

“Saints by God’s Grace Makeover”

Ephesians 1:1-23

Pastor James York

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A saint is an imperfect person that God’s loving light shines through. We Presbyterians define saints as all those who have a relationship with God, whether on earth or with God in heaven. We all are saints. We are all a part of the loving, eternal family of God and will be perfected by God’s grace makeover. As saints, we are to let the loving light of God shine through us.

The Apostle Paul declares we are forgiven. We will all be healed, made whole, perfected and adopted into God’s eternal family. Each and every person is created, chosen, predestined to eternal sainthood by God’s grace makeover.

Paul wrote, **Ephesians 1:1-23 NRSV** “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before God in love. God destined us for adoption as God’s children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of God’s will, to the praise of God’s glorious grace that God freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In God we have redemption through Jesus’ blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of God’s grace that God lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight God has made known to us the mystery of God’s will, according to God’s good pleasure that God set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in God, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of God who accomplishes all things according to God’s counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of God’s glory. In God you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in God, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of God’s glory. I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for us who believe, according to the working of God’s great power. God put this power to work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and seated Jesus at God’s right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And God has put all things under Jesus’ feet and has made Jesus the head over all things for the church, which is Jesus’ body, the fullness of God who fills all in all.”

We are saints even when the light that shines through us is intermitted, distorted and dim. This is wonderful news. We have a glorious inheritance. Our inheritance includes the perfecting of every snippet of love. Sometimes our attempts to express our love doesn’t come out right. Our love gets distorted or misinterpreted. God perfects our love. Sometimes we are exhausted, confused, frustrated, so we say and do things that we regret. God forgives us. God finds the love that we wanted to express and conveys that love. In heaven, we saints, will experience the perfection of all love. We will experience the fulfilment of every attempt to express love.

Sometimes we have a hard time seeing each other as saints shining with God’s love. The Apostle Paul prays for us “with the eyes of your heart enlightened, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life—endless energy, boundless strength.” God is the perfecter of love. We are invited to envision the love of all people perfected. In heaven we will see the glorious, immense love in one another that is primarily hidden here on earth. God’s grace makeover will cleanse away all the hurtful words, actions, and behaviors and polish our true love and saintly glory the image of God which is in each one of us. Can you imagine our joy as every expression of our love comes out and is received perfectly? The delight as we discover all the people who love us but for some reason, maybe an addiction, disease, dispute, crisis, or whatever that love never got through to us here on earth. Can you imagine the joy of being reunited with our loved ones who are now in heaven and the rediscovery of their perfected love?

Ephesians invites us to envision the perfected love of all of us, all people from the beginning of time to the end of time, all united as saints in perfect loving community. Ephesians invites us to contemplate how God created and ordered the universe, so all things and people return home to God. Paul wrote, “We are a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! God thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans God took such delight in making. God set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in Jesus, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.” We are summoned to envision God revealing the love of the entire cosmos.

The apostle Paul describes death as a parade home. “Jesus was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—Jesus is supreme in the end. From beginning to end Jesus is there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is Jesus, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in Jesus. All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies.”

Paul is trying to explain God’s plan which is now mainly hidden but will one day reveal the riches of God’s glorious inheritance. This plan has been in place since the beginning of time. We are predestined. God chose us. God will transform us to be pure and holy. We are adopted by God. We belong to God’s family. We have a room in heaven filled with all our delights, joys, and loves.

We have free will, and we are predestined to have all our love perfected and live for eternity as a saint, in relationship with all the saints. Scripture proclaims, “Long before God laid down earth’s foundations, God had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of God’s love, to be made whole and holy by God’s love. Long, long ago God decided to adopt us into God’s family. What pleasure God took in planning this! God wanted us to enter into the celebration of God’s lavish gift-giving.”

We are predestined. We will be perfected and savor every love and joy for eternity. We are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. By God’s grace we are saints.

Predestination is to be our comfort in life. No matter how bad the situation, how bad we mess up, how distorted and dim our love becomes, how bad the choices we make, we will always belong to God and God’s grace make over will cleanse us until our perfect love shines. The Heidelberg Catechism asks, “What is your comfort in life and death?” the answer begins: “That I belong body and soul not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.”

As we accept the fact that we are saints going to heaven we can live more and more hope filled lives. Hope is envisioning our glorious heavenly inheritance, the perfected love of all the saints.

Paul prays for our hope to grow. Since there is to be no fear, no anxiety, no doubt that we will be united with God in heaven for eternity, we are inspired to take risks, striving for greatness and loving extravagantly. Most of God’s love is hidden from our earthy perception. At best we only get glimpses of God’s love and the heavenly glory that awaits us. Paul prays for us to grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life God has for all people, the extravagance of God’s work in us. Paul prays for us to be saints, hopeful people who let the light of God shine through us.

Pastor Susan Andrews writes, “Ephesians speaks to the lofty, pulsing mood of All Saints Day—when the living and the dead are wed in a liturgy of praise. The living saints, to whom the letter is addressed, are swept up into God’s cosmic plan of salvation—“chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless” and “marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.” The glory of the gospel is that ordinary, imperfect people are saved by grace and so transformed into holy vessels—channels of God’s power to make all things new. The specific ethical instructions in the final chapters of Ephesians bring all the lofty language down to earth, integrating the elegance of grace into the most mundane moments and relationships of living.”

John Calvin encourages us, the saints, to have hopeful perseverance in our daily life, to live amid an evil and confusing world, without being controlled by it. Hopeful saints can persevere—to work down in the thick of things, with God by their side, connected to and in solidarity with all the pain and suffering of an unfinished creation—but not defined or diminished by the chaos. How do we do it? According to Paul, earthy imperfect saints have the eyes of a heart enlightened to see love and to envision the future, the entire cosmos and every person healed, made whole and perfected. Saints are ordinary people who in the midst of daily life, even bleak life, let God’s healing love flow through them giving others a glimpse of their predestined, glorious future with perfected love.

Colin Powell describes saints as “the forgiven who know it, act upon it and live by grace without angling for stained-glass window status.” We all are saints; imperfect people being perfected by God’s grace makeover. Amen