

## Ephesians 1:1-23 “Chosen By God”- Rev. Amanda A. Nevin

### Introduction

This August we are going to take a journey through the book of Ephesians. Ephesians is commonly attributed to Paul although there has been debate in recent years as to whether Paul or ghost writer who was familiar with Paul's writing and style wrote the book. Many argue for Paul as the author because he had a close relationship with the church in Ephesus and the language of Ephesians is close to that of Colossians we will go with that assumption. Paul made his first visit to the city on his way home to Jerusalem in 53 AD and a year later he returned to Ephesus where he stayed for 3 years- living and ministering to the growing church; building relationships with many in the community and laying the foundations there for the church.

Ephesus at this point in history was an important city in the area. It was the capital of Asia and as such was the political, commercial and religious center of the region. One of the sources of income for Ephesus was the great temple of Artemis the fertility goddess which is considered one of the great 7 wonders of the ancient world. Another important source of income was trade as Ephesus was a port city and was the communication and commercial link between Rome and the East. Ephesus boasted the largest of all Greek open air theaters; holding 25,000 spectators. It also had a huge stadium that played host to chariot races and fighting.

Paul wrote the letter in about 61 AD while he was imprisoned in Rome as a way to show the nature of the church and the Christian life to those who came to Christ from a pagan/non-religious heritage and environment. At the heart of this letter is God's desire to show his love through Christ and to show us how to be the body of Christ. Paul is writing to the believers to remind them of their high calling as Christians, in fact that they are called to the highest levels of morality both personally and socially and that they enjoy the rich privileges as members of the body of Christ, privileges of God's grace, mercy, and adoption into God's family.

### Read the Passage

How many of you have ever received a really great letter: a letter that you have kept in a book, or in an old shoe box, or tucked away in a special spot so you wouldn't forget? What was in the letter? Was it a love letter? A letter of encouragement or praise? Or a letter filled with greetings from a long lost friend? Why is that letter memorable and important to you? The book of Ephesians is at the very heart a letter, a letter to new and old friends in a community where Paul had many ties and connections to the church. Paul wants to remind the church at Ephesus of whose they are, what their calling is to be about as Christians and how they are called to be as the community of faith.

Our passage this morning is about God's grace, God's gracious act in choosing us to be his beloved children and God's covering each of us with his immeasurable amount of grace. From the outset of this chapter Paul is reminding the people of God that they are chosen, they are God's beloved, his children and thus are given the riches of His grace because of what Christ has done for them on the cross.

Paul starts the letter off by reminding the people of their identity- they are God's chosen ones. This idea of being forms the basis of the belief of election or God's choice of an individual group for a specific purpose or destiny. Paul wants to remind us that being chosen is God's work and not our own doing. We are saved only because of God's grace and mercy; as believers we are not saved by anything we can say or do outside of accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. What is so amazing about this? It is that God chooses us not by any merit of our own and chooses us without condition. God does not save us because we deserve it but because he graciously and freely offers us salvation. There is nothing that we can do that will persuade God to love us any more or any less. How many of you remember back to the days on the playground when you were "picking teams" for some game you were going to play? Some of us have fond memories of those moments because we were fast runners, great catchers, or coordinated enough that any sport came naturally to us. Or maybe you were just competitive enough that people wanted you on their team. Some of us however were never that fortunate and when we think about standing there waiting to be called on to join a team it conjures up for us unpleasant memories because we were the last ones chosen- we enjoyed the game, we enjoyed playing but weren't always the most athletic. We as people select members for sports teams or games often because we see a person as the most capable, desirable, or worthy to be on our team. We are reluctant to take the underdog because it might jeopardize our possibilities for winning. For many I think that this image of kids on the playground is an image we have with God and our faith. For many there is a fear that we are not "good enough" to be chosen to be on God's team. Sure we come to church, we do attempt to do the right thing; we say what we think people want to hear, but always in the back of our mind is this lingering doubt that we are not good enough, that God couldn't possibly love us enough to want to call us his children. We hope we are, but we are never certain. In fact in a 2001 Barna poll 80% of members of all mainline Protestant denominations believe that salvation can be earned by good works and not by faith alone. And yet our passage tells us something different. We are chosen simply out of love, not because we have any certain qualifications that God is "looking for." God is not a team captain picking only the best but the team captain who chooses everyone and invites us all to participate in his redemptive work. God delights in choosing the most unlikely characters for his purpose, for his work here on earth; and what's so gracious and amazing is that God chooses all who would believe in Christ as their Lord and Savior to be part of his family..

We are God's treasured possessions adopted into his family of faith, elected or chosen by Him. We cannot take credit ourselves for our salvation; for our salvation was given to us through the works and person of Jesus Christ. Before God created anything his plan was in place to give eternal salvation to those who would believe in His Son. A little boy once was asked "have you found Jesus?" To which the boy responded "I didn't know Jesus was lost; but I was and Jesus found me." What a powerful statement, I was lost but now am found, God sought me out when I was a stranger and brought me into his kingdom through the witness and love of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts to reveal the truth about Christ to us.

But why would God do this, why would God chose us before the foundations of the earth? He chose us out of love, out of a desire to be his beloved children and to have a relationship with us. God, who is love wanted to share his love and his grace with his creation. God called us even before the creation of the world- before we had done anything to demonstrate our own worthiness or lack thereof. Through his wisdom and his heart he created us to be his beloved creation, to inherit the riches of his grace and mercy through the act of his Son Jesus Christ. People were created to have fellowship with God but because of our sin we gave up that fellowship and it is through Jesus' sacrifice that God brought us back into his family; made us heirs along with Christ to all that he has to offer. God adopted each of us into his family for the purpose of love.

What does it mean to be adopted? For many of us it a word that we don't really fully understand because we aren't adopted ourselves. For others this word has a lot of meaning behind the word it. The word adoption can conjure up for many questions like: what is my identity, am I loved? Who am I? What are my roots? Do I look like, act like my biological parents? Why would someone give me up? Why would someone else love me unconditionally even though I was not a "biological" child? For some who have been adopted there is joy and gratefulness for a new family that loves them. For others who have been adopted there is deep hurt and pain related to those parents who "gave them up." There are unanswered questions and truths that they long for and wonder about in relationship to their biological family. There are periods of time when an adopted child will question their place in their adopted family- are they really loved? What is their worth and identity in relationship to this adopted family and to their biological family? Can it be true that someone would love them so unconditionally as to take them in to be apart of their family when another family had to give them up? These questions of adoption I think apply to our faith as well. We wonder about our identity in Christ, what does that mean? We may have joy and gratitude for God's love but question whether we are worthy of that love, whether we deserve it, whether we can fit in to this family of faith? For many of us we wonder if this relationship with God the Father is really real, if there really is a place for us in his Kingdom and for many of us we wonder if we are really loved by God. Someone who has been adopted has been given a new name the same is true for us as Christians, we are given a new name- beloved child of God. For one who has been adopted there is a new family, a new way of living and being- the same is true for us in the family of faith; we have a new way of living and being. We are called to live into God's holiness, to learn the scriptures, to learn about Christ's truth and to live those principles out each and everyday wherever we find ourselves. Why does someone adopt a child? Because they have a great love for someone, a longing to have a family, a desire to give a home to someone and to call them their own. Why does God adopt us? Out of sheer love for us, for a desire to share his graciousness and love with each of us. We don't always understand God. But this passage reminds us that before the world was formed, before sin came in, God chose us in Christ to be with His Son for all eternity.

Our response to this message of hope that we are elected or chosen by God is to inspire us to give our praise and thanks God; to remind us that our lives are in God's hands and to remind us that our adoption into God's kingdom is never an excuse for carelessness in spiritual matters but is a reminder to us all that as Christians we have a moral

responsibility to live our life as Christ calls us to live. Knowing that we have been chosen before creation to receive God's salvation and eternal life; that we are called God's beloved children should energize our gratitude and boost our confidence of our faith. It should also inspire us to go out into the world assured of God's love for us and compel us to share that love with others. Do you believe that are chosen by God? What is holding you back from accepting this truth? How would your life and faith walk be different if you truly believed that you are chosen and loved by God? The challenge for all of us this week is to go out believing the truth that we are chosen by God and to seek God's wisdom on how we are to respond to this truth.