



## **The Plan of the Ages**

*Series: The Most Remarkable Run-On in Holy Writ*

Ephesians 1:3-14 (8b-10)

June 27, 2010

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### **Introduction**

Over the last several weeks, as we have gotten into this glorious sentence, we have been invited to peer into the eternal purposes of God and at all that we have in Christ: every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. These blessings are reserved for us before the foundation of the world, before we drew our first breath, before we were conceived. We have seen how God, before the foundation of the world, chose out for himself from among all of the sinful humanity, a group of people whom He would redeem from their sin and make His own special possession, whom He would bless with every spiritual blessing and upon whom He would lavish His love. We have seen how from eternity past God has bounded and encircled us with His love and made us His children by adoption – we who were children of wrath, children of the devil now brought into the family of God and adopted. Last week we considered the glory of redemption and how we have been bought with the blood of Christ. And, outflowing from that redemption, there is the forgiveness of all our sins now and forever. We looked even more at what it means for us to be redeemed – our minds, emotions, wills, bodies, pursuits, relationships – all of us purchased for the exclusive possession of God. Now Paul is going to deal with the question of where this is all leading. It is leading to the fulfilment of God’s plan for the ages.

### **God has a Plan for the Ages**

Andre Maurois: "The universe is indifferent. Who created it? Why are we here on this puny mud-heap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea, and I am quite convinced that no one has the least idea." G.N. Clarke: "There is no secret plan in history to be discovered. I do not believe that any future consummation could make sense of the irrationalities of preceding ages. There is no plan! God has no purpose! All this chaos, all this meaninglessness is just running together and it's just going to end in a big bang and we're all going to end and there's no purpose to any of it."

This is a common thought in mankind, a sort of meaninglessness to life. Through Paul, the Lord declares where this is all going, what the culmination of the ages is going to be about. Paul tells us what God has done in verses 8b-10: "...in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph 1:8-10 ESV) God has a plan, a plan that He conceived in His incomparable wisdom and which He is bringing to pass by His unconquerable power. It is a plan that is greater than our personal salvation. It dwarfs West Salem Baptist Church. It trumps our personal plans and personal desires or our personal pleasure. The grand, comprehensive and ultimate purpose of God is to gather all of the creation under the glorious headship of Jesus Christ, to bring everything under His absolute authority and rule. That is God's plan.

Our salvation is not the ultimate purpose of God's plan. Don't get me wrong, God delighted to save us, He delights to pour His love upon us, but our election, adoption, redemption, and acceptance in the Beloved is ultimately for Christ, not us. It is part of God's plan, part of His good pleasure, which He is bringing about according to His own purpose as a demonstration of His great grace and His glory, but the ultimate purpose of God is the Lordship of His Christ. And make no mistake, that is exactly where all of the creation is heading whether it seems that way or not. God's will and His power cannot be resisted. Continually we are confronted with this truth throughout the Scriptures: (Job 42:2 ; Psa 103:19, 115:3, 135:6 ; Isa 46:9-10 ESV) And of course we see over and over in this text the phrase "according to His purpose." This is good news for us. Some people struggle with the thought that Christ's glory and not our salvation is at the center of God's heart and plan, but the two are intertwined. Our election, redemption, adoption and all that flows from it – sanctification and glorification – none of it can fall to the ground because the exaltation of Christ as glorious will not fail.

God's plan to do all of this is not constrained by anything or anyone outside of God. God's plan is to save a company of people greater than anyone can number and to transform them into the image of Christ so that Christ might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. God's plan is to call out from amongst the nations and the peoples of this world a new humanity, His chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for His own possession – called out of darkness and into glorious light, under the Lordship of Christ, so that they might proclaim His excellencies. And God's plan is also to bring all of creation, everything affected by the fall, all rebels, all rejecters of Christ, every enemy of God into forced subjection to Christ. God's plan is to bring all things under the headship of Christ, to reverse the curse and to sum up all things in Christ so that all of creation will resound with the glory of Christ. It is God's purpose to put on display before the entire created universe the illimitable, incalculable, inestimable, infinite worth of His glorious Son. Everything in creation is moving toward this tremendous end. God is bringing glory to Himself by bringing all of creation under the

headship, authority, and rule of Christ. God's plan is not impersonal fatalism. It is not limited sovereignty over creation and God's plan does not require human ratification. It is His plan. Sometimes God's plan calls for a Great Awakening, sometimes for judgment of a nation. God's plan involves a day like Pentecost on which 3000 people were saved by responding in faith to the preaching of the gospel by Peter and sometimes it calls for a day like in Exodus 32 when 3000 of the Israelites fell by the sword for worshipping an idol. God is the author of the one and the other. Rain and drought, harvest and famine are from the hand of the same sovereign Lord. (Isa 45:7) – all without being the author of evil. Over this world chance and chaos are not reigning, but the Sovereign Lord of the Bible. And Paul wants us to know that:

### **God has Graciously Granted Us the Privilege of Knowing This Plan**

Paul speaks here of God "making known to us the mystery of his will." What does that mean exactly? Our concept of mystery is something that can never be understood, can never be explained. Right? That is what we think of when we say the word mystery. But the Greek word, *mysterion*, that is translated as mystery means something altogether different. It is something "that which was hidden to human understanding, but is now Divinely revealed." God had revealed His plan in part in history. The prophets spoke of the sufferings and the glory of Messiah, and how both could be true was a great mystery to them (1 Peter 1:10-12). Only after the coming of Christ do we see how His suffering and the revelation of His glory fit perfectly together. Everything is understood in Christ.

He has granted us, by His grace, to understand His ultimate purpose and plan. One of the great issues in the American church today is the ignorance of God's eternal plan. Many of God's people today do not understand the Sovereignty of God, grace, justification, sanctification, the purpose of the church, the Lordship of Christ and a whole array of other doctrines. That is why we are so shallow, so undiscerning. Everything is "touch-feely" and "warm and fuzzy" instead of being based in the Truth.

We understand from scripture that Lucifer rose up in rebellion against the Creator, intending to take the throne. He wanted to share in God's glory, He wanted to be like God and receive worship. Satan was created to worship God, but he wanted the status of God rather to serve God, and so he fell with a host of angels who rebelled along with him – what we refer to as demons.

After the creation of Adam and Eve, who were made by God to image forth His glory to the world, Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, resulting in the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God, because, like Satan, they wanted to be like God. The consequences of this fall can hardly be overestimated. All mankind became contaminated with sin, in every aspect of their

being—intellectually, morally, socially, emotionally, and volitionally. No part of our humanity is free from the presence and power of sin making us fit only for death and hell.

But behind all of this was the eternal counsel of the Triune God. Listen to the way that Spurgeon says this: The Eternal Father held a solemn council with the Son and Holy Spirit. Thus spoke the Father:—"I will that those whom I have chosen be saved!" Thus said the Son:—"My Father, I am ready to bleed and die that thy justice may not suffer and that thy purpose may be executed." "I will," said the Holy Spirit, "that those whom the Son redeems with blood shall be called by grace, shall be quickened, shall be preserved, shall be sanctified and perfected, and brought safely home." Then was the Covenant written, signed, and sealed, and ratified between the Sacred Three. The Father gave his Son, the Son gave himself, and the Spirit promises all his influence, all his presence, to all the chosen. Then did the Father give to the Son the persons of his elect, then did the Son give himself to the elect, and take them into union with him; and then did the Spirit in covenant vow that these chosen ones should surely be brought safe home at last.

What a great privilege it is to know this plan of the eternal God. It is not given to all to know. Romans 1 tells us that all men know that there is a God; that God is to be worshiped; they know something of the attributes of that God; of His right and wrong. But the apostle also tells us here that not all know the fullness of God's redeeming plan. That is something which God in His grace and mercy has revealed in the gospel and we could never understand it apart from the grace of God in announcing it, making it known, in revealing it; making us to understand it by His Spirit. We should never take for granted knowing and believing this plan or that our children have the grace to hear it and know it from the time they are little. And Paul means for us to understand that

### **God's Plan is to Sum Up All Things in Christ**

Paul says that God's plan is to "unite all things in him." This phrase has the idea of everything finding its proper place in relationship to Christ. This uniting all things in Christ is the idea of summing up everything in Him, of explaining everything in terms of Him, of understanding all things in terms of Him, of defining all things in terms of Him. Later in this first chapter of Ephesians Paul writes how He has brought about this rulership of Christ telling us (Eph 1:20-23) Paul gives even more insight in his letter to the Colossians writing, (Col 1:15-20) All things are summed up in Christ; they find their ultimate purpose in Christ. What is summed up in the person of Christ?

- **God has summed up our salvation in Christ.** (Acts 4:12)
- **God’s summing up of all things in Christ means the reversal of the fall of Adam which brought sin, death, and judgment to the human race and which subjected the creation to futility.** (Rom 5:17-19; 8:19-23 )
- **The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant are summed up in Christ.** (Gal 3:13-14)
- **The Law of Moses is summed up in Christ who completely fulfilled the law.** (Matt. 5:17)
- **The OT prophecies and promises, including the promise of God to David that he would never lack for a descendant upon the throne, are summed up in Christ.** (2Sam 7:16; Luke 1:31-3; 24:25-27 ESV)
- **All of the OT religious rituals and signs are summed up in Christ.** (Col 2:16-17)
- **All divine revelation is summed up in Christ.** (Heb 1:1-3)
- **All the blessings of God are summed up in Christ.** (Eph 1:3)
- **The glory of God is summed up in Christ.** (Phil 2:5-11; 1Co 15:24-28)

God has given Jesus a name, Lord. Lord over all creation and though for a time He allows rebellion, the entire universe is called to worship and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. The Lordship of Christ encompasses the entirety of the universe. This mandate includes the angels in heaven, the spirits of the redeemed, obedient believers on earth, and the demons and lost humanity that will forever be in hell. Jesus will be confessed, will be magnified as Lord – the Sovereign King of the universe, the one worthy of complete surrender – whether willingly and joyfully or by force and under irresistible compulsion. His title as Lord has been decreed by the unalterable decree of God the Father. There will be no more rebellion, God will not allow it any longer. **The exaltation of Christ means consummate glory for the Father.** Paul says that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord **“to the glory of God the Father.”** (v. 11) What are we to understand from this? Our human instinct is to think that Jesus having the name Lord would somehow take away glory from God the Father. That somehow they would be in competition for praise and for adoration. That is not the case at all. Jesus having the name above all names, Jesus being the one to whom all nations must turn to be

saved, Jesus having the name before which all must bow and every tongue confess His Lordship is exactly the desire of the Father.

The truth is this--God the Father has given to the Son the title of Lord and when He is worshipped or acknowledged as Lord, God the Father is glorified. The great mystery of the Trinity is that when the Son is glorified, the Father is glorified. Perfect glory and honor given to the Son is perfect honor and glory given to the Father. The main point of the universe is Jesus Christ; in the eternal plan and purpose of God, the Father has determined to sum up all things in Christ. We should not forget, however, that when all things are summed up in Christ, the Son of God will, in submission to His Father, give up the position of preeminence, giving it back to the Father: **(1Co 15: 28 ESV)** What Paul means for us to see in this, the application of this text is that:

### **The church is the firstfruits of the summing up of all things in Christ.**

That is the mystery revealed, but what does it mean for us as His church? God has purposed that until the Lord Jesus Christ returns, to subdue His enemies and to reign over all creation, the church is to be the visible manifestation of the mystery of Christ's Lordship over everything to the world.

We are not a building – a temple for public worship only. We are not a social club. We are not a stage for a weekly performance by the pastor. We are not a seminary class. We are the church of the living God -- of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. The church is the first evidence of God's new creation that is to come.

Here's what that means for us corporately and individually. If we are to reflect the Lordship of Christ, that means that in this church **He will have no rivals**. The very name, "Lord," implies that He is "ruler," "one who has authority." To be the church is first of all to "bow the knee" to Jesus. The church is not a democracy but a monarchy. The message is still, "**Jesus is Lord. Bow down!**" That is why we will never become a church that is sold out to the people and their approval or disapproval. ***People in the pews is not the prize, the presence and pleasure of the Lord Jesus Christ is. Let me say it again: People in the pews is not the prize, the presence and pleasure of the Lord Jesus Christ is.*** The question is not, "Are we attracting people?" but rather, Are we attracting the Presence of God, and is he welcome and honored above all else? **He must be our identity**. In the church that delights in the Lordship of Christ and calling to be the firstfruits of His consummated Kingdom, worship means something more. **It is not just a worship service, but worship**. It is not confined to a couple of hours on Sunday morning, it is life that engages all that we are in loving all that he is, that compels us to surrender more and

more to the totality of His Lordship. Worship like this is a response to a God who is so terrifyingly magnificent, yet so intimately known and trusted that praise and adoration burst forth naturally and without effort. It means for us **unswerving obedience to His Lordship**.

Every part of our spiritual life is impacted by whether or not we are absolutely dependent on and submissive to Jesus Christ as the undisputed Lord of our life. If we miss this... the Lordship of Christ...we miss it all. We miss the goal of God's perfect plan. God's plan is to sum up all things in Christ and it begins with us.

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