

The Goal of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] We're over the pen concentrating our attention on what it is to be a Christian and what it is to become a Christian. Over these next couple of Sundays, the emphasis is going to be slightly more on what it is to be a Christian.

But with that in mind, there's still plenty there for us to understand what it is to become a Christian. And then, of course, we'll move back in to a focus on Christ and his cross.

Every year, apart from last year, and that was due to, it was just a very busy year for a number of different reasons. And we never got to do our concentration on the cross as we have previously done.

But this year, hopefully. If you'd like to turn to Ephesians chapter 1. And we're going to be reading the first six verses.

And so, like I said, over the next week, the week after, we'll go all the way up to the end of chapter 2, where it really does explain how we have been saved.

[1 : 09] The book of Ephesians, by the way, is divided into two halves. The first half is the doctrinal side. The second half is the practical side. That's why it speaks about family, marriage, workers, church, all of those things.

But we're going to be concentrating just this morning on these first six verses. Now hear God's word. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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 the adoption 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.

Well, may God bless the reading of his word and that reading to us. We'll come back to the message on it after this next hymn. Amen. Amen.

[2 : 29] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. If you're able to, please make your way again to Ephesians 1.

It would be beneficial to you. Amen.

Well, as many of you will know, in these last few weeks, it's looking at what it is to become a Christian and looking at what it means to be a Christian. Christ is, of course, central in both.

And salvation is the way God changes a person. I just want to state that again, because while it sounds obvious, it becomes less obvious when Christians then live the Christian life.

[3 : 35] So salvation is the way God changes people. But salvation is not the ultimate goal of the gospel. And this is the very point at which many Christians falter on, not purposely, but they hit their self-imposed limit, because they think that the goal of the gospel is salvation.

And of course, very clearly here in Ephesians, the goal of the gospel is not salvation. Salvation is how God changes a person. Salvation is a gift from God that changes a person.

Salvation is when God brings that person into the Lord Jesus Christ and then blesses that person by virtue of union. Every blessing that we received is by virtue of belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every spiritual blessing we have, we only have because we belong to Christ. And so salvation is how God changes a person.

The details of that change is spiritual blessing, but much more than that is we will go. Salvation is also where we come to know God's will and purpose for a person.

[4 : 52] Not necessarily God's will and purpose for how you are to live your life, that is individually, but how you are to live life that God gives you in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the purpose of you being alive? What is the purpose of you receiving all of these spiritual blessings? What is the purpose of you knowing how you received all these spiritual blessings?

Why has God done all of this? And why has he written it down for you to know what he's done? And so what Ephesians does, or rather what Paul does in this letter to the church at Ephesus, is that he writes down a bit more of a detailed account.

His gospel is full, it's deep, it's meaningful. It includes long words like predestination. And these are not words to be frightened of.

I mean, you're used to long words. Delicatessent is a long word. And yet it doesn't fill you with any kind of fear whatsoever. We can talk about how good the delicatessent is, but we can't seem to talk about how good predestination is.

[6 : 05] So it's not that we're afraid of long, deep theological words. It's sometimes we're not quite sure of what they mean. Do they take away our freedom? Do they do something to us that we don't want to be done?

What do these words like election and predestination mean? Well, in order to understand the deep change that God has created in your heart, you have to understand what God has done and how he has done it.

And then once that happens, you'll begin to realize that your attention is no longer on yourself, but entirely on God. Your life begins to draw attention to God rather than draw attention to yourself.

Your mind will draw attention to the things of God. Your heart will be drawn to God. Your actions will seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you're not concerned with your rights before God. Self-denial is something that Jesus calls us to live, to take up our cross and to deny ourself.

[7 : 14] And the true Christian understands that the only thing that he is denying, or that she is denying, are those things that get in the way of following Jesus. The self-denial that Jesus calls us to, are to deny those things that stop us from following Christ.

So, self-denial is not a negative thing. It's actually a very positive thing. And it's the same with repentance. Repentance is a way of life. It's not a one-time deal, where you repented and you attach a date to it, and you say, on this day, everything changed.

No, repentance is a way of life. And therefore, the saved person has not only repented, but he continues to repent. He continues to believe.

He continues to worship God. And so, self-denial is denying all that which offends God, all that which gets in the way, and draws our whole attention, not on what we want, but actually on what God deserves.

And yet, it's so easy for the Christian life to forget these deeper things that actually keep us stable, and just rise up through the levels to a more superficial thing, where we are more concentrated on what we want.

[8 : 35] And I'm a person, and I have rights, and I have feelings, and I'm not denying any of that. I'm simply saying that that's not the most important thing about you.

The most important thing about you is what God has done for you, that he has saved you in Christ Jesus, he has blessed you with every spiritual blessing, and he has done that to make you the person that you will be, ultimately, that you will be.

So here's the summary, as it were, of these first few verses, or six verses in particular. Paul is writing clearly to faithful Christians in the church at Ephesus, and he's showing his readers what the gospel means, and how they are to come to understand what the gospel means, what salvation means.

And then in the latter part of his letter, he explains what the gospel looks like when you're married, because a marriage cannot survive without a clear understanding of the gospel.

It cannot give any glory to God, it cannot live out its purpose unless it is immersed in the gospel. The same with a family, a father cannot be a father without understanding that everything that he does is to come under the lordship of Christ, and that he's not to attach Christianity onto secular things, and then call it Christian.

[9 : 58] The mother also has a responsibility as a wife and a mother, and that, again, has to come under the lordship of Christ. And we think, well, they're outworkings. No, they're all foundational to what it means for you to understand the gospel.

They're the outworkings of the gospel. But before Paul gets there, he has to lay the anchor weights, he has to lay the foundation, he has to make sure that you're going to be able to understand those things later on by giving you a solid base first to stand on.

You'll notice then in verse 3 that he blesses God, the father of our lord Jesus Christ, because that God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

Every blessing we have is by virtue of belonging to Christ. Every good thing that we have that comes from God to us is by virtue of belonging to Christ. Now, that does not mean that the world is not blessed elsewhere.

They're blessed with a common grace. God makes the rain fall on farms. He puts fish in the sea. And sharks are feared with the, have the fear of the dread of man in them.

[11 : 09] This is the beauty of the creation and God's grace over it. But these spiritual blessings, you only have them by virtue of belonging to Christ.

In verse 4, we learn that God made the decision to bless us in this way before the foundation of the world. Not after the fall, not after Genesis 3, not after the point you were born when he found out about you.

No, he knew about you not only before you were born, but even before the foundation of the world. God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world.

And this is a key part of understanding the order of the gospel. We are not to think that the gospel is a response to Genesis 3, that it is a response to the fall of mankind, that now God must do something about it.

That would be clearly not what's being said here in verse 4. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before God.

[12 : 19] In other words, how you appear before God matters more than anything else. What you look like in the eyes of God matters a great deal. And God accomplished this by, verse 5, predestining you.

He predestined us for the adoption through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will. So there you have it. Before the foundation of the world, you were predestined in Christ to be holy and blameless before God.

And then as you come to realize this, verse 6, you're able to give God proper praise for his glorious grace. The ultimate goal here is not salvation, but praise.

The ultimate goal of salvation, of the gospel, is to create you into the type of being that knows why you're praising God. It's to create you as a worshiper who will worship God in spirit and in truth.

The saved person doesn't have any difficulty in putting God first. because God's made him that way. God has made her that way. And so the person who doesn't is not necessarily wrestling with what they think they might be wrestling with.

[13 : 38] When God makes something to work in a particular way, it works in that way. God's workmanship doesn't break down. It doesn't go faulty.

It doesn't have interruptions like we might think it does. It's true that we have a human nature, sin, and we want to rebel. But this is, it's not as if this is a deal of equal forces, that God's in the blue corner and we're in the red corner.

And we're trying to defend our wills. And sometimes we win and sometimes he wins. Round one and two went to us. Round three and four goes to him.

This would be a complete misunderstanding of what it is to be saved and what it is to know the will of God. The point of you being saved is very simple.

That you would praise God. The ultimate goal of God saving you is so that you would worship him. That you would praise his glorious grace.

[14 : 40] That's what you have been made for. And therefore, the content of that grace, you must know in order for your praise to be heartfelt, in order for it to be full of meaning.

That we don't just give lip service to God. So, let's concentrate on this idea of God's glorious grace. In verse six, you'll notice that it ends, before he goes on in verse seven, to explain how we have been saved by the redemption of Christ's blood.

The ultimate aim here in verse six is that we would give God praise to his glorious grace. That God has both explained and applied how his grace has worked in our life.

That we are only blessed because we belong to Jesus Christ. And this is a glorious decision of God. And we recognize that this decision to praise God in us comes from God in the first place, a long, long time ago.

Before any of us did anything right or wrong? Before we were even born. The fact that I am saved here today staggers me for no other reason than God decided it before he even created the world.

[15 : 56] And here I was thinking, I thought it was my decision. And yet, my decision only affirms the decision that God made before I was even born.

And the reason God made that decision is not because I was better and worse than anyone else. This is before the foundation award. It's not because I did anything right or wrong. It is because he created those in Christ Jesus to the praise of his glory.

That we're able to look back and go, I don't know how you've done it, but I recognize that what you have done has changed me. Salvation is how God changes you.

Salvation is how God redeems a person. It's how God brings it, that person to himself. So it's a bit, it's quite a lot to take in the fact that you're sat here based on a decision that God made before the foundation of the world.

That you're sat here praising God, singing the songs that you do, offering prayers, if indeed you are saved, and giving all of this praise to God's glorious grace based on a decision that God made before the foundation of the world.

[17 : 07] And that is only, re-emphasizes that it's grace. And it's not anything based on what we have done or not done, on any decision that we have made or not made.

And this is why the grace of God, it is so devastatingly real. It is beautiful, but at the same time, it strips away any attempt that we have made to think that we are right before God on any of our own terms.

It's all of grace that the church is a church. And so, strictly speaking, the ultimate part of the gospel, the ultimate goal of the gospel, is not salvation.

But it is actually the glorious grace of God that we would be able to praise God for his glorious grace. The focus is not on the redemption of sinners, but rather on what those people become once they are saved.

They become people who praise God in spirit and in truth. That God's will in salvation is so that we may give God absolute glory for what he has done for each and every one of us.

[18 : 23] Now, salvation is a necessary part of that goal. We must be saved in order to do that. But salvation, the gospel, doesn't stop you being saved.

It doesn't stop you believing what you do. If we're to define the gospel properly or the goal of the gospel properly, then we have to go much further than salvation.

We have to go much further than what you believe. We have to go much further than any of those things that are included in the gospel and included in salvation right up to the point where our whole life brings praise to God.

That's the goal of the gospel. That's what God accomplishes when he saves a person. So when we stand here singing the songs that we do, praying the prayers that we do, we recognize that we're not just attending a meeting, but we're tending the place where God's people are doing what they are made to do.

And we don't shrink back from praising God. We don't think that it's some kind of optional thing or even worse, something that we can do on our own. And so these self-defining acts of praise are normally more concentrated on you than what they are on God.

[19 : 49] They're often more about what you want rather than they are about what God wants. At this moment I'm reading this report and on this report it's to do with the worship of God in a church on a Sunday.

I won't tell you what church it is but it was sent to me. I was asked to read it and the session is deeply concerned, deeply concerned that the church would know what it is to worship God properly and how the Sunday sets up the rest of the week.

Now they're in an environment where the churches around about them have the Lord's Day set up like the week leading into it. And what God created in the beginning by giving us the first day a day of rest is so that that would be the model for every day that is to follow.

It's true for a Christian to stand back and say every day is the same. God doesn't consider any one day more important than the rest. No, he doesn't. But for the Christian every day is like the Sunday.

Sunday is not like every other day. And yet too often that's exactly what begins to happen. It is the Lord's Day the day where we worship God in spirit and truth that is the type of songs that we sing.

[21 : 12] In here we are showing the world how it ought to be done. We are showing the world how to speak to God. We are showing the world what type of things that we can sing to him.

We are demonstrating to the world what it means for God to be put first. And sometimes we're sat here thinking how much longer does the service have to go on?

Oh, we've got communion today so it's going to be even that's another 15 minutes. those type of attitudes are more of an indication of where your heart is and the concentration on you than it is on what God is doing through those things.

And so when God saves a person it's not enough for us to simply say well I believe I'm saved because the goal of God's salvation is that we would praise him for his glorious grace.

So what does it mean to praise God? Well here in Ephesians you'll recognize Paul is speaking well of God. To praise someone is to speak well of them but it is to say true things about them.

[22 : 23] And in order to say true things about God you need to know something about God in order to praise him. If you said to your wife or to your husband something that doesn't resonate with who they are they might wonder who you're speaking about.

It's not true of me. And so in the same way with God the praise that we offer up to him must be true for it to be relatable for it to be accepted as praise.

It must fall into that category. And therefore we cannot just respond to the Bible as like raw information. What I mean by that is this.

There's a man by the name of Philip Benetton and he wrote he has written a book called Equality by Default. It's a fantastic book. I won't go into what the book is about essentially and you can't really guess it from the title.

But in the book he gets you to imagine but I think it's the end of the first chapter or the beginning of the second. He gets you to imagine or recount the time that you sat in front of the TV and you've watched a news broadcast.

[23 : 32] And the news reader whether out on the field or at the desk is passing raw information. And they say something like the pound is down against the dollar.

Well it's information, it's news, it's even new news. But what does it mean? It's just a raw piece of information.

Now it will mean something to someone, it will mean a great deal to someone, that information. But to most people that's the point at the time where they go out the room and make a cup of tea, the information that they've heard has no reference or bearing on them.

And it would be a terrible thing for Christians to read the Bible as if it was raw information. That we've got all these things that we're reading and then we have no idea what it means.

That we have no idea how to respond to what God has actually told us. We know it's information, we know it must be important because it's in God's word. We know that it's part of the good news.

[24 : 39] But at the same time, I don't know what it means for me. And so in order to praise God, you have to know what we're praising God for.

And so the point here is not for us to hear something we've never heard before, or for us to receive a piece of information that we've never heard, or a piece of news that we've never heard.

we're meant to understand what God is saying to us and why he thinks it's important for us to know that we have been chosen before the foundation of the world. Why it's important for us to know that we have been predestined to the adoption of sons.

That's really, really important information, and God wants you to know why it's important. This is not the point where you go out and make a cup of tea, because these are deep words, but it's that depth which gives depth then to your praise.

It's that depth which then gives depth to your worship of God. It's not a good thing to say, well, I'm not really a Bible person. I'm not really a Bible study person.

[25 : 50] Why not? He's given us all the same amount of words. And this is the difference between heartfelt praise and sort of empty praise.

I can put it this way. Imagine two children saying thank you, but only one knows why they're saying it. Both are saying the same thing, the same words are coming out of their mouth, but only one can mean it because they know what they're saying thank you for.

And of course, children, as they grow up, need to be taught this. You know, when they're very, very young, they get given a gift and you have to train them. You have to say, now, go and say thank you for what you've received.

Now, of course, when they get to appreciate that gifts don't come free, that someone's worked for it, someone's paid for it, that it's took a lot of time and effort, that suddenly, when you have all that information, your thankfulness is that much greater.

Because now you're beginning to appreciate what the other person did in order to give you what they have. life. And so when a child says thank you, it's considered it's nothing more often than just well-mannered children.

[27 : 05] But you'd expect more of a teenager. You'd expect more of an adult. You'd expect much more of someone like us here. And the reason you would expect much more is because you ought to know more about how you got the gift that you were given.

And so our thankfulness is taking into consideration not just the gift itself, but the extent at which the other person went to to give us that gift.

How far they had to travel, how much they had to save, how hard they had to work, everything that they had to do. And when we say thank you, we're not just saying thank you for what we've received, we're saying thankful for how we have received it.

And in the same way, in order to give praise to God's glorious grace, we're not just saying thank you for receiving Christ, but we're saying thank you for how we have received Christ.

What it took for God to bring us into relationship with Christ. And there, our praise is praise worthy of God's glorious grace.

[28 : 17] Therefore, it's heartfelt, it's meaningful, it has depth, it has foundation, it is solid, it's not empty praise. And the reason it's not empty praise is because we recognize what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

And that's what Paul is getting at here. That our praise should be at that level. Where we're able to understand the content of God's glorious grace.

If I can put it this way, there is no doubt in my mind whatsoever, or can I say in the book of Ephesians, that if we don't understand election or predestination, our praise is not what it ought to be.

That if we don't understand that we have been predestined before the foundation of the world, we're not giving the credit that God deserves. We're not really giving the praise to God that God actually deserves.

if we can't be that interested in the length that God went to to give us what he gave us in Christ Jesus, then that reduces the amount of praise that we can then give back to him.

[29 : 31] Our praise of God is always measured by how well we have received and understood what it is that we have received. And so the church's worship of God is affected dramatically by their level of interest in studying God's word.

And it cannot be covered up with anything else. It's possible for us to be able to sing songs and not know what they mean. And God, in listening to the song, may think that you have an incredibly beautiful voice and that you're singing it with your whole heart.

but you're singing it with your whole heart and not knowing what it means. And therefore, it empties it completely of it being an act of praise.

So when God saves you in Christ Jesus, salvation is not the ultimate goal. You believing is not the ultimate goal. You not going to hell is not God's ultimate goal.

The ultimate goal of salvation is that you would be able to praise him for his glorious grace towards you. That you would be able to worship him in spirit and in truth.

[30 : 51] So here's the exhortation as we close. In short, you have been saved for worship. And worship is simply you, the creature, responding to the creator in the right way.

you don't define the Bible on your own terms. You understand it how God has put it across to us. You recognize that what God has given us in Christ Jesus is something incredibly important.

And you recognize that by understanding it clearly and wonderfully, that you're then able to give praise to God properly understood. that God is able to receive praise from you according to your measure of understanding.

If I can just use a slightly different illustration. You know, when your child comes home having done a crayon drawing of you, and you're not quite sure and you kind of wait, hoping that they're going to tell you what it is so that you don't embarrass them by saying, it's a turtle.

And they say, no, it's mum. Okay. Or whatever. And you bring it down and before you get to that embarrassment, and then they say, it's you, Dad. And you, what do you do?

[32 : 09] You don't go, it doesn't look anything like me. You go, that's incredible. How did you do that? It's just, no, you know it looks nothing like you. Unless you do actually look like that.

Which is, in my case, it would be desperately worrying. But you praise. And the reason you look upon that praise of you in that way, this is a drawing of you, Dad, is because you recognize that you take into consideration their age and stage.

You don't judge them according to an adult standard of praise. You don't judge them according to a mature understanding. You judge that heartfelt sort of picture in relation to the age and stage that they're at.

And so this is an idea of you reaching a particular standard before your praise of God is accepted. It doesn't mean that at all. If you've got this idea that I can't truly praise God until I've understood all of these things correctly, that's partly true.

That's what maturity is. But at the same time, it is equally true that the youngest person in this church is able to praise God for the things that they understand properly.

[33 : 27] That they're able to say, God, you give me food and I thank you for that. That may not be at the maturity level of understanding the atonement, but it is at the same level in the eyes of God when it actually comes to the fullness of its meaning.

And that's what it means to be created for worship. It is about maturing to the place where we can always speak well of God and know why we're saying these things to God. Know why we're giving thanks to God.

And every blessing you have in order for you to be able to do that is by virtue of you belonging to Christ. Every blessing you have. And so I'll finish with this illustration.

It's one that I've used a number of times before, but it really does make the point and I'll change it to a book rather than to when it happened to me. If you ever read the book Moby Dick, you'll realize that when they're trying to catch this big whale, the two people on the boat recognize that, hang on a minute, this whale was bigger than the boat.

What we'll do is we'll tie ourselves together. And so if one of us gets dragged in, we'll be able to hold onto the rope and then save, save the other person.

[34 : 47] But then sure enough, they'd be able to figure out that if one gets pulled in and the other one's tied to him, that he's also going to get pulled in as well. And so both of you are gone.

And so when we talk about union with Christ, when we talk about what it means to belong to Christ, to be in Christ, what it means is this, that as God sent his son into the world to seek and to save the lost, that as he died, you died in him.

It is absolutely incorrect to say that Christ died to give you life. He did not die to give you life. Christ died so that you could die, Romans 6.

Christ died so that you could die. And by virtue of his resurrection, you get your very own in him. Because no sinner can live before God.

You must be dead to sin and alive to God. And yet too often, we shorten the gospel and we think we're praising God by saying Christ died so that we could live.

[35 : 49] But if you go home and read Romans 6 for yourself, it becomes very, very clear that Christ died so that you could die. Because your old life offends God. It gets in the way of God changing you.

It has to go. So Christ dies so that you can die. And Christ lives so that you can live. It is by virtue of his death that you have died to sin.

And it is by virtue of his resurrection that you have been raised to new life in him. In other words, it is by virtue of your union with Christ in both death and resurrection that you have new life in him and every spiritual blessing that is given to you by God.

And knowing this then leads to being able to praise God properly. Because it is fun when a five-year-old does something and we as adults can even find some sinful things is laughable.

You know, a brother hits his sister and gets mad and instead of being angry at that sin, you know, sometimes we go, it is funny. But it is really not funny because it is sin coming out.

[37 : 02] Now when a five-year-old you know, does something or a six-year-old does something, you can pass it off. When a 15-year-old does the same thing, suddenly it is not funny anymore. It is not funny anymore.

You know, when one of your children is eating all of the chips off the plate of the other children while she is turning around and looking elsewhere, it is kind of funny. At least for some of us.

But when you are stealing at a 15-year-old out in the world, suddenly it is not so funny. And that kind of maturity of sin means that things can go from kind of cute and funny to huge consequences.

And in the same way, it is in reverse the true of Christianity. That when you are young in the faith and you don't understand certain things and you ask questions like who made God, it is kind of cute and funny.

But if you are still asking it at the age you are now, it is not funny anymore. It is not quite so funny anymore. Because there is that maturity that ought to be kicking in.

[38 : 10] And so by virtue of union with Christ, our praise of God is something that ought to mature. And so what does it mean to be a Christian? It means that the ultimate goal of salvation is not you being saved.

It is not you believing. It is not you being kept out of hell. It is actually you being brought to the position where you are able to praise God for his glorious grace towards you and understand the content of that grace.

Amen.