

Introduction

We have many interesting examples in our culture where we start experiences not at the beginning, but often at the middle or the end.

For example, one of the most well-known movies of all time, Star Wars, started with the fourth episode. That is really weird when you think about it. You start this movie with very little understanding of many of the characters, and in fact, they don't care really care that you will understand much of their background for the original trilogy. What is a Wookiee? No idea, he just looks like a mix of a bear and man who groans at people. Who is Han Solo? Clearly someone with some troublesome friends, but we have no idea where he came from or where he is going. And don't even start with Yoda and what is up with him!

This weekend we will see this phenomenon in action real time. Be honest, how many of you are going to watch the Super Bowl today but have little to zero idea about how the NFL regular season played out? How bad the Seahawks really were this year, coming in 18th out of 32? We won't even talk about the Panthers! So many of you are starting at the end—the final game—without much of a care for the middle or the beginning!

We also see this in our faith in interesting ways. So often, when we talk with others about faith in Jesus Christ we start in the middle—our perceived need. We start with a me-

centric reality. We talk about how you may be aware of your own sin and the awareness that your fight against sin isn't getting better, and the worry of what that means for you, your relationship with others, and ultimately, your fear of death and your final destination. But we often don't work people into their faith through the origins of that problem, the reality of what happened in the garden and how that has led down a long path of God showing his steadfast love to a people who have needed to know and understand his love in salvation through our Messiah for many years.

In many ways, this is practical and helpful. Starting in the middle is part of how Scripture often engages us. That is exactly what we saw in Romans. Paul, in writing to the church in Rome, which he didn't know as well, and he works through the typical human conundrum of how working for our acceptance before God is fruitless and how we need faith in Jesus Christ. That is the very same individual-centric perspective that we often use when we ask people if they have faith in Jesus. We start with their perceived solution to their sin and work them towards faith. It is a wise and good way to engage people.

But we all need to see the big picture of God!

Ephesians: The Big Picture of 1:3–4

This is part of what is unique about Ephesians. Paul, presumably because of his depth of relationship with the Ephesians because of the time he spent there, starts in the

middle but quickly moves to unpack our reality of our salvation much broader. He seems to be relying on the time he spent with the Ephesians preaching and teaching them and assumes they have a depth of knowledge and maturity where he can push them beyond “milk” as he calls it in 1 Corinthians 3:2, and onto the depth of the glories of God that he wants his Ephesian friends to base their faith upon.

Again, Paul went big quickly—telling us in Ephesians 1:3–4 that God has given us every spiritual blessing (in the heavenlies) in Jesus Christ. He is setting the foundation of his argument for our faith in our entire identity. How our identity is found in all ways, for all times, in every aspect in who Jesus is and what he has done.

It may seem in verse 4 that Paul is simply going to stay in the middle when he tells us that he has “chosen us in Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:4). He starts with our reality of adoption and then pulls us all the way back to the beginning of time, in fact, before time. He tells us the story started in God’s wonderful and glorious plan of creation where he knew he would choose some of his image bearers to save, to be adopted, to walk in right relationship with him. Paul says this was God predestining us as sons and daughters, through Jesus, to the praise of his glorious grace. Paul wants us to go to the beginning that we might see a God who is full of grace and steadfast love in his plan to care for me and you, for him and the Ephesians.

Stopping where we did last week leaves us with a tension. How will God adopt ANY of his rebellious image bearers? On the one hand, many of us fixate on the challenge of God choosing and predestining people and want to know why God wouldn't do that for everyone. The real question we should be asking is why, and HOW, would God bring any of his people back into relationship with himself? Our natural course in our sin is always away from relationship with God. Whether he did it before time or later, we must ask how will he bring any back?

That is where Paul is going today. He started with our beautiful reality of adoption and then drew us all the way back to the beginning of time. In today's section, Ephesians 1:7–10, he comes back to the middle of the story to share with us how God worked this out. And as we will see next week in Ephesians 1:11–14, Paul is also going to point us forward to the beauty of what we have been given and its eventual glorious revealing in us one day in the new heavens and new earth with our God.

Let's start by reading our entire section this morning and then break it down piece by piece:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, 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. (Ephesians 1:7–10, ESV)

Ephesians 1:7—Redemption

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

As we have read through the first few verses of Ephesians, we come to this phrase “in him,” in Jesus Christ, several times and we can see how it becomes an indicator of sorts that Paul is adding another idea to his argument. His original came in 1:4 when he said that God “chose us in him” which was the main point of that last section of 1:3–6. Our section starts with that phrase again: that in Jesus we have redemption. This whole section is going to be about this idea of redemption—an idea that we are released by a payment, or freed by a ransom is another definition of redemption. Here we see several things about our redemption:

Redemption

Forgiveness of our trespasses

In Christ

Through his blood

According to his riches of his grace

The phrase “forgiveness of our trespasses” is describing the specific aspect of redemption that Paul is talking about. That, in particular, we are freed by a ransom FROM our guilt of sin. This is what forgiveness of our trespasses mean. God has ransomed us—redeemed us—from the natural penalty or outworking of our trespasses or sins.

And Paul is making a big claim about our adoption here! We can only come into that kind of loving son and daughter like relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Our ransom and penalty is paid by Jesus that we might no longer live in the consequences of sin. This relationship is true decisively in our life only because of our faith in Jesus. The writer of Hebrews says it this way:

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. (Hebrews 9:15, ESV)

Those whom God calls, who he chooses, come to him through the new covenant mediator Jesus Christ and are redeemed from our trespasses, or our transgressions of the law. This is one of the most basic and beautiful hopes we have in our faith. That all our sins that we have been made aware of, because the law points them out in our hearts and even raises them in our hearts, are now dealt with in the blood of Jesus.

What is even more amazing is that this redemption is not just a one-time, one-moment reality nor just for the sins we have committed in the past. Look at what Jesus says in Luke 21:28:

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:27–28, ESV)

Or look at what Paul says in Romans 8:

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:23–25, ESV)

Our redemption, our adoption as sons and daughters is an interesting reality where it is 100% true when we look backwards on our life and see that God no longer counts our sins against us in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. Yet when we look forward, we see our redemption and our adoption is not fully realized in all ways. We live in this “already-not-yet” state (the fancy word for this

eschatological). What God has done for us in Jesus is secure and fully ours in faith, yet we will see our redemption and our adoption as more real as we come face-to-face with our redeemer one day as he returns in glory or we go to meet him!

And all of this, our past, present, and future redemption is possible only through the blood of Jesus. As Aaron mentioned last week as he took us through Psalm 23, some of the perfect lambs were kept aside for slaughter. We needed blood to cover us. Life for life. Jesus Christ became our once and for all sacrificial lamb (Heb 10:1–18). His death was our ransom—without it we could not be redeemed.

And again, we see that Paul brings us back to God's grace. Paul sees the beauty of our redemption in Jesus Christ and he wants us to see that it was because of grace that God did this! It was not compulsion, not begrudging, it was because God looked on you, God looked on Paul, God looked on me and he smiled! Paul said it in the previous section of Ephesians 1:3–6, and he is going to say it again. God wanted to save you. He wanted to draw you back as a beloved son and daughter that you might walk daily with him.

Application

Again, one of the main applications in this first part of Ephesians is to see God and see grace! To see his steadfast love. To see his amazing desire for mercy and know his

gentle ways. We should hear again and again God's own proclamation of his character:

YWH, YWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands [of generations], (Exodus 34:6–7, ESV)

Is this how you see God, especially when you come to sections like Ephesians 1?

I think Paul knows that one of our tendencies when we look upon the deep mysteries of God, when we peer at his very character that he chose to reveal to us, is that we tend to become frustrated when his ways don't match up to what we might want or expect. We become frustrated, even angry with God. Or we become confused. Our inability to understand completely make us assume the problem is with God, not our finite abilities. So, Paul is drawing us back to GRACE again and again. He reminds us that this is all grace—something none of us deserved. No matter what we can understand, God has only acted in grace towards us. God choosing to do this for me and you—to save us gloriously in his ways—should only fill us with thankfulness and a continued amazement at his ways that are characterized with so much mercy and grace!

Ephesians 1:8

Amazingly, Paul says even more in this section about what God did for us in redemption!

In thinking about this grace, Paul says this:

which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

This word “which” here is Paul repeating himself and saying “This amazing grace” that God gave us, he lavished it on us. God poured grace out abundantly, overflowing, and in ways that is running over us and out beyond any kind of grace we could possibly imagine nor fully understand even in an eternity walking with our God in the new heavens and new earth.

While grace is amazing and huge and almost incomprehensible, Paul does give us one important aspect of what it means that God lavished grace on us. He tells us he lavished grace “in all wisdom and insight.”

My guess is when we think of God’s grace, we either think of how we received grace (the means—through Jesus) or we think of the feelings we have at receiving that grace (thankfulness, marveling, humbling). But I guess many of us forget to think about grace as about being about knowledge, wisdom, or insight. One scholar has said it this way:

“It is remarkable that Christian[s] so readily identify the Lordship of Christ in matters of worship, salvation, and ethics, but not in thinking.”

John Frame, *The History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 5.

Yet that is the picture Paul gives us here. God lavished grace on me and you, grace bought in the life and death of Jesus Christ. And this grace looks like a particular kind of insight and wisdom. A knowledge that God gives us in Jesus Christ!

I would dare to say that in Christianity there is a divide—some who place the emphasis almost entirely on emotions and are quite anti-intellectual about their faith. And then there are others of us who are solely intellectual, forgetting the beauty of the heart of God. In reality, the two go hand in hand. As John Calvin says:

“Faith is...a warm embrace of Christ” and “consists in pious affection.”

John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 3, chapter 2

Faith is both a warm affection and a “pious” or holy, right, good ordered affection. Faith raises our affections, but in a certain direction and in a right and ordered way.

As is often the case, Paul is focusing on one side, and he is saying here that insight and wisdom is a decisive part of the

grace God has given us. He doesn't want us to forget about the knowledge aspect of God's grace.

Application

How often do you think about God's grace meaning God gave you insight and wisdom? That you can know something now? That you have the ability, by God's abundant grace to you, to read and understand, to study and know, to think and ponder?

Knowing—our knowledge—is inextricably tied to God's love and grace to us. Look at Colossians 2:3:

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:1–3, ESV)

Not only have we been given wisdom and insight in Christ Jesus, but in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Jesus, the God-Man, is the totality of all wisdom and knowledge. That is amazing!

But even more mind blowing, look at Galatians 4:9

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world... (Galatians 4:9, ESV)

Paul, in talking to the Galatians about their faith, says that at some point they came to know God, but he couldn't help but correct himself and say "rather to be known by God." God acted first as we have been seeing here in Ephesians 1, and Paul talks about his love for us as knowing us! That we might know him! This amazing, intimate, heart-felt relationship with God Paul defines as knowing and being known. We truly miss what our relationship with God looks like if we limit it to just affection or knowledge—they work together. To be a son or daughter is to be known by God and to know him. That is something we will unpack more another day!

But friends, don't run away from the grace that is wisdom and insight. God gave you the ability to know and study. Attack your Bible with fervor and vigor. Seek to grab ahold of all you can possibly know of our God in this life with the limited faculties we have in our brokenness. Our faith is more than just knowledge, but is never less than it!

Ephesians 1:9a

We should want to know, then, if God's lavished grace is to have wisdom and insight, what is it wisdom about? Insight into what?

making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose,

In lavishing grace on us and giving us wisdom and insight, God was making known to us the mystery of his will. As we see often in Paul, mystery is not something people need someone special like Paul to tell them so they finally know the answer, or something they still need to go hunting for. Rather a mystery was something previously unknown to all people but now revealed broadly by God. It is now widely known to Paul and others in Jesus Christ.

The thing now known (the mystery) IS God's will. The word "will" here means "purposes" (the word is plural), and it is God's purposes, His goals. But that creates a funny interpretation here:

Making known to us the mystery of his purposes, according to his purpose,

That last word is better translated as "good pleasure," so we get this instead:

Making known to us the mystery of his purposes, according to his good pleasure

That is not a huge change, but what gets missed by translating this as will and purpose is that the second phrase

is mostly about God's disposition. He is revealing his plans, his will, his purpose, and it is his "good pleasure" to do so!

Application

You should feel like this idea of God's heart in doing all of this is inescapable. Paul is not going to let you find frustration in God's plan even where you are confused, so neither am I. It was God's pleasure, his good pleasure, to that you should know and be wise about what he has done. It is the third time Paul has said this already in Ephesians and we aren't even to verse ten yet. Do you see God's revealing his character through his good will to choose you to adoption in lavish grace as a pleasurable joy in God? Do you see this all as his joyous sharing with you for your joy? To riff off another pastor's favorite phrase:

God is most glorified in us when we are most joyful in him BECAUSE he is joyful in sharing himself with us.

God's sharing his plan of salvation and all that it has meant from before time to the end of time in glory is not meant to hurt us, to stifle us, to confuse us, nor to frustrate us. It is meant to release us to find joy! As Paul reveals God's plan for us, step by step through Ephesians 1, he will not let us miss this joy no matter how this plan strikes us at each step. For me and you, if we look past our doubt and questions, this is amazing joy! We have a God, who from before time, chose to save us, literally enjoined himself to humanity forever in the God-Man Jesus, and died for our sins that he might

adopt us. And he did this in lavished grace, in his good pleasure!

There is no child, when they hear of the prayers of their adopted parents and the time they spent with applications, the money they saved and raised from friends, and the governmental hoops they jumped through would ever find their purposefulness and planning as anything less than a tremendous sign of the grace, love, and joy their parents had in adopting them. Why would we find this aspect of our God to be full of any less joy? Especially as we see that it came at a much higher cost than we could ever imagine in the death of the very Son of God, Jesus Christ?

Ephesians 1:9b

So as Paul unveils this process step by step, we now see that this wisdom and insight was specifically given to us in knowing the mystery of his will, given in his good pleasure. Okay, but give me more! What is his will? What are God's purposes?

We might think as we come to this next phrase that we have come to the answer of the will of God that Paul is wanting us to see:

Which he set forth in him [Christ]

We would want to say that, yes, God's will was to set forth in Christ. That is true and it is where Paul goes in verse 10. But,

oddly here, “which” grammatically connects back up to God’s “good pleasure.” God’s good pleasure of his plan was set forth—it was shown—in Jesus. Here, Jesus is not the content of his will or plan, but rather the how God’s plan is seen or known.

Imagine if you will a banquet. The host has slaved all day. They have cut the vegetables and steamed them. They have marinated the meat for days, weeks even. It has been slow smoked over hours, requiring the host to get up multiple times during the night to check on it, adjust it, and flip it. The wine has been poured and the bread baked to golden perfection. As you walk into the room, all you see is a banquet table filled with food, ready for the joyous time of friends and family surrounding it and eating together.

This is the image of Christ set forth. God’s good pleasure is seen fully in Jesus Christ. And his good pleasure was planned beforehand. Like a banquet, God prepared our entire existence that we might see him, know our God, most clearly and most lovely in Jesus Christ.

Christ is not only the means by which God accomplished redemption and the forgiveness of our sins. He is the very embodiment of God’s grace and joyful purpose in us.

Application

Friends, to behold Christ is to behold God in all his most wonderful glory. Do you gaze on him intently—in your

prayers, your pondering, and your pursuit through Scripture—that you might see the very beauty of God’s good pleasure? Again, God is smiling on you through Jesus Christ. There is therefore now no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Again, we come back to God’s joy in this plan!

Ephesians 1:10

Instead of in the last phrase of verse nine, it is verse ten that tells us the content of God’s will, or his purposes:

as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

We are told here that God revealed to us wisdom and insight in showing us the mystery of his will, which was his plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Jesus Christ—things in heaven and things on earth. He brought us this plan in Christ, and the plan is all about Christ! Jesus truly is the definition of God’s grace for us as both the means by which God brings about his plan and the goal of the plan.

This idea of plan here is a household plan. God’s version of his goals for what he runs and is over (which is everything). I may have a household plan for my house, but God has a plan for me, my house, your house, and this entire universe. And it is a plan for the fullness (fullness meaning the final goal, the final purpose) of all times. That word is plural—times, not just time. Just like purposes—he has purposes for

all times. All of times, each age, has a final goal and a final purpose. They will end up with all things summed up, united, in Jesus. This is pointing us forward to the final goal—the new heavens and the new earth. This is how God is making all things right and bringing people back under his loving reign and rule, into relationship with him as a loving father.

This picture of all things being united in Jesus is a beautiful picture. This word “united” is a very broad word, giving us the image of the one to whom we will be connected to, Jesus, but also through whom this happens, Jesus. And then this word also has a prefix (ava) which has the idea of restoration, doing it again.

If you never noticed, Scripture starts in a garden in the presence of God and ends in a city-garden in the presence of God. In the middle, God’s people are brought to a land that is described in abundant garden language—a land flowing with milk and honey. They worship in a tabernacle and temple adorned with garden images everywhere.

The entire middle of God’s story from the fall and Adam and Eve’s banishment from the garden is taking us BACK to our relationship with God in the same glorious garden, recreated for God’s now perfect, sinless, and incapable of sinning again image bearers.

And this isn’t just about us! God is bringing all things, things in heaven and on earth back to their purpose as they belong

with, connected to, and united under Jesus Christ. Just as all things were made through him and to him (as John [John 1] and Paul say [Col 1:16-17]), they will all be brought back to their original glory and purpose under him again.

Conclusion

God has chosen me and you, adopted us as beloved sons and daughters, that his grace might be seen in the whole world and that he might receive praise. That was verses 3–6. In verses 7–10 we see that God was able to do this because he also redeemed us. He paid our ransom, and in particular, he paid our ransom that we might have our sins forgiven. Without this wonderful exchange at the cross we would have no reason to believe that our adoption could be true.

And this redemption was given in God's lavished grace that we might have wisdom and insight. He didn't just want to save us but he wanted us to see and know how this was part of a much larger plan—a plan he has always had—to bring all things through all times into, under, and united in Jesus Christ again. Jesus is THE image, THE picture, of God's lavish grace given to us that we might see and know this God better and better:

YWH, YWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands [of generations], (Exodus 34:6–7, ESV)

I keep coming back to this passage from Exodus again and again as God's self-proclamation of his character, and I am realizing more and more how Jesus was God's visible demonstration of this character stated to Moses, not only for our salvation but also that we might KNOW God rightly!

Friends, we should marvel that God would want to share with us this broader purpose. The he would want us to see his larger plan and not be stuck inside the jar. A friend of mine recently used the phrase, "It is hard to see the label from inside the jar." That is exactly what God is doing—he is pulling us out of the jar of our time, our moment, and showing us and telling us what he is doing and has done.

Be thankful that God would bring us to faith in any means he uses, even if it means we come into the middle of the story and see it almost entirely from our perspective. But also marvel and find it an amazing grace that God would show us his purposes, his will, his plan. And when this plan is hard to understand for you, whether that is in a moment of difficulty in your life or in general as you wrestle with a God whose ways are higher than yours (Isaiah 55:8–9), turn to look at Jesus. Paul is telling us here that Jesus is the embodiment, the beautiful picture put forth by God, that we might see and know his lavish grace towards us in a very real way.

Call

Communion

Benediction

YWH, YWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands [of generations], (Exodus 34:6–7, ESV)