

Chosen by God

Ephesians 1:3, 4

Introduction

Rikki Mudd is a Chinese American girl. She was born in China in 1993 - - - She is among over 100,000 Chinese babies adopted by Western families since China implemented their one child policy in 1989. She was the first-born in her Chinese family but her family held out hope for a boy and did not apply for a birth certificate for her. She was kept hidden for the first couple years of her life. When her brother was born – she wound up in an orphanage and was later adopted by an American family that lived near Seattle.

But Rikki seems well adjusted to her life

She now writes of her experience: ‘China’s one child policy led to my adoption and a more privileged life.’

Rikki – has had several visits to China and to see her birth parents: ‘I felt extremely fortunate when I glimpsed how much harder life is for my family in China — and would have been for me if I’d stayed.’

Her Chinese parents divorced – her father lives in an unfinished house with dirt floors.

Her brother Wu Chao who lived with his mother - - - was not doing well in school – did not score well enough to get into college. So – he has now decided to join Rikki in the states to take some classes and learn the English language

Rikki recently saw video of when she was first picked up by her American parents

‘I was nearly 5 years old. I look terrified. And I had a temper. I would bite people and spit food on the floor, which made my adoptive parents wonder if they’d made a mistake. I also had horrible nightmares: In my dreams, I saw loved ones killed.

But with the support of my new family — Bill and Wendy Mudd, their five adult children, and what would eventually be three of us adopted from China and two daughters adopted from Vietnam — I settled into my American life. My parents aren’t wealthy, but they’re comfortable.’

She graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in Psychology and is now working on her Master’s degree.

Rikki summed it up best when she said – her adoption led to a more privileged life

In many ways – that is similar to how Paul tells us that we should view our lives as Christians

The term he uses would be that of **blessed**

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ – Eph. 1:3

He has adopted us into His family
Because of it – we are truly blessed

It doesn't matter who you are – or where you have been

If you are now a Christian – the assessment of your life: 'I am blessed'

We have begun a study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians

The great theme of this letter is the believer's tremendous blessings which they have now as a result of being in Christ

Klyne Snodgrass: 'This letter is about God blessing us in Christ and choosing us so that we might live holy and blameless lives before God.'

Some would say the theme of Ephesians is 'Our Riches in Christ'

We have been chosen before the foundation of the world
We have been adopted into the family of God
We have redemption thru the blood of Christ
We have an inheritance among the saints
We have been given the Holy Spirit
We stand before the Father holy and without blame in our union with Christ

There is such a profound level of blessedness expressed here that the Christian has reason to praise God no matter what afflictions or disappointments they encounter in this world

They can always respond with: 'I am blessed'

Kent Hughes: 'The Devil may curse us but if God blesses us, what does it matter?'

Ephesians 1 gives us the ground under which such a statement can stand

I. Chosen in Christ - vv. 3, 4

This opening section of 12 verses [vv. 3-14] is an expression of praise to God for what He has done for us in Christ

Paul praises God the Father for what He has done

Blessed = [εὐλογητοσ] – to speak well of
Paul is speaking well of God

What has God done that is so amazing?

He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

These riches are spiritual / not material

David Jeremiah: 'these are not earthly blessings that will pass away but spiritual blessings that will endure forever.'

The spiritual is more important - - - it's more important to have the Holy Spirit - - - than it is to have fancy clothes

It's more important to have a mansion in heaven – than a big house on earth

Eternal life is more important than – a life destined to die [one which James calls a vapor!]

*** In God we find the true blessings!

In this opening section – Paul will bring all three members of the godhead into the focus of our blessings in Christ

vv. 3-6 – God the Father chose- before He created the world

vv. 7-12 – Christ [the Son] came in the fullness of the times to redeem

v. 13 – The Holy Spirit is a pledge of what we have yet to come

Where does Paul begin when he wants to enumerate these blessings?

Paul reaches back in time to before the foundation of the earth – to the eternal purposes of God before there was something called the world

*** What is it that leads to a person becoming a Christian and coming to enjoy all these blessings which Paul speaks of?

How did we get here?

We might be inclined to point simply to faith – 'I believed the gospel'

That is – of course – would be a correct answer as far as it goes - - - But – that is not where Paul begins

He comes to belief in the gospel in v. 13

Or – we might point to the cross and what Jesus accomplished on Calvary

That would certainly be a good place to begin as well -

But – we see here – Paul doesn't start there either [that comes in v. 7] – Paul reaches back further to something God the Father has done before the foundation of the world

He chose us before the foundation of the world – to become His children

We are wading into deep waters when we talk about things like election / predestination

We note: Paul raises the issue in the context of praise to God for our salvation

What is his ultimate point?

When it comes to salvation - - - God is to be praised - - - not man
God gets all the credit for salvation / all the glory

We do not divide the credit as if we did something meritorious or praise worthy

What we brought to the equation was sin / deserving of wrath - - - that's where we were
apart from Christ

Imagine someone sharing about how they became a Christian – and suppose they said: ‘I
don't know why I believed in Jesus – I guess I'm just smarter or better than other people – so
it was natural that I would choose Christ.’

Now – if you heard that – you would likely cringe at such an idea

Grace is undeserved
All the glory goes to God
He picked you up out of your sins – and called you / opened your eyes . . .

**MLJ: 'We should approach this by saying to ourselves something like this: "Here
am I in this house of God while there are thousands of people who are not, and
who are in their beds reading their Sunday newspapers or perhaps listening to
the radio. Why am I different, what has made me different, why am I
interested in these things, why bother myself about them at all - why am I a
Christian? Seriously consider what it is that has separated you from those
others, what has put you into a different category.'**

Why did the gospel come to you?

Why did you sense there was something vitally wrong with your life – and look to the Bible
for answers?

Why did you recognize that much of what the world pursues and chases after is of a shallow
and futile nature?

Why did you in your heart respond favorably to a gospel presentation unlike so many others?
Why did you stop resisting God when you had done so many times before?

The reality – if you are a genuine Christian – you know that you must give credit to God's
grace for opening your eyes to see these things - - - there is no other answer

***** Acts 16:14 - 'The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by
Paul.'**

Election points to salvation being God's work

He opened our eyes – caused us to see our sinfulness / need of a Savior / and the glory of Christ

God gets the credit for our salvation – through and through

Some people struggle with the doctrine of election – but I will argue they don't need to

The sheer weight of Scripture texts that point in this direction cause us to grapple with the topic

Matt. 24:31 - 'He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect . . .'

II Thess. 2:13 - 'But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the spirit and faith in the truth.'

Eph. 1:4 - 'Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world . . .'

Romans 8:30 - 'And whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified, and whom He justified, these He also glorified.'

Acts 13:48 - 'When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.'

John 6:37 - 'All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.'

Acts 18:19, 10 - 'Go on speaking and do not be silent . . . for I have many people in this city'

John Stott: 'It is without question a biblical doctrine, and no biblical Christian can ignore it.'

A lot of ink is spilt over the issue of election / predestination / church debates in history

MLJ offers this helpful perspective: 'We are not saved by the view we take on this question . . . we can be as certain that John Wesley is in heaven as that Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield are there.'

John Wesley disagreed with the view of election held by George Whitefield / Jonathan Edwards - - - John Calvin / Charles Spurgeon

You don't have to believe in election to be saved – but you do have to be elect!

*** Charles Spurgeon: 'I believe in the doctrine of election, because I am quite sure that if God had not chosen me I would never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterward.'

Where I think people run afoul on the doctrine of election – is they may have heard it poorly presented - - - by someone who fails to recognize and give due weight to human responsibility

I remember talking one time to a fellow seminarian – and he referred to a new student who shared his testimony and said – I'm a Christian because I'm elect

This person said – 'that's nice – but can you elaborate? Did you ever repent and believe the gospel?'

i.e. – The gospel is not – 'be elect and thou shalt be saved' [a true statement – but not the gospel]

It is: 'believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.'

Election does not eliminate human responsibility and choice

While God gets the credit for our salvation

*** Who is responsible for unbelief / rejection of God's gospel? / condemnation?

I'll give you a hint – it's not God

The blame for man's unbelief is always laid at the feet of the sinner

John 3:19 - 'this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.'

John 5:39-40 - 'You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.'

Sinful man loves his sin / he loves the darkness / He resists God's overtures of grace given to him / He is unwilling . . .

Acts 7:51 - 'You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit . . .'

God calls people to repent and believe - - - but they make their excuses why they can't come to the wedding feast [Matt. 22]

Isaiah 65:2 - 'I have spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts.'

God reaches out with the gospel in many places – sometimes to people resistant to its message / other times – it is embraced

God's Word invites all who will – to come to the fount of His grace

He says, 'Why will you die O sinner?' / repent

J. C. Ryle: 'The bible never says that sinners miss heaven because they are not Elect, but because they neglect the great salvation, and because they will not repent and believe.' [Old Paths, p. 468]

J.C. Ryle: 'if he is lost at last it will be his own fault, and his blood will be on his own head.'

Calvin: 'Upon the preaching of the gospel in a place, some will be affected with lively faith in their hearts and others will go away as they came without benefiting at all, or else they harden themselves against God and betray the stubbornness that was hidden in them before. What is the reason for this difference? Even this, that God directs the one sort by His Holy Spirit and leaves the other sort in their natural corruption.'

When man goes to hell – he will have no one to blame but himself

The Synod of Dort [1618-19] – perhaps dealt with these issues as well as anyone ever has in the history of the church

Canons of Dort: 'The cause or guilt of this unbelief, as well as of all other sins, is in no wise in God, but in man himself; whereas faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through Him is the free gift of God.' [CD I, 5]

Don't allow God's election to demolish human responsibility - - - because God doesn't do that

Don't allow human responsibility to demolish God's election – both are taught in Scripture

Some people have said that human responsibility and God's sovereignty are like two parallel lines that extend outward into eternity

We can't see where they cross here – but it will be made plain in glory

For now we see as thru a glass dimly – but then face to face

We will never praise up our salvation – by giving credit to ourselves if we see things rightly

Rom. 3:11 - 'There is none who seeks for God'

*** J. C. Ryle: 'God must begin the work of grace in a man's heart, or else a man will never be saved. Christ must first choose us and call us by His Spirit, or else we shall never choose Christ. Beyond doubt, if not saved, we shall have none to blame but ourselves. But if saved, we shall certainly trace up the beginning of our salvation to the choosing grace of Christ.'

II. Holy and Blameless - v. 4

What is God's purpose in our salvation?

To make us holy and blameless – to the glory of the Son

Holiness is our calling and our destiny / This is done in love

God's purposes come to fruition in the believer as He becomes holy and blameless

Our fundamental problem is our sinfulness

In a sense – we were born into a bad family

Paul will say we were sons of disobedience / by nature children of wrath [Eph. 2:3]

But now – by some amazing set of events – we have been adopted!

We have been adopted into a family which partakes of holiness!

Election is unto holiness

MLJ: 'the man who is chosen, is chosen to holiness; and if there is no evidence of holiness in his life it is proof that he has never been chosen.'

We are part of this new family

God is putting together a family – He is building a kingdom - - - He is adopting us out of the world of sin - - - making us sharers in His holiness

Conclusion

What do we do with such grand truths?

Election was seen by Paul as something to rejoice in – because it points to this grand goodness of God to the believer

Don't look anywhere else to be blessed – look right here

The Apostle Peter points to the human responsibility side:

II Peter 1:10-11 - 'Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.'

Make your calling and election sure

Believe the gospel – begin obeying Christ