

CHOSEN BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: EPHESIANS 1:1-23

*God's salvation was planned before the world began.***The STORY**

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

Our salvation in Christ was always God's plan. Following Paul's greeting, the first substantial paragraph (Ephesians 1:3-10) is actually one long continuous sentence of praise that celebrates the plan and accomplishment of God in redemption through Christ. We learn some mind-bending truths in Paul's praise of God. We learn that God knew us before we were born; that He chose us in Christ before we were born; that He chose us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ; and that all this was according to God's pleasure and will. God was not surprised by the fall of Adam; He knew Adam would fall. God always planned for man's redemption to be through Jesus.

This truth can be very confusing because it seems that when the gospel is presented to us, we must choose to believe. That is true. To be saved, all men must choose to believe in God's saving plan. And yet, in the mystery of God, before we were born, or able to do any choosing, God chose us. God did not choose us based on our works, or His anticipation that we would choose him. God chose us according to His pleasure; that is, God firmly decided, according to His delight, that He would save sinners by the work of Christ!

Christ's sacrifice was always God's plan. God didn't scramble to come up with a plan after Adam and Eve sinned. He wasn't wondering what He would do next. God never said, "Oh, no! Adam and Eve disobeyed - now what am I going to do?" Even before the fall of Adam and Eve, God's plan to restore fallen man and bring all things together was to sacrifice His Son. Each of God's children was chosen in Christ as part of God's plan. God chose the exact time for Jesus' birth and arranged for it to be foretold by the prophets and even symbolized through the sacrifices He instituted.

God's plan of salvation evokes thanksgiving and prayer. Every time we hear that someone has believed in Jesus Christ, we should rejoice in the same way Paul rejoiced over the salvation of the Ephesians. Paul's prayer also helps us know what we can pray for in our own lives. We should ask God to help us know Him better through the Spirit, that our hearts might be enlightened to see our great inheritance, and that we might know the great power made available to all believers.

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WHERE IS THE GOSPEL?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

We, who were chosen in Christ before the world began, were included in Christ when we heard the gospel and believed. Though we are chosen, we are yet sinners until the appointed time where we hear and believe. The gospel is the message of salvation and is the power of our salvation. We hear it and believe. At the moment of salvation, God places His Spirit in us as a deposit and a guarantee of our full redemption, which will be experienced when sin will be removed and our sinful bodies will be changed into glorified bodies.

In Ephesians 1:7 we read, "In him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." This is the heart of the gospel. It is Christ's shed blood on the cross is the foundation of the forgiveness of sins for all those who "heard the word of truth, of the gospel of your salvation and believed in Him" (Ephesians 1:13).

Paul's introduction to the Book of Ephesians is a repetition of the basic facts of the good news. To this he adds that God's plan for us individually was known in the mind of God even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).



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ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

Bible Passage: Psalm 45:1,2

Connecting the passage to Christ:

Although this psalm, used at weddings, may have been used to describe earthly kings, Jesus is the only most excellent of men that God has blessed forever. Connecting Psalm 45:2 to Jesus, Luke records in his Gospel (Luke 4:22) that after Jesus spoke at the synagogue, the people "all spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips." Later verses of this psalm are also attributed to Christ in the Book of Hebrews. (Psalm 45:6,7 is quoted in Hebrews 1:8,9)

Questions for reflection:

- What words help us know that only Jesus could be the one described by these verses? (It is describing a king who is the most excellent of men that God has blessed forever. Only Jesus fits that description.)
- The writer of this psalm introduces the psalm by saying that his heart is stirred by a noble theme and that this psalm is actually the work of a skillful writer. Why is this true? (The writer, though he may not have realized it, was not just writing a song – he was writing Scripture. He was not just writing about a king, but the King of Kings. The stirring to write was the activity of the Holy Spirit.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.



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ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

GOD'S PREDETERMINED PLAN

Supplies:

Photocopy a simple maze for the children to do.

Make one for each of the children.

Use this to help illustrate how God's plan directs our lives to Christ even though we freely make choices as we go.

The maze only has one correct path to the finish. The children will freely negotiate the maze and reach the end. You knew exactly where they would end up even before they began to do the maze. You even knew the exact way they would go to get to the finish point.

Our lives are like that to God. He knows and has planned all things. Even though we freely make choices about what we will do, the Lord is behind the scenes determining our steps (see Proverbs 16:9).

In this first chapter of Ephesians, Paul clearly teaches us that God chose those who would place their faith in Christ before the foundation of the world was laid.

Many folks have spent a lot of hours objecting to God's sovereign plan rather than rejoicing in it. When we learn of the gospel we should cry out to God to save us. We know that God does not save all men and that some men will be judged for their rebellion against God. It is amazing that God chooses to rescue anyone from death. We should not be surprised that God does not rescue everyone. We should be surprised that God rescues anyone at all, least of all ourselves.



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CHOSEN AHEAD OF TIME

Supplies:

- three identical decks of cards
- jacket with breast pocket

Use this exercise to help the children understand the concept that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Prior to class open the decks of cards and place all the black cards from two of the decks in one pile and the red cards in another pile. Leave one deck alone to be used at the very end of the trick. Then make two decks each with only one color cards. Wear a pair of pants with pockets large enough to easily accommodate a deck of cards without being obvious to those around you. Place the normal deck in your jacket pocket.

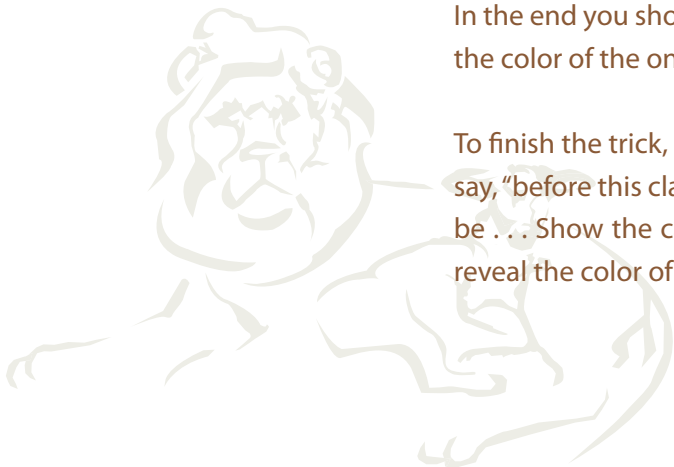
During class, pull out one deck of cards and ask for two volunteers to come forward from your class. Invite them to take any card, look at it, and then place it in their pocket. Move across the room and drop a card on the floor and ask them to stand on it. While you are walking back, switch decks. (You can put the deck you used in a pants pocket. Ask for two more volunteers then pull the second deck out of your other pocket.) Have the new volunteers pick out a card, look at it and then place it in their pocket. Have them also stand on a card at the opposite end of the room from that deck.

Repeat the exercise again without switching decks and have a third pair of volunteers stand on a card next to the first group. (You will be guessing the color of their cards but don't need to remember because you are having them stand on a card with the same color as the one they chose.)

Do this one more time, again switching decks while you casually move across the room and ask for two volunteers. The class will be so excited they won't even realize you are making the switch.

In the end you should have four pairs of volunteers standing over cards that match the color of the ones in their hands.

To finish the trick, walk over to a pair of students, pick up the card off the floor and say, "before this class even began I predetermined that the cards you picked would be . . . Show the card on the floor and call out its color. Then ask the students to reveal the color of their cards.



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Do this all four times. The children will start to guess how you did it. Tell them that you might consider telling them after you go over the Scripture for today.

Read through Ephesians 1:1-6 and talk about God choosing us before the creation of the world, even before Adam and Eve sinned. (While you are doing this inconspicuously take the normal deck of cards out and hold them in your hand as you teach.) Tell them that God had a plan to save us and knew all Christians by name specifically just like you had a plan and knew just what color card each person would pick. (Display the normal cards as you speak).

Tell the class we believe that God chose us before the foundation of the world but we don't exactly understand how God is able to know us before we are born. We believe it, because that is what Scripture teaches. Tell them this is similar to your trick. They know you chose the cards the students would pick before the class began but they do not know how.

Invite the children to try to explain how you did the trick. If they ask to see the cards give them the normal deck. In the end tell them some things are just meant to be a mystery. (Don't tell them how you did the trick as it will ruin the trick for subsequent teachers who may use it in years to come.)



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LIST THE BLESSINGS

Supplies:
white board

Read through Ephesians 1:1-23 and invite the children to list the blessings we have been given by God the Father through Christ. Talk about each one.

- He chose us – All men are in rebellion against God but God chose to rescue some from eternal death.
- God blesses all those He saves by taking away their sins so they are blameless. He does this through the sacrifice of His Son.
- God adopts as His children all those He saves.
- We have redemption (We are purchased out of slavery from sin.)
- We are lavished with His grace.
- We are given the Holy Spirit as a deposit and guarantee.

PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

On a blank white paper draw a large cross outline. Write your name over and over inside the outline of the cross to fill it up completely. Then write the words, "For He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," with colored markers across the top or on the bottom of your paper.



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FOR THE OLDER GRADES

SEARCHING OUT THE TRINITY

Supplies

White board and markers

Paul makes reference to all three persons of the Trinity in this passage. Take time to list the way Paul includes references to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. List them on the board and then draw out the class as to where they see the three persons of the Godhead in this passage.

Father – The subject of the blessings in Ephesians 1:3-10 is the Father.

- The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.
- He chose us in Him before the creation of the world.
- He predestined us.
- He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure.

Son – The Son is the means by which the Father blesses us.

- Christ is the Son of the Father.
- Our blessings are in Christ.
- We were chosen in Him (Christ).
- We were adopted through Jesus Christ.
- We receive His grace freely in the One (Christ).
- We have redemption through His blood.
- We were chosen in Him (Christ).
- We were included in Christ.

Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit is our deposit and guarantee.

- Having believed we are marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.
- He is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.



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A LITTLE BIT MORE

Predestination – It is difficult for us to understand how God chose some, but not all, prior to creation. People will sometimes ask, “Do you believe in election or predestination?” as if it was a teaching made up by man. The Bible clearly teaches that prior to the world being made, God not only knew what would happen, but He pre-determined what would happen. At the same time, the Bible teaches that all men are responsible for their sin and must repent. Someone may say, “I chose to follow God.” That is exactly true. But it is also true to say that God chose that person first, before the world even began. Ultimately God’s choice of us prevails over our choice of God. Jesus said it this way, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed that you should go and bear fruit,” (John 15:16a).

