

Be Chosen: A Child Sponsorship Project

Chosen in Love (Ephesians 1:3-6)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on November 27, 2022

Introduction

- ❖ This morning I have the privilege of introducing a new ministry project that we're doing as a church called *Chosen*. **This is in partnership with World Vision, and it's focused on the noble and needed task of child sponsorship.** In case you're not familiar with this kind of ministry, child sponsorship is about connecting you with a child in an underserved region of the world with the goal of meeting material, relational, and spiritual needs.
 - Organizations like World Vision already have people on the ground in various countries serving impoverished communities. **Which brings them in contact with children who are facing the challenges of poverty and malnutrition and the dangers of disease and exploitation.** So child sponsorship creates a connection between these children and their communities with individuals in communities like ours that are blessed with relative affluence and abundance.

- ❖ **If you get involved, you'll be personally connected with one specific child.** Giving you a chance to send them letters, photos, or gifts, and they'll write back to you as well. So a real relationship with a real kid can be forged.
 - **But, for maximum effectiveness, your monthly donation will be pooled together with others who are sponsoring children in the same district.** World Vision discovered, over their many years of experience, that the best way to help a child is to strengthen the child's entire community. So they invest in projects that improve water and sanitation, health and nutrition, education, child protection, and the spiritual nurture of their souls.

- ❖ **We're going to be working in the country of Vietnam – specifically in villages in the Muong Ang district.** That's a mountainous region in Northwest Vietnam. We'll be serving an ethnic minority group called the Muong, who are also an unreached people group. They live in one of the poorest district in the country, where families struggle to provide the most basic of needs. Malnutrition rates are extraordinarily high, and many suffer from preventable diseases. And a lack of education and opportunity leaves women and children extremely vulnerable in these communities. These are the challenges facing the Muong people.

- ❖ **Now why this project and why now?** As you know, we've recently begun a building campaign. So you'll be hearing a lot about how to support our project to expand and renovate our facilities. Now our building project is largely designed to serve *our* community, which includes *our* children and *our* children's children and generations to come. That's all part of what we believe is God's vision for our church moving forward.
 - **But with so much attention placed on *our* needs and the needs of *our* children and *our* community, I'm glad we have this opportunity to fix our eyes on the needs of the world.** To focus on the poorest and most vulnerable – on children. So with both projects happening concurrently, we hope you're moved to give sacrificially – both internally and externally, locally and globally.

- ❖ This morning, we're going to conclude our worship earlier than usual and provide an opportunity for a World Vision rep to come up here to explain how they approach child sponsorship and how you can get involved.
 - **But my goal, in this sermon, is to study a passage that provides a theological basis for how we can approach the ministry of child sponsorship.** We're going to look at Ephesians 1:3-6 and highlight the biblical concept of being chosen by God.
 - Let's consider three things: (1) The reality of God choosing, (2) The purpose of God choosing, and (3) The basis of God choosing. Then I'll try and relate it all back to our child sponsorship project.

The Reality of God Choosing

- ❖ Let's start with the reality of God choosing. This is emphasized in Ephesians 1. This was a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Ephesus. That's what we learn in vv1-2. In v3, Paul begins praising God, blessing him for blessing us with every spiritual blessing out there. Notice he says *every*. No blessing of the Spirit is held back. **Every available spiritual blessing is yours if you're in Christ.** Paul goes on unpacking blessing upon blessing.
 - But before we go there, we need to ask ourselves the question of why. *Why are these abundant blessings given to us Christians? The answer Paul gives lies in a choice – a choice that God made a long, long time ago.* Before you and I ever existed, even before the foundation of the world set down.
- ❖ Let me read starting in v3, “*³Blessed 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*”.
- That word ‘predestine’, in the Greek, means to decide on something beforehand, to predetermine it. **So predestination is suggesting that your destination – where you're headed, where you'll end up – is something predetermined by God.**
- ❖ Now this idea of God choosing and predestining people might be a new concept for some. You're not sure what to think. Others have heard of predestination before and don't like it. Perhaps you've heard it debated and argued over, generating a lot of heat but not much light.
 - **Let me be clear, there are legitimate differences of interpretation when it comes to predestination – especially when trying to determine how God's sovereign choosing can be compatible with man's free will.** Christians have been debating that for centuries, and I won't pretend to have all the answers.
 - But neither side of the debate denies that God chose us in Christ or that he predestines us in love. Because that's what it plainly says in our text.
- ❖ In the end, we're not committed to a particular system of theology. We're committed to the Bible. **And the Bible says that, for every one of us, our final destination has been predetermined by God.** Determined by a choice he made *before* the foundation of the world. Before Genesis 1:1. Before God created anything, including us, 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 blessings in Christ, he was not under obligation. He was completely free. **His choosing was not in response to something we said or did.** We had yet to even exist.
- ❖ **The point of God choosing us before creating us communicates 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 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.”* (9:10-11) **So God is completely free to choose because he's the first to choose.**
- ❖ So what does this have to do with child sponsorship? Well, if you get involved, then you'll have to make a choice. A choice to enter a committed relationship. A relationship that involves you blessing another. **Well, if it's going to be a relationship modeled after God's relationship with us, then that choice shouldn't be based on any worthy qualities found in the one you seek to bless.**
 - In other words, you shouldn't decide which children to help based on their track record or their potential. Don't look to the past to see if they've been a good kid or to the future to predict if they'll become one. **Their worthiness to receive our blessing shouldn't be a factor in our decision to get involved.**
- ❖ Let's be honest, if you've participated in this kind of ministry, you know how tempting it is to choose which kid to sponsor by looking at all the photos and picking the cutest one or the one that reminds you of your own child. **In the end, we tend to choose based on some quality in the child that stands out to us.** It would be better if there was a way to remove that factor completely out of the equation. If only there was a way to enter into a sponsoring relationship without being influenced by what the kid looks like.

The Purpose of God Choosing

- ❖ Now let's go back to our text. We've seen that if you're going to take Scripture seriously, then you can't deny the reality of God choosing. But you might still be left wondering the purpose of God choosing. That's our second point. Paul actually mentions three in our text.
 - **The first purpose for why God chose you is for your holiness.** Look back at v4, *“he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”* You were chosen in Christ, so that you would one day be perfectly conformed to his image.
- ❖ The next two purposes are found in vv5-6. In love, *“he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”* **So it says you were predestined for your adoption.** That's the second purpose.

- ❖ You were chosen in order to receive the gift of sonship. To be welcomed into the family of God – enjoying the same privileges that belong to God’s only Begotten Son.
 - **And thirdly, you were chosen by God for his glory.** Look at v6. You were predestined for adoption, “*to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*” In other words, you were chosen by God in order to exalt the glory of his grace in freely choosing you without a view towards your worthiness.
 - So you were chosen for your holiness; for your adoption; and for God’s glory. Now for the purpose of our message, I’d like to focus on that second purpose.

- ❖ You were chosen for adoption. This is what’s so amazing about the gospel. **The good news of Christianity is not just that those who trust in Christ are pardoned of our sins by God the Judge (as glorious as that is). The good news is that we’re welcomed into the family by God the Father.** We’re seated at his table and called sons and daughters. And our Elder Brother, Jesus, willingly shares his heavenly inheritance with us. That’s the good news!

- ❖ To really appreciate how gracious and loving this relationship is, it’s important to distinguish our adoption in Christ from how adoptions typically functioned in the first-century Greco-Roman world. Adoptions were not uncommon. Like today, they involved a change in legal status. But the big difference is that, in those days, you’d rarely adopt orphaned babies or children. You’d adopt a young man who shows potential.
 - **If you were well off but didn’t have any sons, then you might look for a respectable young man who’s fit to carry on your family name. You would legally adopt this young man as a son, as a legal heir.** This was common practice. The best example would be Julius Caesar adopting Gaius Octavius as a young man to be his heir. Octavius is better known as Caesar Augustus. Did you realize the most powerful Roman emperor in world history ended up in that position through adoption?

- ❖ But do you see the difference in the way God adopts us? **He chose us – not just when we were babies – but before the foundation of the world. And that was to show that your legal status as a child of God is a gift of grace.** You weren’t chosen because of your respectability or your fitness to be a worthy heir. **You’re a child of God simply because God chose to make you one.**

- ❖ **Unlike Julius Caesar, God was not in desperate need for an heir.** He already had a Son. He had the perfect heir. So when God chose to adopt you, it wasn’t like he was running out of choices. He wasn’t desperate. It was a free and sovereign choosing.
 - **So there’s no reason to fear that God will grow disappointed in his choice of you.** The thought of sending you back has never crossed his mind and never will. **And there’s no need to fear that God will love his only Begotten Son with greater affection than you.** That you’ll be kicked out of the family if you can’t perform to the same level as Christ. There’s no competition here. At least not coming from Jesus.

- ❖ **You need to know the kind of Elder Brother you have in Christ.** In John 17:23, Jesus prayed to the Father that the world would know, “*you sent me and loved them (his disciples) even as you loved me.*” **Jesus wants his adopted siblings to be loved with the same love he enjoys from the Father.** There’s no jealousy. All that belongs to him as the Rightful Heir of Heaven, he willingly shares with us. We are “*co-heirs with Christ.*” (Rom 8:17)
- ❖ So what does this mean for child sponsorship? **First, let’s be clear that child sponsorship is not the same as legal adoption.** In the sense that there’s no legal status change between you and the child, and your commitment to sponsor a child is not permanent like in adoption.
 - **But child sponsorship is similar in the sense that you *are* welcoming this child into your family.** You’re not just offering the blessing of resources but the blessing of relationship. You’re caring for that child as if he or she were family.
- ❖ **But like God the Father, we should enter a sponsoring relationship – not out of a position of emptiness – but a position of fullness.** Don’t get involved if you’re desperate to please God or to please others. Don’t do it because you think by sponsoring a kid you’re more spiritual in God’s eyes or the eyes of others.
 - **But if you’re filled with the love of God – if you’re secure in a love that you could never earn or deserve – then out of abundance, would you prayerfully consider pouring some of that love into the life of a child?** That would be a beautiful reflection of the adopting love of God.

The Basis of God Choosing

- ❖ So my point is: Don’t do it because you’re needy. **But at the same time, don’t just do it because a child is needy.** Being moved to sponsor a kid when confronted with the great needs among the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable of the vulnerable – that’s good and something we hope for. That demonstrates you have a compassionate heart.
 - But I’d argue that even your compassion for needy children shouldn’t be the ultimate basis for a sponsoring relationship. Let’s consider our third point – the basis of God choosing. **Notice how, when God chose us, he’s motivated – not by something needy in us – but by something abundant in him.** Look back at v5. It doesn’t say, “In pity he predestined us.” He wasn’t moved to choose us out of pity but out of love.
- ❖ Let that sink in, Church. The God of all creation, in eternity past, 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 arrive on earth one day and become so lovely and so 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 sounds like a weak answer.
 - But I guarantee that 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 the kind of love that has its own inner logic.**

- ❖ You don't want your husband to say he loves you because you're so beautiful or so smart or so funny. You don't want *that* to be the basis of his love. **Because when it comes to a love that's based on something in you or about you – there's always a chance of losing that love.** What happens when you're no longer as beautiful or as smart or as funny as you once were? What happens if he meets someone more beautiful or smarter or funnier?

- ❖ Do you see? **What you really want – the kind of love you're really looking for – is a love for you that's not based on anything in you or about you.** And that's the kind of love to be found in Christ. In Christianity, God loves you. Not out of admiration – because you're such a good person. Not even out of pity – because you're such a needy person.
 - No, God loves you because he loves you. **He loves you because he chose to love you before time began.** And in fullness of time, he proved that love by sending his 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 can be sure you'll never lose it. He loves you because he loves you.

- ❖ Think about what this means for child sponsorship. When we get involved, we have the opportunity to demonstrate a key aspect of the gospel. **We get to display God's love, by choosing to enter into a relationship with a child – not because of the child's worthiness or neediness – but because we made a choice to set our love on a child before we even meet them.** In other words, you love a sponsored child because you chose to love that child. That's how you reflect the love of God.