Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

 Ever had a situation in life where you had a choice in something but there really wasn't a choice? I know that sounds like a foolish question, but I do think that each of us has been in that situation. Let me explain.

 The example of what I mean by this is probably best observed in a situation with children. Let's say that you have a number of children before you. You take and offer the children some cupcakes you've made. For all intent and purpose the cupcakes are equal, about the only difference being the cupcake paper baking cup's color. You take and allow one child to make the first choice of which cupcake he wants. I remember as a child being confronted with making such a choice, which at the time seemed a big deal, but on later reflection it really wasn't such a big deal nor was it really any real kind of choice. In this situation each child will make a choice, but each child ends up with exactly the same.

 This example is shown in our adult life too. Take the issue of buying a car. Once you have established what you want in the car (4 door, sedan, station wagon, van, etc) you find yourself then confronted by a choice of which make of car to buy. If you throw out the built in prejudice you may have for a certain make (If you work for GM, you will favor GM), you actually find there isn't really much difference. Whatever make of car you buy you will find that each is essentially the same. They provide transportation, the base purpose of every single car.

 I hope you understand what I mean when I say that you make a choice but there really isn't a choice. In actuality I think there are many situations in our world that are just like that. Choices to make without there really being a choice. In many cases the products we buy are basically the same as those we don't buy, the only difference is that we chose to buy one over the other. In our household, what we buy is usually determined by what is on sale or what is a monetary advantage to us.

 If you are wondering what got me into thinking about choice, it is our text. Our text talks to us about a choice that has been made. It isn't our choice though that is spoken of, rather it is the choice that has been made by the Lord. To understand this "choice" that has been made by the Lord is one of the most comforting doctrines found in the Holy Scripture. Let’s then consider this lesson on choice by considering our text under the theme: CHOSEN IN THE LORD.

 The text before is a part of the opening words of the Apostle Paul to the Christian church at Ephesus. Already in the opening greeting (v. 1-2) Paul has established two facts: 1. The Ephesians are Christians who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. 2. The Ephesians are also "saints". The word "saint" means that they are a people who through faith are forgiven their sins and because of God’s grace in forgiveness are filled with a desire to please God. Not that they actually do, but God counts believers “saints” because of His great forgiveness in Jesus!

 After establishing these facts in his opening greeting, Paul now begins his letter proper with words of praise and glory to God. This is quite usual for Paul. It is his way of reminding every Christian of exactly how they got to be Christians in the first place. In these words of praise, which is where our text is taken from, Paul shows clearly that Christianity is not something we have done rather it is something that God has done. This emphasis on God's actions and not ours will set the whole tone of this letter to the Ephesians. It is a letter famous for the teaching: "it is by grace you have been saved.”

 Just look at how this section of praise starts out. Verse 3 says: **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord and Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”** The very first thing you notice about that verse is that God and His actions are being praised, not man and his choices. Consider closely those words. The main message of that passage is that God has blessed us. **“God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”** Oh that every Christian could contemplate and grasp the wonder and joy of those beautiful words.

 This passage reminds us that everything we are and have is because of the blessings of God. God has showered upon us spiritual blessing after blessing solely because of His love for us. And do note they are called “spiritual blessings,” things to be grasped by faith and not by sight. To get the full grasp of this truth then listen to the words of Ephesians 2 where this thought is fully expanded.

 Ephesians 2:1-5 say: **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”**

 These words tell us that here was the world, lost in sin and enemies of God because of the fall into sin of Adam and Eve. We were dead to God, incapable of making any choices or decisions for good or even seeing and comprehending the good or God. The implication of dead is pretty severe. We are a people guided by and rejoicing in our very sinful nature. Such is the meaning of being dead in your transgressions and sins, that and emphasizing it is not something we do or even can do!

 However God took and made these dead people alive. He did that through the many spiritual blessings He has given. He did that in the Old Testament by promising to send a Savior from sin. In the New Testament God carried out His blessings by sending that promised Savior from sin. In essence God has provided us with all the spiritual blessings we need in this life and for the life to come.

 Let me enumerate some of those blessings. God has given us His Holy Word, the Bible that we might know Him, His truth and what He has done for us. God has given us His Son Jesus Christ, the Living Word, who suffered and died on the cross for our sins. God has raised this Jesus from the dead and declared Jesus the Christ the only way to eternal salvation. God even sends upon us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who calls us to faith (makes alive), gives us faith, keeps us in the faith and strengthens our faith. All of these things are the gifts and work of God, the blessings He has given.

 I can't help thinking that the words of this epistle were written because somehow the Ephesians Christians were beginning to waver in this truth of God. Throughout the letter, the emphasis on "by grace you have been saved" seems to indicate that the Ephesian's were somehow beginning to think that they were Christians because of their goodness and works rather than through God's goodness and works. It is a reminder to all not to fall into such error. Don’t give yourself credit for the grace and wonder of God!

 Unfortunately there are a number of churches today that fall into this fault. They are the churches that emphasize "choosing Jesus or accepting God into your heart." Such churches emphasize how we live, spiritual experiences, and emotion as the basis for faith rather than the actions and grace of God. We must remember that as Christians we are what we are because God has blessed us, God has made us alive, God has given us faith and not because we have earned God’s love.

 That this is true is seen from the very next verse of our text. Verse 4 says: **“For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.”**  Notice that the emphasis is not on what the believer does but on what God has done for the believer. In this case, the emphasis is on the fact that God has chosen us, not that we choose God.

 Perhaps the first thing we need to do is to understand just what the meaning of "HE CHOSE US" is. In the original language this word can mean nothing else than "to select, single out, to select, choose from several or from a great multitude of similar persons or things." Even more pointed in this word is the voice of the word. This grammatical emphasis of the verb causes the meaning "to choose for oneself." In other words the emphasis of this word is on the one doing the choosing not on the object chosen. The one choosing makes the thing chosen his very own property. The thing chosen has now been place in a relationship with the Choser and now in some way serves the Choser and His interests.

 I can't help thinking that God's choosing of us was really no choice at all. When God chose Israel to be His nation, he chose them not because they were better or holier than others. God chose them, placed them in special relationship to him, gave them His Law, His Promise of salvation, and worked and ruled among them. The whole relationship of God to Old Testament Israel was caused and given by the Lord, not by the people.

 The same with us. We are Christians because God has chosen us. We have a special relationship with God because God chose us and blessed us. God gave His Son as our Savior as an act of His love not as an act of our love. We were dead in sin, but God made us alive. God gives us faith, keeps us in the faith and works to strengthen our faith. The entire emphasis of eternal salvation is God's act of choosing, not ours. That this is so is emphasized all the more by the fact that God chose us “**before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.”** Before you even were or the world was, God had already chosen us! Nope this choosing does not depend on us at all, in any way!

 Here is where we as Christians struggle the hardest. Our human nature so often wants to take credit for what we have and are. The world and our sinful nature operates under the belief that "those who do good get good and those that do bad, get bad." Yet it can be demonstrated that this "belief" of the world is simply not true. I can cite example after example of people who live contrary to God's Word and yet they enjoy the best of this world. We need to remember that what we have and are is an act of God's grace and not an act of our personal goodness. Having great material blessing is not necessarily a sign of God working in you. Having a wonderful feeling about God's love for you because things in this world seem to be going good is not necessarily a sign of God working in you. For that matter, even being a "good person" in the eyes of the world is not necessarily a sign of God working in you. We need to remember to cast aside such outside measures of faith and rely solely on God's sure and true promises that He has blessed and chosen us in Christ.

 Then there is the final phrase of our text for this morning. Verse 5 says, **“In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ.”** Here is something that we find hard to grasp because of our lack of God's wisdom, but something that proclaims neatly the very divine truth of salvation.

 We are saved because God has saved us. When Scripture tells us that God predestined us all that really means is that God has provided everything necessary for our eternal salvation. God provided His Word. God provided His Son. God provides His Holy Spirit and faith. God provides His true Church to teach us of His Son. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus we are adopted as God's sons, because Jesus died for the sins of the whole world and every single human being.

 The best way to think of this is to consider the practice of adoption in our world. When a couple adopts a baby that is something they did. Yet the baby receives all the benefits of that adoption. The baby becomes that couple's child, considered theirs, raised as theirs, and loved as theirs. The baby has been provided everything that it might be that couple's child. It was not an act of the baby, but of the adopting couple.

 When that baby grows up and considers itself the child of so and so, isn't it because everything has been provided that will make that so? Even as an adult, the adopted child is the real child of that couple because of the actions of the couple. If the child should grow up and reject the adoption, reject this couple and their standards, this is not the fault of the couple. This is the decision of the adopted child.

 Not let's apply that to our faith. God has adopted us. God has given us everything that we need for eternal salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. Should we reject this adoption, it is not the fault of God. It is our fault. Predestination thus says that all credit for salvation goes to God alone because God is the one who has done everything. Those who reject salvation by grace through faith in Christ do so against all that God has done. Their damnation is their fault, not God's.

 So what have we learned? In a nutshell we have learned that without Christ we are nothing and have nothing. Don't look to yourself and your own goodness or works, look to God for salvation. Trust what He has revealed. Trust what He has done. Then you will find your salvation sure and certain. Then you will find God working in you to lead you in the faith and life He has provided. Then you will be motivated in the same way the Apostle Paul speaks in the opening verse. We will be a people who say, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”** Because as the truth of this lesson sinks in, we realize that heaven is our home based on God’s wonder, goodness, love and grace toward us. There is no greater sureness than knowing that God in Jesus has guaranteed our redemption. Amen.