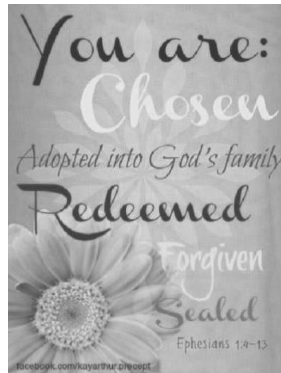


## BLESSED, CHOSEN, FORGIVEN AND REDEEMED



### Scripture:

### Psalm 24

<sup>1</sup>The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; <sup>2</sup>for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

<sup>3</sup>Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? <sup>4</sup>Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. <sup>5</sup>They will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of their salvation. <sup>6</sup>Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*

<sup>7</sup>Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. <sup>8</sup>Who is the King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle. <sup>9</sup>Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. <sup>10</sup>Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. *Selah*

### Ephesians 1:3-14

<sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. <sup>5</sup>He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup>that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup>In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, <sup>12</sup>so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; <sup>14</sup>this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



## **BLESSED, CHOSEN, FORGIVEN AND REDEEMED**

I feel blessed. How many here feel blessed? Say Alleluia!

Why do you feel blessed? Shout out one word explaining why....

Those are all good reasons for feeling blessed. But what about the times when we don't feel so blessed: when the cancer diagnosis comes in; when the bank statement is scary; when the things we used to be able to do are now but dreams of the past? Where does that feeling of being blessed go?

We might lose our awareness of being blessed. We might lose that 'lovin' feelin,' but that doesn't mean the blessings aren't still there. It just means we have let other things take our attention away. Other concerns and worries can block out the sunshine from our faces.

### **REMINDERS FROM PAUL**

That was what Paul was defending against for the developing church in Ephesus. Paul knew Ephesus had big challenges in store for them. They were in a very pagan land with many Roman and Greek idol worshippers challenging the new church daily. Paul was preparing them for the challenges by reminding them of their blessings, purpose, and power in Christ.

When I was in Ephesus three years ago, I saw how there was very little remaining of the church structure. The archeologists had excavated a lot of the temple to the Goddess of Diana but only a small portion of the remains of the Christian church.

The Temple of Artemis was right beside the area where they found the remains of a small Christian church. The Christian Ephesians had a lot of religious competition in Ephesus.

### **THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS**

Reverend Dr. Charles Swindoll has written a blog on the book of Ephesians. He sets the stage for today's reading by explaining that Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians sometime in AD 60–61. The letter was delivered to Ephesus by Tychicus, one of Paul's disciples, because Paul was in Rome suffering his first imprisonment. You can see from this map, Tychicus had a very long trek to get the letter from Paul all the way over to Ephesus!



Ephesians is one of the four epistles (letters) commonly known as the Prison Epistles. The others are Philipians, Colossians and Philemon.

### **WHY IS EPHESIANS SO IMPORTANT?**

It is one of Paul's most formal letters dealing with topics at the very core of what it means to be a Christian, both in faith and in practice.

Paul spent the first three chapters of the letter discussing God's creation of this holy community. He reassured them that they had been chosen by God through the work of Christ, adopted as sons and daughters of God, and brought near to God's kingdom through faith in God's Son. Paul explained that all people with this new faith in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, were at one time "dead in their transgressions and sins," but now have been given new life because of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

### **A MATURE FAITH**

While Paul was not responding to a particular theological or moral problem, he wanted to protect against future problems by encouraging the Ephesians to "mature in their faith."

Isn't that what we all need still today? A mature faith still protects us against succumbing to problems.

**A mature faith still protects us against succumbing to our problems. A mature faith in God is like armor that you can wear to shield you from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune as Shakespeare's Hamlet would say. A deep faith in God is like having a big spongy mattress to catch you when you fall.**

When you read this passage again you can't help but feel blessed and protected by your faith in these words if you deeply believe them.

### **ADOPTION AND INHERITANCE**

Let's break down what this passage tells us. You have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing. You were chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before God in love.

God destined us all for adoption through Jesus Christ, thanks to his glorious grace so freely bestowed upon us all. Thus we are inheritors of the faith, hope and love that come from following Jesus. This language of adoption and inheritance was strongly valued in the Jewish and Greek cultures. In those days, if your family did not leave you an inheritance of some kind when they died, you were left desperate. Wealth in those days built wealth over the generations as it does today. Yet the people born in poverty really had no hope for an inheritance because their parents were barely able to provide daily sustenance. This thought of having an inheritance from God through faith in Jesus was probably very reassuring, especially to the poor and oppressed.

And Paul went on to say that in him we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins or our debts, thanks to the amazing grace he lavishes on us. Paul actually used the word "lavish!" which in ancient Greek is *Perisseuo*, which also means abundantly, overflow and abound. Basically we are flooded with God's grace in redemption.

**One of my favorite professors at Princeton, Dr. Sally Brown said, "That is the true meaning of redemption: God's determination to bless humanity." Does that change your image of God when you realize God is determined to bless you?**

### **GOD CHOOSES JESUS CHRIST**

God chooses Jesus Christ as the instrument to redeem us, the conveyor of God's grace, to pursue us with his relentless love, to save us from ourselves and show us how humanity was meant to be. By looking at the life of Christ we

can see the grace and mercy of God that assures us that we are included in God's promises. We are blessed, chosen, forgiven and redeemed.

Then Paul goes on to say, "With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. So learning about Jesus, understanding his Way, reveals the mystery of God's will as a plan for the fullness of time. Pretty cool, huh?"

### **SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things. And the grand finale is that you were "sealed with the Holy Spirit." This passage reflects what we say during the sacrament of baptism ceremony. We say "you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever." God gives us that sense of being specially chosen, adopted and given a sense of belonging that many people lack. There are many in our society today who feel unchosen, lost and alone. The good news of the gospel is that you belong to God!

I think all of us know what it feels like to not be chosen for something. I remember in grade school recess usually being one of the last chosen for kick ball because I was one of the shortest in my class and not a fast runner. It is a bad feeling to be one of the last chosen for a team, but I still remember getting the last extra uniform for the sixth grade basketball team, and even though I sat on the bench for most games, I was still so happy to wear a real basketball uniform. Even though I was chosen last, I was so glad to be on the team!

### **BLESSINGS OF BELONGING**

Those of us who truly believe that God provides these blessings of belonging, redemption and grace feel truly grateful and want to glorify God in response. Yet, these blessings, as they are described in this passage, are meant for a whole community of believers to receive and not just for one to walk around alone feeling blessed. Our God is a God of relational community. That is why the Trinity image of God as the holy three is so important. We are

created to be relational and live in community, not alone.

We are not to wander this weary world on our own. Joining a healthy faith community is a great way to live up to the foundational purpose we were created to be. We are to be one in community, loving, creating, supporting, laughing, crying and praying together.

Like that song, “We are one in the Spirit we are one in the Lord.” Unity in community is God’s desire for us. God knows we are healthier and happier in community.

So the way to respond to this generous, lavish, communal blessing from God is to receive the blessing with gratefulness and then to bless others. Be blessed and be a blessing. Just ponder the gravity of this blessing for a moment! God has blessed us “in Christ” with every spiritual blessing! Our response then is to live our lives as a blessing to others – to pass it on.

Remember that old church summer camp song, Pass It On? The lyrics are:

**“It only takes a spark to get a fire going,  
and soon all those around are  
warned up by its glowing.  
That’s how it is with God’s love.  
Once you’ve experienced it,  
You spread his love to everyone,  
You want to pass it on.”**

This song is part of the beginning of my call to ministry. Let’s listen and take this time to silently thank God for all our mutual blessings.

A video was shown to the congregation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCjR4dIY33k>

Amen

### **Benediction:**

**You are blessed, chosen, forgiven, redeemed and sealed by the Holy Spirit to do good works on this earth on behalf of Jesus Christ. So go and do with confidence that God had lavished you with grace and sends you out with every spiritual blessing. May you live for the praise of God’s glory!**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen**



**The Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway  
Presbyterian Church of the Roses  
2500 Patio Court  
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**