

Salvation: God's Love Forever

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, January 20, 2013

To The Praise of His Glory

The book of Ephesians is a great place to go in Scripture to understand salvation. And the whole question of 'why' it is that God would show us the mercy of salvation is a good one to consider first. In the first half of the first chapter of Ephesians, we're given insight into at least one of the great reasons why God saved us--and that is for the praise of His glory.

That great phrase--"to the praise of His glory"--is mentioned twice in Ephesians 1:3-14 in the context of our salvation (vv. 12, 14); and once in the more expanded form, "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (v. 6). It speaks of an object (God's glory in our salvation), and the appropriate response that intelligent subjects are to give to it as a result of His work of salvation (praise).

I. THE GLORY OF THE GRACE OF GOD IN OUR SALVATION . . .

- A. Because of the work of the Father (vv. 3-6). In this passage, we're told of the things that are a part of the Father's role in our salvation; that He is the one who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (v. 3); who chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world for holiness and blamelessness (v. 4), and who predestined us for adoption as sons to Himself by Christ (v. 5a). These are clearly acts of His own initiative. He did not *have* to do these things for us; but, as Paul said, He did them "according to the good pleasure of His will . . ." (v. 5b). These acts are utterly works of "grace"--that is, unmerited acts of favor; gifts that cannot be earned. The doing of them highlights the fact that our God is an immeasurably gracious God. The only appropriate response is eternal thanks to God the Father for them; and so, we're told that He did these things for us "to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved" (v. 6).
- B. Because of the work of the Son (vv. 7-12). At the end of verse six; Paul mentions "the Beloved" in whom we are made accepted in God's sight. This "Beloved" is none other than our Lord Jesus (see also v. 3). Paul writes then of Jesus' work in our salvation; that we have redemption (that is, the full payment of the price necessary to purchase our liberation) through His blood (v. 7a), the forgiveness of sins--to whatever degree forgiveness is needed for each sinner, because the measure is not our sins but the riches of His grace; and in whatever sense forgiveness is needed--because the principle is according to His own wisdom and prudence (vv. 7b-8), the revelation of the mystery of God's will to gather all things in Christ (vv. 9-10), and the predestination to a rich eternal inheritance. Once again, we're told that these things were not given to us by compulsion; but that they were done for us "according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (v. 11); and so "that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory" (v. 12). Note that it's not merely that we who have trusted in Christ would praise His glory, but that we who have trusted would "be" the cause of such praise!
- C. Because of the work of the Spirit (vv. 13-14). Paul next continues to speak of the Lord Jesus in the next two verses; but does so to highlight the work of the Holy Spirit. It was in "Him"--that is, in Christ--"you also trusted"; and the context suggest that it was by the work of the Spirit that we heard the gospel of our salvation (v. 13), were enabled to believe what we heard (v. 13), and were sealed in Christ for the promise of future glory

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(v. 13)--the indwelling of the Spirit Himself serving as the guarantee of our inheritance (v. 14); securing us until the day of the full completion of our redemption (see also v. 7). And note, once again, that this--that is, our obtaining our inheritance as God's purchased possession--is "to the praise of His glory" (v. 14).

II. THE PRAISE OF THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE . . .

- A. From those He saves. Throughout the above passage, the praise of God's glory was emphasized without it being stated specifically who it would be that would do the praising. But it's certainly clear that it will be us--those He has saved--who will be involved in the praising. This passage begins with the words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ . . ." (v. 3). In just the act of recounting all that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have done for us, Paul was motivated to break forth in an exclamation of "blessed be . . . !" Later on in 3:20-21, Paul writes, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." You see it further in 5:20, where we're commanded to be filled with the Spirit; "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Our praise to God for our own salvation is a grand theme of Scripture. Paul concludes his great description of God's grace in salvation in Romans 11 with these words; "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?' Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36). As the apostle Peter puts it in 1 Peter 2:9-10; "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." As the apostle John tells us in the vision he was given of heaven, he saw "a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10).
- B. From the angels who behold our salvation. One of the remarkable things that's revealed to us in Scripture is that we are not the only intelligent created beings who respond in praise to God for the glories of His grace toward us. In 1 Peter 1:12, we're told that our salvation concerns "things which angels desire to look into". They don't look into the matters of our salvation as participants; because they are not redeemed. Rather, they look into it as worshippers of God who see His grace on display toward us. A hint of how our salvation provokes praise from the angelic beings is given to us in Ephesians 2:7; where we're told that God has raised us from spiritual death and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus". To whom is it being shown throughout the endless ages? It's not just to us, because we are the ones on display. It must be the angelic hosts who long to look into these things to the glory of God. As we remember each Christmas holiday, the angels

announced the birth of our Savior to the shepherds--and the news of our salvation--with glorious praise: "Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'" (Luke 2:10-14).

- C. From creation itself. We speak of this with the reverence of only a partial understanding; but it seems that--in a sense--even creation itself will praise God for the grace shown to us in our salvation. Creation was caused to suffer because of our fall. And in Romans 8:19-22, Paul tells us, "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."

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In Revelation 5:8-14, we're told of the worship of God that will occur around His throne at the declaration "Worthy is the Lamb". The redeemed will praise (vv. 8-10), the angels will praise (vv. 11-12), and "every creature" will praise (v. 13). All this because of the "glory of His grace" toward us!

That's one of the great purposes of our salvation! Shouldn't we--above all else--be praising Him for it even now?