

The Big Picture

GOD IN THE CENTER FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

Redemption: To the Praise of His Glory

To the Praise of His Glory

In *From Eden to Eternity*, we stepped back and looked at the whole biblical story from a distance. We traced its four great movements: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation.

Then we began moving closer.

In *Created for Him*, we saw Creation through the lens of God's glory. Everything came from Him, belonged to Him, and existed for Him. Creation declared His glory, and worship was the proper response of the creature to the Creator.

Then came the Fall.

In *Glory Exchanged*, the direction established in Creation was reversed. Humanity questioned God's Word, doubted His goodness, challenged His authority, and ultimately “exchanged the glory of the immortal God” for created things (Romans 1:23). Worship was turned away from the Creator toward the Creation.

And as we followed that exchange through Scripture, we discovered that it did not end in Eden. God's people exchanged His glory for the image of an ox. They forsook the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns. Eventually, Scripture brought the problem close enough that we could no longer leave idolatry in the ancient world. The question reached us: What are we allowing to rival God for our devotion, our desires, and our service?

Yet even while humanity turns away from God, Scripture keeps directing our attention back to Him. He remains the Creator. He remains glorious. He remains worthy. He remains the living and true God.

And He gives more grace.

At the end of *Glory Exchanged*, we saw the direction begin to reverse. The Thessalonians had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). But Paul immediately pointed us to something humanity could never accomplish for itself. They were waiting for God's Son from heaven, “Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (v. 10).

And that brings us to the third movement of the story: Redemption.

Humanity needs more than instruction. We need deliverance.

So now we move closer again and ask our familiar question: What does redemption reveal about God? What has God done to redeem? Why has He done it? And what does His work of redemption reveal about Him?

Paul answers those questions magnificently in Ephesians 1. And as he unfolds the work of God in redemption, one phrase appears again and again: **“to the praise of his glory.”**

Redemption Begins with God

Ephesians 1:3-14

Read Ephesians 1:3-14 and, before looking at the details, notice something about the passage as a whole: Who is doing the acting?

Paul begins: “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” (v. 3). Then look at what God does.

God has blessed us in Christ (v. 3).

He chose us in Him (v. 4).

He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ (v. 5).

He blessed us with His grace (v. 6).

In Christ, He gives redemption and forgiveness (v. 7).

He lavished His grace upon us (v. 7-8).

He made known the mystery of His will (v. 9).

He works according to His purpose (v. 5, 9, 11).

And He has given the promised Holy Spirit (v. 13-14).

Notice where Paul's attention keeps returning. The people who needed redemption did not devise the plan of redemption. God did.

That is significant after everything we have just seen in the Fall. Humanity turned away from God. Humanity questioned His Word. Humanity exchanged His glory. Humanity exchanged His truth. Humanity directed its worship toward what God had made rather than toward the God who made it.

If the story depended upon humanity finding its own way back, there would be no redemption. But the story does not begin again with what humanity does. It begins with what God does.

And Paul takes us even deeper. He does not simply tell us *what* God has done. He repeatedly draws our attention to *why* He has done it. God acts “according to the purpose of his will” (v. 5). He makes known “the mystery of his will, according to his purpose” (v. 9). And in verse 11, Paul describes Him as the One “who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”

His will.

His purpose.

His counsel.

The emphasis matters. The Fall was real. Human rebellion was real. Sin brought devastating consequences into God's good Creation. But God had not abandoned what He intended to accomplish. God still has a purpose. And He is accomplishing it.

In fact, Paul takes us back beyond Eden. He says that God chose “in him before the foundation of the world” (v. 4).

Before the serpent entered the garden.

Before humanity questioned God's Word.

Before His glory was exchanged.

Before there was sin from which humanity needed to be redeemed.

God was already there.

That takes us all the way back to where *The Big Picture* began: *Before there was a beginning, there was God.*

And now we discover something more about Him. The God who was there before Creation is the God whose purpose reaches across the entire story. Creation begins with Him. Humanity's rebellion does not remove Him from the center. And redemption originates not in humanity's effort to repair what we have broken, but in the will, purpose, and grace of God.

And that purpose is centered in Christ. We are blessed “in Christ” (v. 3), chosen “in him” (v. 4), given grace “in the Beloved” (v. 6), and given redemption “in him” (v. 7). God's purpose itself is set forth “in Christ” (v. 9).

And then Paul gives us a glimpse of just how large that purpose really is: “as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (v. 10). Paul's words show us that God's purpose in redemption reaches far beyond us.

God is not merely rescuing isolated individuals from the consequences of sin. Paul directs our eyes toward God's great purpose in Christ, a purpose that reaches toward all things. The Fall brought alienation, disorder, corruption, and death into God's good Creation, but God has not abandoned what He has made. He has a purpose for it. And at the center of that purpose stands Jesus Christ.

Redemption Is Accomplished Through Christ

God's purpose is centered in Christ. But how does God accomplish our redemption? Paul tells us: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

There is a great deal packed into that one verse. In Scripture, redemption carries the idea of deliverance or release through the payment of a price. And here Paul tells us both where redemption is found and what it cost. It is “in him” and “through his blood.” Our redemption has a cost.

The God who acts to redeem does not simply overlook humanity's rebellion or pretend that sin does not matter. The God whose authority was rejected in Eden is holy. The sin committed against Him is real. The guilt is real. And forgiveness is costly. The price of our redemption is the blood of Christ.

Peter describes that same truth: “knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Humanity could not provide what our redemption required. God did.

And notice again where Paul places that redemption: “in him.” Our redemption is not found in trying harder to obey God. It is not found in becoming religious enough, moral enough, or good enough to repair our relationship with Him.

It is found in Christ.

The Son who stands at the center of God's purpose also stands at the center of God's provision for sinners. And through His blood, Paul says, we receive “the forgiveness of our trespasses.”

Think back again to what we saw in *Glory Exchanged*. The God whose Word humanity rejected, whose authority humanity challenged, and whose glory humanity exchanged offers forgiveness.

Why? Paul tells us: “according to the riches of his grace.”

Not merely *out of* His grace, as though God were distributing a small portion from a limited supply. Paul speaks of the riches of His grace, which verse 8 says He “lavished upon us.”

Think back to James 4. After describing people whose desires had turned toward the world, James gave us five words that changed the direction of the passage: “But he gives more grace” (James 4:6).

Now Ephesians shows us just how far that grace reaches. It reaches all the way to the cross. This is not grace that ignores the seriousness of sin. It is grace that provides the redemption sin requires.

Once again, the attention of the story is drawn back to God: His purpose, His Son, His forgiveness, and His grace. Redemption is something we receive, but its glory belongs to the God who provides it.

And that is exactly where Paul takes us next.

Redemption Leads to the Praise of God's Glory

Three times in Ephesians 1, Paul directs our attention to God's glory. After describing God's choice and adoption of His people, Paul says it is: “to the praise of his glorious grace” (v. 6). After describing the inheritance we have in Christ, he says: “so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory” (v. 12). And after describing the promised Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our inheritance, he ends: “to the praise of his glory” (v. 14).

Three times. Praise. Glory.

That repetition tells us something about how Paul wants us to understand redemption. He has told us about extraordinary blessings that belong to those who are in Christ: adoption, redemption, forgiveness, an inheritance, and the Holy Spirit. But Paul does not allow the blessings of redemption to become the center of redemption. Again and again, he directs our eyes back to God.

His grace is praised.

His glory is praised.

And His glory is praised again.

That matters especially when we remember where we have just been in the biblical story.

In *Glory Exchanged*, we read that humanity “exchanged the glory of the immortal God” for created things (Romans 1:23). Humanity looked away from the Creator and toward the Creation. The honor and worship that belonged to God were directed elsewhere. But humanity's refusal to glorify God did not diminish His glory.

God remained glorious.

And now, in redemption, something remarkable happens. The God whose glory humanity exchanged acts to redeem. He gives grace, His Son, forgiveness, an inheritance, and His Spirit. And the people He redeems are brought back to the very purpose humanity rejected: the praise of His glory.

Do you see the reversal?

In the Fall, humanity knew God but “did not honor him as God or give thanks to him” (Romans 1:21). In redemption, God's saving work creates a people whose lives are “to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:12).

Glory exchanged.

Glory praised.

And standing between the two is **Jesus Christ**.

God does not receive glory in redemption simply because redeemed people finally begin praising Him again. Redemption itself reveals His glory.

It reveals the riches of His grace, the wisdom of His purpose, His holiness in the costliness of sin, His mercy in forgiveness, His love in the giving of His Son, and His faithfulness in accomplishing what He purposed.

The Fall did not expose some weakness in God. Redemption reveals more of who He is.

That changes the way we look at salvation.

We rightly rejoice that we are forgiven, redeemed, adopted, given an inheritance, and sealed with the Holy Spirit. But if we stop with what *we receive*, we can quietly place ourselves back at the center of the story.

Paul keeps moving our eyes beyond the gifts to the Giver.

We are forgiven because He is gracious. We are redeemed because He acted to redeem. We are adopted because He purposed to make us His own. We have an inheritance because He has promised it. We have the Spirit because He has given Him as the guarantee of what is still to come.

The blessings are ours. The glory is His.

And perhaps that is one of the most important things redemption teaches us about *The Big Picture*.

God does not save us so that we can become the center of His story. He saves us so that we can once again take our rightful place within it: redeemed by His grace, through the blood of His Son, sealed with His Spirit, and living to the praise of His glory.

The direction is being reversed. The glory that was exchanged is once again praised. And the God who has remained at the center of the story all along is still there.

Glorious. Gracious. Worthy of all praise.

The Big Picture

Now step back and look at what we have seen.

Creation: God's glory revealed.

Fall: God's glory exchanged.

Redemption: God's glory praised.

And through every movement, **God remains at the center.**

Humanity exchanged His glory. **He remained glorious.**

Humanity rejected His Word. **He remained true.**

Humanity rebelled against His authority. **He remained Lord.**

Humanity could not redeem itself. **He gave His Son.**

Sin brought guilt. **He provided forgiveness.**

We needed deliverance. **He became our Redeemer.**

And the grace that began in the purpose of God, was accomplished through the blood of Christ, and is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit leads us exactly where Paul told us it would: **“to the praise of his glory.”**

This is why redemption should lead us to more than gratitude for what God has done for us. It should lead us to wonder at who He is. The God at the center of this story is holy enough that sin cannot simply be ignored, gracious enough to redeem those who rebelled against Him, loving enough to give His Son, powerful enough to accomplish His purpose, and faithful enough to carry that purpose to completion.

He is worthy of the glory humanity refused to give Him.

And redemption is not the end of the story. The Spirit who guarantees our inheritance points us forward. God's purpose reaches beyond forgiveness toward the day when everything broken by the Fall will finally be made new.

We have seen God's glory revealed.

We have seen His glory exchanged.

We have seen redemption lead to the praise of His glory.

But one great movement remains.

What happens when God's purpose reaches its completion? What will Creation look like when sin, death, and the curse are gone? And what happens when the glory of God is no longer exchanged for created things, but fills the world He has made?

That brings us to the final movement of the story: New Creation: Filled with His Glory.

This is His story. This is His glory. This is *The Big Picture*.