

Catford Lectures 2014-2015

Part 4

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Place	Catford Lectures 2014-15
Duration	01:00:48
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/best003/catford-lectures-2014-2015

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[00:00:01] The hymn I should like us to commence with this evening is 337 in the Black Books, in the Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs. O God of grace, our Father, all praise to Thee we give. We might note the words of verse two also as we sing. There only is a fountain when still immortals go, which like a glorious river still gladdened as they go.

[00:01:22] As I now disclose from all eternity, my chosen ones ever kept present to my eye, and when worst came the moment, Thou called in by Thy grace, [00:02:02] this gently fell before us, each from his hiding place.

Why would I, self-relieving, thus sanctify thy truth?

Still leading all my children with gentle heavenly roads, but still the work proceeds, the work begun by grace, for which is neat and training, Father, to see Thy face.

[00:03:18] When Nick was finishing speaking, three words came into my mind, to be continued, because it was evident to me, as I'm sure it was to you also, that the subject was not complete. And I thought to myself, will I rise to the challenge? Shall I say some words on baptism? And I might have had some interesting things to say, and some surprising things, startling things even to say.

[00:04:10] But I had to think of Mr. Darby, and the occasion when a lady approached him, and said to him, Mr. Darby, what does Mr. Wigram hold on baptism?

Mr. Wigram had a different view on the subject, and Darby replied, Madam, he holds his tongue. So I'm going to hold my tongue and wait my turn on that subject, and instead speak to you about election.

And for that I'd like to turn to 1 Peter chapter 1.

[00:05:24] And the first two verses of this epistle would be sufficient for my purpose.

Verse 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia,

Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, [00:06:24] through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, grace unto you, and peace be multiplied.

Now, that is the opening salutation. That is the greeting, and immediately he speaks of these believers as being elect, which simply means chosen.

[00:07:18] They were specially chosen.

The first thing I want to emphasize here tonight is the scope of this scripture. Because it carries us back into a past eternity, if we may use that expression.

Because Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, tells us that we are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the earth. [00:08:10] Here, before anything else happens, we're elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. And then certain consequences flow out of that. And in wishing these believers grace and peace, multiplied from God the Father, That multiplication of the grace and of the peace, coming from the character of an infinite God, can never know any end.

It knows neither measure nor end.

[00:09:02] In Paul's line, it carries us up into the heavenly places. In Paul's mind, it carries us into the future eternity, when we will in actuality be before God the Father, in holiness, without blame. He tells us of that future realization, when we will be to the praise of his glory. And when in company with the Lord Jesus Christ, we will enjoy such rich privileges. And there's an inkling, there's a hint of that, in fact there's a proof of that, I think, in the fact that grace and peace are multiplied to us from God. [00:10:02] He doesn't give with a beggarly, miserly hand.

He gives abundantly.

What blessing is ours, beloved?

Maybe we have a very feeble apprehension of it at this present time. Maybe we don't enter into our blessings. Maybe we haven't possessed our possessions. In the language of Joshua, we may not yet have put our feet down upon the ground, but the whole land is there to be possessed.

Brother Ernie Brown often said, if a thing's worth saying, it's worth repeating.

[00:11:09] And the Scottish brethren, in speaking about spiritual subjects, some of these things, which are ours experientially or experimentally, or that are given for our enjoyment, that practically we might seek to enter into them. They say, it's better felt than told. It's better felt than told. We can experience or feel the thing, even if we cannot adequately put into words the explanation of the thing. I was always taught that this is what the old Scottish brethren said, and then here didn't I discover it in one of the Puritan writers of former days of a few centuries ago. [00:12:13] So you see, in divine truth, a thing that is worth saying is worth repeating.

But my first point tonight is the largeness and the grandeur and the scope and the magnificence of the salvation which is ours in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. And it has its origin and its beginning in the heart of God that we are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Isn't that a

wonderful thing?

[00:13:02] That God had thoughts of us before ever we had thoughts of him. That he saw us ruined in the fall and loved us notwithstanding all. So we go back to a great God, a God who has set his love upon us. And that's the difference in the scope of this subject. As compared with baptism, which is something, as we've heard, that has to do with this earth.

That is a positional thing, that is an introductory thing, that associates us externally with the Lord Jesus and with the Christian profession. [00:14:03] Because we saw already in the scripture that was read from Acts that there were professors who had the privilege of Christian baptism conferred on them. Because make no mistake, it's a privilege. They had that privilege conferred on them and yet they didn't know the reality in their heart. We have to face that possibility. One Lord and one faith and one baptism, that's profession. Many people say the creed. Many people own the Lordship of Christ in name only.

Who don't in this day sadly, in the current condition of things in the Christian profession, they don't have the reality in their hearts. Many people acknowledge the Christian faith. [00:15:02] They'll be confirmed, or they'll have their first communion, or they'll say the confession.

And nominally they say, oh yes, I adhere to the Christian faith as a body of doctrine, as a system of ideas. People can do that without having the reality in their heart. And baptism is an external right.

It doesn't confer life. It's impossible that immersion in water, or sprinkling with water, or ablution and pouring of water, it's impossible that something external of that nature can produce an inward change. [00:16:06] So in connection with the subject this afternoon, we were looking at the important matter of our place on earth. We're looking at that which is bounded by time. We're looking at that which in a certain point of view is something external. But tonight we're considering our privileges. We're considering the reality. What we are speaking about tonight is something that only a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has true faith in God, who has repented of his sins. Only those whom Peter speaks of as the elect, these are the ones who enter into that truth.

[00:17:08] And it's a wonderful, establishing thing to think of ourselves as God thinks about us.

Now, these people to whom he wrote were sojourners of the dispersion, if we want to give it a literal translation. They were strangers scattered.

Or as it might more literally be worded, the sojourners of the dispersion.

They had been uprooted. They had been dispersed.

[00:18:04] They had been resituated. They had been moved out of their own country. Because he's speaking of the Jewish dispersion here. And he's naming the places in which through the persecution or the captivity or whatever the factors were. He's naming the places where they were found. And we can find these places in Annapolis, in Pontus, in Galicia, in Cappadocia, in Asia, in Bithynia. We can find those places. And the Jews were settled there. And actually, they probably considered themselves as a downtrodden people.

And as a dispossessed people. [00:19:01] And as a people who had been messed up by, if you go

back far enough, by the Babylonians or in more recent times by the Romans. Or by the cut and thrust of the politics in which, in the day in which they lived.

It was fun. And that gives people a certain mindset. Because I've been visiting amongst people who've been uprooted twice. First of all, from their own country in Bhutan. And then after 19 or 20 years, suddenly they were removed from Bhutan. And asked to find a new life in the United States of America. Sometimes in very different situations. And there's at least one person here this evening who will be able to tell you with me. [00:20:02] But they don't look at things the way, their way of thinking and their way of looking at things. Somewhat different to the way you or I, with our upbringing culture, would look at things. And sometimes the decisions they take appear to us to be a bit strange. Well, be that as it may. Evidently, these people didn't have very much. Outwardly, I should think.

They had suffered.

They were no longer in their own land.

No longer in comfortable surroundings. And we might say they had disadvantages in life.

And yet they could look up to heaven.

[00:21:07] And they could say they were elect.

They were chosen by God.

Isn't that a comforting thought for each and all of us? Especially if we have to go through trial. Turmoil.

Bereavement.

Family problems.

Work. Headaches.

Moving from one place to another or from one country to another, you know. It's easy. It's easy to get despondent. And in this fast-moving age, where man is everything, [00:22:11] and where we come across intellectuals, men of brilliant mental capacity, and we look at all the inventiveness of the wit of man, and we look at the information superhighway, and we find everything that's going on all around us. And sometimes it makes us feel very small.

Very insignificant.

Sometimes in turmoil.

Sometimes feelings of low self-worth.

Actually, when we read in the New Testament and Paul's epistles, [00:23:06] we find that very many of the early Christians were slaves.

They had nothing in this life. They had no rights. They had no property.

No possessions.

They were merely the goods, the chattels and possessions of someone else, who could be bought and sold at will, to such people who had nothing.

God says, you're mine.

You're my chosen one.

He says, I've chosen you according to my own foreknowledge. I've introduced you through sanctification of the spirit into or onto certain things, [00:24:04] and I'm multiplying grace and peace towards you.

Now, if we could grasp that, I think it would be very helpful.

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul turns round to the Corinthians, and he says, You see your calling, brethren? That's brothers and sisters. He says, look at your standing in life. 1 Corinthians 1, verse 26. How that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, [00:25:04] but God, you see it?

You caught that? But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. I believe it was the Countess of Huntington or some such person, aristocratic lady, she said she was delighted that Paul said in these verses, God has not chosen many. He didn't say, I haven't chosen any. It doesn't say he hadn't chosen any from these more privileged classes, [00:26:01] but it says he hasn't chosen many. So we're back here even in 1 Corinthians 1 with the choice of God. And that's a very comforting truth for us, that we have value to God.

We're valuable to Him because He chose you. And He chose me, that we are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. That He put such value, infinite value on us, that He sent His Son, His well-beloved, only begotten, eternal Son, the Son of His bosom, to Calvary to offer Himself without spot to God [00:27:03] in order that we might be redeemed and come into the good of all that God has purposed for us. That comes in under the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. So, it's a really encouraging thing.

And incidentally, if we want to know that we are amongst the elect of God, we don't seek to look into the eternal councils of God and occupy ourselves with whether our name is in the ledger or if God has chosen us at a particular point in time. For us, that's not the road that we have to go down. We make our calling and election sure by assuring ourselves that we have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. [00:28:05] And if we know Him as our personal Saviour and have that faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be assured that we are His and that we are God's. On the divine side, John's Gospel emphasizes strongly the sovereignty of God.

And in John's Gospel, there is the dealing with individuals. And in John's Gospel, we read, All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.

That's the Father's part.

That's between the Father and the Son. There are those that are given of the Father to the Son. [00:29:02] They're referred to in John 17, the men whom thou hast given me. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me. And then it says, And Him that comes to me.

That's the open invitation. Whosoever will Him that comes to me. The Lord Jesus, who is God, the Son, says, Him that comes to me, I will not in any way, I will in no wise cast out. If you come to the Lord Jesus, in true penitence and in simple faith, confessing your sins, He said, Him that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out.

[00:30:01] That's the free offer of the Gospel. And yet, behind it lies this truth. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me. And Him that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out. So we need to hold the balance of the truth. But when we come to this, it's God that chooses, no question. And the order is this.

We are elect onto obedience.

We are elect.

And as a consequence, we obey.

It's clear in the order of the words here. Don't put them the wrong way around. Don't say we obey onto election.

It doesn't say that. It doesn't say that our obedience leads to our election. [00:31:04] It says that the election results in and leads onto our obedience. So that's the order. We are elect.

We are chosen.

And we are chosen onto obedience. And then it tells us how or why this election has come about.

We're told that it is according to the foreknowledge of God.

Now, what does that mean?

According to the foreknowledge of God.

I'll tell you first of all what I don't believe it means. I don't believe that it means that God looks down through the passage of time [00:32:06] and he realizes that this one and that one and those here and those there will choose salvation and will choose the Lord Jesus Christ and based on that foreknowledge of their actions he then elects them. I don't believe that.

And I'll tell you why.

Because if that had been the case there would have been no one to choose. Because Paul is very clear.

There's none righteous. There's not even a single one. The summary of man's plight the summary of man's ruin in Romans [00:33:03] is given this capstone. This is the conclusion that Paul reaches in regard to the gospel. Romans is the gospel of God. And the grand conclusion that Paul reaches looking at the sinfulness of the human race and looking at all that has happened he says there's none Romans 3 verse 11 there's none that understands there is none that seeketh after God there's not one there's not a single one of Adam's ruined race who would have sought after God. Not one.

Unless God worked by His Holy Spirit.

So if God [00:34:01] looking down through the passage of time was waiting for one of us to respond to the offer of the gospel we'd have turned our backs.

We'd have spat in His face like those who crucified the Lord Jesus. We would have had no time and no place for Christ in our sinful human hearts. There's none that seeketh after God. And Paul follows it up later in the epistle he says the carnal mind the mind of the flesh what we are naturally it is enmity against God it is hatred of God. That was the background. So in order for a soul to respond to Christ was necessary that God in His grace and by His Spirit should take the initiative. After all if we are dead in trespasses and in sins [00:35:04] we may be alive in our sins but Godwards we're dead. If we're dead there's no spiritual movement whatsoever towards God and it's necessary that life should be brought in and of His own will He begat us through the word of truth. Of His own will He caused us to live James say by the word of truth. It was God's will. It was of His own will. And here it says that we're begotten again onto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We don't born ourselves again. We've no control over our natural birth. We've no control over our spiritual birth. But if poor knowledge means that God looked down through the avenues in the vista of time and waited for us to respond there would not have been a response from any of us. [00:36:01] So I don't think that that is what foreknowledge means. It's contradicted and confounded by other scriptures. But the second point is this.

We're told in scripture that foreknowledge is a foreknowledge not of deeds and not of actions but it's a foreknowledge of persons. In Romans it says whom he foreknew them he also predestinated in that great chapter in Romans chapter 8.

Whom he has foreknown he has also predestinated. [00:37:01] It's not what he saw.

It's not the actions. It's not the response that would come from us. It's whom. It's persons. It's naked election. It's bare election. It's a choice of persons based on the person and not on the action.

And the Old Testament bears that out. Jacob have I loved. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. So when we read about God's foreknowledge our second point in regard to it is it's a foreknowledge not of things, not of actions not of possible responses but it's a foreknowledge of persons. It's a choice of persons. Because actually and this is the third point I want to stress [00:38:02] in connection with foreknowledge that's actually the meaning of the Greek word. If you look this word up to foreknow or foreknowledge it's speaking of choice. If you look at Little and Scott if you look at a Greek lexicon you'll see the meaning of this word. And we may be thrown off track a little bit by the English translation of the word meaning knowing beforehand. Well of course God knows beforehand. How could he not know? God knows everything. About everything. And he knows it all beforehand. The present is as the past with him. He knows everything. But this is a special foreknowing. It's a special foreknowledge. [00:39:02] It's a foreknowledge of individuals. It's tantamount to God's love or

God's choice of individuals.

And we see that in Amos. Chapter 3.

In regard to Israel.

It says you only have I known of all the families of the earth. God knew everyone. He knew all the families. He knew all the nations. But he chose the seed of Abram. Called Abram out of idolatry.

And established his covenant with him. He knew Israel in a special way. And therefore he says I'll punish you for all your iniquities. They were God's earthly people. They were in a special relationship with God. [00:40:02] And consequently as more responsible when they stepped out of line and transgressed the covenant. Then it says therefore I'll punish you for your iniquities. But the point I'm emphasizing here is you only have I known. This knowledge is speaking of special relationship. God knew everyone.

But he knew Israel in a special way. And this foreknowledge means that God has a special take. Special account. Shows a special love. Enters into a special relationship with individuals. He says I've foreknown you. And actually we might illustrate it by going down 1 Peter chapter 1 to verse 20 where it speaks of Christ. And it says there [00:41:05] who was foreordained or foreknown in the new translation it's the same word. He was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world. Now did God need to know beforehand if Christ was speaking reverently equal to the task? If he was willing to obey and go to the cross of Calvary as the Lamb without blemish and without spot. It would be a blasphemy even to think such a thing of our Lord Jesus Christ who was very God of very God of the essence and nature of the Father in the divine and ever blessed Trinity. The Father didn't need to work out or ascertain in advance or know beforehand whether Christ [00:42:01] was willing to obey or not. It cannot carry that meaning. Christ was foreknown. Christ was chosen for that specific task because of his intrinsic worth and because of his personal excellence and he accomplished the work of redemption. We are foreknown not because of anything that we have in ourselves but because of the infinite grace and wisdom of God. The other thing here too which I have more or less indicated but I'll say it again this choice or election is personal.

It's individuals because these were Jews who were scattered sojourners of the dispersion.

In one sense they had [00:43:01] they were part of God's chosen earthly people that already were part of the chosen people in that sense but this is a higher thing and a deeper thing and this is a personal choice which distinguished them from their fellow countrymen.

How blessed a thing I say it again it is to see that we as individuals have value with God that God has set his love upon us individually and that we are objects of his sovereign electing love. This choice this election is according to the foreknowledge [00:44:01] of God the Father and then the next stage of it is that it's through sanctification of the spirit through the setting apart of the spirit and then it's on to obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Generally when we think of sanctification we think of it as an ongoing thing in our lives as believers that we need to be sanctified that we need to be more holy that we need to be more conformed to the image of Christ and that it is progressive and that it is something which happens after we believe. Actually this sanctification here takes place before we obey we are set apart onto obedience [00:45:01] this is the initial setting apart to God by the Holy Spirit This is how God works this is the effectual call. This is this is as far as the internal work is

concerned I would correlate this with new birth with the conviction of sin with faith arising in the heart all this is through the initial work of the Holy Spirit. That's the order here it's not that we've believed and then we are sanctified it's that we are sanctified onto obedience and we don't often weigh these words we don't often [00:46:01] put the subject in this context and see that there is a setting apart of the Holy Spirit that actually precedes our obedience and precedes our being brought under the blood into the good of Christ's work that's the order here. I just want you to note that the sanctification of the Spirit precedes the obedience that characterizes the Christian life and it precedes the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ we are set apart we're sanctified onto obedience and actually the obedience is linked with the word of Jesus Christ it's not just the [00:47:01] sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ but the thought is it's the obedience of Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ the phrase of Jesus Christ qualifies the obedience also that's a very important thing for us as believers to notice the character of our obedience is to obey as Christ obey it's not a legal obedience it's not just a matter of keeping the law or keeping the ten commandments because the law it didn't give any object and it didn't give any power and with the flesh in us in law keeping as Paul illustrated we're bound to fail what Peter is setting before us is the character of the [00:48:01] life of the Lord Jesus the one who said I do always those things that please the Father the one who said I delight to do thy will oh my God he had an object before him in God we have an object before us in God and in Christ and we're called on to obey as he obeyed and the life of the Lord Jesus as man delighted in doing the will of the Father his will and the Father's will ran in the same direction the problem when we seek to put ourselves under the law is that the law and our carnal desires they come into collision and then we find that we are lacking in power and that's a very important distinction like it's like this if I said to my son you're not to go out and play [00:49:01] you're to stay at home and do your homework and he didn't want to stay at home and do his homework the command or the instruction and the will were in conflict we're saying one thing he's wanting to do another but if I said to him right off you go out you go and play some football well he's wanting to do that his will is to play football but the command the instruction is to go out and play football the two things are running in the same direction and that's how it was with the Lord Jesus Christ in regard to the will of his God and Father and Peter is saying something quite deep here which perhaps we don't often realize that the character of our obedience [00:50:03] is the obedience of Jesus Christ that we're to walk as he walked that we're to obey as he obeyed that we have a new life that we have a new power the spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death and that that obedience of ours is to take character from the obedience of Christ it's the obedience of Jesus Christ but we are elect we are chosen to obey as Christ obeyed that the obedience of Jesus Christ should be seen in our lives and that's one of the reasons that God has put his hand on us so to speak that's one of the reasons God has chosen us we know that it's for glory [00:51:01] and we know that whom he justified in Romans chapter 8 whom he justified them he also glorified we know that it's seen as a complete process we know that in regard to election there are so many links in the chain right through to eternal glory yes we're chosen for glory and in 2nd Thessalonians in chapter 2 Paul says we're bound to give thanks always to God for your brethren beloved of the Lord because God has from the beginning it's God's work he's from the beginning he's chosen you to salvation so this choice is in regard to glory and this choice is in regard to salvation and incidentally the order in 2nd Thessalonians [00:52:01] 2 verse 13 through sanctification of the spirit onto belief of the truth is the same order that we have here in 1st Peter that it's through sanctification of the spirit onto obedience onto belief of the truth and onto the sprinkling of Jesus Christ but the point here is that God has made a sovereign choice of us not only for glory and not only for our salvation eternal salvation but also that in the here and now while our feet are on this earth it is onto the obedience of Christ we obey as Christ obeyed and then it says that this setting apart of the Holy Spirit is onto this sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ and no doubt [00:53:01] it's an allusion to Exodus chapter 24 where the Israelites were brought under the covenant and the blood

was sprinkled upon them and on that occasion they committed themselves to something that they weren't able to do in the flesh they said all that the Lord has said will we do and be obedient they committed themselves to that they grievously failed in that and the blood of the animal was taken and sprinkled on the people Peter's saying in Christ we have a contrast to that the character of the obedience is different it's the obedience of Jesus Christ God has said through Peter I'll give you the power to obey and you're [00:54:01] committed to that through the sprinkling or the aspersion of the blood of Jesus Christ and I'll just say in closing let's not lose the emphasis on the literal shedding of the blood of Christ as we sing in the hymns all our sins so great so many in his blood are washed away because you know you listen carefully you'll find certain brethren they say the blood of Christ that is the death of Christ and they correlate the death of Christ with the shedding of his blood but here it's speaking of the sprinkling of the blood in regard to the supper in Luke's account it's the blood of the new [00:55:01] covenant which is poured out for you the blood was poured out in John's account when the Lord's side was pierced by the spear forthwith there flowed out blood and water we have the significance of that act given in 1st John this is he that came not by water only but by water and blood cleansing efficacy of Christ's death and the purifying efficacy of Christ's death through his blood so here it's speaking of the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ we're speaking of that which is precious to God we're speaking of that which has been applied to us it's the application of the blood the sprinkling [00:56:01] of the blood would give that signification that we are under the application that we have the merits that we have the benefits of it and truly as we look at these things how blessed we are and so grace and peace may be multiplied to us but I say the reason that we enjoy these things is because we are God's elect we are his chosen one and if we value the blood of Christ and if we are trusting in Christ as our Saviour there need be no doubt in our minds that we are God's elect and you shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect as Christ that died and is risen [00:57:01] and is now at God's right hand as we know he's the one who's coming again and so here based on his work God can say to us through Peter grace to you and peace be multiplied may we learn more of our privileged place even as individuals as dear to God so may we sing in closing hymn 318 O Lamb of God still keep us close to thy pierced side number 318 O Lamb of God still keep us close to thy pierced side [00:58:01] is only there in safety and peace we can abide with those that stares around us and fills their air the grace that so confound us alone can keep us clean is only in abiding within ourselves secure only [00:59:01] in the abiding the conflict can endure I know the victory gainer for every hateful thought triumph amongst us still endure behold their crest and glow soon soon shall arise behold thee they fracture face to face and [01:00:01] rest in their glory we'll sing thy power thy grace thy beauty love and glory the wonders of thy love shall be the endless glory of all thy saints above