

Sermon for Pentecost 8 (Series B) / Election / Holy Trinity

Text: Ephesians 1:3-14

Preached on 07-22-2007

Introduction:

“What have you done for me lately?” That’s a question that is not at all uncommon in the world today. It’s a question that determines the kinds of decisions people make in life. Whether it’s an athletic coach deciding which player to put into the game; a customer deciding which cell phone provider to go with; a voter deciding which political candidate to support, time and time again those kinds of decisions boil down to the self-serving question, “What have you done for me lately?” Sometimes we find ourselves applying that same question to God. As we seek to prioritize the things in our lives, it’s easy to say, “I don’t know God! I’m not sure if You’re worthy of my time and effort anymore. What have You done for me lately?” Today the apostle Paul invites us to reflect on that very question. He asks each one of us...

Theme: What Has God Done For You Lately?

As far as your eternity is concerned...

Part I: God the Father has elected you

Part II: God the Son has redeemed you

Part III: God the Holy Spirit has marked you

Part I: God the Father has elected you

After identifying himself and greeting his readers, Paul went into a twelve-verse doxology, a song praising God for everything He had done for him. He began by saying, “**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing**” (v. 3). What are the spiritual blessings we have received from the Lord? Paul says, “**God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world**” (v. 4). Remarkable, isn’t it? Before time began; before the foundations of the world were laid, God had already chosen us to be His very own. He elected us from eternity to be adopted into His eternal kingdom.

Application:

Attempts at answering the aged old question, “Why are some saved while others are not?” have led to the teaching (of synergism) that salvation comes through a certain amount of cooperation by the human will along with God’s grace. For example, we might think of how students receive academic and athletic honors for their outstanding performances. Sales professionals receive special bonuses after

achieving certain sales quotas. The choosing in these cases is due to some ability or quality displayed by the individual receiving the reward. How different it is with God choosing us to enjoy eternal life with Him! No human achievements; no special quality of any kind played a part in God electing us for eternity. How could it? We were saturated with sin from conception (**Psalm 51:5**), making us objects of God's wrath, deserving eternal death.

BUT God has chosen us nonetheless! Paul reveals God's motive for doing so. He says, "**In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ**" (vv. 4-5). The word for *predestine* here gives us a vivid picture of a fence (or boundary) built around someone's property. So when we speak of God predestining us for life in Heaven, we can think of our loving Father putting a protective fence around us before ever entering our mother's womb. This fence says, "Hands off" to the devil, whose only desire it is to have us fenced in with him in Hell. *What Has God Done For You Lately?* God the Father has elected you for eternity!

Transition:

In addition to God the Father electing you,

Part II: God the Son has redeemed you

For what purpose has God elected us for eternity? Did He look into the future and see that we were more special than others? Was there something good in us that led God to choose us? Absolutely not! The Bible says, "**There is no one who does good, not even one**" (**Romans 3:12**). So God hasn't elected us because we were holy and blameless, but that we might be, "**Holy and blameless in His sight**" (v. 4). That's an important distinction to make. Because, by nature, there is nothing holy (or good) about us! We were spiritually dead, blind, and enemies of God! We neither knew Jesus nor possessed any desire to get to know Him. We came into this world as spiritual captives, enslaved by the devil himself. Belonging to Satan, we were destined for Hell. So we couldn't make ourselves a part of God's family. God had to adopt us into it.

Application:

We are all citizens of the United States. But what did we have to do to obtain our citizenship? Was there some good quality in our human make-up that influenced God to put us in this bountiful land rather than in some famine, diseased, and war ravaged Third World country? The mere thought is absurd! The only reason why we were born as American citizens is by God's grace! In the same way, our citizenship in Heaven

(Philippians 3:20) is not dependant on any good quality in us. If it were, we comfort or assurance could we possibly have? We would be scared out of our minds, constantly worrying; always asking ourselves, “Have I done enough to be saved?”

BUT we don’t have to worry! Paul says that we have, **“Redemption through Jesus’ blood” (v. 7)**. The word for *redemption* here conveys the act of securing the release of someone who is enslaved. What was the last sin for which you needed redemption? Maybe it was the tone you used the last time you raised your voice against your spouse. Maybe it was wishing you were somewhere other than God’s house on a Sunday morning. Maybe it was a lustful desire that flooded your mind when a pornographic link popped up on your computer by mistake. There is really no end to the sins that we need redemption for. And yet, as embarrassing and countless as our sins are, we have been set free from them all – not by our works, merits, or decisions, but solely by the holy, precious blood of Christ. So even though our citizenship in Heaven is free, it was by no means cheap. It cost God everything! *What Has God Done For You Lately?* God the Son has redeemed you for eternity!

Transition:

In addition to God the Father electing you and God the Son redeeming you,

Part III: God the Holy Spirit has marked you

Paul provides further incite into the mystery of election by explaining how God has marked us to be His own, personal possession (or property). He says, **“We were marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession” (vv. 13-14)**. In Bible times a seal was used as a sign of ownership. The Roman emperor, for example, would place his seal on the bottom of a letter to prove that it was authentic, that it belonged to him. God has essentially done the same thing with us. He has marked us with His seal of ownership. He has done so by giving us, **“The promised Holy Spirit” (v. 13)**. But how can we be sure that the Holy Spirit is in us? Should we feel Him working in us through some kind of mystical or emotional experience? Should we be able to speak in strange tongues that no one can understand? No! Rather, Paul says, **“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3)**. So if God hadn’t marked us as His own; if He hadn’t placed His seal of ownership on us; if He hadn’t given us His Holy Spirit, there is no way

we could confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior today.

Application:

But why is the Holy Spirit needed to work faith in our hearts? Don't we make decisions about things every day? Can't we decide, for example, what television shows to let our kids watch, what career path to pursue, what to order for lunch? If we can make decisions on virtually everything else, why should deciding to follow Christ be any different? Because the Bible tells us, **"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God...and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned"** (1 Corinthians 2:14). From these words we know that our election from eternity, our coming to faith, is entirely the result of the Holy Spirit's work, not our choice.

Paul tells us, **"From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit"** (2 Thessalonians 2:13). The word for *sanctifying* here is used in a broad sense to include all that the Holy Spirit has done in turning our hearts to God as well as keeping us in the faith, preserving us for eternity. A better, more accurate translation would be, "God elected us to be saved *by sanctification* of the Spirit." The emphasis here is on an activity that is entirely God's doing, not our thinking, choosing, or doing. *What Has God Done For You Lately?* God the Holy Spirit has marked you for eternity!

Conclusion:

So please don't consider relying solely on the merits of Jesus Christ for salvation as some small, insignificant thing. Believing that takes a miracle. It is a miracle that the Triune God has worked in us from start to finish. For most of us, it occurred through the washing of Holy Baptism. For others, it occurred through hearing, **"The Word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation"** (v. 13). Through whatever Means (of Grace) God used in bringing us to faith, we have received, **"Every spiritual blessing in Christ"** (v. 3): The forgiveness of sins, new life, and eternal salvation. We are assured, therefore, that our sins ARE forgiven and that Heaven IS ours! So the next time you find yourself asking, "What has God done for me lately," don't answer that question with a cynical "what's in it for me" attitude. Rather, take the opportunity to step back and look at the big picture. God the Father has elected you! God the Son has redeemed you! God the Holy Spirit has marked you! The Triune God has made eternity yours, **"To the praise of His glory"** (v. 14)! You tell me, then, *"What Has God Done For You Lately?"* Amen!