God hates religion! Now, if you want a religion, there are plenty out there to choose from - just don't let Satan turn what God has done in Christ into a religion, where we slap a loving, gracious God in the face by doing things for Him out of obligation. Freely, freely we have received, and freely, freely we give ... or we don't. Everything comes from God freely ...

... in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption ...

Notice it doesn't say “we will have redemption.” It doesn't say, “we are working towards our redemption.” It doesn't say “we long for or hope for our redemption.” It says in Him (Christ) we have redemption... how?

... through His blood ...

The pardon for our sins, all our sins, past, present and future, has already been signed by God the Father with a pen dipped in the blood of His own Son and in this redemption through His blood we have ...

...the forgiveness of our sins ...

We have, not 'will have' or 'may have if we confess' but we have forgiveness of our sins, past present and future, before they were even committed. In fact, before we were even born.

If I asked you the question, “When were you saved?” How would you respond? I bet many of you would think of a particular day or event in your life. But theologically, you would be wrong. Millions of Christians refer to the day when they were saved and the assumption is that they were not saved before that day. That's not what the Bible says. Your personal *experience* of your salvation may have a starting point in your journey. Mine was in 1973. There may well have been a point in your historic time-line when you personally embraced your salvation and it became real for you. But theologically speaking, Biblically speaking, God saved you from the consequence of all sin before you even knew what sin was, before you were even born, in fact. Even more shocking and amazing than that: God saved you from sin before the foundation of the earth, in the eternal, timeless Kingdom of heaven.

Now of course, the physical reality of the atonement - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - broke into time and space in this earthly Kingdom at a particular point in our history over 2000 years ago. But that was not the *beginning* of our salvation. So it's wrong for me to say, “*My salvation began in 1973.*” It's just as wrong for me to say, “*My salvation began when Jesus died and rose again.*” If that's true, then what about Abraham, Moses, Ruth and all God's servants before Christ's death? They're in big trouble if salvation was secured thousands of years after they died!

No, the only accurate statement any of us can make and be true to God's Word and not cast all the people of God before the cross out into the cold is simply this: "I was saved before the foundation of the world, in the heart of God ...

... according to the riches of His grace that He lavished on us."

It's God's grace from the beginning - you don't get in any other way – and, it's God's grace every day – you don't get along any other way. God made sure there was nothing of us in our salvation that we could doubt later on or take pride in something we did to secure it. God wanted the foundation of our faith and our relationship with Him to be 100% secure and that means we cannot be part of securing that at all – because we are fallen, broken people who get it wrong more than we get it right and nothing we do can ever be trustworthy enough to last a lifetime, much less for eternity.

God loves you so much, that He made sure your eternal security in Him, your eternal salvation, redemption and reconciliation was totally and completely secure, which is why He effected your salvation before He even created you. The rest of the story from then on, is just the glorious and wonderful detail in the picture. That's why Paul, in his exuberance and overwhelming sense of God's love says that God 'lavished' His grace upon us. It was like he was trying to find the most qualitative and quantitative adjective to describe this love, this grace, this God. He *lavished* this grace on us. And yes, there is even more ...

With all wisdom and insight He has made known to us the mystery of His will ...

In this amazing salvation, this wonderful, eternal relationship God has secured for us in Christ, we are given a glimpse into the mystery of God's will. This revelation has come in and through Christ in these last days to you and me and all believers in Christ. What a blessing it is to be born this side of the cross, so the manifold wisdom, plan and purposes of God might be fully revealed to us and through us to the rest of God's children who don't know that's who they are, yet! And all of this is ...

... according to His good pleasure that He set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time ...

What you and I get to live out in this time and place is all part of God's master plan from the beginning. We may not understand it, but by faith, we embrace the assurance that God is in control and He knows the end from the beginning and He planned, Paul says here ...

... to gather up all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance ...

Notice again the past tense. Our inheritance is already ours, *in Christ*. Of course the manifestation and experience of that inheritance, the unfolding wonder of what is ours in Christ is a life-long adventure of discovery, but we don't strive to *achieve* it, we simply *believe* it and *receive* it. Now there's a religion-busting slogan for your fridge door: **Don't strive to achieve it, just believe it and receive it!** We have obtained this inheritance ...

... having been destined according to the purpose of Him who accomplishes all things according to His counsel and will ...

In the midst of our broken and mixed up lives, here is our rock, our foundation, our anchor point: God will accomplish all things according to His counsel and will. If we walk only by sight and develop our theology from what we see around us or in the mirror or on the evening news, then we will end up with a confusing, impotent, powerless God.

But if we learn the lesson of Abraham and *believe God in spite of* the circumstances which surround us, then amazing things will happen in our head, in our hearts, through our lives and in and through this church ...

... so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of His glory. In 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 ...

Have you ever read and understood any of the Bible? Have you ever prayed and seen God answer your prayer, no matter how insignificant you thought it was? Have you ever discerned the hand of God at work in the world, in your family, or in your Church? Have you ever felt the presence of God in a hymn or song or prayer or worship time in a Church service? If you answered yes to any of those questions, I have some great news: you have been marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit and you don't ever have to doubt the presence of God in your life again.

You see, none of those things can be humanly discerned or understood. Only the Holy Spirit can interpret Scripture to your spirit, minister the presence of God to you and open your eyes to see and discern the things of God. So you don't need some 'higher' blessing from God, you just need to believe the truth of God's Word which says, as a believer, in Christ, you have been marked with the promised seal – the Holy Spirit of God and ...

... this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people ...

This is a down-payment, a deposit, a taste of things to come. Whilst we live in two kingdoms, the temporal kingdom of this earth and the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, we will experience the fullness of the presence of God in increasing measure over time. As we press into the heart of God and experience in our lives more and more of what He has already given us completely in Christ, all of this will be ...

... to the praise of His glory."

Wow! What a passage! And I have only lightly scratched the surface in my commentary. We could devote a sermon to each verse, each phrase, each word, in some cases! So let's now read this statement out loud once more:

"In the kingdom of God, the quality of my life depends firstly not on what I do for God or for others, but on what God has already done for me, and continues to do *for me, in me and through me.*"

And what has God done for you? According to the passage we just explored from Ephesians: *everything!* Everything you could ever imagine, plus some! Welcome to the Good News! Welcome to the Gospel! This is why our life in Christ is anything but religion!

At the heart of religion you will find a list of what *you* have to do to honour and please God. At the heart of the Christian faith, you will find Christ, Who has already done *everything* that religion expects you to do, He has effected everything that legalism says is your job – and He has given that to you as a free gift, once and for all time! This is love. This is God.

A God Who has loved us with a love so deep and wide and high and strong that we could explore its depths in a thousand sermons and only then be skirting around the edges of this love!

I finished our last message talking briefly about fear and how God's love casts out fear and I said we would explore that important area further, and we will, next week. But first, I want to issue you with a challenge for this coming week. You are free to accept this challenge or not, nobody but you and God will know anyway, but I want to invite you to read Ephesians 1:3-14 every morning this week before you embrace the challenges of the day, and preferably out loud. Then every night, I want you to read Psalm 23.

Then next week we will talk about fear – the greatest barrier to receiving God's incomprehensible love. We will ask God to deal with whatever fear is left after the Holy Spirit has used Paul's words and David's words to remind us of some important truths and challenge the underlying unbelief which is the seedbed of all fear.

Come Holy Spirit, speak to us and reveal Christ to us and in us. Amen.