

## Introduction

Good morning. It's great to see you this morning. If you have a Bible with you, and I hope that you do, I want to invite you at this time to take it out, open it up, or take it out and turn it on, as the case may be. We are going to be in the Book of Ephesians this morning. If you don't have a Bible, don't worry. If you look right there in the seat tray in front of you, there's a Bible you can use. If you don't own a Bible, then that Bible is our gift to you today. So I'd like to ask you at this time to go ahead and head over to the Book of Ephesians. We are going to be in chapter 1 today. We're starting a new series today, and the title of that series is "Life Together." We're talking about the fact that God is so incredible and so great. He has rescued us with such a powerful act of love through His Son Jesus Christ, that those who have been saved are bound together through a special life together known as the Church. So for the next ten weeks, we are going to examine the great news of God in the Book of Ephesians. We are also going to be examining the creation of the Church, what the Church is supposed to do, who the Church is, and why it is that you need to be fully invested in and fully part of the Church of Jesus Christ.

We have a few resources for you that are available during this series. I want to let you know about those. First of all, there's a little book that we are going to be reading together as a church over the next ten weeks. It's called "Life Together." It was written by a pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was a pastor in Germany during World War II. He wrote this book as he was preparing to teach pastors how to focus on the Church in the middle of a dictatorial regime. So I would love for you to read this book. We are asking for a five dollar donation if you use one of these books. But if you don't have any money, we still want you to read this with us. You can get this at some of our kiosks out here in the atrium. We would love for you to join us in that. More importantly though, we have a booklet that we have put together. It's a curriculum booklet, also entitled "Life Together." It walks through the Book of Ephesians, and it is to be used in each of our Life Groups. So for the next ten weeks, I will be teaching in the morning on Sunday in the Book of Ephesians, and then during the week, our Life Groups will be meeting and discussing other parts of the Book of Ephesians. So we want to ask you to be part of a Life Group so that you can get this curriculum and so that you can understand more and more. But also so that you can taste... you can try out what it means to live in community and to be part of the Church. As you came in today, you saw some of these white popup tents that are set up out here in our atrium. On your way out today, if you don't have a Life Group or you have questions about a Life Group, those are our crack team of Life Group experts. They would love to visit with you today and talk to you about how you can get signed up for a Life Group. So I want to encourage you to do that. Now, if you have a phone with you, and I know that you all do because you are spiritual people. (Laughter) Inside your phone, you can go to the web browser. I'm going to show you how you can find a Life Group there, on your phone. You are welcomed to follow along with me, if you would like to, or you can just watch this. You go to [HNW.org/lifegroups](http://HNW.org/lifegroups) – or you can just look on our webpage. If you look here, this is the way that the mobile version looks. You go to [HNW.org](http://HNW.org)... at the top there, those three parallel lines represent our menu; so you just click on that and then you'll get a drop-down menu. Now, if you look, you'll see the third option down says, "Get Connected." That "+" symbol right next to it... that's the menu, so you just click on that "Get Connected" button, and when you do, you will see that the third option down below that are our Life Groups. So when you click on that, you will then be taken to a page that will give you a description of what a Life Group is. You just scroll down below that, and as you scroll down below it, you will then see another menu that says "Finding a Life Group." Click on that and there will be a host of different groups that are listed there. You can read about those, you can scroll through... you can see all of the options that are available to you. There will be a link right there that says "Contact the Group Host." You can click on that, and it will send them an email so that you can

communicate with them and find out exactly where their address is, when they are meeting, and those sorts of details. If you say, "You know what, that's great, but I really need face-to-face interaction to understand this," then I understand completely. We want you to stop, like I said, by one of these Life Group tents on your way out or come by our Connection Center. We believe that it is so important that you are in a group. Let me tell you why. The way the world is changed and the way you are changed is by being part of a small group of people where you can learn how to love people the way that Jesus loves people. That's how God is going to change your heart. When you learn how to love people like Jesus loves people, then you won't just end up in a group of ten or twelve people that is a cul-de-sac of Christian friendship. You will then take that and you will go out into the world. The whole idea there is that you'll begin to pray for people who are far from God, and you will then begin to hopefully reach those people and start a group out of that group. Our goal is for our groups to multiply and to begin planning and praying to that end so that we can see more and more people come to know Jesus Christ. We have forty groups that are ready to start. My understanding is that about fifteen of those are already full, so you are going to want to go out to the website, stop by these popup tents, and get signed up so that you can be part of this. We are excited as we go into this series together.

I am now going to turn attention to the Scripture, and I want to again invite you to be part of this with me. We are going to be in Ephesians chapter 1, beginning in verse 3. Let me pray over us, and then we will jump into it.

"Heavenly Father, how good You are. Lord, how amazing Your news is... that You have rescued us. Lord, I want to pray today for any person who is here that is far from You, and God today that Your Word would break through to them, that it would connect with them, that they would hear You and that they would be rescued. Lord, I want to pray and ask that You would bring them into Your family today. Lord, I pray for those who are frustrated, those who are depressed, those who think that perhaps You have forgotten about them, that Lord, today, they would hear Your truth and know that You never, ever leave them and never, ever forsake them. Lord, I pray this in the Name of Your Son Jesus. Amen."

Alright. Ephesians chapter 1, beginning in verse 3. Let's read that. *"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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory."*

I don't know about you, but I'm a sucker for heist movies... you know, those kind of movies where the semi-lovable criminals go out and make a plan to make the big score so that they can finally drop out of that life of crime. Probably the quintessential heist movie is "Ocean's Eleven." Maybe you've seen that one with George Clooney and Brad Pitt, making plans to rob the casinos and get back at Andy Garcia's character, Benedict, so they can take his money, make a fool of him, and make off with the girl in the end.



That's sort of the plan and the plot. But like any good heist movie, there has to be a good reveal scene. In other words, we know that the criminals have a plan that they're trying to do something, but we don't see every single part of their plan. It's not until the climax of the film that finally all of the intricacies are revealed, and we see just exactly how they did it. In the same way that a magician might reveal his trick, it's there. The heist is laid bare and we finally see it, and the audience "oohs," "aahs," and is amazed at the great reveal.

What I want you to know is that Ephesians chapter 1 is the reveal of God's plan to rescue you. You see, God wanted to steal you away from the clutches of Satan, and He wanted to rescue you in the heist that would rival the greatest heist of all time. That, in fact, would be not just a thieving away from our sinful hearts but also indeed be a redemption and a rescue. And that's the thing I want to talk to you about. It is the great plan that is laid bare in Ephesians 1. There is the plan that is a plan to rescue and change the universe, and you need to know about it. Ephesians 1 is an incredible story of how God rescues us. God plans to do amazing things.

### 1. To Choose. (v. 4)

What does He plan to do? Well number 1, we read in verse 4, that our God plans to choose. God the Father chose us long before we ever even lived. Verse 4 says, "...even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world..." Many of us feel as if somehow we chose God, but Ephesians 1:4 says, "No" ...that actually He picked us. Before there was an earth, He was picking us. He was choosing us to be His people. You see, Christianity teaches that we are in a state... a broken state, a sinful state. A fancy word for it is the word "total depravity." It basically means this: that every part of our existence has been infected by sin. It means that we are so broken that we are not capable, even if we wanted to, to choose God... that we are slaves to our own wickedness.

I could give you all kinds of verses that talk about this in Scripture, but let me just read four of them to you:

Genesis 6:5... *"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."*

John 6:44... *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him."*

Romans 6:20... *"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness."*

Ephesians 2:1... *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world."*

Dead people don't have the ability to do anything. That's sort of one of the things about being dead... you're dead. You don't do anything. The Bible says you are dead in your sin; you are not able to pick God. You were that broken. You were that messed up. Martin Luther talked about it being the bondage of our will. We are wrapped up. We are tied to our sinfulness. We cannot break free from it.

But the Bible says that before the very foundations of the world, God saw us in our sin and chose us anyway. What did He choose us for? Well, it says in verse 4 that we have been chosen in order to be holy and blameless. You see, the Bible says that the Lord has picked us, plucked us from being stuck in our sin, and declared that He wanted to remake us into a new person... just like a reality show where we see these people that have a basic appearance but some sort of raw great talent. A producer chooses them, gets them better clothes and a better hairstyle, and suddenly they are palpable and attractive to the great American public. God took us in the middle of our sin and in the middle of our brokenness and remade us. He intended to make us holy and blameless. You are not holy and blameless as you are. I'm not holy and blameless as I am... apart from Christ... but God chose us to rescue us so that He might make us so. That's what He wanted to do. He wanted to make us His own.

Why would He do this? Verse 5: *"He predestined us for adoption as sons..."* Now why doesn't it say "sons and daughters"? It says sons only because sons were the ones in the ancient world who had a full inheritance. So this isn't actually a slight toward the females in the Church; this is Paul saying that females and males alike receive the full inheritance of sons whenever they are brought into the family of God through Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter your gender, just as it doesn't matter your skin color, it doesn't matter your education level. It doesn't matter any of those things because, once you have said "Yes" to Jesus Christ, you are brought in fully and completely for adoption.

Now what does adoption mean? Steven Fowl, a great scholar at Duke University, has brought up the fact that adoption in the ancient world is a lot like adoption in the contemporary world. It's this idea that your rights are terminated with your old family, and then you are brought into a new family. So if you've ever been to an adoption ceremony, you know the way that this works. When it's final, it is final. Those people are brought into the family. They have a new name and whatever old family they were tied to... those ties are officially severed. They may still have some sort of knowledge of them, perhaps even a relationship with them, but they are no longer officially part of their family. Legally-speaking, they are brought into a brand new family. Well why does that matter? ...Because Scripture says that we have therefore been adopted into the family of God. The Lord chose you to be holy and blameless so that you might be adopted.

There's a family in our church that has a couple of adopted sons. I was speaking to the mother about this this week, talking about the experience of adoption. And as we were speaking about that, these two boys that she has adopted... they come from different family backgrounds, and so people have asked her, "Do they fight like real brothers?" And she said that she always looks at them and she says, "Well, first of all, they are real brothers. They may not have any blood relation, but they are brothers because they have been adopted." Too many people who have heard the news of adoption laid out in Ephesians chapter 1 keep putting a giant asterisk next to their family qualifications. Listen to me. If God has chosen you... if God the Father has picked you to be part of the family... once the judge slams down his gavel... once the final signature is on the final document... once that document has been filed with the court, there is no

longer any doubt; you have been brought into the family. We need to stop saying, "Well, I'm brought in, I'm adopted, but..." No... there is no "but." You have been chosen to be made holy and blameless so that you might be brought into the family. God has chosen you to bring you in because He wants you to have the full rights. The first part of God's glorious plan is that the Father chose you from your condition of habitual sin and habitual rebellion so that you might be brought into this type of relationship.

## 2. To Redeem (v. 7)

So why does He choose you in this? *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace..."* God wants to adopt you because He wants to redeem you through the blood of Jesus. You see, we are chosen by the Father to be redeemed by God, the Son, Jesus Christ. Sometimes, if you're like me, you might wonder, "Why does there have to be blood? Why does Jesus have to die? Why does it have to be so violent... so gory?" I think the answer is found in the words that are used for redemption all throughout the pages of Scripture. Over and over we read words that point out the fact that redemption is something that is purchased. The first word... the Greek word "agorazo"... it means "to buy in the market." Whenever someone is bought, redeemed, there is a price that has been paid. A second word is a word that is Hebrew, "goel." It's very similar to the word "gaal". Perhaps you have been reading in the Book of Ruth and you've noticed that Boaz, the one who rescues Ruth, is described as her "kinsman redeemer." That is that word "gaal." That is the idea that Boaz could not simply lay claim to Ruth. He had to purchase her redemption because of the brokenness that had happened in her family. Maybe you remember the deal that is made through the exchanging of sandals, at the gate, at the city in Bethlehem. The way that that works is that there was a purchase made for redemption. There is another word in Hebrew... the word "kofer." It's the word that means "redeeming" whenever an animal accidentally kills someone in the village. A price had to be paid to pay for the debt that had been given, to right the wrong in that family. Over and over in Scripture, whenever the word "redemption" is used, the same idea comes up: "purchase." If the Lord is going to redeem you, He purchases you.

You see, this idea was so common in the ancient world. Adolf Deissmann, the great New Testament scholar, points out that there was a legal form that was used to recognize the fact that slaves, whenever they were freed, had to be purchased. This is the way that the legal form was written. Several scraps have been discovered. It says, "**\_\_\_\_\_ pays to the Pithian Apollo, the sum of \_\_\_\_\_ minae, (that was their currency) for the slave named \_\_\_\_\_ on the condition that he/she be set free.**" Why does that legal form show up so regularly in archaeological digs across the ancient world? The reason is because redemption was always focused on the concept of being purchased, of being bought back. That is why, then, over and over, Scripture testifies to the fact that Jesus purchased us, that Jesus redeemed us, that He bought us. Matthew 20:28... *"...even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."*

Ransom? What's that? You've watched your kidnapping movies. You know, ransom is the payment that is given to rescue the one who has been captured. Ransom is another word tying into the concept of redemption, the fact that if someone is going to be rescued, a price must be paid. Luke 24:45-46... *"Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead...'"* You see, this ransom is paid to forgive us our trespasses. That's what verse 7 says. Not only does our sin prevent us from being able to choose God freely, but our sin also lines us up for punishment and wrath. That we ought to be destroyed because of our

sinfulness, we deserve now to be completely tormented for all of eternity, to be punished. Because God is a holy God, a just God, a God who will not allow imperfection, that sin ought to be punished.

There had been a sacrificial system for years, and we read about that in the Book of Leviticus. But the Book of Hebrews tells us that through Jesus that sacrificial system was put to an end, once and for all: Hebrews 10:10... *"And by that will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* Hebrews 10:14 declares... *"For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."* This is an incredible prisoner swap where the one who is the guilty one, the captured one, is set free and someone else willingly goes in, in order to rescue... One who has done nothing wrong.

Today is the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11. Maybe you heard this story on the radio this week of Welles Crowther, the 24-year-old who had volunteer fire department training. So whenever one of the planes hit the towers, he started immediately to rescue as many people as he possibly could. He would take them down to safety and then turn around and go back and get more people and carry them and lead them down. People didn't know his name; they only knew him as the man that was wearing the red bandana. I didn't have a red one... I have an orange one... but basically you get the idea. They didn't even know his name; they just knew him as someone who was doing the right thing. The last words that anyone ever heard Welles Crowther speak... *"I'm going back for more."* He was killed that day. There is a memorial to him there at Ground Zero where a red bandana is on display, remembering the fact that he was someone who went back for more. The red bandana idea, that symbol that reminds us of people who go back for more... that's the same kind of symbol that we see in churches whenever we look at the cross and we see that Jesus said, *"I'm going back for one more. I will rescue those who need to be rescued."* You see, we are slaves to our sin. B. B. Warfield says that we have been slaves by our birth. We were born into sin. By conquest we have been conquered by our sin, and by our debt we have earned our death by our sin. But Jesus, the One without sin, the One who was not born into sin, the One who was not conquered by sin, the One who owed no debt of sin... the One who was perfect... that One decided to pay our ransom to rescue us. How? By giving His life and doing it in grace.

Look at the second half of verse 7: *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace..."*

What did we do to deserve the great rescue mission of Jesus? Nothing. What does a kidnapped person do as they are bound and gagged? How do they earn the right for the SWAT team to break in the windows and to come in and rescue them? They don't do anything. They are a prisoner. They are helpless. They can't do anything. That is the picture that is given us in Ephesians 1. We didn't do anything, but God chose us, broken, and rescued us in Jesus Christ, saying simply, *"I want them. They are mine and I must have them."* We did nothing to earn it. We did nothing to deserve it. We were just lying there helpless, dead in our transgressions, dead in our sin, and God came for us.

Robert Farrar Capon declares it this way: *"Everybody, even the worst stinker on earth, is somebody for whom Christ died."* Why does that matter? ...Because some of us are here today and we have convinced ourselves that even though we have snuck in to the back and we're here to hear the words, perhaps, of Scripture spoken today. We have still convinced ourselves that we are not yet good enough to be rescued by Jesus. Please hear me today: There is no one who has ever lived that is good enough to be rescued by Jesus. You are just rescued. There is nothing that you can do to make you good enough. You can never come to church enough. You can never listen to enough sermons. You can't listen to enough Christian radio. You cannot do enough good things. You can't be nice enough to people. You can't give enough

money. You can't be a good enough parent. You can't be a good enough spouse, a nice enough girlfriend, a nice enough boyfriend, a good enough person at work... You can't do it but He rescues you anyway. He does it because He wants you. He wants you. And He has done this because He wants you to know that your ransom has been paid. I don't care if you're here today... if you're a criminal, a reprobate, a loser, a jerk... whatever negative connotation or adjective that someone might stick on you... I want you to hear this. It doesn't matter. Jesus has died so that you can know freedom. (Clapping)

You are welcome at the table of the Lamb. Grace has been extended. It is free. Why is God like this? I don't know. He just is. It pleases Him to rescue those who are dead in their transgressions simply to show glory to Himself... simply to be gracious. So in verse 10 we read that God's big reveal is even bigger than us because in verse 10 we read: *"...as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth."* All things. You see God's big plan is not just that He will rescue sinners, dead in their sin, by His grace... even though that is a part of His plan. God's big plan is to unite all things. The Greek there actually says, "To unite again." In other words, all things were once united under the Headship of Jesus Christ, and then that Headship was disrupted through our sin, through our rebellion. It was taken away and so that was busted. But then, Ephesians 1:10 says, "But now God's will, His plan has been revealed, to reunite all things, all of creation, all of the universe... everything... business, government... everything reunited under the Headship of Jesus Christ. Reunited... and it feels so good to be back under the Headship of Jesus, once and for all. That is what He wants you to know. God is not interested in just rescuing a few people, although that pleases Him greatly. He wants the whole enchilada. He wants it all because He wants to demonstrate the glory of His praise. By paying the ransom through the death of Jesus, He gets it.

### 3. To Give (v. 11)

So God the Father chooses, God the Son redeems, and then God the Spirit gives. What does He give? Verse 11: *"In Him, we have obtained an inheritance..."* The inheritance is actually the full and glorious presence of God Himself that one day we will have, whenever we end up with Him in heaven. But, in the meantime, we get His presence anyway. Verse 13: *"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..."* You have been sealed with God's Spirit. That is, you have God's presence in you now, enough so that you know that one day you will truly be resurrected and reunited with Him.

Have you ever been sitting in church and listening to a sermon and suddenly something wells up within you where you think, "I need to change this specific behavior" or "I need to be different." That is not the force of the preacher. That is God's Holy Spirit working through the proclamation of His Word in your heart. Have you ever been in worship singing when suddenly a word that you were singing or some sort of beauty in the music awakened within you a desire to give full love and devotion to God? You got a vision of His beauty, a vision of His grandeur... that is not the skill of our musicians. That is the power of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever been in a place when you've felt something within you prompted to tell your barista that you need to talk to them or pray for them... or a coworker that you need to encourage them? That is not something bad you ate for breakfast. That is the power of the Holy Spirit telling you to obey Him. The Spirit is the seal. The seal is put on documents to demonstrate that it's authentic, it's real, it's verifiable... it is the property of the one who owns the seal. You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit of God so that you know that your salvation was real. You have been brought into the Kingdom. You have truly been adopted. You have His full presence. All of it has been given to you.

Charles Hodge puts it this way: "The seal demonstrates that our salvation is genuine, that we belong to the Lord and that we are secure." This is why we pray for miracles, why we ask for healing, why we say, 'Lord, cast demons out of this place,' why we cry out to God... because we believe that our God is real enough to do these things even today. God the Father chooses, God the Son redeems, God the Spirit seals so that we have His presence so that we can begin to work and do the life that He has asked us to do.

You may not know this, but verses 3 through 14 are actually one long sentence. My English teachers would not have liked that. That is a run-on sentence. Why is it so long? By the way, this is the longest sentence in all of the New Testament in Greek. Why? ...Because Paul wants to demonstrate with forceful rhetoric the power of the work that God has done in Jesus Christ. And what is the first thing that He does? In verse 3, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ...*" Listen. This run-on sentence is front-loaded with a command, "Worship God."

Why do we worship? We worship because God the Father chose us when we were dead in our transgressions. We worship because God the Son redeemed us... bought us, gave His life for us, conquered the grave for us. We worship because we have been sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit. We worship because this God is so big, so incomprehensible, so amazing, so gigantic that we can only, once we finally realize it, stand up and sing and declare, "God, You are amazing. You are worth everything. We give You all glory." (Clapping)

If you notice, there in verse 3 we read this... "*that He did these things, He blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.*" The phrase "In Christ" shows up in Paul's writings in the New Testament 164 times. This all happens because of what God did in Jesus. He did this in Jesus. The point is this. It is that God wanted to rescue you, to steal you away, to ransom you, and the only way He could do it was by changing the rules and becoming flesh Himself... by giving His own life... by rescuing you... by buying you... He wants you.

#### **4. For His Praise. (v. 3)**

So how should we respond to this? We should sing. I know that sometimes you wonder, "Why do we sing whenever we come to church? I don't go anywhere else where people sing unless they pay money to go into a concert or to go into a sporting event. We come here and we sing for free. Why?" ...Because our God is that good. Our God demands singing. Why is it that the psalmist says over and over "Clap to the Lord"? Why is it that the psalmist says "Shout to the Lord"? ...Because this God is so big and so glorious that our own mundane, typical ways of expression are not sufficient to describe the glory of the things that He has done in Jesus. So we sing, we shout, we clap, and we raise our hands. We do these things not to draw attention to ourselves but to say, "God, You are that great... You are that amazing... You are worthy of worship." (Clapping)





Sometimes I will say that church is like a party. And people will say "Church is like a party? Pretty lame party." It's only lame if you don't know this God. If you show up here today and you think this isn't worth my attention, this isn't worth partying... then you do not know the power of this God. Today I would say, "You need to know Him." This Jesus... He came for you. He chose you, He rescued you, He died for you, He redeemed you. He conquered the grave so that you could have life with Him, and He gave you His Spirit because He wants you. Today, the question is now this: "He has come for you. Do you want Him?" Amen and amen.

Let's pray:

"God, how good it is to know that You have chosen us, that You have rescued us, that You have come for us. Lord, I pray that now we would choose to say 'Yes' to You. In Jesus Name, Amen."