

Ephesians 1:3

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[0:00] that? 1241. Good. All right. Now you all have no excuse but to turn there. Oh, 976. Okay.

So if you turn to 1200 and you just get a list of like metric conversions from old ancient things, you know, you've got the wrong addition, according to Jonathan. Thanks, Jonathan. Thanks, Eric.

Great. All right. Hey, we are in Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 through 14. Let me read this text for us. Paul writes, 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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

It was the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory. Well friends, imagine you're visiting a new city for the first time. Let's say it's New York City.

You've never been there. You're visiting for the first time and after you do some sightseeing around town, you decide to take an elevator up to the top of one of the great skyscrapers. Maybe it's the Empire State Building or maybe it's Rockefeller Center, say, and imagine that at each floor as you go up, you could sort of take a look out the window. So, well then, you'd say maybe 10 stories up, you could look out and you could maybe see around the whole city block. And then as you went up maybe 20 or 30 stories, maybe you could start to see the whole neighborhood. And then 40 or 50 stories up, maybe you could see the whole borough, maybe you could see all of Manhattan. But then as you kept going 60, 70, 80 stories up, well from there you can probably see the whole city or most of it stretching out in every direction. And from that height, you get to see things you never noticed before when you were down on the ground. You start to see how all those streets and avenues, which just felt like a jumbled mess down below, now sort of make this beautiful grid of intersecting lines and pathways. And you get to see how all those green spaces and parks, which before just sort of felt randomly tucked here and there, now they sort of dot the landscape and they add margin and they add nature to what you're seeing, almost like brushstrokes from an artist all around the city.

[3:15] In other words, you're able to kind of take in the whole of it from that height and the whole actually starts to become gloriously more than all of its parts. And for a moment, as you're standing up there sort of taking the whole thing in, you're in awe. It's actually a bit breathtaking to stand up there and to see the scope, to see the grandeur of this city as it kind of stretches out.

Well, in our passage tonight that we just read, it's as if we've taken an elevator up, as it were, to the 80th or the 90th floor so that we can see the grand scope, not merely of some earthly city, but to see the grand scope of God's eternal plan of redemption.

And when we take it in, as Paul sort of pushes us up to the heights, as we take it in from this kind of dizzying height, we're meant to be awestruck. We're meant for a moment to have our breath taken away. We're meant to be swept up in worship and praise of God. That's how this whole section begins in verse 3, right? Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the word blessed here is just another word for praise, an expression of praise, of delight, of wonder. Blessed be this God.

Now chapter 1 as a whole is actually structured very simply. Verses 3 through 14 are praise to God, and then verses 15 through 23, prayer to God. Very simple chapter. But you know, it's worth pointing out that this praise of God in verses 3 through 14, that kind of extends for like a whole column in our English Bibles. In the Greek, in the language that Paul actually wrote it in, it's actually one long, intricate sentence. It's one long, 12 verses worth of one long, unbroken, unfolding, firework display of praise to God. This is the kind of long sentence that your composition teachers would say, fail, too long, cut it up. But no, for Paul it's this long, unfolding thing.

Now in the next three coming weeks, we're actually going to look a little more closely at each section of it. But you know, even if we do sort of break it down in that way in the coming weeks, I want us to see tonight that we're meant to view it all as one piece. We're meant to actually sort of take it all in together to get the kind of rooftop view of the whole thing. Because if you read the sentence in the original, as we just said, Paul almost doesn't let you stop reading.

[6:10] He doesn't stop the sentence. You're actually driven further and further and richer and richer until you step out onto that 80th floor observation deck and then gasp in wonder at who God is and what God has done. Now, as we sort of stand up here, viewing at this sort of skyline view of God's redemption, I think Paul wants us to see, and I think we can at least take in four things.

First, something about God's nature. Second, something about God's story. Third, God's goal.

And then fourth, our participation in all of this, our way in. So first, let's take a look at God's nature. Scan your eyes over the whole of this text. And although it is one long sentence, you kind of discern a three-fold structure here, do you not? Verses 3 through 6 speak mostly of the Father who chose us. Verses 7 through 10 focus on the Son who redeems and unites us. And then verses 11 through 14 highlight the work of the Holy Spirit who seals us for an eternal inheritance. Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

Look again closely at verse 3. It's actually right there from the start if you kind of have eyes to see it. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ the Son with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And most commentators will point out that the word spiritual there is actually a pointer at least to the work of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, as verse 14 says.

So you see, in the unfolding of God's grand work of redemption, we see an expression of his eternal nature as the triune God. That this one God has existed eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[8:13] Now, of course, if you were to grab your concordance or if you would go online and jump on Bible Gateway and do a search for the word Trinity, you would find it nowhere in your Bible.

It wasn't until the third century that Christians started using that word Trinity with frequency. But it is a word that captures and summarizes a very basic biblical truth about God.

So it's a very helpful word. It's a very helpful language for us to describe a biblical reality. You know, if you were able to kind of go back in time and ask the Apostle Paul or the Apostle Peter or the Apostle John and you would sort of pull them aside and say, hey, Paul, do you believe in the Trinity?

Paul would probably say, what the heck is the Trinity? And then you would say, well, here's what we mean. We mean that there's one true God, but he's eternally existed in three persons, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And then Paul would say, oh, yeah, that's exactly what I believe. In fact, that's a pretty good way of talking about it. I wish I would have thought of that. And in fact, you know, this idea of God being by nature triune is something that Jesus himself actually taught.

[9:15] After his resurrection, Jesus instructs the church to go make disciples and baptize them, do you remember, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Notice very carefully the language that Jesus uses there.

In the name, singular, not names, but the name, one name, one God, but three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In fact, in the book of Ephesians, you see God's triune nature coming up actually all over the place.

It's like water in the ground that just keeps seeping through all the cracks. Look down at chapter 2, verse 18. Skip ahead another chapter. So we've seen it in chapter 1.

Now look at chapter 2, verse 18. Paul's speaking of our peace with God and our peace with one another that comes through the work of Jesus' cross. And he says, through him, through Jesus the Son, we both, that is Jews and Gentiles, have access in one spirit to the Father.

Through the Son, by the Spirit, to the Father. And at the end of chapter 3, look at the end of chapter 3, verses 14 through 19. Paul prays now for spiritual strength and insight.

[10:22] And again, it's unmistakably Trinitarian. He says, And it keeps going on and on and on and on through this book.

I'd actually encourage you this week, take some time, read through this whole book of Ephesians in a sitting or two, and take note of how many times you see this kind of Trinitarian shape or structure to Paul's thinking.

And then note the context. What's the context in which Paul is saying? Is he talking about redemption? Is he talking about prayer? Is he talking about ethics? And you'll see that it just colors everything. That for Paul, God's nature matters for almost everything.

Once you start looking for it, it's all over the place. Now, why is God's triune nature so important?

Who cares, in other words? Well, there are a lot of things that we could say here. If you're looking for a good book recommendation, I'm going to recommend a book. So, this is a book by a guy named Fred Sanders called The Deep Things of God.

[11:37] How the Trinity Changes Everything. A friend of mine gave me this book, and I probably wouldn't have read it otherwise, but I read it, and it's really good. So, if you're looking for a good book to just start to get your toes wet in this understanding of God as Trinity, that's a good one.

The Deep Things of God by Fred Sanders. He's a theologian out of Biola in California. But, let's stick to our text tonight. What is Paul doing here? He's praising God for his work of redemption.

And we see here that the work of the Father, and the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit are like unbroken links in a chain. That they can't be divided, or separated, or staved off from one another.

Augustine, the great church father, put it this way. He said, the external works of the Trinity are undivided. In other words, what God does in creation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can't be broken up into bits.

What the Father does can't be cut off from what the Son does. And that can't be separated from what the Spirit does. And you see that in our text, don't you? The Father chose.

[12:48] But if the Father chose, then certainly the Son will redeem those that the Father chose. And if the Son has redeemed those that the Father chose, then certainly the Spirit will seal those that the Son has redeemed.

They can't be broken, and they can't be divided. What the Father plans, the Son accomplishes. And what the Son accomplishes, the Spirit applies and brings it to completion.

And friends, that means that God's very nature, who He is from all time, ensures that the whole of our salvation is complete.

That it will be done. You know, I often have plans that never come to completion. I began a project painting the exterior of my house this summer.

And it started out as a plan. I chose the wall of my house that was going to get painted. Because I knew I wasn't going to get the whole thing done. So I just picked one side. And then it took me a few weeks to go out and purchase the materials to redeem them from Sherwin-Williams to get the job done.

[13:59] And then I worked on it for a few weeks. And the summer got busy. And I still haven't brought that project to completion. I got the primer coat on and all the sanding done. But I still need to actually put the final coat of paint on the thing.

And at this rate, I'm hoping just to get it done before Christmas. Before it snows. And then it's too cold to paint. And it won't dry. Now friends, how many of our best laid plans are like that?

The best laid plans of mice and men often go wry. Wrote the Scottish poet Robert Burns. That's true of us. Often our best laid plans go wry.

But friends, what's true of us is not true for God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The one true God.

His plans will not be thwarted. They will not go awry. What he plans, he performs. And what God performs, he perfects.

[15:02] You see. It's in the very nature of God. In saving you, Christian. Brother and sister. It's in the very nature of God.

In saving you. To save you all the way. God's not going to stop halfway and get distracted. He's not going to leave off three quarters of the way.

He's not going to purchase a salvation for you in Christ. And then wait around to see if you're going to get it. He's going to make sure that it sees you the whole way home. He's not going to leave us until he's done.

He cannot. It's in his very nature. Friends, I wonder if we meditated on that fact.

How much of our anxiety and our worry and our fear would start to subside. To know that what God plans, he performs.

[16:07] And what he performs, he will perfect. Well, let's move on to the second thing that we see. As we take in this skyline view of God's redemption.

What do we notice here? We notice. We notice God's story. Take a look again at the movement from father to son to Holy Spirit here.

And you'll see that it's also a movement from election. Which is just another word for choosing, by the way. To elect, to choose in verse 4. It moves from election in verse 4. To redemption in verse 7.

To inheritance in verse 11. Election, God chooses his people for his very own. Redemption, God sets them free. Purchasing them from slavery. And then inheritance, God gives them a home.

Gives them a place where they can dwell with him forever. Where they can have this intimate relationship with him. Now, if we were to keep those three movements in mind. And we were to go back to the very beginning of the Bible.

[17:05] Go back to the very beginning of the Old Testament. And we were to just start reading the story. What would we find? That this is exactly the story of Old Testament Israel.

God chose them. First Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob. Then all of Jacob's family, Israel. God chose them. And then what happened? God redeemed them from slavery in Egypt.

Well, that one happened. God gave them an inheritance in the promised land. God chooses and he redeems. And he gives them a home. But you know, the Old Testament was actually just the first movement of the symphony.

This is a story that God's been telling from the very beginning. But in the Old Testament, we just sort of get the first movements. The first sort of melody line of the great symphony that God's telling. In the New Testament, that melody starts to just blow open into full shape.

And suddenly, all the instruments are playing. And all the harmonies. And all the transpositions are added. It's being played in this higher key. With full orchestration. And suddenly, we find in the New Testament, as the gates are sort of opened up, that it wasn't just about Abraham's family.

[18:16] But it was about men and women from all nations. And it wasn't just about redemption from Egypt. But it was about redemption from sin and redemption from death.

And it wasn't just about an inheritance in Palestine. But it was about an inheritance in the new creation. And the whole earth made new. Paul says, church, this is your story.

You know, friends, whether you like it or not, you're actually living your life according to some story. There's some plot. There's some narrative that's running at a deep level in your heart that shapes your thinking and your feeling and your acting.

You might not have thought of it that way. But I guarantee you it is true. Have you ever taken a moment and just examined what that story is? Have you ever taken some time to reflect and ask deep down, what is the narrative that's shaping my life?

What story do I see myself a part of? Am I a collection? Of just time and chance and energy? A big pile of chemicals and stimulus and response?

[19:39] And is the best that I can hope to do is leave things a little better than I found them and hopefully get a little happiness before my brief spark is extinguished and we all return into nothingness? Well, that's a bit existential for most of us.

That's probably not the story we think we're living by. Most of our stories are a bit more mundane, aren't they? Get a good job. Earn a decent wage. Find the right person.

Live comfortably. And hopefully when my life ends, well, I don't really want to think too much about that. What's the story for you?

Friends, the Bible here is inviting us into a whole new story. It's actually inviting us into God's story. The true story of everything that is that begins with God's creation and ends with God's new creation.

In fact, the way Paul would tell it here, it begins in eternity past with God's burning desire to redeem his people. It begins with creation and ends in new creation.

[20:51] In the middle, in the middle of that story, in the face of our rebellion against God and in the face of the death and decay that it brings, this story tells us of a God who chooses and redeems at the price of the blood of his own son and who seals and secures us by the person of his own spirit.

And if you lived in that story, it would begin to change your view of everything.

And it wouldn't just change your view of everything again. It would change how you feel and how you think and how you act. You know, suddenly, the material world that we inhabit isn't just raw material to be used and manipulated.

No. This world is a gift of God to be cared for and to be cultivated if we're living by God's story, the one true story of all that is. And suddenly, your job, your job isn't just a means of building wealth, but your job is an avenue to serve others and to play a part of shining God's kingdom into the world.

And suddenly, your relationships don't just exist for a little mutual pleasure and a little mutual help, but suddenly, they become these opportunities to call forth in one another the image of God.

[22:19] And they become opportunities to exercise forgiveness and grace and on and on and on. Suddenly, nothing gets untouched when you begin to live into God's story.

And Paul's inviting us. We're being invited to step into it and to realize how much better it is than so many of the parodies that we try to live our lives by.

Third thing. Third thing we see in this skyline view of God's redemption is God's goal. Now, what's the end that God is after here?

Why is God doing all this? Why does the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit choose and redeem and steal for an inheritance? What is God doing? What is his chief end, his ultimate goal in doing all this?

Well, again and again it came through that refrain. Did you catch it when we read it earlier in the service? Again and again we read to the praise of his glory.

[23:34] To the praise of his glory. In other words, God does all things to put on display how beautiful he is.

to communicate his infinite splendor to his creation. Now, at first this sounds a bit strange, doesn't it?

It sounds a bit, I don't know, how would you put it? It sounds a bit kind of egocentric of God, doesn't it? I mean, think about it. If you did something noteworthy, let's say you gave a very generous donation to a charity of some kind and a news reporter found out about this and they came to your door and they asked you, hey, why did you give such this, why did you give such a generous gift?

That was really amazing. What would people think if you answered and said, well, I did it to show how incredibly glorious I am? I guarantee you that social media would explode with people calling you a self-centered jerk and all sorts of other names.

You would be trending on Facebook but not in a very positive way. But you see, friends, it's very different with God. And it's different with God because, well, because God is God.

[24:57] A number of years ago, my wife and I took a trip to Italy and in Rome, as it turns out, there are a number of museums that you have to get tickets to like weeks in advance. And even if you have a ticket to these museums, you have to wait hours in line to get in.

Now, why? Some of you are thinking, I would never wait hours to see a bunch of dead art. That sounds dumb. Why do people wait hours and plan weeks, months in advance to be able to get in to see these things?

Because the things inside are worthy to be beheld. Because they're beautiful and they're worthy to be taken in and experienced and enjoyed.

But friends, if that's true of human works of art, of just artifacts that we've made in our finite human capacities, how much more infinitely is it true of God to see God in his beauty, to really get a glimpse of God's splendor.

You know, oftentimes, the psalmist had it right. I'd rather sit in the house of God and behold the beauty of God than do anything else.

[26 : 23] God's splendor and what Paul is saying here is that God has blown open the doors and he's done something to put his heart-thrilling, his soul-satisfying glory on display for everyone to see and to savor and to know and to enjoy.

So you don't need a ticket and you don't need to wait hours to get in. God's goal is the praise of his glory and that's really good news because praising God's glory, savoring his beauty, knowing his just manifold splendor, that's the thing our hearts were made for.

It's what we're starving for, really. It's the thing that haunts us every time we encounter some finite beauty, whether it's beholding nature or a piece of art or taking in a breathtaking city skyline.

In each of these things there's an echo of a voice that says there's a deeper beauty to be had. A beauty that won't fade and that won't grow old because behind these finite encounters with beauty stands the glory of the infinite creator.

And this infinite creator has put his glory on display in redemption. salvation. And he says anyone now can come and they can drink without price.

[28 : 22] And that leads us to our last point. We've seen God's nature and God's story and God's goal but then how do we participate in all of this? What's our entry point into this thing?

How do we get in? There's a new candy store on Chapel Street I forget what it's called but when I walk by it with my kids it's like a magnet and we're just stuck to the window staring at these stacks and stacks and stacks of sugary confectionery beauties.

And we never go in because they'll never take a nap if they eat all that sugar but there we are sort of standing at it and it's like bright pink and we can't get away. But friends is that us with respect to God?

Are we always looking through the window at God's glory and redemption? Always out on the street never partaking always just separated and one step off?

What's our way in? Look again at verse 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.

[29 : 40] Now we've just been rehearsing those spiritual blessings and we're going to unpack them in the weeks to come to be chosen by the Father to be redeemed by the Son to be sealed by the Spirit to have our hearts unleashed in the praise of God's glory and how does all of that come to us?

In Christ He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. In other words, all that heaven has to give, every spiritual blessing that never fades and never decays and never grows old has been gifted to us free of charge in Christ.

Christ. Do you notice how many times that phrase in Christ, in Him, through Him occurs in verses 3 through 14? That's almost a dozen times.

In Him, in Him, in Him. Christ is the mediator, the channel of all these blessings. God hasn't left us out on the street forever staring through the window.

No, He's come out to us and He's put His arm around us and He's led us personally inside and He said, welcome, it's all yours. Friend, if you are in Christ, if you have united your life to Him in faith, then you are chosen, redeemed, sealed.

[31 : 12] Every blessing in the heavenly places is yours. Not a single one has God withheld from you in His Son.

Every spiritual blessing. And of course, that's so much better than every material blessing in the earthly places, isn't it?

I remember studying this book quite some time ago and coming across verse 3 and thinking, that's great, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. What about some material blessing once in a while, right?

But you know, God doesn't promise us that in Christ. He doesn't promise us material blessings in the earthly places. But what He promises us is so much better.

And why is it so much better? Well, lots of reasons and we could enumerate them all, but I mean, just to get right down to it, to put it bluntly, because material blessings won't make you happy.

[32 : 20] They might for a little while, don't get me wrong, if your car breaks down, a new car will make you happy. I get that, right? They might make you happy for a little while, but not for long, not in a lasting way.

And of course, God isn't against material blessings. He wants us to care about economic injustice. He wants us to care about the poor.

It's not what this verse is about. But friends, you and I both know that if your bank account is full and your heart is empty, that you would cash out the bank account in an instant to fix your empty heart.

You would cash it out in an instant to find someone who loves you and who looks at you with all of your flaws and chooses you and who would lay down their life for you and who would stick by you to the end no matter how many times you screw up.

You would cash out your bank account in a second for someone like that. And don't you see, friends, that's exactly what God has done for you in Christ.

[33 : 37] He has looked at you, he has loved you, he has bled and died for you, and he has promised to be with you to the very end and let nothing tear you away.

And you know now in him, whether you have material blessings or not, your heart is full. And that means that if you get material blessings, they won't rule you.

And if you don't get them, it doesn't crush you. You're free because you have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Friends, are you in him? Or are you still outside looking in? God has unleashed from heaven.

We've been staring out the 80th floor observation tower out at God's plan of redemption, and there's God's nature, and there's God's story, and there's God's goal, but at the end of the day, it all comes down on this razor's edge that is pointed directly at each one of us.

[35 : 04] Are you in him? God has unleashed from heaven every spiritual blessing in Christ. There's not a single one he's withheld right there in his son.

And all you have to do is lay down your pride and lay down your despair and trust in him and take hold of him.

And suddenly God's goal becomes the thrill of your heart and God's story becomes your story and God's nature becomes the one that you get to commune with for all eternity.

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. Let's pray.

God, thank you tonight that we can draw near to you and call you our Father because of our Lord Jesus Christ and because of your spirit.

[36 : 20] Lord, help us tonight to really believe these things that you tell us in your word. And give us, as Paul will pray later in this letter, give us strength in our inner being by your Holy Spirit to really grasp Jesus in all of the manifold, unrelenting love that you've given us in Christ.

God, wake up our hearts because they're so sleepy. Remind us because we're so forgetful. Lord, even for some of us here tonight, call us forth from death into life.

For those who are far off, God, bring them near. Bring them near in Christ so that we might live to the praise of your glory.

Amen.