



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dr. S. Lewis Johnson

Ephesians 1:7-12

“The Work of the Son” -- TRANSCRIPT

We’re turning again to the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. As one reads through this first chapter of the letter to the Ephesians, you will notice in the opening section, verses 1-14, that the thought of the epistle is gathered around the work of the Father, and then the work of the Son, and, finally, the work of the Holy Spirit, after a brief introduction of a couple of verses.

We have been talking in our preceding studies about the work of the Father. And the primary stress of the Apostle’s thought is gathered around the doctrine of divine election. He says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, because he hath chosen us before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

In the course of our studies, not only here but also on Sunday, we’ve been in Romans chapter 8, and there again this truth is brought before us by Paul. We’ve sought to make distinctions that are important in understanding the term “election.” God did not choose those who were good. He did not choose those whom he by foresight saw would believe, and then ratified their choice of him by his choice of them. But rather, he has chosen according to his good pleasure.

Now when we say he has chosen us according to his good pleasure, we do not mean that this is a choice that has any significance. Occasionally people will look at something like this and say, “Well, that’s just like God saying ‘eeny-meeny-miny-mo,’ and picking some and not picking others.” Well think about it. Divine election is not like that, in the first place, because that kind of choice is an impersonal choice. It’s a kind of choice into which a person does not really enter. In the second place, that’s a choice by chance. And in the third place, we don’t usually say “eeny-meeny-miny-mo” unless it’s an insignificant issue. In fact, that’s what children say. They play the game of eeny-meeny-miny-mo. God doesn’t play that game.

In the first place, divine election is very personal. When it says he foreknew us, it means he entered into intimate relationship with us: the relationship of love. It’s a sovereign kind of love. So it’s a kind of love he set upon us. It’s the kind of love a man has for a woman, or woman has for a man. Men, don’t, in selecting a wife – I can’t speak for the ladies, of course – but, men in selecting a wife do not say, “Now, I know forty-two women. Eeny-meeny-miny-mo. Well, it turned out to be Gertrude. I rather thought it might turn out to be someone else, but it’s Gertrude.”

No, no. In fact, we don’t even – when we choose a wife – choose on the basis of: is she a good cook? Does she have a good bank account? Is she good looking? Would she care for me when I’m sick? Does she have compassion? Is she stylish in the clothes that she wears? Is she frugal? Has she got a good job? We don’t do things like this. We might be better off, some of us, if we did, but we don’t do it that way. We fall in love. And in fact, you will see individuals who had the opportunity to marry someone who was rich, and beautiful, and had a good job. And instead, they married someone, well, they’re not so beautiful. They don’t have a job. And they’re gonna be a problem and care, and nevertheless they love them and they have fallen in love with them, and they marry them. And they’re happily married to them.

You see, divine love is like that. When God set his love on us, it was a like a person falling in love. It’s very personal. It’s very wonderful. So, it’s not something that’s impersonal. It’s not something that’s by chance. It’s not chance, when love takes place. And it’s certainly not insignificant. It’s the most significant thing in the world, not only significant for the individual but it’s significant for the whole Body of Christ. Because the whole Body of Christ is the object of the determination of the love of God. And it was his purpose in ages past to gather together a certain people. So it is not insignificant. In fact, the whole church of Jesus Christ is the product of divine, purposive election. It’s a matter of magnificent truth. And it seems to me it’s one of the greatest things that the word of God speaks about.

Well, now we talked about election. We talked about foreordination, or predestination, in which the stress rests upon the goal God has in mind. He predestinated us to be like Jesus Christ, as the Apostle puts it here, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” And all of this is designed to bring praise and honor and glory to the great triune God, Father, Son and Spirit: “To the praise of the glory of his grace, through which he has made us accepted into the beloved.”

We said that this term “beloved” is a term for the Messiah. And so here, we are acceptable in him, because it is by virtue of his redeeming work for us as our representative that we are acceptable. We shouldn’t be acceptable were it not for that.

At the end of the sixth verse, the things that the Apostle has been saying about the work of the Father merge now into the work of the Son. Because you see, the blessing of God cannot come to us by mere edict. Justice must be satisfied. And unfortunately, those upon whom God has set his love are sinners. They stand under divine condemnation. The Holy Spirit cannot indwell unholy people. Something must be done for them.

Many years ago I read in a commentary by a well known commentator in which the story of the prodigal son was told to some Glasgow urchins. Glasgow is one of the

cities of Scotland that is really not generally considered as a very beautiful city. It’s a very industrial city. This city is rather run down in a number of parts of it, or has been in the past. And in addition, it’s not set in an unusual location like the city of Edinburgh or the city of, some of the other cities in Great Britain. And there was at one time a lot of very tough kids that roamed the streets of that city.

A group of them were gathered in, and a Bible teacher was telling the story of the prodigal son. He spoke about the prodigal, and how he left. And he spoke about the elder son who remained. And he spoke about the prodigal who came to himself and came to his father. And as he reached the climax of the prodigal son having come to himself and now coming to the father, he asks the little class, “Now what do you think the father will do to that child?”—he wanted to stress, of course, the fact that the father loved his son so much that he gathered up his robes and he ran down the road and fell upon him and kissed his neck.

The little boy, who was used to a different kind of life, said, “Bash him! That’s what the father would do to the son who returned.” Well, in the case of us, who are sons, something must be done in order for us to be accepted. Justice must be satisfied. If there is no atonement, then the Father must bash us, because we stand under judgment.

And so the Apostle now tells us about the work of redemption. The Father purposed our redemption; the Son has purchased our redemption. So we read in verse 7, “In whom...”

Now I’d like to stop at this word “in whom.” You’ll notice how often in this section the Apostle has been saying “in him,” “in whom.” And we said that term referred to union. That is, it’s the kind of union that we have with our representative, the Lord Jesus. He’s our covenantal head. And he has come, and he stands for those who are related to him, the elect. So, it is “in whom” – “in him” – that we have redemption. We do not have redemption in any other person. This statement “in whom we have

redemption” excludes all other possibilities of redemption. So, in whom, that is, in “the beloved,” we have redemption.

This word redemption is a word that is used by the Apostle in some other places, and it has some significance because it is not the ordinary term for ransoming. It’s a term that really means “to ransom away.” It’s an emphatic word, or an intensive word. There is a term in Greek called “ransoming” or “ransom,” a very active word, *lutrosis* which means “a ransoming.” But this is a word compounded with a preposition that means “away from,” so that the literal meaning of the expression is “a ransoming away.” As far back as the fourth century, commentators, commentators of the Greek text who spoke and wrote in Greek, like John Chrisistum, have commented upon the fact that the Apostle did not use the ordinary word for ransom, but used this intensive word. And John Chrisistum made the point that he used this intensive word because he wanted to stress that not only is a ransom “paid for us,” but that by this ransom we are ransomed away from the servitude to sin, which is natural to us, and it’s as if he were saying we shall never again come under the same bondage. John Chrisistum makes that essential comment in one of his statements concerning that particular word.

So, “in whom we have redemption,” in whom we have a “ransoming away,” we shall not come under that bondage. It’s suggestive – it does not state it directly, of course – of eternal security. We are redeemed. So, he owns us by redemption.

There’s another little story that I like of a little boy, who went through a lot of trouble to make a boat. And it was a rather elaborate little boat, a nice little boat, a model boat. And he lost the boat. And he was very much upset of the fact that he had lost the boat, or it had been stolen. One day, he was walking down the street, and he passed by a pawn shop. And he looked in the window, and there was his boat. But unfortunately, they had a price on it.

And so, he went home. Somehow or another he managed to get the money necessary. He went in. He put the money down, and he bought his boat. And as he

went out of the shop, he was heard to say, “Now, boat, you’re mine. I made you, and I bought you.” Well, that’s how we are his. We are created by God, and we have been redeemed by him, “in whom we have redemption by his blood.”

And it’s through his blood. It’s through the sacrifice. It’s through the violent sacrifice. Blood suggests not only death, but it suggests a sacrifice. It suggests slaughter – that’s the idea in back of it. So when we read in the New Testament we are redeemed by blood, it’s not the same thing as saying we are redeemed by the cross. The stress of this word rests upon the fact, that we are redeemed through the sacrifice, the blood sacrifice, like the slaughtering of an animal in the Levitical economy. So, we have redemption through his blood.

And that is defined as the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. Now that’s an interesting expression, isn’t it? That expression, “according to” expresses the standard. And it’s the standard by which this redemption and forgiveness is to be measured. It’s to be measured by the riches of his grace. So it’s suggestive of the greatness of the redemption: the vastness of the forgiveness of sins, forgiveness of all sins, past, present, future sins – all covered by the blood of Christ. It is according to the riches of his grace that we are forgiven.

Many years ago, I heard H.A. Ironside illustrate the difference between “according to the riches in his grace” and “out of the riches of his grace.” When I was a kid, the original Rockefeller was still living. I can remember him as a man who was the head of the Standard Oil companies. His companies, of course, had been divided, but he was one of the original wealthy men. And he had this habit of giving out dimes to people; it was his way of publicizing, I presume, his name. But he was famous for giving dimes, and so wherever he went, he had his pocket full of dimes, and he would pass out his dimes.

Well that was, Ironside used to say, that was a giving “out of” his riches. But that was not a giving “according to” his riches, because that man was a multi-millionaire back

when dollars were really dollars. To give according to his riches meant he should write out at big check for everyone.

So when we read here that we have the redemption that came from his blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins “according to” the riches of the grace of God, we’re talking about a great redemption, and of vast forgiveness of sins.

Now, the Apostle continues in the eighth verse by saying, “in which,” that is, in which grace, “he has abounded to us, or he has caused to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence.” Wisdom – the insight that an individual has into what is true and wise in conduct, and then prudence – the practical outworking of one’s wisdom. So God has given us wisdom. Christians have wisdom. Some of us need more, but we have wisdom.

We have wisdom in the sense that we look out on the world scene and we see some things are more important than others – that’s wisdom. It’s wisdom to see that the relationship with Jesus Christ is more important than having a big bank account. It’s wisdom to see that the relationship with Jesus Christ is more important than having a right relationship with a friend of mine who cannot abide the doctrine of Christ. It’s wisdom to select one’s friends on the basis of a relationship to the Lord. It’s wisdom to order one’s life according to Holy Scripture, not according to the patterns of life about us. It’s wisdom for a young person to follow the words of God and not the whims of his companions that change with the months and the years.

Christians have wisdom. They have an outlook on life. As the Germans call it, and the German scholars call it, a *weltanschauung* – an outlook on the world that is different. Everything that comes before us is judged by a different standard. It’s judged by the standard of the word of God that’s natural for believers. God has given us wisdom. He as abounded unto us wisdom.

Now that doesn’t mean there isn’t a distinction among Christians. Some Christians sometimes seem to act very foolishly. Sometimes they fall and act according to the world. At times, material things become more important to them than the word of God. They

spend more time in their business than they do in their Bible, by far. I don’t object to the actual time, but I think we’re talking about the question of priority: what really is first in our thinking? That’s wisdom. It’s a wonderful thing to have as a Christian: wisdom.

Now some people have wisdom but not prudence. Prudence has to do with conduct, the application of wisdom. There are people who have the right outlook on life, but their practical decisions aren’t always too good. They know that God is first, that they are redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Those are the things that really count, but they make foolish decisions. They make decisions that are out of harmony with the wisdom God has given to them. It’s probably only experience to learn, to exercise proper prudence, and we don’t ever learn it perfectly. Because when you get old, you can make foolish decisions then. I won’t go into details on that point, but I can think of some which I am not proud.

Now the Apostle continues, he has said,

“He has abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence because he has made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he has purposed in himself.”

So, he has abounded to us in revealing his purpose, and his purpose is to reunite all things under the Messiah, and apparently, in the eternal state. So, “he has abounded to us because he’s made known unto us the secret of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself.” He had the intention to make known to the saints who are in Christ, his great purpose: the mystery of his will.

Now isn’t it a fantastic thing that I, as a human being, have been given insight into the will of God? The world doesn’t really know anything about this. Their ideas of the will of God are superficial and usually wrong. But Christians have been given an insight into the secret of his divine will.



Now, even the beginning Christian knows things that the world does not know. He knows the basis of his redemption. He knows that all of history has moved forward to the first coming of Jesus Christ, and all of history is moving toward the climax of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the kingdom, and it shall ultimately issue in the eternal state. So, he’s been given an insight into the secret of his will, and that is according to the good pleasure of God, which he has purposed in himself. He determined that we would be given that kind of insight. The Lord Jesus spoke about the Apostles as being his friends. He had introduced them to things into which we are introduced by the study of Scriptures.

Let me ask you a personal question. How many of you, today, have read the papers far more than you read the Bible? Would you hold up your hand—no, don’t bother. I’ll hold up mine. I did. I sat and read every line in the first section of the paper this morning. I wanted to find out all about President Reagan’s shooting. And why it was somebody from Highland Park, of all places, did it. But I read every line, practically, in that first section. I did read the Bible this morning. We sat down and read the Bible around the table. But I must confess, I didn’t read the Bible nearly as much as I read the newspapers.

But really, the wounding of a President is insignificant in comparison with the great things of the word of God. Now what significance in the light of eternity shall that have with the secret of the divine will, according to this good pleasure which he has purposed in himself? That’s a magnificent thing.

Now, what is that purpose? Well, Paul says that in the dispensation of the fullness of times, he might gather together in one, all things in Christ. Both which are in heaven and which are on the earth, even in him. So evidently, the purpose of God is to reunite all things under the Messiah. There is to be restoration, unity, with the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let me say what Paul is not speaking about before I say a word about what he is speaking about. One might look at this and say, “Well, it looks to me as if he is trying to say that everybody is going to be saved. He’s going to, in the dispensation of the fullness of times, gather together in one all things in Christ: things in heaven, things on the earth, even in him.” What we know from the rest of Scripture and also the Epistle to the Ephesians, for he talks about children of wrath in the very next chapter, but that’s not the Apostle’s meaning. He doesn’t mean that everyone is going to be saved – the doctrine of universalism, which is a characteristic heresy of Protestant theologians today, unfortunately.

If you go in our theological seminaries, over the United States, and go in our Protestant seminaries over the Western world, in Britain, on the continent, the prevailing doctrine, when the atonement and eschatology are discussed, is the doctrine of universalism: the salvation, ultimately, of all men and women. But that is unbiblical. That is a denial of the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ; it is to make his work of no significance at all. It is, of course, contradictory to many, many passages of the word of God. That is not what Paul had in mind.

What did he have in mind? Well, he does talk about gathering all things together. He talks about gathering them together in Christ. And he also talks about gathering them together in Christ, in the sense in which he is the dominant figure. In fact, the word that is used and translated “gathered up,” is a word that means “to head up” all things in Christ. It’s built on the Greek term for head. So, the idea is a restoration of things, also a unity in the restoration – that is, the resulting unity – and everything will be under Christ.

What does he refer to? It’s a rather interesting thing that so far as I know, the Apostle never clearly speaks of the millennium. That’s rather interesting. Now, he doesn’t deny millennium. And John clearly teaches millennium, in the Book of Revelation. The Prophets of the Old Testament clearly teach a millennial age: a kingdom on earth. The Apostle doesn’t deny a kingdom on earth, but in his teaching, it is impossible,

so far as I can tell, to find an explicit place where he mentions the Kingdom of God on the earth as over-against the eternal state.

I think, rather, that the reason for this was that it was reserved for the Apostle John as the last of the writers of the New Testament and the last of the Apostles to put the capstone on the biblical revelation by unfolding to us explicitly in the New Testament the doctrine of the millennium. So I’m inclined to think that when the Apostle says that “in the dispensation of the fullness of the times he might gather together in one all things in Christ” he’s talking about the eternal state. He’s talking about the time following the Kingdom of God upon the earth, in which all things, all of the redeemed shall be gathered together, and they shall be gathered together under the headship of Jesus Christ, and there shall be the unity of the one people of God down through the ages of eternity: one people of God – I do not mean that to deny that Israel and the Church are separate, of course – but the one redeemed family of God.

I think that, possibly, what the Apostle has in mind is what he writes about in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 20-28, so I’d like for you to turn there for a moment and listen to me as I read this section – we don’t have time to expound it – but it appears to me that what he is saying is expounded also here in this section. Notice what he says in verse 20 – he’s been talking about the resurrection, and he’s been talking to people who denied the resurrection, or at least were confused about the resurrection. And so he, in effect, says, look, if Christ was raised, then there is a resurrection, because he is a man. And furthermore, if there is no resurrection, to turn it around, then we have no assurance of the forgiveness of sins. “If Christ is not raised then your faith is vain, you are still in your sins.” Those people who fell asleep, thinking they would meet the Savior face to face, did not meet him face to face if there is no resurrection. Now he says in verse 20, positively:

“But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that

slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead...” (He talks about Adam, of course.) “...For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order. Christ the first fruits, afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and authority and power, for he must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, for he hath put things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he has accepted who did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject to him who put all things under him that God may be all in all.”

In other words, there is a program that has as its ultimate, God: all things in all.

In the meantime, the Son as the mediatorial Messiah, is working to the accomplishment of the purpose of God, and that purpose of God is that all things are ultimately under him, under God, united, in that sense. It appears to me that’s what Paul is saying here when he says that “in the dispensation of the fullness of times, he might gather together in one all things which are in Christ, both which are in heaven, and are in earth, even in him.”

And he says in the eleventh verse, “and in whom we also have obtained an inheritance.” That, of course, is a wonderful truth: “in whom we have obtained an inheritance.” The Greek word, however, may also be rendered – and is probably supposed to be rendered, most scholars feel – by the term, “chosen as God’s inheritance.” Let’s render it that way: “In whom we have also *been chosen* as God’s inheritance, according to the purpose of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.”

So we have been chosen, as God’s inheritance. All people would like a great inheritance, wouldn’t they? Would you like to know that the time would come when you would inherit a large sum of money? But, look. Look what God expects. At first glance you might think he has a very poor inheritance. Do you know what it is? It’s you.

So, we read here, “in whom also you have been chosen as God’s inheritance. Mighty poor inheritance. But really a very great inheritance. Because, God looks at this not as we are now, but, as he is going to make us. What is he going to make of us? He’s going to make us like Christ. He wasn’t satisfied with just one son; he wanted a lot of sons. He wanted to bring many sons unto glory. And so he’s going to bring many sons unto glory, and he’s going to pass, some of us, through death and resurrection. And he’s going to take some of us while we’re still living, but through the resurrection make us different.

And he’s going to give us a body that is like unto Jesus Christ’s own body of glory. He’s going to eradicate the sin nature and the sin principle with us. He’s going to make us shining exhibitions of his magnificent grace. So that in the ages to come he will show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

One of the most wonderful things about heaven to me is the fact that we are going to be able to hear the testimony of all the saints. You know, Campus Crusade, when they have a worker, a person who wants to be a worker, they have them write up their testimony. That’s one of the things they do. That’s very useful in getting money, of course, and you ought to be able to tell your testimony in a dramatic way. The more dramatic you can do it, of course, the more effect you have.

So one of the exercises they put you through – I’m not trying to be too critical of that – one of the things they put you through is to write your testimony, and then you give it. And then they criticize it. And then you rewrite it, until you can give it and it makes a good impression.

Well, we’re not going to have to do that in heaven. Because the truth will out. And all will see the magnificence of the work of God in salvation of each one of us.

Today I opened up *Decision* magazine and there was a remarkable testimony in it of a man who was fifty years of age, and converted by the grace of God. It was a wonderful story, and a story of what God has been doing in his life. Well one of the things that shall take place throughout eternity is the manifestation of the magnificent grace of God and what he now has by virtue of his work. Not of anything in us, but totally of his own glory. That’s what’s meant when it says that “we have been chosen as God’s inheritance.” And he has a magnificent inheritance. It just doesn’t look very good right now. But it is a great inheritance.

Now, finally, in order to assure his readers, that there is a certain consummation in the program, that is, that this holy heritage of God is really going to be his someday, he says in verse 11”

“According to the purpose of him of who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.”

So God works all things according to the counsel of his own will.

What is the providence of God, put simply?: God’s care over everything in his universe. Every little thing in the universe is subject to the purpose and planning of God. “According to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will.” There are no accidents in the program of God. All things are things that take place within the counsel of his will.

Everything. Notice how universal it is: “of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will.” Every little thing. Because in the final analysis, many of the greatest things are the result of very little things. Let’s just say – just an illustration – let’s suppose that that young man who fired that .22 pistol had been one inch closer to his target than

he was – one inch. What great things would have transpired in this country. One little inch. You see, often the little things are the things that are really the important things. God is not a God who handles the big things but leaves the little things up to us. It’s the little things that make the big things happen.

So, he says, “according to him who works all things according to the divine counsel of his will” – that’s divine providence. That simply is God’s care over everything in his universe. And we believers – and unbelievers, too, for that matter – but we believers stand under the providence of God. That’s magnificent, isn’t it?

Everything: our choice in ages past, the fact that we will be here when this great final event – everything gathered under the headship of our great Savior Lord Jesus Christ – when all of the stages and ages of history reach their climax, and everything is finally handed over to God, that God may be all in all – everything is under the control of our magnificent God. That has great practical significance, because it means that whatever little thing is troubling you is part of this providence. And it’s part of his plan. One could talk forever about this, but it’s so vast, so significant, so obvious, that we’ll just let it rest at that.

May God help us to appreciate, not only the planning of the Father, but the purchase the Son has made of us.

And then next time in our studies we will look at the work of the Spirit, briefly, and then move on to discuss the Apostle’s prayer for divine illumination given in the latter part of chapter 1. Let me close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this magnificent passage which so beautifully expounds the redemption that is ours. A redemption that reached us when we were in sin. A redemption that covers all of the steps of our life until we reach the presence of the triune God. A redemption that covers with cosmic significance all of the events of this earth. We look forward to the day when all men shall acknowledge the sovereignty of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lord, if there should be someone listening who does not know this wonderful God who has loved, and who has loved, and who has sacrificed and redeemed, and who works to magnify his own magnificent person, O God, touch their hearts. May they turn to Christ. May they rejoice in the intimate, personal, significant, divine election and purpose that encompasses us with the care of the eternal God. May they learn to rest in the everlasting arms.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.