

Intro

Thank you St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon for having me and my friend, Samuel, to be with you during this summer as we minister to you and your kids as summer ministry students.

I am so thrilled and honored to have this opportunity to share life with you this summer. Though we cannot be there physically, yet I am grateful that technology enables us to connect today.

And even more than technology, I am grateful because to know that it is the Lord Himself who unites and connects us today!

Conflict

St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, the idea for today’s theme, **“The**

Greatest Gift God Gave Us,” is taken from our lectionary reading in [Ephesians 1:3-14](#).

In this passage Paul wrote down beautifully his heartfelt prayer for his church members in Ephesus. This prayer not only reveals the pastoral heart of Paul but it also reveals the greatest gift God gave us through Christ, His Son.

Diagnose

Gifts — I believe all of us love gifts. Whether that be the gifts of items or materials that you like; such as perhaps shoes, scooters, PS5, and so on. Or the gifts that are non-material in nature; such as friendship, care, attention, service, words of encouragement, etc. Whatever the forms of gifts that you like to receive from others and to give to others, giving gifts as well as receiving gifts, according to Gary Chapman, is the language of love. According to Gary

Chapman in his famous book, “[The Five Love Languages](#),” there are five love languages; words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts/presents, quality time, and physical touch.

My son, Ben, just turned 8 last Sunday. Together with Samuel Andri, my wife, and I, we set up a plan to make his birthday experience feel so special on that day. We took him to Canadian Tire to buy some stuff, then we continued to have lunch at the Korean restaurant, after that we invited our Brazilian neighbors to come to our house and celebrate a small party together, and then in the evening we took him to his favorite restaurant.

At the end of the day, before we went to bed, I asked him a question: “Out of so many things that you do and have today, which part that you are most grateful for?” It took a while for him to answer, then

with confidence he said, “**I am just grateful that I have you! You are the best!**” (say it using Ben’s expression)

And when he was sleeping, I was just looking at him and I was just thrilled by the reality that out of so many gifts that he received that day, the best gift for him is not the gifts in itself, but the givers of gifts — me and his mom!

In today’s text, Paul describes the greatest gift God gave us, namely **the gift of grace**. And by fully understanding how wide and long and high and deep is the gift of God’s grace to us may in our childlike faith to God we cry out, “You are the best!” (again, use Ben’s expression when you say it)

Now let us dive into the passage today to see why the gift of grace is the greatest gift God has given us.

Surprising Truth

In verses 4-6 Paul says, *“4 For **He chose us in Him before the creation of the world** to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love (or “in His grace”) 5 **He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ**, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.”*

Here in these verses we see the **first reason** why the gift of grace is the greatest gift God gave us. Through and by God’s grace **“we are chosen to be His children.”** And we are chosen even before the creation of the world!

Have you ever gotten picked for a team, let’s say like for basketball or soccer or baseball? (pause)

To what I know, the best athletes always get picked first. The athletes who have proven how good they are chosen. But have you ever played sports with someone who chose you not because of how good you are or how athletic you look but simply because they loved you? Before you or I could do anything right or wrong, before the world was even created, our Heavenly Father said, **“I love you. I choose you. You are mine.”** Grace is being picked not because you’re the strongest or best or even good at all but simply because God loves you, thus grace is a gift.

In addition, Paul also says in verse 5, *“[God] predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ...”* What’s the destiny God chose for us? Adoption. Sonship. Before creation, before you were born, before you could do anything good or bad God chose you and me to become his children, to become a son or daughter of the King. In that culture where Paul wrote his letter, “sons” normally received

the inheritance (not “daughters”). However, here the Bible isn’t making a statement about *gender* but about *rights/privilege*. If you know Christ, you have the rights/privilege of a “son!” The ESV says in verse 11, *“In Him we have obtained an inheritance.”* In other words, because of what Christ did — in particular what He did on the cross — we have now obtained an inheritance.

Now, what Christ did on the cross, is the **second reason** that Paul describes in verses 7-10 to explain why the gift of grace is the greatest gift God gave us.

Ephesians 1:7-10 says, *“**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace 8 that He lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, 10 to***

*be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment — **to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.**”*

In the book titled [“Ephesians For You,”](#) Richard Coekin, the author, connected *“redemption through His [Jesus] blood”* back to its Old Testament origins, the passover sacrifice and exodus.

Do you remember the story of Israel? They were held captive by the nation of Egypt for 400 years until God sent them a leader, Moses, to lead them out of captivity. But Pharaoh didn’t want to let them go. Therefore Moses, empowered by God, called down plagues on the land of Egypt. The last plague was that every firstborn would die, Egyptian, Israelite, human or animal (see: [Exodus 12](#)). But God also provided for a way of deliverance. If the Israelites took a lamb *“without defect”* (v5), sacrificed it, and wiped its blood *“on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses”* (v7), when God

came to Egypt to strike down the firstborns he would “pass-over” those families. It’s by the blood of the lambs the Israelite firstborns were saved. It’s by the blood of these lambs that they were redeemed from death. This symbolism continued in the sacrificial system. But are sheep an adequate substitute for human lives? No. These lambs were pointing forward to a final lamb to come: Jesus is our Passover Lamb. He chose to die on the cross as a lamb “without defect.” His blood was wiped on the tops and sides of the cross. Because of Jesus’ death God “passes-over” us. And now God offers salvation, deliverance, and forgiveness as a gift. He spares us from the punishment our sins deserve and then just like He led the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt and into the promised land He is leading us, His exodus people, into our promised land.

Verse 10 tells us this redemption isn’t just for us. God’s purpose is *“to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”*

Where lions and lambs can sit side by side, where snakes and rabbits can play together, and where churches and Indigenous people can be in perfect harmony with one another. Christ’s redemption can heal and deliver us not only spiritually, but it can also heal and deliver us relationally, culturally, historically, nationally, and globally.

Now, let us see the last **third reason** — the last reason — of why the gift of grace is the greatest gift God gave us.

In verses 11-14 Paul says, *“**11** In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, **12** in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. **13** And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. **When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the***

promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession — to the praise of His glory.”

What does it mean in verse 13, “*When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit*”? One commentary said, “**Seals were used widely in the ancient world as the primary way of indicating ownership.**”¹

A person sealed or marked important things that belonged to them. We’ve been marked with the Holy Spirit that we belong to God. Anyone chosen by the Father and redeemed by the Son also receives the Holy Spirit. John chapter 3 tells us that the Holy Spirit is like the wind (John 3:8). He goes where He wants to go so if you receive the

Spirit it’s a gift. Now, perhaps some of you are listening here and asking yourself, “Am I chosen by God? Has Jesus really redeemed me?” (pause)

Well, one of the ways we know is if we have the Holy Spirit in us. Now, the real question is: How can we sense if we do have the Holy Spirit in us?

Having the Holy Spirit in us is more than just a feeling. These are the things that the Holy Spirit do in the hearts of those who believe:

1. The Holy Spirit **convicts us** of our sins and liberates us from their power (John 16:7-11; 2 Cor 3:17).
2. The Holy Spirit **comforts** our hearts in trouble (Acts 9:31).
3. The Holy Spirit **gives gifts and talents** that we can use to serve the church (Hebrews 2:4).

¹ Weima, Jeffrey A.D.. *Romans to Philemon: Volume Three* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Book 3) (Kindle Locations 10078-10084). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

4. The Holy Spirit **transforms and sanctifies** us, making us more like Jesus (2 Cor 3:18; 2 Thess 2:13).
5. The Holy Spirit **gives unity** to people from different races and social-economic status (1 Cor 12:13).
6. The Holy Spirit **gives us faith** in Christ Jesus (John 3:5-8; 16; Acts 13:48, Titus 3:5).
7. The Holy Spirit **dwells within** all who believe (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).

St. Andrew’s Presbyterian, God doesn’t invite us today to worry whether or not we have the Holy Spirit within us, today He simply invites us to receive the greatest gift he wants to give us — namely the gift of grace. In and through this grace we are chosen by the Father to His beloved children, we are redeemed by the blood of Christ, and we are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Good News

One day I watched a Tiktok about a man who proposed to a woman to marry him. He gave her a really big gift. It was all wrapped up beautifully, but when she opened it she found a smaller box wrapped inside. And when she unwrapped that gift she found another gift wrapped inside that one. And the box that had started out big got smaller and smaller; and by the time she got to the last box this man was on his knees proposing. The ring was in the last box.

The grace of our God is like that. Grace is a gift within a gift within a gift. When we open up grace we discover our Heavenly Father chose us before the creation of the world to be a child of God, a son and a daughter and to share in the inheritance of His abundant blessings. But we find another gift, and when we unwrap that we find we are redeemed by the Son. That Jesus has won our freedom and has forgiven us by His blood apart from anything we’ve done.

But there’s another gift, and when you unwrap this one we find that we are sealed and marked and in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit. It’s a gift within a gift within a gift with a diamond called “grace” at the center. Truly, God’s grace is the greatest gift God gave to us.

Close in prayer.