

The Father and the Atonement (Pre-Communion)

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[0 : 00] Our Old Testament reading is from Deuteronomy chapter 7, page 151, Deuteronomy chapter 7. From the beginning.

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you're entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Seven nations, more numerous and mightier than you. And when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction.

You shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons, or taking their daughters for your sons.

For they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

[1 : 24] But thus shall you deal with them. You shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and chop down their ashram, and burn their carved images with fire.

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

It was not because you were more in number than any other people, that the Lord set his love on you and chose you. For you were the fewest of all peoples.

But it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers. That the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Know therefore, that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God, who keeps his covenant and steadfast love with those who love him, and keep his commandments to a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him by destroying them.

[2 : 46] He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today.

Amen. Again, the Lord add his blessing to his holy word. Let's bow our heads once more in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we come before you.

We come before your throne of grace, thanking you that you are the God who hears and answers our prayers. We thank you that you are able to answer our prayers, because all the resources of the universe are yours.

And we thank you that you are not only able, but that you are willing, because you love us. And we thank you for that. We thank you that we can bring all kinds of prayers and petitions before you, and spread them out before you, knowing that you are a God who is generous, and a God who has a perfect plan for your people.

[4 : 22] Father, we bring the town of Livingston before you tonight, and we pray for Livingston and the surrounding areas, and we pray for the work of the gospel in this place.

For God, we are so conscious that one day the Lord Jesus shall come back to earth, and there shall be that great separation, that one will be taken and the other left behind, that you will separate the sheep and the goats, the good fish and the bad fish.

Father, we think of these great truths, these great realities that you have revealed to us in your word. And so, Father, we know and believe that it is so urgent that people turn to you while they still can, while there is still a day of opportunity.

And so, Father, we cry out to you, and we pray for your mercy upon us, and for your blessing upon the work and witness of this church here.

We pray for the preaching of your word week by week. We pray for the Bible studies and home groups and prayer meetings and all the good work that goes on here in the name of Jesus.

[5 : 56] And, Father, we do pray that it would be for your glory. We see less conversions than we want to, Father.

And so we cry out to you, and we pray that your will would be done, but that if it pleases you, that you would use us in the salvation of many people, many boys and girls, and men and women, even those with no background whatsoever.

Father, we pray that this church might see baptisms, those who have never had a Christian heritage coming to faith and coming to put their trust in you.

Lord God, we know that only you cause things to grow. One souls.

But, Lord, another plant, and only you can make things grow. Only you can raise the spiritually dead but we look to you to do that.

[7 : 12] We look to you and to no one else. And we pray for faithfulness in this church too and unity. We pray for harmony, that there might be a growing sense of love in this church.

We pray that the people would be filled with patience one to the other with forgiveness, that they would love one another, that they would bear with one another, that they would encourage one another, that they would confess their sins to one another.

Father, we pray with thanks for all that the church family are here and pray that they would grow ever more in their love and their love for one another and for you.

So, Father, we do pray that for your name's sake, that you would pour out your blessing on Livingston Free Church and in all the churches of Jesus Christ in this area.

And may, Lord, you be at work as only you can. Hear our prayers for we ask in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

[8 : 34] Let's sing now from the Scottish Psalter from Psalm 105. Psalm 105 from the Scottish Psalter from the beginning.

So that's page 374. Page 374, Psalm 105 and we'll sing verses 1 to 7. And again, you can look out for God choosing his people in this psalm.

Give thanks to God, call on his name, to men his deeds make known. Sing ye to him, sing psalms, proclaim his wondrous works, each one.

Let's stand and sing 1 to 7. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[9 : 58] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. And we can turn to that now and tomorrow a couple of times as well.

[13 : 04] Ephesians chapter 1. I wouldn't embarrass anyone by putting you on the spot, but let me just begin by asking you what it is you praise God for the most.

Maybe we don't think about that question very often. Maybe you do. But what would you say are the main things that you praise God for the most?

Or if I were flying the wall in the Livingston Free Church prayer meeting and heard all the things that I'm sure you praise God for, what kind of things would those be?

And there are all kinds of things. We often thank God for our health, our work, the money and resources we have, food on our table, security.

If our children are getting on well, we praise and thank God for all of these things. And it's good that we do that. And it's proper that we thank God for these important things.

[14 : 18] But it's always a challenge, as we know, to think how God-centred is our praise. In other words, do we just praise God for giving us temporal things that we need?

Or do we praise God for himself? For who he is and for what he has done for us?

That's always a challenge, isn't it, in our prayers, to make sure, to ensure that our prayers, in terms of our praise, are God-centred.

And there's a lot that I can learn from the Apostle Paul as we see his praise here in Ephesians chapter 1.

Ephesians 1 verses 3 to 14 contains some of the most profound statements in all of the Bible. And it's broken down into five sentences, I think, in the ESV.

[15 : 27] But actually, verses 3 to 14 in Greek is one long sentence. It's one bursting of praise from the Apostle Paul who writes to the church in Ephesus, modern-day Turkey.

He writes from jail, and although he's in jail, he's pouring out all of this praise to the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And the theme of this wonderful long sentence is praise to the God of salvation. The God who provides salvation for his people.

The God who saves people like us and calls us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The God who takes people who were condemned and under the just judgment of God and saves us. saves us by his grace.

[16 : 42] And the grace of God changes everything. And we read in verse 3 that we have as God's people, and we can say tonight for all of us who are Christians, we can say along with Paul in verse 3 that we have every spiritual blessing in Christ.

What a wonderful phrase that is. That we've got everything in Christ. That we are adopted as his sons and daughters.

That we have been redeemed. That we have been forgiven. That we have been given the Holy Spirit. That we are being sanctified. That we are heirs of heaven.

We have everything we could possibly hope to have. Who is it who receives these wonderful, amazing blessings?

Who is it who can say that they have every spiritual blessing in Christ? Well, we see from verse 3, it is to those who are in Christ.

[17 : 52] We see that halfway through the sentence of verse 3. Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

So if you are in Christ tonight, if you love Jesus, and you trust in him, and you believe that he died on the cross for your sins, then you are in Christ.

And you have in him every spiritual blessing. And that is amazing. And sometimes we don't realize that we have every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Like the elderly couple, true story, who had a work of art in their attic. And they were millionaires.

But they didn't even know it was there. And they didn't know it was so valuable. And so they lived scrimping and scraping all through their lives.

[18 : 56] Until towards the end of their lives they made this discovery. And maybe I'm a bit like that. And maybe we can all be a bit like that. Because we have all these things from God.

And yet even though we possess them, sometimes we live as if we don't. And so I hope that over the course of the weekend, that we can unpack some of these blessings.

And refresh our minds. Thinking of all the things God has done for us and given us. So that we will praise him more.

One wonderful thing about this huge long sentence. Again, verses 3 to 14. One big sentence. But one great thing we see from it.

Is that when it comes to being saved, all three persons of the Godhead are involved. When it comes to being saved. When it comes to becoming a Christian.

[19 : 59] That is the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They are all involved. And it's very striking in the passage. We see in verses 3 to 6, which we'll focus on tonight, the choosing, the electing work of God the Father.

Verses 3 to 6. Tomorrow we'll look at verses 7 to 12, where we see the atoning work of God the Son. Jesus dying for us.

And then, in the last couple of verses, 13 and 14, we see the sealing, the guaranteeing work of God the Holy Spirit.

And if you just glance down at chapter 1 just now, you can see that as Paul goes through the work of the Father, the work of the Son, the work of the Holy Spirit.

There's a refrain. There's a repetition of this phrase, to the praise of His glorious grace. See that at the end of verse 6. See it at the end of verse 12.

[21 : 03] And see it at the end of verse 14. It's there in 6, 12 and 14. To the praise of His glorious grace.

And so that's where I want us to go. I want us to see what God the Father has done. And God the Son. And God the Spirit. So that we can praise our triune God.

The first thing I want us to see tonight, as we think of the work of God the Father in salvation, I want us to think, what reasons do we have to praise God the Father?

Number one, we praise Him for what He has done. That's not a very complicated heading, is it? We praise God the Father for what He has done.

What has He done? Verse 4, He has chosen us. He chose us. And we praise Him for that. He chose us to be saved.

[22 : 04] He chose us to have eternal life. And so, for all of us here who are Christians tonight, the ultimate reason that we are Christians is because God the Father has chosen us.

That's why I read from Deuteronomy chapter 7. Because it's so clear there that God is a God who chooses.

Deuteronomy 7, 7. The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

But it was because the Lord loved you. God is a God who chooses. He chose Abraham to be the father of many nations.

He chose the Israelites. And He did not choose. He passed over, He passes over the other nations, like the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and so on.

[23 : 13] He did not choose them to be His special people. He chose the Israelites. And there's mystery in this.

That God is a God who chooses. But it's undeniable. And it's an amazing fact in the Bible that God is a God who chooses. Psalm 65, verse 4.

How blessed are those you choose and bring within your courts of grace. I'm hoping my wife and four kids are going to come tomorrow.

And how long have I been married for? 15 years. And I chose Sarah to be my wife and she chose me. And that's usually what happens, isn't it?

In Scotland, we're not into arranged marriages and that kind of thing. In our culture, so we chose each other. But when it comes to God and us, He chose us.

[24 : 21] It wasn't that we chose Him. First and foremost, we are Christians because He chose us.

Why does God tell us this? Why does God want to tell us that God the Father has chosen us? Why should we think about it tonight?

Well, one massive reason is it keeps us humble. Doesn't it? Just to think about that for a moment. That God chose us.

That God chose me. Even in all my rebellion and sin, when I didn't deserve it, God set His love upon me.

It should keep us humble. That we know that like Lazarus, who was dead in the grave in John 11, and could not raise himself to life, spiritually we are the same.

[25 : 20] Without God at work, we would have remained spiritually dead. And the new life that we all have in Christ, if we're Christians, must be the result of something that God has done.

And the origin of that, the fount of that, is the work, the choosing work, of God the Father, who purposed to save us.

That was His will as His people. So why am I a Christian tonight? Why are we Christians tonight? Those of us who can save that.

It's because God the Father chose us, and God did a wonderful new work within our hearts, and took out our hearts of stone, and gave us a heart of flesh.

And we praise the Father for that. And Paul, who's writing this, knows that. Paul was dragging Christians off into jail.

[26 : 25] Paul hated Jesus. There's no way Paul, if it was up to him, would have become a Christian. But because God the Father had chosen him, that's why Paul was changed.

Because God intervened into his life. And this action was rooted in the loving plan of God to save Paul.

So, we could say that true humility, true humility is a virtue which grows in the soil of predestination, of God choosing His people.

That keeps us humble, because we know that ultimately it's all of grace, all a work of God from beginning to end that should keep us humble and thankful.

John 17, verse 2, For you granted him authority over all people, that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

[27 : 36] To all those you have given him. So, we praise God for what he has done. I think I've got five points, but quite a lot of them are much shorter than the first point.

So, don't get too stressed. Second point is this, we praise the Father for when he chose us. We praise the Father for when he chose us.

When did God's love for us begin? What do we read in verse 4? He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

Before the foundation the world. And that is astonishing, isn't it? That God chose us before we were born, before he created the world, even before that.

And it's hard for us even to imagine that. God set his love upon us. God the Father thought of us before making us.

[28 : 50] He chose us before making us. And God's love for us is older than the mountains and the seas.

And God's love for you is older than the mountains and the seas. Sinclair Ferguson says of this passage, Can his love for me be that big and long and deep?

Yes. God's love is rooted in eternity and it will also last for eternity. It sounds good, doesn't it? And it's true that God's love for us is rooted in eternity and lasts for eternity.

Why does God tell us this? Surely it gives us security that we know we are secure in the loving arms of God because his love for us is eternal.

It is eternal in its beginnings and it will have no end. And in a world where there's so much broken heartedness death, divorce, friendships that are broken, all kinds of things which end love in many cases.

[30 : 19] People letting us down. We let other people down. Here is the only perfect love which we have.

The love of God in Christ. Christ. And we praise the Father for this eternal love. I'm sure we all love the verse in Philippians that he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion.

I love that verse. And we know that that's what God's like. God would never start something and then just ditch it and not complete it.

It's not like God's going to make the first and the second day of creation and the third day and the fourth day and then just say, oh no, I'm not going to finish making the world. God never does that.

And so we know that God completes what he begins. And so we say, well, isn't it wonderful that he who began a good work in us will carry it out to completion.

[31 : 27] And that gives us great security that we know that if God has began a work of grace in us, he will finish that work of grace. And then I was thinking, well, it goes even further back than he who began a good work in us.

It goes back into eternity, goes back into the mind of God, even before he made the universe because he chose us and set his love upon us.

And so if he's done that, are we going to be lost? Surely God, if he's loved us from all eternity, as he says to us tonight, as he says to you tonight, surely he will never stop loving us.

Surely nothing will separate us from the love of God. So we praise God the Father for what he's done, he's chosen us.

We praise God the Father for when he did that, before the foundations of the world. Let's notice thirdly, that we praise the Father for why he chose us.

[32 : 37] We praise the Father for why he chose us. And again, we see that in verse four. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will.

God did not choose us because we are better than other people. We know that.

That's nonsense. As Christians, we're not better than anyone else. We don't deserve God to choose us. God didn't choose us.

He did not choose us because God looked through the tunnel of time and saw, oh, Nigel, he's going to become a Christian, so I'll choose him.

And, you know, Ian, he's going to become a Christian, I'll choose him. And John Angus is going to become a Christian, so I'll choose him. That's not what God did. But what we read here is that God chose us.

[33 : 47] Why? Not because of anything that we deserve, but simply because he loves us. And that's mind-blowing and mysterious and amazing and wonderful and awesome in the proper sense of the word.

And we also read that he chose us not only because he loved us, but because it was his good pleasure and will. None of us deserve the love of God and we'll be reminded of that in the Lord's Supper tomorrow as we take bread and drink the wine and remember that Jesus gave himself for us, that he died in our place.

We must be humble thinking, well, we don't deserve that at all. And yet because of his love and because it was his good pleasure and will, God sent his son Jesus who willingly died in our place.

R.C. Sproul says God is not obligated to save anybody. We need to remind ourselves of that, don't we? We need to be reminded that God is not obligated to save anybody, to make any special act of grace, to draw anyone to himself.

He's not obligated to do that. He could leave the whole world, says Sproul, to perish and such would be a righteous judgment. And that's true, isn't it?

[35 : 25] No one deserves to be saved. But yet the wonderful thing is God has chosen many to be saved. Many.

Remember Abraham and God tells him to look at the stars in the sky and he says you're going to be a great nation, more numerous than the stars in the sky.

We can praise God our Father that he has decided to save many because of his love and because it is his pleasure and will.

So that's the third thing we praise God for why he chose us. Fourthly, we praise the Father for the purpose he chose us. We praise the Father for the purpose for which he chose us.

What is that purpose? Verse five, adoption, adoption. He predestined us for adoption to sonship.

[36 : 31] Can you imagine, maybe some of you have been adopted, I don't know, but in a literal sense, I don't mean spiritually, but imagine that you had grown up without a mum, without a dad, that you had no one to look after you, no one to pledge to care for you, no one to turn to, and then someone, some loving parents, took you under their wings to nurture you, to love you, to give you security security, how wonderful that would be, and how wonderful it is when parents adopt children, it is a wonderful thing, and yet that's exactly what God has done to us, his children, he takes us, and he becomes our father, and we become his children, his sons, and his daughters, and he adopts us into his family, and he promises to provide for us, to nourish us, to protect us, all these amazing things, we become his children, and that means that we are all brothers and sisters in

Christ, so that is part of the purpose, why did God choose us, to bring us into a new relationship with him, to adopt us into his family, family, but there's another reason, not only does he choose us to adopt us into our family, we see a second purpose in verse 4, the second half of verse 4, he has chosen us to be holy, he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, why, that we should be holy, and blameless before him, and that is a wonderful thing too, and a reminder to us all tonight, that as Christians, part of the purpose of God making us Christians, and choosing us, is so that we would live increasingly holy lives before him, that our holiness was in the heart of God, and your holiness was in the heart of God, even before he made the world, world, that is actually astonishing, isn't it, that even before God made the world, he purposed that he was going to choose you in order that you would become a holy people, and so

God has not chosen us because we're holy, or because he knew we would become holy, no, but he has chosen us to be holy, and we need to remember that, and that's part of the reason that God tells us about predestination of his election, because he wants us to know that he has chosen us for this purpose, to become more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's keep our finger on Ephesians 1 and flick to Romans 8. We know Romans 8.28, that famous verse, and we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

But then Paul goes on into verse 29, for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined, why?

[40 : 37] To be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And so there we have it again, predestination, God choosing us, why?

To conform us into the likeness of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, so that one day we will be perfect in our beings.

No more sin, nothing to be ashamed of, completely like Jesus morally, full of the Holy Spirit, full of love, and joy, and peace, and patience, and kindness, and goodness, and gentleness, and faithfulness, full of self-control, in a perfect way.

And that's the reason God has chosen us. And so our holiness is so important, even now. And this should motivate us to think at work, at school, at home, wherever we are, whatever we're doing, we ought to live holy lives, and seek to grow in holiness, and seek to weed out evermore the sin in our hearts, and to be evermore dependent on God's Spirit.

So God, he purposes to save us for the purpose of adopting us, for the purpose of holiness, and also, verse 6, to bring glory glory to himself.

[42 : 22] See that in chapter 1, verse 6, why does God choose us? Why are we predestined? Yes, for adoption, yes, for holiness, but also, verse 6, to the praise of his glorious grace.

Maybe that's the main reason. In fact, it is the main reason, isn't it? The main reason God's chosen us is so that we might be for his glory, so that we in our lives will bring glory to him and magnify his name.

What dignity this gives us, what purpose. So many people who don't know the Lord Jesus Christ have that sense of purpose, purpleness.

What's the word? Purposelessness. Is that what I'm trying to say? But we have this wonderful purpose as Christians that we have the purpose of bringing glory to God.

Not living to please ourselves, but living to please God. And so that's another reason why God chooses us to the praise of his glorious grace.

[43 : 31] Now, we're nearly done. The fifth thing I want us to see, and this is very short, the fifth reason to praise God the Father is the way that he has chosen us.

the way that he has chosen us. What do I mean by that? Well, God couldn't just ignore our sins, could he?

Because God is a just God. He couldn't ignore our sin and just gift us all these amazing spiritual blessings without doing something about our sin.

It's once been said, and it's quite profound, I think, that the God who said, let there be light, could not just say, let there be salvation. Because then our sins would remain unpunished.

And our sins need to be paid for. Because God is just, and he cannot go against his own character. But we see here how the way that God chooses to save us.

[44 : 40] And we see it in verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ.

It's all about Christ. It's all about being in Christ. And as God chose us from all eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, they all agree with one another, that Jesus would come and die for us.

And that's what happened. And that's what we'll be celebrating tomorrow, that Jesus lived the perfect life that we could never live. And he died the death and took the punishment that we ought to bear.

we need to remember tonight that God loved us before we loved him.

God loved us before we loved him. And we have so many reasons to praise God the Father for. And I hope we go home tonight and read the passage again and reflect on all the reasons we have to praise our Heavenly Father.

[46 : 05] Why not read the passage and begin to think too of the reasons we have to praise God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And we'll look at that in more detail tomorrow.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, even as we sing in Psalm 36 that you're steadfastly, fast love is great, O Lord.

It reaches heaven high. Father, we thank you that we have had another glimpse of that from your word tonight as we have thought together about your love for us, about your choosing us even before the foundations of the world.

Father, we thank you that the most certain thing in all the universe is your love for us. We pray that indeed it would keep us humble, but that we would also feel safe and secure in your loving arms.

And Father, we do pray that it would make us thankful and that it would cause praise to burst out from within our hearts, even as it did with Paul in this chapter.

[47 : 33] Father, continue with us tonight and be with us for the whole weekend, we pray. May it all be for the praise of your glory. Amen.

Amen. Let's sing together now from Psalm 103, from the Scottish Psalter, sorry, the Sing Psalms rather, from Sing Psalms, Psalm 103, from Sing Psalms, and that's on page 135, page 135, Psalm 103, and we'll sing verses 12 to the end of the Psalms, so those three double stanzas, as far as east is from the west, so far his love has borne away are many sins and trespasses and all the guilt that on us lay.

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Remember, we adore and dwell in all the people's friends.

Amen. Amen.

[50 : 57] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

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