

**Ephesians 1:1-14**  
**11 August 13**

“Yea, God, You Rock!”

I can think of two titles for a sermon on this piece of Scripture. One would be, “Yea, God! You rock!” More than a few of the Psalms boil down to the same thing Either they are complaints to God, thinly veiled challenges for God to do a better job, or they are songs of sometimes over the top praise. You know, like Psalm 150, “Praise the LORD with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!”

Today’s reading is a lot like that. “he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption to the praise of his glorious grace. In him we have redemption. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we’re a free people—free of penalties and punishments.”

Really, this is over the top rhetoric, effusive in its joy and exultation and praise. *Before the foundation of the earth* God chose us so that we might lived to the praise of his glory. In Greek this section, verses 3-14 is one *long sentence!* It’s like the writer got wound up and couldn’t stop.

Now later on this letter to the Ephesians is going to get pretty practical in its advice on living. Most of the letters in the New Testament have sections on how to live, and in that sense they are like the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Some of that advice on how to live is fairly general, and some is really specific.

But here’s the key on all that advice: if you read through the genuine letters of the New Testament you’ll notice that they pretty much all follow a certain form. And part of that form is that the advice on living always comes towards the end.

That’s not because the writers of these letters want to put off anything that might be uncomfortable or difficult to hear. It’s because in Christian thought the “here’s how you should I’ve” parts *always* are based on the “here’s what God has done for you” parts. “Here’s what God has in store for you, here’s what God wants for you,” therefore, “Live this way and not that way.” The “do this and don’t do that” parts of the letters are not *if* you do this, then God will love you and bless you; they are *because* God loves and blesses you, you really ought to do this and not do that because 1) that’s what God wants, 2) you’ll be better off and that’s what God wants for you, and 3) if you don’t live this way, you’re kinda thumbing your nose at God and throwing away God’s love and blessings, and that’s just not going to be good for you. So, not if but because—because God is this way and acts this way towards you, you should do this and not do that. That’s how Lutherans and many other Christians read these letters Our church body is not the *If*angelical Lutheran Church in America; it’s the *Ev*angelical Lutheran Church in America,

Gospel centered.

So Ephesians begins with this effusive, over the top song of praise. Yes, it's a song; it's very much like the other early Christian hymns we know. This reading today can be preached; but really it's better to sing it. You're more likely to get it if you let these words wash over you than if you study them. Treat them like one of the Psalms, "Yea, God! You rock!"

But I got another title for this sermon. It's "How to Live a Happy, Joyful, Contented Life." "What?" you say, "there's nothing in there about how to do any of that." Yeah, well, there isn't. But the more I think about this passage, the more I try to sing it, the more I think this is *exactly* what Scriptures like this are about. They are about "How to Live a Happy, Joyful, Contented Life."

Here's how this works, at least for me: For Ephesians, even though the end is not even in sight; the final chapter of God's story, while it may contain surprises, is already written, and it's going to be pretty awesome. I mean based on what has happened, what God has done and continues to do, it's going to be pretty awesome. Christ is exalted; the church is alive and raised with him; there is still conflict to be faced because the days are evil. Yet the end is not in doubt, since the Spirit lives in the church and in us as a guarantee that our final inheritance is assured. This means the future, even the unpleasant parts, even the tough parts, can be faced with confidence. And even the tragic and ugly parts can be met with hope, not despair, because God's final chapter will be awesome and because we have a sure and certain part in because *before the foundation of the earth God predestined us in love to be his own.*

Now, to me that is formula for living a happy, joyful, contented life.