

The Great Plan

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[0 : 00] Well, in May 1940, German forces swept through Belgium and northern France, leaving British troops cornered with their backs against the coastline.

Winston Churchill ordered the evacuation of as many troops as possible back to Britain from the port of Dunkirk in France. And so on May the 20th, Operation Dynamo was formulated.

Now with the Nazis advancing quickly, it was estimated that as many as 45,000 men might be successfully evacuated from the reaches of Dunkirk.

And so on the 26th of May, Britain held a national day of prayer and King George VI attended a service at Westminster Abbey. And then the Archbishop Canterbury, in his prayer at that service, was praying for our soldiers in dire peril in France.

And so Operation Dynamo began the next day. And on the first day, apparently only 7,669 men were saved. So well short.

[1 : 13] Then after two days, the total number had risen to 25,000 men. So still short of their estimate of 45,000. So well below target. And then those in command enlarged the vision.

And a call went out across the British Isles for all available sailing vessels to be piloted by civilians to head across to Dunkirk and to assist in the evacuation of the British troops.

And so by May the 31st, nearly 400 small craft were voluntarily and enthusiastically engaged in the effort. And so the numbers began to rise of those being evacuated and taken back home.

So in response to that moment of national crisis, 933 ships sailed to Dunkirk. I say ships, basically anything that floated.

And you could put people on and get them across the channel would work. And so over a period of eight days, it wasn't just 45,000 troops who were saved. But it was 338,226.

[2 : 28] Sorry, 226. And it's called the miracle of Dunkirk for obvious reasons. Now I use that as an illustration because in our world today, there are many people in dire peril.

God's great salvation plan is operational. God's operation dynamo, if you like, is happening. And so there is an urgent need for action for Christians and churches to be involved in what God is already doing.

And that's why we here, Christ Church Glasgow, are working hard as a church plant to reach people who are lost. We want to be a church, not just for other Christian people to come, but we want to reach those who are in dire peril, whose lives are lost and are heading to hell if they don't know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

And so we want to see men and women brought into God's kingdom. And so today what I'd like us to do is to look at God's great salvation plan here in Ephesians chapter 1.

Because we are part of a movement that is far bigger than just ourselves. It's not just about us in our small room in the northwest of Glasgow. It's about God and what he is doing on the grand scheme of all eternity.

[3 : 50] Because we need to know our place as individuals and we need to know our place as a church in God's bigger picture. So where do we look in the Bible to see God's great salvation plan?

Well, God's great salvation plan is the story of the Bible. And so we look at the whole Bible to see what God is doing. And that's what we're going to think about today, the whole Bible. So it's not going to be a long sermon, but it is going to be about the message of the Bible.

But a good place to look is in this passage in Ephesians chapter 1. Because what it does is it gives one of the best panoramic views of God's salvation plan in one place.

It doesn't go into great detail, so we won't either. But it presents the grand sweep, if you like, of God's saving purposes. In fact, this passage that was read for us is actually one long sentence.

There are no full stops in it like we've got in our translation in the original Greek. It's a sentence of over 200 words. Where Paul, the apostle, the writer of this letter, launches into this avalanche of praise to God.

[4 : 57] And he hardly pauses for breath in what he's saying. So Paul shows us how God is working out a salvation plan. Not just for individuals, but for the entire cosmos.

Where God is going to unite all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. And so it's a great picture, a great illustration here of God's salvation plan.

So we're going to look at this afternoon. Three points are on the back of some piece of paper that you'll find on your table. Three points are what God has done. He's blessed us in Christ. Secondly, how God has done it according to his will.

Thirdly, why God has done it to unite all things under Christ. What God has done, how God has done it, and why God has done it. So first of all, what God has done. He has blessed us in Christ. Verse 3, if we read it, says, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

[5 : 59] So Paul praises God for every spiritual blessing in Christ. He's speaking to the Ephesian Christians, saying that God has blessed us in the past tense.

And so he's talking about himself, and he's talking about them, but he's also talking about every single Christian. Because when you become a Christian, like Salmon explained, when you follow Jesus, then you receive every spiritual blessing from God.

So God hasn't held anything back in what he's given to his people. And so we might have different gifts, and we might have different lives, but we all have every spiritual blessing in Christ if we are a Christian.

And so that means we're never more spiritually blessed than other people, or less spiritually blessed than other people who are believers, because God's given us every spiritual blessing.

And Paul reminds us of this 11 times when he tells us of everything that we have in Christ. So look down at your Bible. In verse 3, he says, Every spiritual blessing is in Christ.

[7 : 09] Those words, in Christ. In verse 4, he chose us in him. In verse 5, we are adopted through Jesus Christ. In verse 6, God has freely given us grace in the one he loves, who is Jesus.

In verse 7, we read, in him, we have redemption. Verse 9, God has made known his will in Christ. Verse 10, God will unite all things under Christ.

Verse 11, in him, we were chosen. Verse 12, we have put our hope in Christ. In verse 13, we were included in Christ, and we were marked in him with the Holy Spirit.

So we owe everything to Jesus. And with Jesus, we have every spiritual blessing when we're united to him by faith. And so if you don't know Jesus Christ, Paul's saying you don't have anything.

So he's describing here what it means to be a Christian. To be in Christ means we get every spiritual blessing Jesus has won for us.

[8 : 21] No blessing of salvation is withheld. So when Paul talks about the heavenly realms or the heavenly places, he's not talking about being in heaven.

He's talking about the spiritual and the eternal dimensions of the reign of Jesus, who is the king.

Jesus reigns and rules over all. And these heavenly realms mean that Jesus, because he died and was resurrected, he defeated Satan, he defeated sin, he defeated death.

And so now he is enthroned as king. And so he has ultimate power, he has ultimate authority in the heavenly realms. Which means when we belong to Jesus and are united to him, then nothing can harm us, either in this life or for all eternity.

We're safe and we're secure in him. And so we can enjoy this salvation right now. And we can look forward to its full flourishing in the future.

Because we see here that it's coming. And so what Paul wants us to do is to adopt an attitude of praise to God for all of these spiritual blessings that he gives to us in Christ.

[9 : 31] Let me try and explain or illustrate. I love sport. I enjoy playing sport. I enjoy watching sport. And the point of all sport is that you win. Why would you do it unless you win?

And I don't mean just winning personally. What I love about sport is winning because it's great to see the reaction either of an individual or of a team when they win something that they've worked really hard for.

Seeing the sheer delight just overflow is brilliant because of what they've achieved. And it might be children winning a rugby match at school or it might be an Olympian winning a gold medal or it

might be Norwich City beating Manchester City in the premiership.

Whatever it is, when you look at the winning team and you see their reaction and you see their joy and you see their delight, it is a great sight to behold. And it's one of the greatest privileges in sport. Winning when you have worked hard. But as good as that is, nothing is compared to the greatest privileges in the world which belong to those who are in Christ.

[10:42] That's why Paul reacts to these blessings with overflowing praise because while sports people might work hard for what they win or for what they achieve, what we see here is that God gives us all of these amazing blessings in Christ.

Jesus is the one who has won them for us and he invites us to share in his prize with him. Which is fantastic. So God gives these blessings to his people.

So what are the specifics of these blessings then? Well, that's when we move on to our second point. So first of all, what God has done, he's blessed us in Christ. Secondly, how God has done it. Well, he's done it according to his will. In other words, God has done it because he wanted to do it. So verse 4 to verse 14 specify all of these spiritual blessings.

And you see that they're the activity of the three persons of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. So the blessings of salvation are authored by the Father, they're accomplished by the Son, and they're applied by the Spirit.

[11:48] So first they're authored by the Father, verse 4 to 6. How is God the Father, the author of our salvation? It's because he has chosen us and adopted us.

Verse 4, for he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. So Paul's telling the Ephesians that God chose them before the world was made.

And so that's true of you and of me if we believe in Jesus Christ. We're only a Christian because God chose us.

Not during our lifetime, not even before we were born, but even before the world was made. We're told that God chose us. So our salvation is based solely on God's decision, on what he has decided to do, not on anything that we have chosen to do.

And so we might struggle to understand words like predestination or election, and yet God's choice of his people is a reality and it's a fact.

[12:59] So somebody might say, well, didn't I choose to become a Christian? Wasn't it my choice? The answer is only because God first chose you. Why did God choose us?

Paul goes on and tells us in verse 5, in love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will.

He chose us in love because it was his pleasure and will. In other words, he wanted to. And so in case we're tempted to think, because God's chosen me, then it doesn't matter how I live my life or how I behave.

See what Paul says about why God chose us. Verse 4, he chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight. So how have we been chosen?

Well, we read, in love he predestined us for adoption. So God chose us to be his children because by nature we aren't his children.

[14:02] We're his enemies by nature. And so adoption is about bringing somebody who isn't a child of birth into a family.

So when Paul was writing in the first century, people would often adopt slaves because they wanted somebody to inherit their estate when they died.

And if they didn't have children, they would adopt somebody to be the heir. And so Paul's saying something radical here. He's saying that God the Father chooses us for adoption so that we'll inherit a share of his son's glorious estate in heaven.

He's chosen to unite us to Jesus so that we can enjoy all of his privileges and blessings. Let me try and illustrate.

In 1976, which was a good year, a Royal Jordanian flight was guided safely to a crash landing. And the plane overshot their runway and crashed into a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan.

[15:08] And everybody in the plane was safe. But there in the rubble was one screaming little girl because all of her family had been killed by this airplane. But then King Hussein of Jordan adopted this little girl into the royal family.

And she was called Abir. And so she went from being an orphan to being a princess. From having nothing to having a family who ruled the kingdom in which she lived.

And if you look at, if you Google the story, you'll see this girl Abir in the family portrait. And she looks different from everybody else. But she is there as a part of the family. And it's a fantastic story. But it's nowhere near as special as the privileged relationship that we have with God that's described here. Because we have been chosen by the Father as unlovely and unworthy as we are.

And he has saved us and rescued us. So God is the Father and the author of our salvation. Our salvation is also accomplished by the Son.

[16:18] And we see that in verse 7 to 10. How has Jesus accomplished our salvation? Well, read verse 7 and 8. In him we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Be lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And so Paul uses this word redemption here to describe what Jesus has done for us. So the background to this word redemption is in Roman society.

It's also in the Old Testament when God redeemed his people from slavery in Egypt. So redemption essentially means being set free from slavery or from imprisonment through the paying of a ransom price.

Being set free through somebody paying a price. And so when Paul says in him we have redemption through his blood. He's saying that our redemption comes through Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross.

Because we're all slaves. We're all in slavery to sin. We're trapped. And we deserve to be condemned. And there's nothing that we can do to free ourselves.

[17:29] And yet by his death on the cross Jesus has bought us back. Paying for our sins through his blood.

So by his death on the cross Jesus brings us back to God. Do you know what the best four words to learn are when you go on holiday to a foreign place?

Four words that are essential in any country you go to. Let me just tell you in case you didn't know. They are. My friend will pay. Great. Use those words.

But isn't that exactly what Jesus does for us here? He is the one who pays for us to become a member of God's family. He pays for our sin through his shed blood on the cross.

And that's why Paul speaks in these verses of the riches of God's grace. We don't deserve any of this. But God in his grace has done it through Jesus Christ. So our salvation is offered by the Father.

[18:31] It is accomplished by the Son. And it is applied by the Spirit. So how does the Holy Spirit apply our salvation? Well, in verse 13 and 14 we read, And you were also included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

So Paul's readers heard the good news of Jesus and they believed and then they received the Holy Spirit. Paul says they were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Now when Paul was writing, a seal was a sign of ownership and protection.

So cattle or slaves were sealed by their owners to show who they belonged to. And so what he's saying is that God gives us his Holy Spirit as a sign that we belong to him.

The Holy Spirit is like a birthmark or we've been marked with a UV pen to show that we are God's children. We belong to him. He owns us.

[19:39] And so he'll protect us. And here there's more because Paul says that the Holy Spirit is the deposit or the first installment that guarantees our inheritance.

So the Holy Spirit's presence in our life is God's guarantee that the full payment of heaven, of enjoying God forever, is coming.

So just think of a deposit that you might put down on something, maybe a student flat, put it down before the summer to ensure that that flat will be yours when you get back for university.

And so God, in giving us his Holy Spirit, is promising us what will be ours in the future. And he's giving us a foretaste of it right now to let us know that there is more and better to come.

So that's how the Holy Spirit applies our salvation. And God does this according to his pleasure and his will because he wants to.

[20 : 38] So we get the benefit and he gets the glory. It's all down to him. It isn't down to us. So just notice a phrase that Paul repeats here as he moves through God's work.

God the Father, then God the Son, and then God the Holy Spirit. So just look, after he speaks about how the Father has authored our salvation, he says in verse 6, it's to the praise of his glorious grace.

Then after he speaks about how the Son has accomplished our salvation, he says in verse 12 that it's for the praise of his glory. Then after he speaks about how the Holy Spirit applies our salvation, he says in verse 14, it's to the praise of his glory.

So can you see God's work whereby he chooses, he adopts, he redeems, he forgives, he seals, he secures, it's all to the praise of his glory.

It's all to make him look good. It's his work and it gives him glory. But it doesn't just give him glory, it gives us great blessing.

[21 : 44] He does it not only for himself but for us. We benefit and he benefits. And so all of these wonderful blessings of salvation that Paul speaks about are meant to stir our hearts to praise.

That's why Paul starts off by saying, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Praise. So, what God has done, first of all.

Secondly, how God has done it. And then thirdly, why God has done it. He's done all this to unite all things under Christ. That's God's great plan.

To unite everything under Jesus Christ. And this is in verse 9 and 10. He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment.

To bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. This sentence, if you like, these words unlock this whole passage to us, even unlock the purpose of the letter to the Ephesians.

[22 : 53] Because God is moving all history towards this glorious goal of uniting all things under Jesus Christ.

And what's amazing is that God hasn't kept this secret or hidden. He's revealed it to us so that we know what he's up to. That's why Paul says he's made known to us the mystery of his will.

Not mystery in the sense of being a puzzle. But mystery in terms of being a secret that has been revealed. So God, if you like, has shared his eternal plan with his children.

He's said to us, this is what I'm up to. This is what I'm doing in you. This is what I'm doing in the world. This is the reason for everything. And so everything, we're being told, is going to be reordered and restored under the rule of Jesus Christ.

God will restore his creation. So the very fact that Paul says that Jesus will unite all things means that right now things aren't united.

[24 : 05] Things are broken. Things are fractured. Everything in our world is falling apart. And we know that that is true, don't we? The world is fractured by human sin.

And it's all pervasive. It fragments everything from the created order, nature, right down to us as people and our relationships and life itself.

And every day we're painfully reminded of how divided our world is. How messed up we are. So there is disorder and confusion over the creation.

That's why we've got natural disasters. There's disorder and confusion over our lives. That's why there's suffering and death. So this fallen world that we live in is not the harmonious creation that God brought into being.

And so the promise here is that God is going to put an end to all evil and suffering. And in Jesus Christ, he is going to restore and transform everything.

[25 : 10] So it's great to hear of how God transforms individual people. But God is going to transform the entire cosmos. And he'll do it in Jesus Christ.

It will be unified and united under Jesus as king. It's like God is the great architect. And what he's done is he has rolled out his great big paper.

And he's given us sight of his great construction plan. His salvation plan. His cosmic construction of what he's doing. And he's laid the foundation in the death and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And it's just a matter of time before his great building project, his work, will be complete and finished. And God has revealed his plans to us.

Plans for all eternity. That's how we know what his intentions are for our lives, for our church and for this world. And so there can be no excuse for ignoring Jesus.

[26 : 16] Because God's plans centre on him. And there can be no reason for doubting God's absolute power. Because God's great plan is invincible.

And so it's amazing and it's humbling to be caught up in what God is doing. God is leading people. People like you and me.

And we're not great. I'm looking at you and you're looking at me. And you're thinking that. But God is leading people like us to our true home. Earlier on we spoke about Dunkirk.

And we mentioned Dunkirk's Operation Dynamo. And it's portrayed in the recent movie Dunkirk, which some of you may have seen, which is a great movie. And there's a powerful scene.

And it's powerful because of the music and because of the eyes of Kenneth Branagh, who's one of the actors in the movie. And Branagh plays this Royal Naval Commander.

[27 : 15] And he's tasked with the overseeing of the evacuation of the trapped British troops. And just when all seems lost and the enemy is encircling, hundreds of British civilian boats arrive.

And they rescue more than 300,000 otherwise doomed troops. And so in the movie, there's the musical tension. And it climaxes when Branagh, Kenneth Branagh, sees something in the distance.

And so he's handed a pair of binoculars by the soldier next to him. And the soldier asks him, what do you see? And he replies, home. And then the angle of the camera switches in the movie.

And then it changes to a scene of hundreds of rescue boats coming to save these troops. And then Branagh's eyes fill with tears. So did mine when I was watching it.

Because it's just so powerful. But what it does, it illustrates for us the riches of God's grace. That he has lavished on us. Because we can't get home on our own.

[28 : 23] We've got no chance and no hope. And yet the good news of Jesus Christ is that home comes for us. So as we close, what should be our response to God's great plan?

Well, if we've been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing, then the right response is praise. What else can we do when we are reminded of what God has done for us?

Then praise him. But that's not all. Our praise should lead us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to others. Because that's the other response that we ought to make to God's great plan.

And that's the application for Christ Church Glasgow. Because it's through hearing this message, the message of truth, that people come to believe. Just like the Ephesians did in verse 13.

So God's great plan of salvation is underway. And that's why we want to plant a church to reach those who are lost. And to see them being brought into God's kingdom.

[29 : 24] It's God's plan to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. So because it's God's plan, that's why we, those who are in Christ, must proclaim who Jesus is.

Why he matters. And call people to believe in him. That they would be taken home to be with the God who made them. God's plan. God's plan. God's plan. God's plan.