

LOVED WITH EVERLASTING LOVE

By Paris Reidhead

(Transcript of Tape)

Tape 1

Prayer

"Our Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom, with Whom, through Whom, You have given us all things. We ask that the eyes of our understanding may be opened; that we may see the things that You have prepared for those who love you. Speak to our hearts today. Show us where we are, where You want us to be, the provision You have made so that we can be where and what You want us to be. Then incline our hearts with that firm unfaltering purpose that we will not be content with ourselves until the Lord Jesus is satisfied with us.

We know that one day we will awaken in Your likeness, but today we realize that You are not through with us. There is still more. And we welcome everything what You do because we know Your purpose is to conform us to the image of Your Son. We worship You. We adore You, God of all grace. May these meditations today, and in the ensuing days in this month, cause our hearts to be filled with praise and adoration, love and thanksgiving.

In Jesus, Name, we pray. Amen."

We are in the book of Ephesians. Two years ago when I came to you we studied the Epistle of the Colossians. We learned a little bit about Colossae. Last year we studied the Epistle of the Philippians, and we learned a bit about Philippi. Now we are going to the Epistle to the Ephesians, but with a very specific purpose, to see in it that which sets for our God in His sovereignty.

The Bible does not teach systematic theology. Men systemize theology. The Bible teaches responsibility. The Bible teaches us how to worship, how to pray, how to praise, how to adore, how to obey, how to serve, but it does not teach systematic theology. That is man's effort to bring together all that a scripture has to say about a particular aspect of truth.

Our approach is from the standpoint of the Apostle Paul who gave us this truth. He did it in the stream of responsibility, in worship and adoration.

We begin with Ephesians 1:1. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God." At the very outset we are seeing the sovereignty of God introduced into the text.

Paul is an apostle "by the will of God", not by the will of his parents who undoubtedly dedicated him to that highest of service, namely to be a religious teacher. He had been born into a Roman Jewish family, but with Roman citizenship, entitling him to the highest privileges of education and opportunity. As a Pharisee Paul was given the privilege of being associated with the teachers whose theology was fundamental in orthodoxy, in sharp contrast to the Sadducees who were liberal in every aspect. Paul had committed himself to Judaism to such a degree that after Christ's and resurrection, Saul of Tarsus was considered a major threat to this heretical sect that declared that a man had risen from the dead and had become a major threat to the security of Judaism. It was in this zeal and dedication that Paul had stood by holding the garments of Stephen and thus approving as a Pharisee (as a Roman he was breaking the law which stated that all execution had to be by the Romans and couldn't be by the Jews) Paul consented to the stoning of Stephen because Stephen had seen Christ alive, standing at the right hand of the throne of God. Stephen had spoken to Christ. This affirmed that this sect wasn't heretical but that Christ had risen from the dead.

So here was a man totally dedicated to the extermination of Christianity who says "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."

And you will recall on the road to Damascus, Paul, with his jaw jutting and his teeth clinched and his will fixed, was proceeding to Damascus to arrest, condemn and have executed all who followed Christ. He was overshadowed by a bright light and he heard a voice from the midst of the light saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

"Who art thou, Lord?"

"I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him "Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

An Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. There you see the very first words of the Epistle to the Ephesians is an introduction to a sovereign God--a God who reigns, a God who rules, a God who controls, a God who directs, a God who is in charge, who has never abdicated government, never relinquished the throne, never put down the scepter of His authority. Paul is an apostle by the will of God.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestined us unto the adoption of children of by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Ephesians 1:3-6)

Ephesians begins with the doxology. This is the most sublime, the most complete, has the most profound insights. We will later discuss how these verses might be viewed as a doxology, a pean of praise, as a hymn of worship. Paul is saying to these poor, ignorant, virtually illiterate, uneducated Ephesian gentile converts, who are a few months, or at the most, a few years, out of the most dreadful paganism, groveling before the shrine of Diana, in the most voluptuous, immoral worship on record, that he was satisfied with the genuineness of their faith. He accepted them into the fellowship of saints. Then he spent a bit of time with them, teaching repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. The Ephesians had some teaching, but not a great deal, nothing like what you and I have been privileged to have. They didn't have the scripture in their language. The Old Testament was all in Hebrew and they didn't speak Hebrew.

Here is a company of believers meeting together, worshipping together, and serving together. Paul is writing to them, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

Human love is but a faint glimpse or a light shadow of God's eternal love, which Paul is describing. From eternity past God the Father has loved them and us. This love is from His heart. It didn't have a beginning; it won't have an ending. Earthly parents provide good things for their children, try to protect them, try to prepare their children to live fruitful and effectively. God has a father's heart, a father's concern, a father's love. He is a sovereign, He reigns, He rules, but He is a Father. How do we join together the fact that God is sovereign and God is Father without diminishing His sovereignty, without diluting His authority. How can He be the God of all grace, the author of our salvation, the source of all blessing?

Understand that now why Paul is going to talk to them about this God who is sovereign, but he first wants them to understand that He is Father. This is not systematic theology, but a relationship. Paul is introducing the Ephesians to their Father, His love, His mercy, the peace that He has brought into their hearts and lives. They are not going to draw back when they discover

His sovereignty.

Picture a child born into the home of a king. As an infant all he knows is that a certain hour of the day a male figure comes into the room, takes the little one in his hands and cuddles him and plays with him and tickles him and laughs and coos at him and makes all sorts of silly sounds that fathers make toward little children. As the boy gets a little older he discovers that when his father speaks, people move. As time progresses he finds his father sitting above the others on a very important looking chair. Then comes the moment when the boy becomes aware his father is a king, with the power of life and death over his subjects.

Now he knows this king as father, but he isn't any less king because he is father. We who once were the children of the god of this world, who once obeyed him, are now being taught by the apostle that the One into whose family we have been born, the One who has by His grace washed us from our sins, removed that great weight of guilt and condemnation, whom we have called 'Aba, Father' is none other than the sovereign of the universe. That is what Paul wants the Ephesians to understand; that he wants us to understand.

In Ephesians 1:5 there is a sovereign speaking (or the word spoken by the Holy Spirit concerning a sovereign) we're in the royal family. This sovereign God is the sovereign ruler over all. So we view this from earth with narrow bigoted little minds. In a democracy it is difficult for us to grasp the divine right of anything by birth or by the choice of others. We like to think we live in a world where merit prevails and only ability is recognized and honored. Can we conclude that there are often other factors that enter into promotion and demotion other than just merit alone? Can we accept the concept that somebody has predestined under the adoption of children to Himself by the good pleasure of His will? (Ephesians 1:4-6) "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

Well, I can understand how from this point of view that there might be a problem or two, but in heaven there is no challenge to God's authority. Everyone acquiesces to the sovereign Father's rule. The angels cover their faces and cry "Holy, holy, holy; Lord God almighty." There once was, but the ones who challenged were cast out (Genesis 3:1-6). Since all God wills is good, those in heaven are content to abide by His rule. They find no problem with it.

But on earth we have another situation. Do you recall what it was the God of this world, the serpent Lucifer, said to our mother Eve, "Yea, hath God said, thou shall not eat ... God knows that when you eat you will be as god and He doesn't want you to be as God. He is trying to rob you, to cheat you. It will make you wise. See, God doesn't love you. He is not interested in your happiness. God only loves himself and is using you." That is the atmosphere of the world in which we live. (II Cor. 4:4) "... the god of this world" hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

Now there are some to whom the light of the gospel is shining. Who are they? They are the ones who have been awakened by the Spirit of God, convicted of their crime of playing God and usurping authority in their minds and insisted on being God in their own lives and have ceased their warfare against God. They have embraced God in the person of Jesus Christ as the rightful ruler of their lives; they've confessed Him to be Lord, King, Sovereign. They have renounced their crime of sin. They have been pardoned from their past, forgiven of their crimes, have a new heart, a new spirit, God's Spirit, and have had certified to them that they have been put into God's royal family, a child of the King.

Paul is not at all surprised that we have been predestined into the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will. God is so good that He cannot even will anything that is not good. Justice is willed by Him because it is good and injustice is evil. Everything that is willed by God has to come out of His character.

(Ephesians 1:3-14 Phillips)

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ forgiving us through Christ every possible spiritual benefit as citizens of Heaven! For consider that He has done--before the foundation of the world he chose us to become, in Christ, his holy and blameless children living within his constant care. He planned, in his purpose of love, that we should be adopted as his own children through Jesus Christ--that we might learn to praise that glorious generosity of his which he made us welcome in the everlasting love he bears towards the Beloved. It is through him, at the cost of his own blood, that we are redeemed, freely forgiven through that full and generous grace which has overflowed into our lives and opened our eyes to the truth.

For God has allowed us to know the secret of his plan, and it is this: he purposes in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in him.

And here is the staggering thing--that in all which one day belong to him we have been promised a share (since we were long ago destined for this by the one who achieves his purposes by his sovereign will), so that we, as the first to put our confidence in Christ, may bring praise to his glory! And you too trusted him, when you heard the message of truth, and gospel of your salvation.

And after you have your confidence to him you were, so to speak, stamped with the promised Holy Spirit as a guarantee to purchase, until the day when God completes the redemption of what he has paid for as his own; and that will again be to the praise of his glory."