

God's Plan is Eternal  
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### An Unclaimed Inheritance

Sports broadcaster and former NY Giants running back Tiki Barber hosted a special series on NBC's "Dateline" called "You Might Be Rich. In the show they found large amounts of unclaimed property that was waiting in various state treasuries to be returned to their rightful owners.

In one case a man who used to live in Pennsylvania, but who had moved to Germany, was found by Barber's team, and they gave him over half a million dollars that was due him from an inheritance he didn't even know he was entitled to...when "Dateline" was finally able to track him down; they learned that he was homeless.

Question: What if Tiki Barber and Dateline showed up at your house tomorrow saying you were entitled to an inheritance of a HALF MILLION DOLLARS that you didn't know you had coming to you?

1. What would you do with the money?
2. How would it change your way of living?
3. Any chance you'd take the money and live like a pauper refusing to spend any of it?
4. Is there anyone who would slam the door and say NO THANKS?

It's a NO BRAINER that you would accept the money with THANKS. Your way of living would probably be changed in some way as a result. I'll bet word would get around about your good fortune. You might tell others about what happened so THEY might look for an UNCLAIMED INHERITANCE.

I'm sure not Tiki Barber, and I don't have a check for you. But I DO have good news...if YOU and I are believers in Christ, WE HAVE AN INHERITANCE worth much more than a HALF MILLION. An inheritance that was made possible for us before the beginning of time.

### Ephesians – Background

- A letter from the Apostle Paul to the churches at Ephesus
- Paul helped establish this church in AD 53 and returned there twice staying about three years with them...he knew them very well!
- Written in about AD 60, from Rome during Paul's imprisonment there
- Paul wrote to this church "To strengthen and encourage the believers in Ephesus in their Christian faith by explaining the nature and purpose of the church, the body of Christ." Source: Life Application Bible

- Location: (Map in your Bible of Paul's Missionary Journeys) Ephesus was a strategic city, ranking in importance with Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria as a port. It lay on the most western edge of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), the most important port on the Aegean Sea on the main route from Rome to the east.

This morning's lesson is only based on the first fourteen verses of Chapter 1 of Ephesians. But there is an INCREDIBLE amount of RICH content. We only have time to give you the appetizer...you would be blessed to spend some more time this week enjoying the FULL MEAL slowly.

Ephesians 1:1-2 (New International Version)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,  
To the saints in Ephesus,[a] the faithful[b] in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Verse 1: Paul answers the question WHO?
- Who wrote it (Paul); his credentials (an apostle of Christ Jesus); and his authority (by the will of God).
- He also answers to WHOM he wrote: The believers in Ephesus
- How does Paul describe the people to whom he's writing?
  - Saints
  - Faithful in Christ Jesus
- What is a "Saint"?

Warren Wiersbe writes...

*No word in the New Testament has suffered more than this word saint. Even the dictionary defines a saint as a "person officially recognized for holiness of life." (He continues...)*

*The word saint means "one who has been set apart." It is related to the word sanctified, which means "set apart." When the sinner trusts Christ as his Savior, he is taken out of "the world" and placed "in Christ." The believer is in the world physically, but not of the*

*world spiritually (John 17:14-16). Like a scuba diver, he exists in an alien environment because he possesses special equipment—in this case, the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.*

- They were "Saints" because they were "Faithful in Christ Jesus". Not faithful on their own but by GRACE through FAITH
- Saints are BELIEVERS. Clearly they were FAITHFUL BELIEVERS
- You might say that Paul is "preaching to the choir" in this letter to tell them MORE about WHO THEY ARE and WHAT IT MEANS to be SAINTS IN CHRIST.

- IN CHRIST is the key phrase here. He used it or it's equivalent more than 16 times in his letters, more than 30 times in Ephesians, and more than 11 times in this week's lesson passage. IT MUST BE IMPORTANT.

Our teacher's quarterly puts it well:

*"A fish is in the sea; a branch is in its vine; and a root is in the soul. These cannot live without being joined to their respective spheres. So it is with Jesus' followers. We cannot survive outside Him. Living IN UNION with Christ"*

- Verse 2: Paul gives them the greeting and blessing "Grace and peace to you..."
- Paul opens EVERY letter he writes in the New Testament with some variation of this greeting.
- It sets the tone for what he is about to write in the next few verses
- PEACE was a traditional Jewish greeting (Shalom) and GRACE is the way TO PEACE and it only comes from who? God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- To summarize verses 1 and 2: Paul is writing to a group of Faithful Saints IN CHRIST JESUS.

Ephesians 1:3-6

3Praise 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. 4For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5he[a] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

- Verse 3: Why does Paul say he is praising God? He has blessed us with EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING in Christ.
- Blessed us where? In the heavenly realms.
- God shows His kindness to us every day...but even better he has blessings set aside for us IN HEAVEN...beyond what we can see here!
- Verse 4: What did God do for us? Chose us; To be what? Holy and blameless in his sight; When did he choose us? BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD
- Whew!!! Let that SINK IN. This isn't just for the Ephesians...this is for YOU and me!
- Do you ever have days when you start feeling sorry for yourself?
- "I'm not much." "I'm not very important."
- If you are a believer in Christ I have a Greek word for those thoughts: POPPYCOCK!
- Before the CREATION OF THE WORLD the God of the universe CHOSE YOU and made a plan to allow you to be seen as HOLY and BLAMELESS in His sight.
- But there's more. Look at verse 5: he PREDESTINED us to be ADOPTED as his sons (and daughters)

- We're not just someone He took pity on...He went further...He ADOPTED US as His CHILDREN

1 John 3:1 (New International Version)

1How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

- Furthermore, He didn't adopt us because we were cute and cuddly...He adopted us IN SPITE of how we are

Spurgeon writes:

*If a king should adopt any into his family it would likely be the son of one of his lords—at any rate some child of respectable parentage. He would not take the son of some common felon, or some gypsy child, to adopt him into his family. But God in this case has taken the very worst to be His children. The sons of God all confess that they are the last persons they should ever have dreamed He would have chosen.*

- Another observation on Adoption. Question: When a child is adopted, what do they receive? Name; Inheritance; LOVE, etc.
- In God's economy we get all of that PLUS we get HIS NATURE

2 Peter 1:3 and 4

3His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (Emphasis mine)

- Now, I jumped over a word there in verse 5: PREDESTINED
- That word could keep us here all day; all week; all month.
- Some of you think we're about to talk about TULIPS and Calvin, and I don't mean Coolidge.
- I'm not going to avoid the topic of PREDESTINATION and ELECTION and Calvinism, but I'm also not going to get bogged down in it.
- Right now let's be clear about this word

Predestined

*Predestined (4309) (proorizo [word study] from pró = before + horizō = determine from horos = boundary, limit) means to mark out the boundary or limits of a place, thing or person in advance or before. The aorist tense speaks of a definite event though not stating necessarily when. The active voice indicates that God initiated this action of His Own free will!*

Wuest (west) commenting on proorizo writes that...

*The genius of the word is that of placing limitations upon someone or something beforehand, these limitations bringing that person or thing within the sphere of a certain future or destiny. These meanings are carried over into the New Testament usage of the word. Thus, the “chosen-out” ones, have had limitations put around them which bring them within the sphere of becoming God’s children by adoption (Eph. 1:5), and of being conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus (Ro 8:29). (Wuest, K. S. Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: Eerdmans)*

- Christians continue to debate and disagree over PREDESTINATION
- If you believe in the SOVREIGNTY of God you have to believe that He knew before time began who WOULD and who WOULD not be saved
- The debate is the “BASIS” of PREDESTINATION:
  - Some believe that God KNOWS but He allows the person FREE WILL to accept or reject his free gift of salvation (J.V. McGee story: Sick man refuses the ‘remedy’)
  - Others believe that we are “dead” in sin and a “dead person” can’t do anything unless they are “brought to life” by God who chose them for salvation.
- In the lesson notes I’m giving you some links to some good resources if you want to explore further into that topic.

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Resources for Further Study on CALVINISM and Southern Baptists

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility  
How Should Southern Baptists Respond to the Issue of Calvinism?  
by Daniel L. Akin, Ph.D.  
<http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2006/04/sla7.asp>

Ed Stetzer’s Resources on Calvinism and the SBC  
<http://www.edstetzer.com/calvinism.html>

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- Verse 6 tells us WHY God did this: To the praise of the glory of His grace. He made us ACCEPTED in the beloved.
  - Bottom line: The good news is that BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD God made a plan so that YOU and I could be made HOLY and BLAMELESS as HIS KIDS! With all the rights and privileges of sons and daughters.
  - Our time is short so let’s quickly look at some key points in verse 7-12

Ephesians 1:7-12

7In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9And he[a] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10to 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.

11In him we were also chosen,[b] having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

- Verse 7 pretty much stands alone as an overview of God's plan of salvation: In Him we have REDEMPTION through His blood (for) the forgiveness of sins.
- And this was given "in accordance with the riches of God's grace"
- Then verse 8 uses a great word: LAVISHED. God didn't just give us enough grace to "squeak by". He LAVISHED us with His grace PLUS "all wisdom and understanding."
- As His children, not only do we get SALVATION (as if that alone were not enough)...He is available to us to GUIDE us with HIS DIVINE WISDOM and UNDERSTANDING.
- Verse 9 says he's even willing to make known to us "the mystery of his will".

John 15:15 and 16 Jesus said

15I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

- Verse 9 tells us why God did this: "according to His good pleasure" my translation: "because He's God and He wanted to". He's God and He can do whatever He wants and PRAISE HIS NAME He chose to do this for US.
- Verses 10-12 paint a picture of a well designed plan to bring to pass His will...so that He will be PRAISED.
- Then in verses 13 and 14 we find that God "sealed the deal"

Ephesians 1:13-14

13And 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, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

- Because God knows our nature and how DOUBTFUL we can become...and because we're NOT HOME YET (with Him in heaven)...God gave us a DEPOSIT on our inheritance.

- He gave us the Holy Spirit living in us.
- Just in case we begin to doubt that we're REALLY entitled to this INHERITANCE; just in case we begin to wonder if it's real. His Holy Spirit is there to remind us of not only WHO WE ARE but WHOSE WE ARE.
- Paul wrote in Romans 8:15 and 16:

Romans 8:15-16 (New International Version)

15For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.[a] And by him we cry, "Abba,[b] Father." 16The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

- Though I am not a Calvinist in the "five point" sense, I close with a good quote from one.

John Piper writes...

*If you are trusting in Jesus Christ this morning the roots of your life were planted in the eternal counsels of God, and the branches of your life are growing into an absolutely sure and glorious future with God. There are no unimportant days in your life. You don't ever have to go to bed at night feeling that your life is going nowhere. You don't ever have to give in to the lie that you are not connected to an awesome purpose.*

So What's The Takeaway?

- Before the beginning of time and the creation of the world, God love YOU and ME. So much, in fact, that He was willing to sacrifice His perfect SON Jesus so that we might be HOLY and BLAMELESS in His sight...and become ADOPTED sons and daughters in His family.
- If there is someone in this room who hasn't accepted your INHERITANCE...what are you waiting for? Why would you leave such riches unclaimed? There are those in this class who would be thrilled to show you how to CLAIM YOUR INHERITANCE.
- For those of us who have already CLAIMED our inheritance by BELIEVING in Christ, we need to remember WHO WE ARE and WHOSE WE ARE.
- Like a fish in water or roots in soil we can only live this life IN CHRIST
- And, when we feel "kicked to the curb" or "down in the mouth", we need to stop and break out in song:

"Oh yes! Oh yes! I'm a child of the king. His royal blood now flows in my veins. And I who was helpless and poor now can sing. Praise God, Praise God, I'm CHILD OF THE KING!"