

Sunday Update

18#7#21

Ephesians 1:1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

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

3 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. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.

Is there something for which you want to say “thank you”? Why not start a conversation around the meal table or over coffee with a friend about the things you are grateful for in your life? When you find something to be grateful for, how does that feel? Our spirits feel lighter for a moment because we have discovered something good about life, even if it is a small thing in a sea of uncertainty and anxiety. Gratitude is a very powerful emotion: it is the driving force behind so many people who spend huge amounts of time and energy raising money for charity – the charity has done something for them or a member of their family and feeling grateful they decide to support their work; gratitude is one of the reasons why we give presents, grateful for the help and support we have received and we want to acknowledge that. We were determined to show gratitude to NHS workers last year, so we stood outside on a Thursday and clapped. Paul wants us to develop a deep and strong sense of gratitude to God for all that He has done for us.

Ephesus was one of the great cities of the ancient world. It was to be found on the west coast of what is now Turkey and was the place where some of the great trade routes crossed, so it became a centre of commerce. The Temple of Diana (or Artemis) at Ephesus was one of the Seven wonders of the ancient world, so the city was a place where religious tourists or pilgrims came; the craftsmen of the city made a good living by making and selling artefacts of the temple. Paul visited Ephesus at least twice: the first time seemed to be a passing visit, but the second visit lasted about three years (you can read the story in Acts 19) during which time Paul preached the good news and taught people the truth about Jesus. Luke tells us that “*all the people in the province heard the word of the Lord*” and “*the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour*”. He also tells us of a riot in the city when the craftsmen complained about the Christians: because of the gospel, people no longer wanted Artemis artefacts in such great numbers and their livelihoods were being affected. It is to the church in this great city that Paul writes this letter, probably from prison in Rome in AD 60.

Today's passage in Ephesians 1 is all about gratitude. It is possible that verses 3-14 are originally all one sentence, with ideas just pouring off Paul's pen one after the other without taking time to compose real sentences. This is a big-picture reading; Paul is not taking time to consider these ideas in any detail, but is simply pouring them out onto the page so that the Christians in Ephesus have some idea of the scale of what God has done for them. Television documentaries and sports programmes have developed the use of cameras in drones or on zip-wires, so that we see the view from above, so that we see the whole mountain, or the whole golf course all in one shot; the big picture so often has a wow-factor in it! This piece of Bible can be quite hard to understand for that reason: there is no time to stop to think "what does that mean?" before Paul moves us on to something else. The whole point is to give us the big picture of all that God has done for us in Jesus, each word and idea is a gift or blessing from God.

"Every spiritual blessing in Christ" – that is what God has given us and that is what Paul sets out to explain. God has chosen us to be part of His family; He has adopted us to be His children and to belong to Him; He has set us free and given us our liberty; He has forgiven us our sins; He has given us wisdom and understanding, insight into what God is like, what life is like and what the world is like; we have hope. This is not theory in general, but He has given these gifts to us – it is personal; His Spirit lives in us and the Spirit is the deposit, the first instalment guaranteeing the rest, the seal (in wax on a letter rather than the animal in the sea!) making the promises of God sure and certain. This is our salvation; God has done all of this for us. When we talk about salvation, it includes all of these ideas, and God has done all of this for us. He has done this because He loves us; His grace is at the heart of all of this, God's love to people who don't deserve it. All of this is freely given and lavished upon us – this is not a small gift grudgingly given!

We can carry around a deep sense of guilt and failure because our faults and mistakes – God forgives us our sins and sets us free to live a new kind of life, doing what is good and right. We live in a world where people feel isolated and alone, dislocated – God makes us His family; there is a sense of belonging in the gospel. If anything has marked the world since March 2020 it is a sense of despair, anxiety and uncertainty – God give hope to our hearts, the hope that He is with us and the hope that we shall share His glory. This salvation is old, because God has promised it from the very beginning of the story, but it is still brand new because it addresses the very deepest needs of our hearts and souls and minds today. God has given us everything that we need. At the centre of all of this salvation story is the huge person of Jesus Christ: He came preaching the good news, but now He is the good news; Jesus achieved this salvation for us by His life, death and resurrection and because He lives, He is able to save us completely.

All of this is written to draw from us praise and gratitude to God. The very first words of verse 3 are *"Praise be..."*. Is there something here for which you would say "thank you" to God? You might say that this Bible passage is too complicated for you to understand, so you're not sure what you're supposed to be saying "thank you" for. Karl Barth was an esteemed Swiss theologian of the early part of the 20th century; he wrote many pages and many words to explain his understanding of God and the gospel. He was once asked if he could sum up his life's work in a sentence, to which he replied: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!" if you find most of Paul's explanation of the gospel too complicated for you, then remember this one thing: Jesus loves you, always has, always will. That's something to be enormously grateful for.

Gratitude inspires us to do 2 things. First of all, gratitude inspires us to worship God, to sing His praises and be glad. I'm not much of a singer, but I can make a joyful noise to praise God for His love and for

all that He has done to save me. That desire to worship is inspired by all the good things that God has done for us and given to us. Secondly, gratitude inspires us to live our lives in a way that gives praise to God. We are to be people who live “*for the praise of God’s glory*” so that our very lives give praise to God by the kind of people that we are. Gratitude is a powerful force in our lives, inspiring us to say “thank you” to God for all that He has done for us in all that we call “salvation”, and inspiring us to faith and to live life being what Jesus wants us to be.

There are all sorts of things in life that will dampen our spirit, or make us feel anxious or afraid; if we find something to be grateful for, it might just lift our spirit for a moment and inspire us to say “thank you” to God for His love, and for His great salvation.

Prayer:

Open unto me — light for my darkness.

Open unto me — courage for my fear.

Open unto me — hope for my despair.

Open unto me — peace for my turmoil.

Open unto me — joy for my sorrow.

Open unto me — strength for my weakness.

Open unto me — wisdom for my confusion.

Open unto me — forgiveness for my sins.

Open unto me — tenderness for my toughness

Open unto me — love for my hates.

Open unto me — thy Self for my self.

Lord, Lord, open unto me! Amen.

(Howard Thurman; 1899-1981)

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- People who are lost and broken, to find grace from God with hope and peace, a sense of being loved, a place of belonging in God’s family.
- For people whose hearts are shaped by the experience of life in Covid times, feeling that everything is bleak and hopeless, to see something good, something to be grateful for.
- For people in Germany, Belgium and Holland who are victims of horrendous flooding; may the Lord comfort them and give them grace to deal with their hard circumstances.
- For people who have contracted Covid and are in hospital, that they make a good recovery; those NHS staff who are caring for them.
- For people who mourn because a loved one has died; help them to find comfort and peace; for the process of grief that goes on and for those who feel the effects of lockdown on their deepest emotions and feelings of loss, even if that lasts for years.
- For the continued roll-out of the vaccine to be efficient and effective, reaching the people who need it most; for the vaccine to make people safe, as promised.

- For the next stages in Covid regulations in Scotland, that we may find the right balance and may keep people safe; prevent people from being reckless and inspire people to be kind and considerate towards others.
- For people who are still isolating, still spending time on their own again and feeling afraid; for people in care homes, beginning to meet family again, and the staff who care for them. For the anxiety created by any kind of social contact; for the gaps left in the social interaction of many people, adding to their sense of isolation.
- For Scripture Union events, Day Camps at each of the sites run by SU, for missions in local churches and communities the length and breadth of Scotland, for the few activity camps that are taking place; for Magnitude festival 24th – 28th July online.
- For the Church of Scotland, wrestling with the aftermath of the General Assembly, to have in our hearts a sense of mission, looking to bring the good news of Jesus to the people of Scotland!
- For Churches, some buildings open and some still closed; help them to care for all of their people; may the technology be a lifeline for lots of people; help churches across Scotland to be a light in their community and share the light of Jesus with others.
- For Juniper Green Church as we make plans for what happens next with church services on Zoom and in-person; may God make us wise!
- For our Holiday Club, July 26th – 30th in the grounds of Heriot-Watt University; for children to be involved; for Heather leading and for the team she has put together; for *Jungle Adventure* to be done outdoors and lead people to discover new things about Jesus.
- For people we know...
- This week, take time to think about these words and pray them into your own heart: *“But what about you?” Jesus asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” (Matthew 16:15,16)*

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love:

My heart is filled with thankfulness	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qntf2Y_VNok
Blessed Assurance	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuyf1YQvcwY
God you're good to me	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzZiwHjkgOU
Dear Lord and Father of mankind	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAxIN0egN-I
By faith we see the hand of God	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXB8ihepUpE

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, a tablet or an i-pad, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of "Our Daily Bread" Booklets for June, July and August are now available. Please contact Michael Merriman who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are:



Paul's letter to the Ephesians

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Lord God of all, when we allow ourselves time and space to meet with you we are blown away by the knowledge of your love and plans for us.

Open our hearts, Lord, to receive all you have for us.

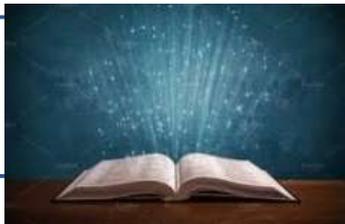
Amen.



Question...



What does it feel like to be chosen for something?



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in **Ephesians 1:1-14**. You can read them in a Bible or find them [here](#).

When Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus, it was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. It was a busy and important city that was devoted to the Greek goddess, Artemis. Paul had first visited Ephesus years earlier and told them the Good News about Jesus, many people believed Paul's message and chose to follow God. Paul was now in prison but he wrote this letter to encourage the people. His letter is all about unity. He wants Christians to know that we are all joined together through Jesus and should work to love and support one another. No matter our background, we have all been chosen by God to be part of his plan and no-one is more important than anyone else.

If you want to know more about the history of Ephesus watch this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FfIE2jS7-k>



Talk together...

- Read verses 4 and 5 again. God chose us as his children before the world began. How does that make you feel?
- How did we/do we become children of God? What role does Jesus play in our story?
- What kind of choices do you make each day?
- How can we involve God in our choices?
- If everyone is a child of God, how might that affect how we treat others?
- What plans might God have for our lives or for planet Earth?



Play together...

Play a game of Top Trumps if you have it. Or/and play “What is the purpose?” Each person chooses 3 random objects (easy or obscure!) Then talk about each object and what it’s purpose might be. What is a human’s purpose?

Pray together...

Invite everyone to find a pebble to decorate or make a bookmark with the words: “Chosen by God”.
When you’ve finished hold the object in your hands while you say a prayer of thanksgiving.

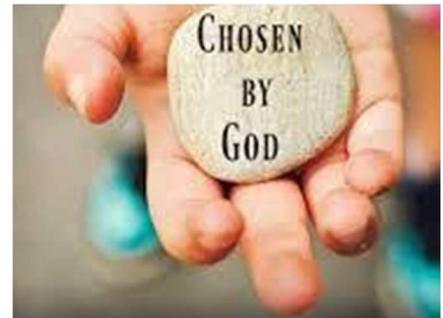
Loving God, thank you for choosing us to be your children before our world even began! It’s hard to imagine love as big as this. Thank you for caring so much about our lives: past, present and future.

Amen.

Make something...

A destiny teller

You’ll need paper squares and pens. Make a destiny teller using instructions found here: [Fold-a-Fortune-Teller](#)
On each outside square flap write the name of a colour, a different one on each flap. Turn it over and write on each triangle a number between 1-10.
God chose us as his children and whatever choices we make, God always loves us and wants the best for us.
Open up the flaps and write positive messages from God on the triangles underneath, eg. You are God’s child, God loves you, you are great/special etc.
Then try out your tellers on each other.



Praise together...



[You say](#) – Lauren Daigle

[Our God is a great big God](#)

[Lord, I lift your name on high](#)