

Midweek Advent 1 | Ephesians 1:3-6
Salvation Willed

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In the name of Jesus, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Christian Church Year is a wonderful opportunity to look at all the work of the Triune God for our salvation.

Each week, we learn and re-learn a different aspect of salvation.

In our Advent series this year, we will have the opportunity to see God's work of salvation more in a general way, considering the Father's work of willing our salvation, the Son's work of winning our salvation, & the Holy Spirit's work of distributing that salvation to you.

Tonight, our emphasis is on the Father's work: willing your salvation.

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We read as follows in Jesus' name.

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 to Himself 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.^(ESV)

So far the Words of our text.

These are Your Words, heavenly Father.

Sanctify [us] in the Truth. Your Word is Truth. ^(John 17:17)

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St. Paul addressed his letter:

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

He was writing to 'saints,' that is 'holy ones.'

People who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, had believed the Good News of their forgiveness and salvation

by the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

They had been called at some point in their lives

through the preaching of God's Word and had been recipients of Baptism along with all its blessings.

What a blessing to have these eternal promises, and from a God who does not/cannot lie or deceive!

But St. Paul called them 'holy' and 'blameless'.

I wonder how many people read those words and wondered to whom St. Paul was actually writing.

If you spend any time in a congregation, you soon begin to realize that congregations are not without sin.

I wonder how many people read those words and wondered if they should keep reading, since it's addressed to holy ones, and through their self-examination, they knew they weren't.

For many of us, perhaps this doesn't seem like such a big deal, at least not right now.

If there is no burden of guilt or sin that weighs you down, then the idea of one's holiness often seems like an easy matter: of course, St. Paul was speaking of their holy status because of the work of Jesus washing away their sins.

But when you are wracked with fear and regret, when you are disgraced for something you have done, or shamed for something you failed to do, you can easily be tempted to doubt God's forgiveness or His love for you.

You wonder why God has been so good to you in calling you, while others who seem so much better than you, do not cling to Him in faith for their own salvation.

It is for such times as this, that St. Paul's words here can be helpful and comforting to you.

Here, there is not the slightest inkling of consideration of your own worthiness to receive God's favored status.

Here, you see that God the Father,

from before the foundation of the world,

had a plan not only to create you but also to save you.

And to follow that plan through all the way into eternity.

He did not consult you about whether you'd like to be saved.
He didn't wait for you to ask to be saved.
He didn't wait to see how you might respond to being saved.
HE made the decision and it wasn't based on you at all,
but upon His love for you in Christ.

This really rubs against our desire to be in control.
A large swath of American Christianity has a problem
with this concept:
that God has done the choosing of those who will be with Him
in eternity.
Those who struggle with this want to somehow put in their own
effort or decision making,
that there must be something in me that led God to chose me.

This is how they, even we, are tempted to try to explain
why God has chosen us for salvation,
while others will receive damnation.

Our logic would like to take a step further and assert that
if God chose some to salvation,
then He had to have chosen others for damnation.
But this, the Bible never says or supports.
Instead, God tells us that a person is saved by having Christ,
But those who are damned are without Christ, ^{John3:36}
have rejected Him.

Consider also that when Jesus spoke of the Last Day in Matthew 25,
He said, He will say to the sheep (the believers),
**“Come, you who are blessed by My Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you
from the foundation of the world.”**^{vs.34}
Those who inherit, inherit as a gift.
Why do these inherit the gift?
Only because they are blessed by God the Father
through Christ, are chosen in Christ.
It is not based on their merit or worthiness.

Nor was the kingdom prepared for them
after they proved themselves to be worthy of it.
But God prepared it before they had done either good or evil.

But to the goats, that is, to the unbelievers, He will say,
**“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire
prepared for the devil and his angels.”**^{vs.41}
If God had chosen some for damnation, then the eternal fire
would not only have been prepared for the evil angels,
but also for those predestined to damnation.
But these will be cursed, not because God cursed them
from the foundation of the world,
but because they would not receive His gift of Jesus
during their life of grace while on this earth.

This truth baffles our minds.
The truth is that no one can completely comprehend it.
Our sense of reason and logic cannot grasp it,
but that doesn't mean that it is illogical, or non-sense.
It is above our reason, but true to God's infinite wisdom.

But perhaps the reason why we can't understand it
is because this teaching is rooted in complete grace.
Grace is not logical, to us.
We have a strong sense of “right & wrong” / “cause & effect” .
But grace is not something that is earned or deserved.
It is a gift, not a reward.

So why is it that the Father has chosen you? By grace in Christ.
If you are looking for certainty of your salvation,
do not look to yourself for worthiness or for a decision.
You falter and fail constantly.
But if you are looking for certainty of salvation,
then look to the Father who never falters, never fails.

Consider our text once again.
Consider how much emphasis St. Paul puts on the Father.

Consider: who is the subject of the actions?

**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 [the Father] chose us in [Jesus]
before the foundation of the world,
that we should be holy and blameless before Him.
In love [the Father] predestined us for adoption to Himself
as sons through Jesus Christ,
according to the purpose of [the Father's] will,
to the praise of [the Father's] glorious grace,
with which [the Father] has blessed us in the Beloved
[that is Jesus].**

Your salvation rests in the Father's very capable hands.
The same hands that sent His Son into human flesh,
so that He would live a holy, blameless life
and die an innocent death on your behalf.
It is the Father's active will that chose you from eternity,
and still chooses you to put off your unholy and blame-full life,
and to be the Father's adopted child through Baptism,
having received Jesus' holy and blameless life as your own.

The Father's will is not idle. It is still active.
Active to bless and to save.
And He has chosen you, for you have Christ, His beloved Son.

Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth Peace, Goodwill toward men!.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria