

Manifesting the Manifold Wisdom of God
Predestined in Love (Ephesians 1:1-6)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 10, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ With the start of a new year we're starting a new sermon series that's going to walk through the entire book of Ephesians. We're titling it "**Manifesting the Manifold Wisdom of God**". You might recognize that from Ephesians 3:10. In chapter 3, the Apostle Paul speaks of the gracious privilege he had to be a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles. He says the gospel reveals the plan of the mystery of God hidden for ages – that through Christ Jesus, God is bringing Jew and Gentile together into one new humanity (2:15), to be members of the same body (3:6) with Christ as our common head (1:22).
 - ▶ Let me read chapter 3:8-10, "⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."
 - So God's manifold wisdom to bring together great diversity into one body, under one head, is manifested for all to see "*through the church*". **The church of God is the mechanism on earth designed to make visible these invisible gospel realities.** The lives of the members of this church and our shared life together is what manifests the manifold wisdom of God.

- ❖ So we chose to study Ephesians because the book fits well with our church's new ministry theme for 2016. We're calling it "**Many in One: Diversity in a Unified Church**". This is something we're focusing on together with the Chinese side. We want to be clear on what binds us together as one unified church. Because we have a lot of differences. We speak separate languages; we have different cultures; we're outreaching to different target groups; most of us don't even know each other or interact – *so why are we not two churches?* What keeps us unified? What *should* keep us unified, biblically-speaking?
 - ▶ **Well once we identify that – that reason we should remain one church – then we're free to celebrate the *many*.** We can give room to each congregation to grow in its diversity and difference. Let's celebrate it. Let's pray for greater diversity in a unified church. For in that, we manifest the manifold wisdom of God.

- ❖ So that's why we're studying Ephesians. The Chinese services will begin the book in a month or so. If you look in the pew, you should see a pew card listing all the English sermons in this series. You can take a card with you, keep it in your Bible, and follow along. As you'll see, we're covering the whole letter fairly quickly in just sixteen messages. But we're going to take our time with the first fourteen verses because there's so much packed in.

- ❖ Now with vv1-2 there's a textual variant that raises some interest (The words "*in Ephesus*" are absent in some early manuscripts raising the question of whether Paul originally address this to the Ephesian church). But it's vv3-14 that stand out. In the Greek, it's all one long sentence. It's starts off with "*Blessed be*" God. It's the word *eulogetos*. It's where we get the term *eulogy*. We usually hear that in the context of a funeral service. But a eulogy is just a speech that praises and celebrates someone, whether he's dead or alive.

- ❖ **So in this case, Paul is eulogizing God.** He is praising and celebrating God, and he gets carried away in one big run-on sentence. It's bad grammar but Paul could care less. He's heaping praise upon praise to the "*God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"
 - ▶ **Paul is blessing God for blessing us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus.** Look at v3, "*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.*"
- ❖ Hear that! Every spiritual blessing. *Every.* No blessing of the Spirit is held back. **Every conceivable spiritual blessing is yours if you are in Christ.** Paul goes on in the next eleven verses unpacking blessing upon blessing. In a couple of weeks, we'll cover the entirety of vv3-14 and look at all the blessings. But for today and next week, we're going to slow it down and narrow it down.
 - ▶ Next week is Sanctity of Life Sunday. In observing that national movement, we're just going to sit on v5 and focus on the spiritual blessing of divine adoption. Where Christians are made sons and daughters of God through Jesus Christ, and we'll tie that doctrine to the actual practice of adoption as we honor the sanctity of every life.
- ❖ But today it's about the question of why. *Why are these abundant blessings given to us, to Christians, to those in Christ? As we'll see, the answer Paul gives us in v4 lies in a choice – a choice that was made a long, long time ago.* Before you and I ever existed, before the world existed. It's a choice that lies in the sovereign will of God.
 - ▶ So to tackle this weighty issue I've divided this message into three parts. First, we'll have to deal with **the reality of God choosing.** Then we'll consider **the purpose of God choosing.** And lastly **the comfort of God choosing.**

The Reality of God Choosing

- ❖ Let's start with the reality of God choosing. This idea of God choosing people for salvation might be a fairly new concept for some of you. You're not sure what to think. Others here have heard of this before and you really don't like it. Maybe you're uncomfortable right now to discover that you showed up for a sermon on predestination.
 - ▶ I'm sorry you feel that way, but I'm just preaching the text. **I didn't set out to preach on predestination. I set out to preach Ephesians 1 and this is what's in the text.** But because this doctrine is so misunderstood, I thought it wise to slow down when we come to vv4-5 because these things are undeniably here in the Bible.
- ❖ **My point is that this doctrine of predestination is not just a curious fancy for some. It's an integral aspect of God's truth revealed to us in Holy Scripture.** Granted, the question of exactly how it works and intersects with our faith is debatable. It has been for centuries.
 - ▶ But everyone who takes the Bible seriously as God's authoritative Word has to take Paul's teaching seriously – that God did choose us in Christ, that he did predestine us for salvation. It plainly says that in our passage.

- ❖ Start again in v3, “³*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, ⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us*”.

 - ▶ The word in the original (*proorizo*) means to decide on beforehand, to predetermine. **Predestination is referring to your destination – where you’re headed, where you’ll end up – as something predetermined by God.** We often apply this term to all sorts of events in life. “*You were predestined to go to this school or to meet that person.*” But in theology, the better term for that is not God’s predestination but God’s providence. We’re referring to **God’s providence** when we talk about the days of our lives being predetermined.

- ❖ Predestination is used more narrowly in theology to focus on salvation. **It teaches that, for every single one of us, our final destination, upon death and the judgment to come, has been predetermined by God.** Determined by a choice he made *before time* itself began. Before the foundation of the world. Before Genesis 1:1. Before God created anything, including you and me, he made a choice.
 - ▶ **And the point of emphasizing the chronological order is to stress the freeness of that choice.** When God chose us to be the recipients of all these tremendous spiritual blessings in Christ, he was not beholden to us. He was not under obligation. He was completely free.
- ❖ **His choosing was not in response to something we did or said or something we didn’t do or say.** We didn’t even exist. So God doesn’t choose to bestow his spiritual blessings as a reward for good behavior. It’s not because we’re the cream of the crop or the top of the class.
 - ▶ **No, the whole point of God choosing us before time began is to emphasize that he didn’t take into consideration our good or bad deeds.** This is what Paul teaches in **Romans 9** where he points to the patriarch Jacob and explains how even though he was the younger twin, he was chosen to receive the blessing of the firstborn. **This choice was made and foretold before Jacob and his brother were born.** Before either boy had done “*good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls*” (vv10-11).
- ❖ **So God is completely free to choose because he’s the first to choose.** That’s predestination. I know it’s difficult. It is for everyone. I don’t think anyone starts off the Christian life with an innate grasp of predestination. **If it weren’t for passages like ours that clearly teach God’s priority in choosing, we’d naturally assume that I choose God first and then he chooses me.** I knock on the door of heaven, and then he opens and gladly welcomes me in.
 - ▶ That makes sense based on experience. “*Didn’t I choose to believe in God? Didn’t I decide to follow Jesus?*” Yes. You did make that choice but only because he first chose you. You did make that decision but only because he first decided on you.

- ❖ I know that probably doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel like your experience. **But Christians are never to base our theology primarily on personal experience but on divine revelation.** So we always have to ask: *What has God revealed in his Word?* In the Bible, who's the one we see knocking on the door? It's not you. It's not me. It's Jesus (cf. Rev. 3:20). He chooses our house, our door. He knocks and we open.
 - ▶ Actually a more biblical picture would be like this: Imagine we're dead asleep in our house. And it's ablaze! It's going up in flames. We're doomed but we're out. Unaware of the danger. Jesus comes. He not only knocks on our door. He knocks it down. He rushes into the house, shakes us awake, and carries us out before it comes crashing down. And as he's carrying us in his arms into safety – our choice is to hold on tight to him. Our decision is to cling to our Savior. That's a real choice, a real decision.

- ❖ I don't see why people think that you either believe in predestination or you believe in free will. As if you have to choose one or the other. As if they're mutually exclusive. **Just because your choice of something is influenced by the prior choice of another, doesn't make your choice any less free or any less real.** It's still a free choice as long as you want it. As long as no one is twisting your arm, twisting your will, to choose it.

- ❖ If you asked my four-year-old to choose a team to win the Superbowl (before yesterday's debacle), I guarantee her answer is the Texans. That's her choice. I'm not twisting her arm. That's what she wants. But I'm proud to say I had a part in that. A very influential part.
 - ▶ Over these short but formative years, I've been influencing her heart (her will) to the point that she's now inclined on her own to choose the Texans. **You could say, she chooses to be a Texans fan today because before she was even born her father chose that his daughter would be a Texans fan.** My choice was prior. My choice was influential. But her choice today is still her choice. It's a real, free choice.

- ❖ Now it took me a couple of years to shape her will, and there's no guarantee she'll keep rooting for the Texans in the future. That's where the analogy breaks down. But when we're dealing with God and our salvation (our choosing of Jesus), it doesn't take years. It takes a moment. **In a moment, God can regenerate you. He can utterly change you.** You can be born again where your dead heart is made alive. It's awakened to new affections for Jesus. Your will is immediately inclined to choose Christ. That's how you become a Christian.
 - ▶ *So did you choose Jesus? Did you decide to follow him?* Of course. **But there was a prior choice that was influential in making you who you are today as a new creation who's inclined on your own to choose and follow Christ.**

- ❖ And the beautiful thing about God's choice of you in eternity past – and his gift of regeneration in the present (in your conversion) – is that you'll never lose your inclination for Christ. You'll always be a fan, a follower. **Sure, your fervency will waver over the years and in proportion to your holiness, but you'll never be disinclined towards Christ to point that you completely reject him.** That has to do with the way the Holy Spirit is sealed in you, guaranteeing salvation, which Paul touches on in vv13-14.

- ❖ Bottom line, **if you're a Christian today**, rest assured that the underlying reason you're saved rests in a choice that God made about you before the foundation of the world. And **if you're not a Christian but you want to be** – if you want Jesus to be your Savior – then don't bother yourself with the question of whether God chose you in eternity past. That shouldn't concern you.
 - ▶ The fact that you're even inclined to believe is indication enough that Jesus is already knocking down your door and waking you up from spiritual slumber. Otherwise you'd still be dead asleep and none of this would bother you. **If you want to choose Jesus, then do so already!** Cling to him by faith. Because that means he already has you in his arms, and he's leading you to safety.

The Purpose of God Choosing

- ❖ This is the God of the gospel. He saves sinners doomed to destruction. And all at great cost to himself. And what's so amazing is that he was utterly free to do nothing at all. He was free. To choose to save some. To choose to save all. To choose to save none at all. God is free.
 - ▶ **His choosing is a free choice. But it's not an arbitrary choice.** I think that's one of the biggest misconceptions of predestination. We assume the freeness of God's choosing implies an arbitrariness. But v5 says otherwise. It says, "*he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.*" **God's choosing is not arbitrary. It's not purposeless.** It says God has a will that governs his choosing and that will has a purpose. Let's move to our second point and consider God's purpose for choosing. We can point to three things, three purposes.
- ❖ **One purpose is our holiness.** Look in v4. It says, "*he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.*" Some would argue that if a Christian believes in predestination, he'll probably be more assured of his salvation, but that'll undercut all motivation to pursue holiness. Why strive so hard to be holy if you already know you're in – not based on your own efforts but on God's choosing.
 - ▶ But do you see how Paul goes at that objection? **How can you use predestination to ignore holiness?** Your holiness is the purpose of your election. Paul says in Romans 8:29 that, "*those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.*" So if your life is not marked by holiness, by conformity to Christ but by conformity to this world, then you lack any evidence of being chosen. So to try to take comfort in predestination while ignoring your own holiness is a fool's errand.
 - **Another purpose of predestination is our adoption into the family of God.** That's in v5, "*he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.*" But as I said, we'll wait till next week to unpack that.
- ❖ Now these two purposes are certainly important but they're not primary. They're secondary. The primary purpose of predestination is found in v6. God chose us in Christ *that we should be holy*. He predestined us *for adoption*. But that's all done, "*to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*" **The primary purpose of predestination is to praise, to exalt, to glorify the glorious grace of God.**

- ❖ **The primary reason why God chose his elect before time began, why *he* chose first, why he chose with complete freedom – is so that we would know it's all about his grace.** That our salvation is an act of free, sovereign grace. Think about it. Before the foundation of the world, God chose you. Not because you impressed him. Not because he looked into your future and knew you would be this amazing person who'd accomplish amazing deeds.
 - ▶ In fact, it was quite the opposite. God knew you and I would be born dead in trespasses and sins. That we would follow the course of this world. That we would live in the passions of our flesh. That by nature we'd be children of wrath like the rest of mankind (Eph. 2:1-3).
 - **It's out of this lot – in which all of humanity is included – that God chose people out of their sins, out of their spiritual deadness, for salvation, for new life in Christ.** It was completely undeserved, completely unmerited, completely free on God's part, according to the purpose of his will.

- ❖ **If you miss this, you might too quickly react to predestination and charge the doctrine of attributing injustice to God.** But don't picture all of mankind lined up outside of heaven's gates clamoring to get in, and God as this **Divine Bouncer** choosing who gets to come in and doing so arbitrarily – or worse doing so based on who's the prettiest, who's the smartest, who's the richest, who's the holiest, etc.
 - ▶ **The biblical image is all of mankind condemned in their sins, lined up before the gates of hell.** None are in heaven's line. None are even considering to switch. We are all spiritually dead. **But God, out of sheer mercy and grace, comes over and freely chooses people and transports them to heaven's gates.** This is all to the praise of his glorious grace!

- ❖ What this means is that the appropriate question is not, "***God, why didn't you choose everyone and bring them all over?***" If that's the question that bothers you, then you've yet to grasp the reality of your spiritual deadness apart from Christ. You're assuming God owes it to you and the rest of mankind. But God would be perfectly just to leave us in our sins. He would do us no injustice if he decided to choose none at all.
 - ▶ The appropriate question – the question that baffled Paul – is why did God choose any at all? ***Why did he choose me? Of all the hard questions over predestination, that's got to be the toughest. Why me? What did I do to deserve this?***
 - Of course the answer is "Nothing". And that's the whole point. That's the primary purpose. It's to highlight God's choice of you and not your choice of him. So that your salvation might redound to the praise of God's grace.

- ❖ Have you ever asked: ***Why are you a Christian?*** Why do you have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in your life but other people don't? What is it about you? Your immediate answer is most likely, "*Because I chose to receive Christ.*" Great, but why did *you* choose to receive Christ while another person didn't? **What's the fundamental difference between you as a believer and another person as an unbeliever?**

- ❖ If you say, "*Because I confessed my sins.*" Well then you're suggesting you're more self-aware, you're more spiritually sensitive, than other people. If you say, "*Because I humbled myself.*" Then you're saying you're humbler than other people. If you say, "*Because I was just willing.*" Then you're saying you're more willing.
- ❖ You can't escape it. **As long as you make your choice the reason why you're a Christian** – as long as you see the fundamental difference between you and a non-Christian as something that lies in you – **then the reason why you're a Christian today and other people aren't is because you're better.** You're more sensitive to spiritual things. You're humbler. You're more willing. Even if it's ever so slight, there's still something for you to boast in.
 - ▶ Of course that flies in the face of everything Paul teaches in this letter (cf. 2:8-9). It is by grace you have been saved. Through faith. So yes, your faith decision matters. But it's all a gift of God. A gift he decided to give for you before the foundation of the world. So that no one may boast in anything but the free and sovereign grace of God.

The Comfort of God Choosing

- ❖ This may be difficult to hear. Especially if you were always under the impression that salvation was primarily about us. That God was acting *primarily* with our good in mind. **Because here the Bible is saying that God freely acting with the glory of his grace primarily in mind.** That's disarming. That's discomfoting. At first.
 - ▶ But I believe the more we consider these truths, the more comfort we draw knowing that, in the end, it all depends on God choosing. Let me conclude with this third point.
- ❖ Perhaps you're like me when I started learning about predestination. It took some time, but eventually I couldn't deny it was taught in the Bible. So I believed in it. But I didn't glory in it. I didn't take any comfort in it. I didn't derive any joy out of it. **The idea of God choosing me in Christ before time began with no view to my good or bad deeds – felt cold and impersonal.** Like throwing darts at a board.
 - ▶ But that was a gross misconception on my part. That's *not* how God chooses. He's not just casually drawing cards out of a deck. No, instead we see in vv4-5 and it was "*in love*" that God predestined us. **We were chosen *in love*.**
- ❖ Let this sink in, Church. The God of all creation, in eternity past, before time began, before he flung the universe into existence, he thought of you. **He freely set his love upon you. He chose to love you.**
 - ▶ Not because he knew you'd be so lovely and lovable. Not because he foreknew your love for him. **No, God chose to love you because he chose to love you.** I know that sounds like circular reasoning. "*I love you because I love you.*" It makes no sense.
 - But I guarantee that's the kind of love all of us want. That's the kind of love we're all looking for. **Nothing is more comforting, more securing than this kind of love that has its own inner logic.**

- ❖ For you husbands out there, if your wife ever asks you, "Why do you love me? Why did you choose me?" You don't tell her, "Because you're a better cook than the other girls I know." Or "Because you're prettier than them. You're funnier." She doesn't even want to hear, "Because you're humbler than other girls I know. You're more spiritual."
 - ▶ **Trust me, nobody wants that kind of love – love that's given to you because of something in you – because you know there's always a chance of losing that love.** What if I change? What if I'm not as pretty or as funny or as humble as I once was? What if my husband meets someone prettier, funnier, humbler?
 - Brothers, you just tell her, "*Honey, I love you because I love you. I chose to love you because I chose to love you.*" That's the kind of love we're all searching for.

- ❖ And that's the kind of love to be found in Christ. In Christianity. God loves you. Not because you're so spiritual. Not because you're so humble. Not because you're such a good person. He loves you because he loves you.
 - ▶ **God loves you because he chose to love you before time began.** And in fullness of time, he proved his love by sending his Beloved Son to live the life you were designed to live and die the death you deserve to die. And when the time was ripe, he put his Spirit in you to seal his love as a guarantee. So you know you'll never lose it.
 - Christian, you are God's beloved. He loves you because he loves you. Let's stop trying to earn that love or keep that love. Let's just take comfort in it.