

QUEEN OF THE EPISTLES 1: THE PURPOSE OF GOD
PSALM 103; EPHESIANS 1:1-8
2026-01-04

We touched on Ephesians back in November. It's a magnificent letter, written by Paul, and referred to by some as "The Queen of the Epistles". Ephesus isn't mentioned in all the early manuscripts, so it is may well have been a letter that was intended to be circulated from church to church.

Biblical Scholar, J.A. Robinson paints quite a picture for us. It's assumed that Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison in Rome at the close of his career. Here's the context:

First, Christ's personal ministry was almost totally focused on His own people, in spite of His hints at a larger, universal mission.

Second, those who carried on Jesus' work after His ascension kept that tight sphere of influence. Christians were like a Reformation movement within the Jewish church, for maybe a 5 year period, who enjoyed the esteem and goodwill of all except Jerusalem's governing class.

Third, but suddenly the Jews of Alexandria dispersed from Judah after Stephen's stoning and subsequent persecution of Christians. The scattered believers took Stephen's (and Christ's) message with them. But seeing the Gospel as being for all people was considered heresy by the Jews. So, Jew and Christian suddenly came into deadly opposition with each other—thus Saul's presence. Gentile churches were established, where baptism replaced circumcision virtually instantly.

Fourth, Jerusalem was dismayed at the inclusion of Gentiles into Christian society. How could the nucleus of the Messianic kingdom not conform to Jewish practices? What was this confusion breaking down the barrier which separated Jew from Gentile in the house of God? The OT temple consisted of the Holy of Holies, the inner courtyard, the court of men, the court of women and the outer court of the Gentiles or foreigners. How could the kingdom of Israel be restored if the new society included Gentile equal to Jew? Could anyone be a good Christian unless he was first a good Jew? To Paul's bitter sorrow, he saw that his doctrine of Christian freedom was erecting a new barrier against the conversion of the Jewish nation; the universality of the Gospel was ironically excluding the Jew. (See Romans 9-11).)

Fifth, this change was swift once it started as a result of Paul's missionary action. Paul saw the splitting of the Church into Jewish and Gentile factions as fatal to the very mission of Christianity, which was intended to be the healer of the world's divisions. So, the best years of his life were devoted to reconciling this rift; hence the letters to the Romans and Galatians.

Sixth, in prison in Rome, Paul was free to teach and write to the Philippians, to the Colossians and this letter to the Ephesians. Having finished the contentious issues in his writing

to the Colossians—where he emphasized freedom from works for salvation, freedom from the need to be circumcised, freedom from food sacrificed to idols as well as the rumour that Christ had already returned—the second coming—and had been missed. With this behind him, Paul set to writing one supreme letter, not controversial, positive in tone, fundamental, and the great doctrine of his life—the unity of all humanity in Christ and God’s purpose for the world through the Church. So his great argument begins, “before the foundation or creation of the world” and goes on to include “through the fullness of the times” and “embracing all things in heaven and earth”.

This background shaped Paul’s understanding of God’s plan and our place in it. In 14 verses, again we hear who God is, who we are, what God wants for us and what we need to do/how.

First Paul refers to himself as an apostle of Christ—a calling directly from Christ—uniquely called to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. That’s significant. It means he belongs to Jesus. second, His life wasn’t his own to do with as he pleased; he was the possession of Jesus, needing always to live as Jesus wanted him to. Saying he was an apostle is to say he was sent out by Jesus. Apostle means “to send out” with some special task to do. You and I are members of His special task force; we have a mission to serve Christ within this world. third, being an apostle meant that any power Paul possessed was a delegated power—it’s the strength and power of Jesus with him.

The second thing Paul says is that he’s an apostle through the will of God. There’s a tone of amazement, that God would choose him in spite of his background as a former Christian stalker. We too, should be filled with wonder that God finds each of us worthy to share in His work.

“Grace and peace” (verse 2) is another of Paul’s signature introductions—two great words of the Christian faith. Grace has two main ideas. The Greek word *charis* can mean charm. If our life is unattractive, we’re not really being Christ-like. Our life needs to be winsome. second, grace always describes a gift—a gift that’s impossible for us to procure for ourselves and which is never earned or deserved. It’s about the sheer undeserved generosity of the heart of God.

We’ve talked about peace lately—at Remembrance Day and during the second week of Ad-vent. Greek *eirene*, Hebrew *shalom*; neither are just an absence of trouble. *Shalom* means everything which makes for a person’s highest good—quite independent of outward circumstances. The implication is that there’s only 1 source of peace and that is doing the will of God. When you drift outside that guardrail you will experience what we all know too commonly—*dispeace*. “To the saints”(in Ephesians) those set apart because they belong to Christ—called by God.”

Have you responded to God’s call to receive Christ and enter a real relationship with Him —then you’re a saint! “To the faithful in Christ Jesus”; the Greek is *pistos*, trustworthy or “those who have faith”. “In Christ”, another of Paul’s signature phrases, speaks of a life totally different

from those who aren't in Christ. "In Christ" speaks of those justified by grace through faith when they receive Christ. They're united with Christ and made new persons, part of a new humanity. Christians—in Ephesus. Each of us has a human and divine address, ____ of Minden and ____ of heaven.

Look for the depth of God's love for us by His intentional plan to bring us to salvation, with its astounding assurances and total involvement of the Trinity in bringing it about.

Verse 3-4: "Praise God who's given us every spiritual blessing that exists--through Christ. Do you thank God and acknowledge Him to others when good things happen?"

WE ARE CHOSEN BY GOD—not the other way around (verse 4)—before the beginning of the world. It was always God's plan to confer salvation on us. We've been in God's plans forever! It never occurs to Paul that he chose to do God's work. How remarkable is that! But it's not only that we're chosen, but that God chooses to bless us with blessings that are only found in heaven. While we can accomplish certain things on our own, we can never attain goodness or peace of mind that only God can give us. God does this purposely so that we can be holy and blameless. Holy, *hagios*, conveys the idea of different or separate from. God is holy because He is different from us. Similarly, God chose Christians to be different from others. We should be different from the world. This is tricky. Of course, the church should welcome everyone. But we should not become like the world. And very unfortunately, when the church has defined itself as different from the world, it ends up with us being perceived as holier than thou, superior to or intolerant of others and judgmental. The real difference should be evident at school, at work, in the hospital wards—everywhere, but by the measure of care and concern for others.

The Greek idea of the word blameless (*amomos*) is thinking of it as taking every part of our life—work, pleasure, home life, sport, personal relationships and offering them all to God. We are not to settle for "it's good enough" when we can do better.

THE PLAN OF GOD: Verse 5: "He predestined us for **adoption** as sons through Jesus Christ... to the praise of His glorious grace"! Grace is solely the gift of God, magnificent, beyond measure and understanding. The Greek *prooriso*—is to predetermine. Paul asserts the elect follow the path of holiness that God established. Are you following that holy path? Those who come to believe in Christ find themselves participating in God's eternal plan. Our purpose is "That we should be holy and blameless before Him". "Holy" in Greek is the idea of difference and separation. As Christians, we should be distinctly different—set apart by God for His purposes—not separate **from** the world, but a difference **in** the world. Our whole lives are to be an offering to God (Romans 12:1).

What does it mean to be adopted as children of God? In the Roman Empire, the person who had been adopted had all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family and completely lost all rights in his old family. In the eyes of the law he was a new person. So new that even all debts and obligations connected with his previous family were abolished as if they had never existed.

Does that sound familiar? This is what Paul says God has done for us. How could God convey His love and care for us or the privilege He gives us to be full-fledged family members in any deeper way? We were absolutely in the power of sin and of the world. Jesus took us out of that power into His—and that adoption wipes out the past and makes us new.

THE GIFTS OF GOD (verse 7-8): In these two verses are three great principles of our faith. **Christ redeemed** (delivered) **us** through His blood. It comes from the Greek verb, *lutroun*, which means to ransom, particularly of a prisoner or slave; for freeing a person from the death penalty. It's God's continual rescuing of His people in the time of their trouble. It's always delivering a person from a situation they're totally powerless to liberate themselves or from a penalty he never could have paid. It was just that liberation which Jesus brought. In short, Jesus can make bad people good. second, there is forgiveness. If there is one thing people knew, it was the sense of sin and their dread of God. Jesus changed all that, teaching not hate, but the love of God. Because Jesus came into the world, even in their sin people discovered God's love. And as you can see from what I just shared, the primary meaning of redemption is forgiveness. Third, there is wisdom and understanding and Christ brought both of them to us. According to the Greeks, if a person had both, she was perfectly equipped for life. Aristotle defined *Sophia* as knowledge of the most precious things. Cicero defined it as knowledge of things both human and divine—the answer to the eternal problems of life and death and God and man and time and eternity. Jesus brought us knowledge which satisfies the mind and understanding, the practical knowledge for handling daily life and living, making for completeness in our character. “According to the riches of [God's] grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and insight”—it's extreme, overflowing and intentional. “Lavish grace”, sweet!

So, in eight short verses here, we have the assurance that we are chosen by God, we get a glimpse of the plan of God and we can revel in what we've heard so far about the gifts of God. I encourage you to rest this week in knowing that God chooses you, that He has adopted you and given you full unalienable rights as His child and that He has equipped you to be who He wants you to be. Go in confidence and live that way before Him and others.