

## The Sermon

Text: Ephesians 1:3–14

January 2, 2022

### Introduction:

The word “Destiny” has been popular in the last decade, especially the Hollywood movie industry seems to use it a lot. Along with the word destination, we also hear terms such as fate and karma. Generally, people use these words when talking about punishment or reward (For example, what goes around...comes around). These words are pretty common in the belief system of Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism.

The idea of having a destiny is not foreign to us, Christians, either. In fact, the concept of destiny is the centre of our Christian faith. In today’s text, St. Paul grounds the faith of the Ephesians in their election before time began. We see in verse 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””**

#### 1.

St. Paul, in this passage, tells us that our heavenly Father blesses us in Christ Jesus with every spiritual blessing. The term blessing immediately informs us that all is ours **by grace** (*alone*), not due to any **work, action, worthiness, choice, or decision** on our part. In Christ, we have all that God has to offer; there is no need to search for another. It is incredible to consider that God loved us so much that He sent His Only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him as their Savior will receive eternal life.

Yes, all of us need forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. Is there a person who can genuinely say that they have never thought an unkind thing, never said an unkind word, and always has acted in ways that were pleasing to God? We struggle with selfishness, don’t we? Our sinful self is always ready to show itself in our **actions, thoughts, and words**. The awful reality is that we all have **fallen short of the glory of God**. We all earn with our sins the wages of death – not only physical death but also eternal. Every one of us must confess that he or she has not obeyed the commandments of God perfectly and needs to be forgiven.

Meanwhile, we all must understand that we are not able to earn our way to heaven. We simply cannot do enough good works to cover our many sins. In fact, if we try to earn our salvation by way of God’s Law, we must obey it perfectly, and not one of us has done that. So, what are we to do then? Who will save us?

The wonderful message of St. Paul in this text is that God, in His grace, has blessed us with **our election before the beginning of the world**. In other words, before the creation of the world, before our creation, God considered carefully how to save us. This is an act that God does **purely out of grace**. And the way that God determined that we were to be saved was in His Son, Jesus Christ. The heavenly Father **predestined** us to

be adopted as His sons so that, through faith in Christ Jesus, we are indeed children of the heavenly Father. We are heirs of God's kingdom!

This is not simply a general proclamation of God's grace, but rather it is a personal one as well. God loves you! He calls you by name! His plan of salvation is for you personally!. Therefore, rejoice in how dearly God loves you!

## 2.

Even our faith in Jesus is a blessing from God, not our own. Jesus loves you and me so dearly that He willingly became a man. He was born of the Virgin Mary. Thus, Jesus was born without sin. And as a man, Jesus lived perfectly under the Law of God so that He might obey it as you and I have not obeyed it. Jesus loves you and me so dearly that He willingly took our sins, in fact, the sins of a whole lot of mankind, and **carried them to the cross of Calvary**. Upon the cross, in obedience to the Law of God, Jesus died.

Jesus died on the cross in order that He might redeem us with His blood shed and His body broken. Jesus once and for all paid the price of your sins, for my sins, and the whole of mankind's sins. Jesus didn't remain in the grave but rose again on the third day **victorious over sin, Satan, and death**. Time and again, the sign of the cross + made over us reminds us of this price paid by Jesus to win for us that inheritance, which God had planned since before the creation of the world.

Paul reminds us that this plan of salvation was in place even before we breathed our first breath. The word "**predestination**" in our text focuses on the blessing that we are "adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ." It was all because of gracious God choosing us in Christ. St. Augustine spoke of Christ as "the mirror of our election." Therefore, we, who are in Him – who have been incorporated into His body – receive the benefits of His election. What a comfort! **God chose us; He picked us out, He selected us, He set us apart for Himself**. We simply accept that and praise and thank God for this grace.

## 3.

You and I know that it is God's desire that all people be brought into saving faith. And we know this is His will from so many passages of the Bible that point it out. For example: "For God so loved the **world**, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for **all people**" (Titus 2:11). "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires **all people** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3–4). And "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the **whole world**" (1 John 2:2).

But the question is, "how does God bring people to faith?" St. Paul, in our sermon text, reminds us that the Holy Spirit called each of us to faith, and He, that is, the Holy Spirit, comes and dwells with us in **Holy Baptism**. The Holy Spirit changes us by enabling us to have a new heart, mind, desire, and will to do the will of God. In other words, the Holy Spirit leads us to serve God and our neighbor above ourselves. The best way that we

can serve our neighbors **who are Christians** is to encourage them in their faith. The best way that we can serve our **unbelieving** neighbours is to invite and bring them to church so that they might hear the message of salvation in Christ Jesus.

And when we find that we have fallen and sinned against God's holy will, the same Holy Spirit enables us to repent of our sins and strive once again to walk according to God's will. **See how much God loves us dearly?** He doesn't leave us without a guarantee of our salvation. This guarantee is the validity of God's promises, which are the basis of our future hope. So, the Holy Spirit is the **guarantor** of our eternal inheritance.

In **Gospel of John 14:16**, **Jesus promises that the Spirit will be with us always.** And Paul writes in our sermon text, verse 13: **"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.** So, being sealed is a spiritual blessing for us, not just for eternity in heaven, but for our daily lives here on earth as well.

Indeed, the power and presence of God's Spirit is the mark showing that we belong to God. As it is indicated in verse 5, "adopted as his sons," God has marked us with the Spirit through Baptism. The Holy Spirit leads us to **true faith** and enables us to receive the wonderful **blessings of God**, blessings which God determined to give us before the creation of the world. Therefore, we rejoice that we have been marked with a seal. And we live each day anew to praise of His glory.

### **Conclusion:**

What God determined **beforehand** in eternity, He carried out in time. Those He **predestined**, He also **called** through **Baptism** and the **Word**. Those He called, He also **justified**, declaring us in Christ to be Holy and blameless in His sight. Those He has justified, He **promises** to glorify, and His promise is **sure**.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, **God indeed loves you dearly! Amen.**