
WHY SHOULD WE PRAISE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST?Sermon for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost, 2018

Ephesians 1:3-14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from Ephesians 1:3-14, our Second Reading read before: **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 before He made the world, His love led Him to choose us in Christ to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love ⁵ He predestined us to be adopted as His own sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the good pleasure of His will. ⁶ He did this that His glorious grace, which He bestowed on us in His dearly loved Son, might be praised. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, because of God's rich grace. ⁸ He caused His grace to abound toward us in all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ when He made known to us the mystery of His will. According to His good pleasure it was His purpose in Christ ¹⁰ to manage everything, both in heaven and on earth, in such a way that, when the right time came, He might summarise all things in Christ. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance. He who carries out everything exactly as His will plans it has predestined us according to His purpose. ¹² He did this that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might praise His glory. ¹³ When you heard the message of the truth, the Good News that you have been saved and when you became believers, you were also sealed in Him by the Holy Spirit, whom God promised. ¹⁴ That Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems us to be His very own, that His glory may be praised.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The explanation of the 1st commandment in our catechism says that: *We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.* As Christians, we look to the one true God for all that we need. This is the God who created and sustains us, who redeemed us by giving Himself to be crucified for us in the God-man, Jesus, and who sanctifies us through the power of His Holy Spirit. There is no other God. God generously provides us with all that we need for our daily lives and eternal salvation. Jesus Himself tells us

not to be anxious about our life, because God takes care of us.¹ Even so, how many times do worrying thoughts cross our minds! And there are plenty of them, I'm sure.

The Apostle Paul gives good advice when he says that rather than worrying about things, we should thank God for the blessings of His love and grace. Paul says: **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

People often fall into the habit of only going to God when the going gets tough, and then seemingly forgetting Him when things are going well. There are many good reasons for us – and all mankind - to bless the Lord, to praise Him and to thank Him both when times are good, and when they are not so good. We have reason to thank and praise Him for the many manifold *bodily* gifts which He showers upon us. We have reason to thank Him that He has called us into existence, for creating us. We thank Him that He has given to us our body and soul, our eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and our senses. We thank Him that He has preserved us to the present hour, and that He provides for us with all that we need to support our body and our life.

Even if there are times when it appears that He does not give us everything in great abundance, nevertheless we must at all times confess that He always gives us what we need. Shortly after the Last Supper, Jesus asked His disciples, “*When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?*” They answered: “*Nothing,*” (Luke 22:35). If this same question is asked of us, may our answer be that of the disciples.

Although we have many reasons to thank and praise God, so far we have only mentioned *bodily gifts* that we are continually enjoying. But we should be especially thankful for the *spiritual gifts* which He has prepared for us and which He so graciously gives us for our enjoyment and happiness in time and in eternity. For these, above all else, we are to praise and thank God.

Paul mentions three outstanding deeds of God in our behalf for which we are to praise Him. First, we are to praise God *that He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world*. Paul says: **⁴ For before He made the world, His love led Him to choose us in Christ to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love ⁵ He predestined us to be adopted as His own sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the good pleasure of His will.** In Christ, God chose us to be holy and blameless. It is not that we were holy and blameless to begin with, and for that reason God took a liking to us and chose us. No, far from it! God saw us in our sinful and helpless

¹ Luke 12:22-29

condition and determined to help us, to rescue us and save us out of the mass of the fallen, condemned and helpless human race. He chose us when we had no righteousness to offer. In fact, He chose us before we were born, before the world even existed. God chose us, Paul says, not *because* we were holy and blameless, but He chose us **“to be holy and blameless.”** He chose us - sinners that we are - in order to make us righteous in Christ. Every spiritual blessing rests on Christ and His saving merit.

God did this **in accordance with the good pleasure of His will.** There was nothing in us, no merits of our own that prompted Him to choose or elect us. We might simply say that He did it because He wanted to do it, prompted by His great love for us. It was an act of His own pure goodness, originating only and wholly in the freedom of His own thoughts and loving counsel. His grace, His love toward us, prompted Him to choose, or for a better term, elect us. He chose us to be His children, us who by nature are just as sinful, just as corrupt as the rest of mankind, not on the account of any, even the least, worthiness in us, but only for the sake of Him who before the foundation of the world was laid and ordained to be the Saviour of the world and who, when He came into the world, did work out our salvation.

At this point the question could be asked: Why did God choose us and not others? But this is a question that shouldn't be asked. Rather, we are to be satisfied with what the Bible in many other places tells us, namely, that those who are lost are lost through their own fault. We are not to judge God and to sit in judgement over Him. On the contrary, we should bless Him, praise Him, and devoutly confess: *How deep are the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge; how impossible it is to search out His decisions and to trace His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His advisor? Or who has first given God something that He should pay him back? For all things are from Him, and through Him, and for Him. To Him be glory forever,* (Romans 11:33-36).

Second, we should praise God because in time *He has blessed us in Christ.*

Paul goes on to say: **⁶ He did this that His glorious grace, which He bestowed on us in His dearly loved Son, might be praised. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, because of God's rich grace.** In Christ, we have that redemption which had long been promised and expected. He paid the ransom for all the sins of mankind, and we acknowledge this without any doubt. We are blessed with the knowledge that the blood of Christ has paid the guilt of all our sins, that He has borne the guilt of our punishment. The result of this is that we now have a permanent possession of the forgiveness of sins. In Christ, once and for always,

there is complete redemption, perfect forgiveness of sins. In Him, our trespasses are no longer charged to our account. In Christ, we have forgiveness and therefore salvation. We do not have this in a small measure, as this would leave doubt as to the sufficiency of the Substitute ransom, but rather, we have it **because of God's rich grace**.

Furthermore, another blessing given to us is this: ⁸ **He caused His grace to abound toward us in all wisdom and understanding**. In His grace God has given us a wise and understanding heart. By doing this, we are able, with the help of God, to walk in the path of righteousness, to follow the course which is in accordance with the will of God. We have an enlightened intelligence to know God's will, and at all times and under all circumstances to live and walk as the children of God, to avoid sin, and through faith abound in good works.

Another blessing given to us is this: **He made known to us the mystery of His will. According to His good pleasure it was His purpose in Christ ¹⁰ to manage everything, both in heaven and on earth, in such a way that, when the right time came, He might summarise all things in Christ**. In God's grace, He made known to us **the mystery of His will**. For us who are living in the time of the New Testament, the time of the fulfilment, God has revealed His gracious will, His loving thought, His intention to gather from all the peoples of the world a congregation of believers, of saints, a holy family of children, united in Christ, who in eternity, together with the holy angels, shall stand as a blessed multitude around the throne of God, unceasingly praising Him for graciously electing us to eternal life.

Third, in eternity, God will in Christ give unto us *life eternal*.

¹¹ **In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance**, Paul says. As we mentioned earlier, our election unto faith and eternal life rests, not on any merits of our own, but by the determination of God Himself. Our entire life should serve for the praise of the glory of God. God wants to be glorified in us, primarily through His grace and mercy, but then also through His might and power.

This purpose of God was realised first in the believing Jews, represented by Paul and the Jewish Christians in general. The true Israelites in the Jewish nation put their trust in the Messiah even before He appeared in the flesh, and many Jews knew Him as their Saviour before He had given the command to bring the Gospel-message to the Gentiles. In these people God actually carried out His eternal counsel, or election.

But God's plan is not only confined to the Jews. Paul sets the Gentile Ephesian believers alongside Jewish believers when he declares, ¹³ **When you heard the message of the truth, the Good News that you have been saved and when you became believers, you were also sealed in Him by the Holy Spirit, whom God**

promised." In the case of the Gentiles also, as Paul here shows in addressing the Ephesian congregation, which consisted largely of Gentile Christians, God's eternal purpose was realised. They had been brought to faith in Christ by hearing **the message of the truth**, the message which testifies of the divine truth, the **Good News** which told them of the salvation gained by the Saviour. And not only this, being brought to faith, the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts serves yet another purpose. Having become believers Paul says, "**you were also sealed in Him by the Holy Spirit, whom God promised.**" The Ephesians bear a seal: having the Holy Spirit in their hearts. In ancient times a seal was the sign of ownership. For a Christian to bear the seal of the Holy Spirit is an indicator that he or she belongs to God. That is a *present* blessing.

But Paul points to yet another blessing coming from the Spirit's presence in our hearts by faith. We have assurance for the *future*. Paul describes the Spirit as "**the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems us to be His very own.**"

The fact that God has given His Holy Spirit into our hearts by faith at the present time is an assurance that the rest of God's promise will also be forthcoming. It is His guarantee that He'll hold our inheritance in heaven for us **until God redeems us to be His very own.**

Dear friends, by His grace, through the **Good News**, the Gospel, we are made members of that congregation of saints, of that holy family. The **Good News**, which had been entrusted to the Jews, the people of the Old Covenant, has come also to us. Through it the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith. Through it the Holy Spirit also now fills us with the divine assurance that we, already from eternity, belong to God, that we will continue to belong to him, that we are His sheep, whom no one will pluck out of His hands.

The Holy Spirit, through the **Good News**, preserves us unto salvation which is promised to us by Christ and to which we have been chosen from eternity. We can rest assured that in eternity God will, in Christ, give unto us life eternal.

Everything that from eternity has been decreed in regard to us, everything that in time has been done for us in order to bring about our salvation, the full measure of His grace which we have experienced - everything aims at the final consummation of our happiness, at our eternal blessedness. Everything that we now through the **Good News** have and enjoy is the earnest of our final inheritance, our heavenly bliss, the earnest that we will surely reach our heavenly home, where we will belong to our good Lord, be His own, and praise and thank Him because by His grace He has brought us to eternal life.

Surely such an outstanding deed of God in our behalf should make us want to bless and praise Him without end. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Most holy and eternal God, You rule over all, and have given us victory over all our enemies. We come before You with humble hearts to praise You.

We thank You that You so richly supply the world with daily bread, that You fill the earth with untold resources, that You give every seed the miracle of growth, and send the rain to make fruitful the efforts of those who farm the soil. But, above all else, we thank You for that great love that has satisfied the hunger of our souls by sending from heaven the bread of life, Jesus Christ Your Son. Grant that we may believe in Him with all our hearts, and find joy and satisfaction in Him alone. Help us each day to turn to Him who was wounded because of our sins, and bruised because of our iniquities, so that by His punishment we may be cleansed, healed, and forgiven, and may know in Him the joy of unbroken fellowship with You.

Gracious God, You know that we are weak and sinful. Give us the strength that we do not have of ourselves. Fill us with faith, hope, and love, so that we may live as Your children and enjoy life in all its fullness. Give us the power to stand firm in the spiritual battles of this life, the resolve to be Your true and loyal servants, and the ability to conquer our sins and to live in righteousness.

Bless Your Church, O God. Supply it with pastors who pray without ceasing, proclaim Your Word with boldness, call people to repentance and faith, and prepare them for the final coming of Jesus our Saviour and judge. Give all of us opportunities to speak the Gospel to others, and grant that we may do it with certainty and conviction, with a sense of urgency, and with genuine love for people's bodily and spiritual welfare.

We thank You for the many mercies You have shown to our country. Strengthen all forces of righteousness in our midst, and overthrow all the powers of evil. Teach us to trust in You, for You alone help and protect us.

Bless our homes with Your continual presence and help. Put Your Word in the hearts of children, and Your love in the lives of parents, so that they may all enjoy the bread of life for ever.

Deal mercifully with those among us who are suffering, bereaved, lonely, and depressed. Free them from their troubles, and bind them to You, that they may know the security of Your presence, and live to serve and praise You.

All these things we ask in the precious name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

8th Sunday after Pentecost

Amos 7:7-15

⁷ This is what He showed me: The Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb-line. He had the plumb-line in His hand. ⁸ The LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?"

I answered, "A plumb-line."

Then the Lord said: "Look! I am putting a plumb-line among My people Israel. I shall not overlook them any longer. ⁹ The high places of Isaac will be made desolate, and the holy places of Israel will be in ruins. I shall use a sword to rise up against the family of Jeroboam."

¹⁰ Then Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, sent a message to Jeroboam, the king of Israel: "Amos has been conspiring against you in the middle of the family of Israel. The land cannot endure everything that he is saying. ¹¹ For this is what Amos has been saying: 'Jeroboam will be killed with the sword, and Israel will certainly leave its own land to go into exile.'"

¹² Amaziah told Amos: "Go away, seer! Run off to the land of Judah! Earn your living over there and prophesy there! ¹³ You shall never prophesy at Bethel again! For Bethel is a royal sanctuary and is a temple of the kingdom."

¹⁴ Amos answered Amaziah: "I had not been a prophet and had not been a disciple of a prophet. For I had been a herdsman and had also been taking care of sycamore-fig-trees. ¹⁵ However, the LORD took me away from following the flock and the LORD told me: 'Go! Prophesy to My people Israel!'

Ephesians 1:3-14

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summarise all things in Christ.¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance. He who carries out everything exactly as His will plans it has predestined us according to His purpose.¹² He did this that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might praise His glory.¹³ When you heard the message of the truth, the Good News that you have been saved and when you became believers, you were also sealed in Him by the Holy Spirit, whom God promised.¹⁴ That Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems us to be His very own, that His glory may be praised.

Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴ King Herod heard about this. For Jesus' name had become well known. Some people were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him."

¹⁵ Others were saying, "He is Elijah." Others were saying, "He is a prophet, like one of the other prophets."

¹⁶ However, when Herod heard about it, he used to say, "John, the man whom I beheaded, has been raised."

¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent some men, arrested John and bound him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom Herod had married.

¹⁸ For John used to tell Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."¹⁹ Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him but could not do it,²⁰ because Herod was afraid of John. For he knew that John was a

righteous and holy man and he kept protecting him. When he listened to John, he was greatly disturbed and yet he liked to hear him.²¹ Then an opportune day came on Herod's birthday, when he made a dinner for his noble-men, his military officers and the leading men of Galilee.²² When his daughter, that is, the daughter of Herodias, came in and danced, she pleased Herod and those who were sitting at table with him. The king told the girl, "Ask me for whatever you want! I shall give it to you."

²³ He solemnly swore to her: "I shall give you whatever you ask me for, up to half of my kingdom."

²⁴ She went out and asked her mother, "What am I to ask for?" She answered, "The head of John the Baptist."

²⁵ Immediately the girl hurried in to the king and made her request: "I want you to give me at once on a platter the head of John the Baptist."

²⁶ Although the king became very sorry, yet, because of his oaths and because of those who were sitting at the table with him, he did not want to refuse her.²⁷ Immediately the king sent an executioner and ordered him to bring John's head. He went and beheaded John in the prison,²⁸ brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother.²⁹ When John's disciples heard this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.