

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

They have long been two of life's biggest questions. Questions asked by so many people throughout the years, and for many, with an answer that has never truly been satisfying, even after years and years of searching for the right one. Do you know what questions those are? How did I get here? Why am I here?

I'm guessing your answer would be quite different from, oh, well, let's say, a scientist who believes in evolution, or a secular philosopher, or even an unbeliever. Because, while they search, you already know the right answer. It's pure grace. God's underserved love for us, a gift, given to us.

And it's that same grace which the Apostle Paul centers his entire book of Ephesians around. You see, when Paul wrote his letters, which became our books of the Bible, he wrote them to many of the Christian churches. And oftentimes, these letters were meant to address specific issues and problems each individual congregation was facing.

But not with this letter. Paul had spent a great deal of time at the church at Ephesus. The people there held a dear place in his heart, and so, and fortunately, they weren't dealing with any pressing matters. So, what to do with this congregation you love, you miss, you want to talk to them, but they don't have any problems to deal with? Well, you write about the greatest thing there is. At least, that's what Paul did. This entire letter focuses on the amazing grace of God, and really, it answers two of life's biggest questions, "How did I get here?" and "Why am I here?"

Throughout these coming weeks, as we walk through the book of Ephesians, we're going to see the answers to those two questions, seeing what God's grace means for our lives and how we respond to that grace. But for this morning we look at the first question, "How did I get here?" Well, God's gift of grace chose you before time.

If you're looking for God's gift of grace, look no further than our verses from Ephesians this morning. Paul starts out this morning by saying, "Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us...with every spiritual blessing." And then he goes on to name those spiritual blessings.

I have to tell you, when I read those verses for the first time this past week, I was just floored by the wealth of riches, the huge amount of blessings the apostle Paul describes in these few verses, blessings which are ours because of grace, because of God's love. And maybe you had a similar reaction when I read those same words just a few moments ago.

This is the God we praise. This is the God who loves you. This is your God of grace.

It's the triune God. Now, I know we just finished a sermon series on the Triune God, but here they are again, all three persons of the Trinity, all three essential in God's gift of grace being ours. And here's how each of them are. The Father chose us, the Son redeemed us, the Holy Spirit is our seal.

The Father, he pre-destined us. He chose you before time. Do you understand the implications of that statement? That's really the answer to the age-long question, "How did I get here?" Well, by divine election. God's choosing you before time.

Before any of you were a twinkle in your parents' eyes. Before the world was even created, before the first man and woman were created. Before such a thing as time even existed, God chose you.

And what God chose each of us to be? Holy and blameless. Right, that was God's original intent at creation, man and woman, along with the rest of his creation, they were good. They were perfect. And of course, creating them that way, God was perfectly right to expect them to remain as he had created them, holy and blameless.

Well, you know how that story goes. A serpent, a piece of fruit, one little lie resulted in the greatest misstep in all of history, the fall into sin. The ability to be perfect, to be pure, holy and blameless, lost forever, replaced by lives full of sin.

You and I, we are still suffering the lingering effects of that fall even today. The times we get angry and lash out at our spouse, our children, our friends, our co-workers, often over some small matter.

The resentment I often harbor in my heart against God because, while he says he works out everything for my good, I don't always see it that way, with illnesses in my family, overwhelming bills to pay, angst in relationships, especially in my relationship with God.

How our words, our thoughts, our actions how far God falls down our totem pole because faithfully serving him doesn't always seem to be that high on our priority list, or at the very least, the highest priority, as it should be, as it needs to be.

And finally, the cold, hard, SAD fact that day after day, because of sin, people are dying. And not just a physical death. People are dying a spiritual death and are now suffering its eternal consequences, life forever with the devil in hell.

So, do you know why God chose us? It's not because we are holy and blameless. No, far from it. Not because of what we've done, but because of what he's done. Because of his grace. Because even before creation, God knew about the fall into sin. God knew every human being since Adam and Eve would follow in their sinful footsteps, long shots from being holy and perfect, as he created you and me to be.

He knew what spiritual misfits we would be, how by our sinful acts we would show ourselves to be children of the devil, so unworthy, so undeserving of his love and his blessings because we could never be able to follow his simple command to be perfect, no, not on our own.

So God chose us. He predestined us to be adopted. Had this plan in mind all along. Had you and me in his mind all along. The Bible says, "God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Our loving God hates sin, but he hates seeing men and women going to hell even more.

So when we were powerless to do anything to save ourselves, when we were so undeserving of God's love, he adopted us. Now, people I've talked to who have been adopted or who have adopted someone, if there's only one word they could use to describe the process, it would be love. Adoption takes place because of love. There are people who need that love, and there are others who have a lot of love to give.

In our lives, that person with a lot of love is God. Huge, vast amounts of it. Incredible wealth of love, especially knowing, so long ago, how we would fall away from him, how we would spit in his face and turn away from him time and time again. To know all that would happen beforehand, and yet, God wasn't fazed. His mind was not changed. He wanted you and me for himself, so, in love, he went and got us.

"He predestined us to be adopted as his sons THROUGH JESUS CHRIST...In him we have redemption...the forgiveness of sins." In time, God saved us. Jesus, the Son, redeemed us. That was part of God's plan from the very beginning. You remember what happened immediately after God confronted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and they confessed their sins, don't you? The first gospel promise, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."

That Son, Jesus, the offspring of Eve, he was the steep payment, the immense adoption fee needed so we could be children of God. Jesus paid the price for our sins, the ransom to buy us back from the devil with his life, death, and resurrection. The perfect life of Jesus, holy, blameless, without sin, just as God had originally intended for every person, but which no other person was able to do.

His death on the cross, sacrificing that perfect life, that was the ransom Jesus paid for us, for the forgiveness of our sins. And so you and I could be sure we are redeemed, that our sins are paid for, for good, Jesus rose. He came back to life, our victor, our redemption and our forgiveness complete. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection so we are adopted sons and daughters of God.

That's the mystery of God's will, the answer to the question of why. Why did God do all this? Why did he choose us, adopt us, and redeem us?

It's all in accordance with his good pleasure. It makes God happy to see his children saved, to see his will fulfilled. That's why it would be wrong to reason that if God chose some to be saved, then there must be those he chose to go to hell. God would never wish that on anyone. He rejoices in every soul won for heaven. He was even willing to go to the lengths of sacrificing his own Son so all could go to heaven. The greatest act of God's grace, God's love for every single person, for you and me, the same love the Apostle John wrote about when he said, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

And you know the best part about all of this? All that love? It's free. Our adoption as God's children? Free. A free gift. The price has already been paid by Jesus. All part of God's amazing riches, nothing earned by you and me, nothing we have deserved. If you look at our verses again, you see they say, "God chose us...to be holy and blameless."

God chose us to BE holy and blameless. He didn't choose us BECAUSE we were. Because God has chosen us to be his children, because Jesus has already paid the perfect price for us, as a result, we are now holy and blameless in God's eyes.

Such an incredible blessing, that we are included among God's family because of Jesus, our Savior. And God has not left us without a guarantee we are. Can you guess what it is? It's the Holy Spirit. God is our guarantee that we are his. Paul says, "You were marked in him, in Christ, with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance."

Do you know what it means to be sealed by the Holy Spirit? In biblical times, a seal was used to indicate ownership. The Holy Spirit, and especially, the faith he has created in our hearts, that is the mark indicating we are God's. We are his children, and as awesome of a blessing as that is, there's more. The Holy Spirit is also our deposit, guaranteeing an inheritance, just like the inheritance any child would have. But this inheritance far outweighs them all. The inheritance of joining our God in eternal glory, living in heaven forever.

You and I, chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, adopted into God's family, with the Holy Spirit as our guarantee, now that is God's amazing gift of grace. To be part of a family we don't deserve to, that is an incredible blessing from our God.

The question so many have asked, have tried to answer, but with an unsatisfying answer, you and I can be sure of. We are here because God chose us. We are God's children because Jesus paid the price for our adoption. And as for heaven, we don't have to worry about our place. The Holy Spirit is our deposit. We have been sealed by God. We are his possession, and nothing will change that. Praise and glory be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Amen