

# And the Oscar goes to...

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[0:00] Well, in here, we're carrying on kind of the second week of that new series in the book of Ephesians. So if you want to turn to Ephesians 1, I'm going to read it first, and then I'm going to read it first.

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In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.

[1:29] To be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. This is God's word.

Let's pray. Almighty God, we just thank you for your word, the Bible, and we thank you that this is the way that you want to speak to us. This is the bit of the Bible, the passage that you've ordained in the history of time to be the thing that you want to say to us, your people here this morning, as a body, as a family.

And so I pray that together we would hear the word of the Lord and that we would respond in our own way, individually, but also together.

That you would challenge us, correct us, teach us, rebuke and train us in righteousness that we, your servants, may be equipped for every good work. We ask for this in his name.

Amen. Amen. I don't have to say that we all have a, well at least I think we do, we all have a favorite film and favorite actors.

[2:37] One of my favorite actors is Tom Hanks. What I think I, what I love about Tom Hanks is his, he's got this kind of amazing ability to carry even a bad movie.

Okay. He's, I think he's, he's been in films that are actually, they're not great, but he seems to turn it into like half decent. Anybody else playing that part, the film would have been a disaster.

But the production, the script and the kind of the profit actually that it makes, they're kind of carried by him. So you've got great actors that can do that. The reverse, but do you not, have you not seen that the reverse is also true?

You could have a script and a production that is great, but if you get someone who's wooden and lifeless, that kind of a performance.

Like the, before it even makes the box office, the lead could never carry it and it cans and makes no money. Now our life is not a movie, but I just wonder how you, we often think about our lives because, you know, seven billion people in the world and we can live as if we're the main character of our own story.

[3:56] We are, we can live as if, you know, we are the protagonist, the main character. The, you know, the reality is we all think like that because we're in our own heads, we're doing our own life, we've got our own jobs, family, place that we live in, that's the thing that we think about.

And because that's how we think, because we live in that way in our own heads, we only, we, and we will only ever see life from our own perspective. What that means is, because we sort of live as if we're the main character, the protagonist of our own story, it builds pressure because what it means is that we can try to carry the success of our life on our own shoulders.

When we do that, it leads to the familiar patterns, exhaustion, isolation. We can end up thinking that we're the, you know, that we're kind of unique compared to everyone else.

We can end up thinking that we're the only ones who, who really know what it's like to be us because we're the only ones who've lived our story. Nobody really gets me. That's why trying to be the lead is a lonely, is kind of a bit lonely.

What I want to show this morning from this passage is, and what I kind of want to invite you to think through this morning from Ephesians 1, is to consider this.

[5:25] What if you were never meant to be the lead character, even in your own life? What if the pressure to carry the success of your life was actually never meant to rest on you?

Paul's letter to the Ephesians kind of kicks off with a bit of a spiritual bang, and it shows us that there is only one true lead character.

And it's not us, not even in the scenes of our individual lives. Even in your life today, the true lead, the main character of your existence is Jesus Christ.

And we're going to think about what that might look like, and flesh that out a little bit more. The first thing that we're going to think of is our kind of spiritual location.

That might sound a bit of a weird thing to say. What does that mean? But our location is in Christ. Our location is in Christ. You see, the drama of our lives as it plays out, it only actually gains significance and relevance with how you relate to the main character of history.

[6:47] You know, this is true in movies, isn't it? If you are a side character in some forgettable kind of, you know, indie movie, no one cares.

But if you're an extra in Forrest Gump, or Saving Private Ryan, you'd be telling everyone. You see that guy just right at the back with his, that's me, that's me right there.

You're connected to something that gains cinematic fame. Everybody's seen those two. How we perform or succeed in life, you know, it hurts because, when we make it about us, because actually it violates the design from our creator, really, because what we're meant to do is find significance through association with the lead character of history.

We're meant to find significance through association with Jesus, but the problem is we attempt to find significance on our own. It's estimated that the total population of the world ever, you know, the whole history of population, is about 100 billion across the whole of human history.

That means, you know, me and you here today, we are one, of course all of history, one in 100 billion. Our single story, our individual lives, while important to us, in the grand drama of history, it's small, it is fragile, and actually, you know, compared to everyone else, it's pretty irrelevant.

[8:27] The number of people we actually know and spend time with, even that is pretty small, isn't it? You know, how many people do you know? One, you know, put that into 100 billion.

You know, it's just like the significance, a small part in an epic all-time classic lifts the status of the actor.

Our status is lifted when we're connected to the lead character in the drama of human history. One in 100 billion? Well, there is one in that 100 billion that is Jesus.

He's the true lead. And as believers, we have a connection to him. You see that all the way through, there's, we're connected, we have that location of what it means to be a believer is we're connected to the lead actor, that phrase, it comes all the way through, in Christ.

You see, it says, right from the word, right from the word go, to God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful, where, you know, he's writing to people in geographical, in Ephesus, but where are they spiritually?

[9:40] Verse one, they're in Christ. End of verse three, he gives them every spiritual blessing in Christ, for he chose us in him.

We go further down, verse seven, in him we have redemption through his blood. He brings everything, verse nine, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure,

which he purposed in Christ.

Everything is about being connected to the lead character of history. Being an actor in a film means your name appears on the credits, it means you're in the final cut.

Bad days on set don't change the final version, you are locked in. Paul writes, as I've mentioned, to a church that has a physical location, they're in Ephesus, that is the stage, that is the place in the world where they're part, the drama of history is being played out, but then there is the spiritual location to God's holy people, the faithful in Christ.

This is participation, Jesus is the lead. What is true of him is credited to the whole cast. The geographical location could move, but the spiritual one is for God's people that doesn't change.

[11:05] They're all in Christ. And so what it means for us this morning is that we are united and connected to Jesus, we have a relationship with him, we are in him and he is in us.

Because our, and it's because our location is in him is secure, it's the reason that Paul's able to kick off in verse 3 with blessing God.

See that word for, that word for praise, verse 3, it says, praise be to the God and Father. That word for praise is actually the word blessed. It actually reads, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Because you're in Christ and that's secure, what it means is, it means when you start your day, we don't need to start our days wondering, maybe we do wonder, how God might bless us today.

We don't need to wonder about, will God bless me today? I wonder how he might bless me today.

No, no, no. We actually can bless God, praise and worship him because he already has blessed us and his blessings are secure and are with us every day of our spiritual lives.

[12:24] He has blessed us to the maximum that he is able to. He's blessed us in, what does it say, in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing? In other words, praise be to God because he's not withheld any blessing from us.

He's not withheld no blessing as he withheld from his people, not a single one. It's not a question of if he'll bless you today, you start the day, you wake up as somebody who is blessed.

So that's the first point is location in Christ. The second one, we move to verse 4 and 5, is chosen in Christ. Before any drama starts shooting, there is the casting.

As part of the production, there is someone whose job is to cast and choose the right people, the right actors for the part. But we know what that is usually based on. It's based on looks, isn't it?

Do they look the part? Perhaps it's based on looks, maybe a few other things. It's based on perhaps acting ability, experience, and maybe a previous connection to other actors or the director.

[13:36] In the drama of history, even before the creation begins, before the stage is built, the living God casts for the drama. Look with me, verse 4.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. The director, the living God, sets the cast list before the theater is built or the cameras start to roll.

He chose us before the foundation of the world and in real time we didn't exist. What that means is we can say for certain, we can say something for real certain here, that the living God, because of that, he did not choose us because of some ability or something about us.

When this eternal casting was taking place, we didn't have to win the role in front of the director, God himself. No, God chose us to be in Christ.

He chose us that he would make us holy and blameless in his sight. He chose us that we would be his people. And not only did he choose us, but even before the cameras of creation started rolling, he decided what our future would look like.

[14:57] You see what he says in verse 5? In love, if you're chosen, this is what he's saying, because you're chosen, this is what's going to happen. Verse 5, In love he predestined us for adoption, to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

It pleased him to say, I've chosen you, and then in the future, what I'm destining you for is that you will become my children. He chose us and said that in time, what that would mean, we would, because of the work of Jesus Christ, in time, we would one day become his children.

His chosen people, before time, would become his sons and daughters in time. The director has decided that ending at the same, before the beginning, predestined us for adoption. Which means, if we have a bad day in our lives, if we shoot a bad scene, we will never be cut and replaced. We never auditioned for the role, and so we can never lose our place in him. And that's a comfort. That is a comfort. Because, the real problem, isn't it, is that, the real problem is that, it's more than just bad scenes in our life that's the problem.

[16:27] This analogy that's kind of working through the whole sermon kind of falls down here. Because the bad scenes, the bad days, are not just kind of, they're just a pointer to what we're like on the inside.

You know, they're not just momentary slits where we forget our lines. But, the bad things that come, are not just things that are on the outside, they come out of us.

We're not just good actors having a bad day, no, actually, what we read later in Ephesians is that we're kind of dead characters that need new life. What we need is to really look at, well, how do we really rest in that reality?

And, and the reality is, because the, it's because the director who's planned the whole of history is, because he's the same one who finishes the story, he's working all these things out to the end that includes our part.

You see, what that means is that there's more to it that's going to come in time. What happens in time to the chosen, which is where we're going to turn to our third point, forgiving in Christ.

[17:47] Out of the hundred billion people who've ever lived, Jesus is the only one who's able to take the lead, and he delivers the perfect life performance. There's a huge weight on him. It's a massive burden, isn't it?

To be the lead, when there's a, the supporting cast is a hundred billion people. to, to know that the success of the whole divine production depends on his performance, but it's a burden that he alone can bear.

And the shock, this, the shock, this grabs my heart, is that, not only is, and I've said this a few times already, not only is the, is he the main character of history on the grand scale, he's also the main character of your individual life.

Even in our own story, our performance is wooden and lifeless because of our sins and failures. We need Jesus' perfect performance.

We need him to do it flawlessly because it's beyond us. And look what we read in verses seven and eight. In him, in Christ, in the spiritual location, what do we have? We have redemption through his blood.

[18:56] The forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavishes on us. Jesus is cast as the lead and he lives without sin.

Then through his blood, he pays for us. We have redemption. We're set free from what we should have received. On the cross, Jesus, the lead, takes the bad reviews that our sins deserved and we receive the standing ovation of his perfect performance.

And the scale of the gift surpasses anything we could comprehend. It's not that he only has so much forgiveness to go around, is it? You know, there is no scavenging to see if we can grab a little bit of forgiveness.

If we're first in line, perhaps we'll get a little bit more. No, forgiveness is given what we read out of his riches. It is lavished on us. There's no expense spared. There's no budget cuts. The profit of the lead's perfect performance is poured out on the supporting cast with infinite generosity.

We are forgiven in Christ. We're located in Christ. We're chosen in him. We're forgiven in him. The final point is that we have a purpose in him.

[20:19] Purpose in Christ. All of this has a goal, a purpose, a reason that lies behind it. It is the goal of grace. You know, because the question we might be saying is, why would a director, why would the God of history who's ordained the whole plan, why would a director do all this for a cast that couldn't perform?

And we see what he says in verse 6. Actually comes again later on, which we'll see next week. to the praise of his glorious grace.

To the praise of his glorious grace. We are not the stars of the show. The living God is. The entire production is for the director of history.

It's so that he is praised because of his grace, because of what he's done, because of his character, because of his actions towards us. What God does across the span of history, before time began, then through his son, in time, and then in actual time in our lives, by calling us to adoption, the display of his infinite kindness, this work of grace, shows God's character, and demonstrates it in a way that maximizes the display of his glory.

We are the stage on which his infinite kindness is being displayed for the whole universe to see. That's the reason, that's the ultimate reason he does it.

[21:46] The purpose is so that he'll be praised for his glorious grace. And the end point of that will look like Jesus becoming Lord over all things.

Verse 9 and 10. This is the will of God to do that for the prayers of his glorious grace. But verse 9 and 10, we get the purpose fleshed out. He made known to us, look with me, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the time has reached their fulfillment to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Your one in a hundred billion life has significance because the drama of history you're a part of is a cosmic masterpiece. The aim of all of what God is doing is to restore the cosmos to what was intended.

Jesus as Lord and everything under him together. not just people, we are the first expression of that, the church, but everything in heaven and on earth with Jesus reigning.

Our redemption is the reality of that coming to pass. As your location spiritually is in him, you have unity with God, you have unity with every other believer.

[23:18] Our lives one in a hundred billion might look small, but they have cosmic significance in the drama of history. Your lines won't get cut, but your redemption is there for all to witness the glory of God.

This is the place of rest. Paul says in verse 2, grace and peace to you from God, our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the place of peace, isn't it? Grace and peace, why should you have grace and peace? Paul says, well here's why. Peace comes from knowing that production is a guaranteed success.

You don't have to carry the weight of your own story because the main character who's the protagonist is the protagonist of your story, he's already won.

You get to be a part of the greatest story ever told. Your own individual story is designed to display the glorious character of Jesus working through your life, the glorious character of the living God, the director forever.

[24:23] What does that mean for us? Because you're in Christ, you get to live without the pressure of making your life a success.

Jesus is the main character so in him you already are. You don't have to pretend. You can stop any kind of acting or presenting or trying to make it on your own and live as a child of God, as a brother of Jesus knowing that he has got you where he wants you and is blessing you.

You were never meant to be the main character. Why not let Jesus take the lead of your life? Why not let him? You don't have to be a somebody. You are one in a hundred billion but united to Jesus he makes you into a display of his grace and glory.

He makes you into a display of his grace and glory. I don't know, maybe you're here this morning and you're still thinking it through about what it means to follow Jesus.

Well, can I invite you to consider that this is what is on offer to you. This is the good news of Jesus and if you're hankering for significance God won't just give it to you in a little bit.

[25:52] He'll give it to you in spades. He'll give you cosmic significance when you let him take the lead. Located in Christ. Chosen in him.

Forgiven in him. And with a great purpose in him. Let's pray. Almighty God, this grabs my own heart and I know there's so often when I try to take the lead in my own life and think that success and the way that life goes is all about how I perform and I know that along with me there'll be others of us too who've walked in that way.

Lord, I thank you that you take the pressure off us that success is not about the way that we live our story but success in life is the connection, the relationship that we have to you, Lord, the main character of history.

and so I pray that you would lift that burden from our shoulders and that we would let you take the lead of our life. Forgive us where we've not.

Change us. Remind us that our future is secure in you because you've chosen us before the creation of the world and because you're the God of the beginning and the end, the future is secure.

[27:36] we were predestined at that moment for adoption that we could call you Father. And now we have the great, what a wonderful purpose to glorify you, that Jesus would be Lord over all of our lives and that you give us significance in him.

We praise you and ask for your blessing in Christ's name. Amen.