

The sermon

Intro

We were created to praise. To recognize excellence and celebrate it. And stand in awe. That's why some of you get excited about a car or a painting or whatever it is. That's why I get excited about an action figure that perfectly captures the likeness or an exquisitely designed video game. We were designed to perceive and celebrate and praise excellence.

Far too often we celebrate lower forms of excellence (cars, paintings) to the neglect of perfect excellence. I'm talking about God. Sadly we may find ourselves drawn to celebrate broken distortions of God's perfect design. I'm talking about sin. Things like pornography and the Jerry Springer Show.

What stirs your heart to praise? What are you calling awesome?

READ PASSAGE

Body

BIG IDEA: Doctrine is revealed to provoke praise

If doctrine isn't provoking praise, there's something wrong in my heart.

Point 1: Praise God because he's wisely directing our lives (1:11)

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

We'll get to inheritance in the next point.

If you're a believer, you've been predestined. Chosen to become holy and blameless (1:4). Predestined for adoption (1:5) = predestined for personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Predestination means God determined, before time began, that the people he chose would experience salvation. If something has been predestined, it can't fail to happen.

Predestination is "*according to*" God's purpose. Not a haphazard, random flip of the coin. Intentional. Paul follows up predestination with another remarkable statement.

Purpose, counsel, will

The God who predestines "*works all things according to the counsel of his will.*" What is Paul saying?

"*According to*" indicates there's a basis for what God does (works). The basis for God's activity is his purpose and "*the counsel of his will.*"

Purpose, counsel, and will are three different yet similar words. Taken together the idea is God works "*according to*" his desire (will). What he wants to happen. God works "*according to*" his plan and purpose (purpose, counsel). Long ago, before the foundation of the world, God decided what he wanted to do and he planned the things he would do. God planned out what he would make take place.

How does God ensure every last bit of what he planned takes place? He "*works all things according to the counsel of his will.*" "*works*" means God is active. He's doing something. God doesn't simply permit "*all things.*" God "*works all things.*"

God made plans before the foundation of the world. Then he works his plans in time. In **Psalm 139:16**, David said this about his life:

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.

What's David saying? God formed my days before I even existed. That's planning. That's setting things in stone. What God said about David is true of us. Because "*all things*" includes our lives.

"*all things*" means God is at work in everything that takes place. Nothing in the universe happens in isolation to God's work. "*according to the counsel of his will*" means everything that happens is the outworking of God's eternal plan.

Everything that happens is planned and purposeful! God planned. God works.

The Heidelberg Catechism puts it like this:

"God's providence is
his almighty and ever present power,
whereby, as with his hand, he still upholds
heaven and earth and all creatures,
and so governs them that
leaf and blade,
rain and drought,
fruitful and barren years,
food and drink,
health and sickness,
riches and poverty,
indeed, all things,
come to us not by chance
but by his fatherly hand."

Does this stir you to praise?

Big picture? Everything that happens in our world is in some sense effected by God. Nothing happens by random chance.

If you're tracking with me, you have some questions. I'd note you already believe this when you claim Romans 8:28.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. – Romans 8:28

Christian, everything that happens in your life, God works for your good. What percent does God work for your good? 10%? 50%? 90%? No, 100%. So you already believe God is behind everything that happens in your life. Ephesians 1:11 reveals God is behind everything that happens in our world.

But what about evil? What about human suffering?

1. Ephesians 1:11 is clear.

God is behind everything. We can't redefine God to fit our desires. That's idolatry.

2. The alternative to Ephesians 1:11 is awful.

Christian, God isn't actually working all things together for your good. There's no divine purpose guiding your life. Your cancer is meaningless. You're the victim of random chance.

3. Ephesians 1:11 doesn't mean God makes people sin.

"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. – Deuteronomy 32:4

4. Ephesians 1:11 is true and we remain responsible for our actions.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. – James 1:13-14

We can't blame God for our sin. The blame is always on us. We chose to sin.

5. God has good and wise reasons for what he does.

We don't put God on the stand. God puts us on the stand.

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; ³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" – Daniel 4:34-35

“The Bible insists that God is sovereign, so sovereign that nothing that takes place in the universe can escape the outermost boundary of his control; yet the Bible insists God is good, unreservedly good, the very standard of goodness. We are driven to conclude that God does not stand behind good and evil in exactly the same way. In other words, he stands behind good and evil *asymmetrically*. He stands behind good in such a way that the good can ultimately be credited to him; he stands behind evil in such a way that what is evil is inevitably credited to secondary agents and all their malignant effects. They cannot escape his sway, in exactly the same way that Satan has no power over Job without God's sanction; yet God remains mysteriously distant from the evil itself.” – D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 158

In **Genesis 50:20**, Joseph said this to his brothers:

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Joseph was sold into slavery. Sinned against by his brothers. And there's human intention and divine intention in the same act. God gets credit for the good. Joseph's brothers get credit for their evil. That's what the Bible teaches.

Personal reflections

About the most comforting truth to me in the whole Bible. It's great to know that God chose me, loves me, forgives me, etc. But what if God isn't involved in my life? What if God only cares about where I'll end up? What if God has no input on what's happening in Maine?

Why do I love this truth so much?

1. God is good and wise. Better than the alternative: someone not good and wise is directing history.
2. Ephesians 1:11 makes life purposeful, not meaningless. It's all according to plan.
3. I can rest. I'm not in control. I don't have to be. God is working out his will.
4. Faithfulness is the goal, not forcing my will. God knows better than me.
5. Caution: people won't be saved if no one speaks the gospel. People won't grow without Bible intake (teach well!). Kids won't fear God without instruction and correction.

What does embracing Ephesians 1:11 look like? I don't know if leaving that church was the right decision. But God wanted me to have that experience. I'm 31 and still single. God is wisely guiding my life. My marriage is hard. God gave me this woman for my good. I hate this job. God is wisely providing for me and my family. We have a child in the womb without a skull who's going to die shortly after birth. God has wisely brought this into our lives. I really wanted to be a pastor by now. God is wisely directing my life. Now I'm a pastor and things are hard. God has wisely directed me to this church. My brand new snow blower is going to give me a stroke. God has wisely brought this snow blower into my life. God has a good purpose. Character formation? This is living by faith in God's word.

What about Satan? Satan tempts. Malicious intention. God tests. Redemptive, character-building intention. Like Job, if Satan brought any of these things into my life, God had the right of refusal. God determined it wise and good to bring these things into my life.

When life is hard and unbearable and you've reached the breaking point, God is good and sovereign and wise. He's wisely directing your life. Maybe the problem is my decision-making? Maybe the problem is I need character growth?

If I'm angry about being bald or I'm angry about the weather, who am I angry with? If I'm angry about being bald or angry about the weather, am I living by faith?

Point 2: Praise God because he will bring an end to our suffering one day (1:13-14)

I want you to know that our suffering is planned and purposeful.

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. – 1 Peter 4:19

God wisely wills his church to suffer. But his doesn't mean that we don't suffer anguish of soul when God works hard things into our lives. And suffering in this life isn't the final word.

In him we have obtained an inheritance,

"In him" = in Christ = through the person and work of Jesus.

The idea in the verb "*we have obtained an inheritance*" is to be chosen by lot. God chose us to receive an inheritance.

"having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will" is a theological aside.

so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. – 1:12

We've been predestined for the purpose of praising God's glory. Why predestination? God wanted praise.

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, – 1:13

There came a point in time when they heard the gospel, the good news of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and believed in Jesus, not in their own goodness or merit. At this point in time they were sealed with the Spirit.

Sealed = a mark of ownership. Being marked by the Spirit, we belong to God which entails the protection of our owner (God). We've become God's treasured possession (1 Pet 2:9).

who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,

“*guarantee*” = a down payment that guarantees a transaction will be completed in the future. Our inheritance is a done deal. Being sealed (and indwelt) by the Spirit, our inheritance is certain. “*until we acquire possession of it*” = indicates we don’t have the inheritance yet. We’re waiting!

What inheritance?

God is working out his plan. The church is spreading and sinners are being saved. Suffering remains. But one day God’s plan will reach its climax when all things are set in right relation to Jesus Christ (“*as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite of things in him, things in heaven and things on earth*” – 1:10).

No more rebellion means no more suffering.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." – **Revelation 21:3-4**

This is the essence of our inheritance. We’re not talking about a boatload of money and stuff. We’re talking about the presence of God and the absence of sin. We’re talking about the effects of the fall coming to an end: death, loss, weeping, pain. No more funerals. No more cancer. No more fighting our sinful heart. No more being sinned against. A world without sin and death under the rule of God. That’s our inheritance.

The Bible has answers for human suffering. First, Jesus suffered on the cross so that we could be spared from the suffering we deserve: weeping and gnashing of teeth in hell. Second, suffering is temporary and coming to an end for all those who repent and believe. God rescues suffering people through Christ. The cross and the new heavens and new earth are the Bible’s answer to suffering.

Point 3: Praise God for election, predestination, adoption, and redemption (1:6, 12, 14)

Why doctrine? Why has God revealed Ephesians 1:3-14? Yes, to fuel comfort, hope, and spiritual growth. But the answer Paul gives here is to fuel our praise. If these truths aren’t fueling praise, something is amiss in our hearts.

Doctrine is a praise issue!

Did you catch the repetition?

“to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” – 1:6

Election and predestination are cause for praise. Election and predestination are acts of grace.

“so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.” – 1:12

God predestined us to praise his glory.

“who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” – 1:14

God guarantees the inheritance (sure and certain), a cause for praise.

It all began in 1:3:

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,

Paul blesses God (praise) then proceeds to stimulate their hearts with their spiritual blessings in Christ.

The goal of these truths is praise. Election, predestination, adoption, redemption, inheritance should enflame our joy in God! We're supposed to understand these truths, rejoice in these truths, and delight in God.

Are you bald? There's reason to praise God. Are you single? There's reason to praise God. Are you married? There's reason to praise God. Are you dealing with excruciating pain? There's reason to praise God. Are you dealing with cancer? There's reason to praise God. Are the finances tight? There's reason to praise God.

There's always reason to praise God. If praise is a struggle, the antidote is Ephesians 1:3-14. These are good things to be known and talked about and celebrated.

Non-Christian

Adam and Eve were created to know and love and serve God. They failed the test, plunging our world, plunging us into ruin. Jesus passed the test. Obeying the Father unto death on the cross. Bringing forgiveness of sins to all those who would ever believe. Who or what are you hoping in? Is there an inheritance awaiting you?

The greatest story ever told is too good to be true. A world without suffering, sin, and death. But it's true! Jesus furnished proof by rising from the dead! Come to Christ. Repent and believe! Worship the one you were created to worship! Live according to your design.