

THE DIVINE SYMPHONY

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Massachusetts
October 25, 1964

Iglesia Bautista Latinoamericana, East L.A., California
February 20, 1972

Scripture – Ephesians 1:3-14

Introduction:

Our age is an age of human voices and noises. We have tried to find answers to the human dilemma through our own devices and gadgets. We have become so wrapped up in our own music that we have no ear nor inclination for the heavenly music.

No wonder the Bible is a strange book to us. We cannot hear nor understand its message, because our radio set is tuned to another station, which sends the messages of redemption and salvation which we ourselves have created and like to hear.

This morning I invite you to hear the divine symphony that can be heard in the first 14 verses of the Epistle to the Ephesians. Let us unstuff our ears of the human music that we constantly hear, and let us make a true effort to hear the divine symphony that these verses play for us.

I remember that when I was in college we had to analyze rather carefully one of Beethoven's symphonies. One of the facts that I had to learn was that a symphony is composed of different movements – one movement may be allegro, another andante, and still another very slow. The instruments employed may vary from movement to movement and even within the movement itself. There are many possibilities of arranging the musical material.

Our symphony this morning consists of two movements. On the one side we have the part played by God – the heavenly movement. And on the other, the part played by man, or the human response to the heavenly movement.

I. The Divine movement

Both the human and the divine parts of our symphony are present in the first verse of our Scripture reading: *“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.”* Notice here the phrase *“Blessed be God”* It is the confession of the human heart to divine action. This action is summarized in the statement: *“who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”* For the time being let us put aside the part of the human response in this symphony and let us give our attention to the blessings given to us by God.

A. The transcendental origin of our salvation

First it must be pointed out that divine blessing has priority over human response. In our context there is praise of God only after God has revealed himself as the God of blessing. The blessing of God can be compressed in the word *“in Christ”*. It is *“in Christ”* that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

B. The blessings of God.

1. God has chosen us – divine election (1:4) *“Even as he chose us in love in him before the foundation of the earth.”*

God chooses us just as we are.

This was true in the case of Israel, the people of God in the Old Testament. (Deut.7:7 ff.) *“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It is not because you were more in number that any other people that the Lord set his love upon you, and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.”*

Even when Israel is unfaithful, God’s election and love continue. (Hosea 11:1 ff.) *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me. They kept sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols.*

“I led them with cords of compassion, with the bonds of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, I bent to them and fed them.”

But they did not know that I healed them and fed them.

“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender.”

God’s election is the election of love, and therefore constantly reaches toward us. He chose us in Christ even before the foundation of the earth. This means that election is grounded in the eternal God and is not the product of natural forces working within the time scheme.

2. God has destined us in love for sonship through Jesus Christ.

“He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”

3. God has forgiven us through Christ. *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us.”*
 (Ps. 32:1-2) *“Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity.”*

In the presence of Christ people experience forgiveness – ex. the paralytic man that was brought by four.

4. God has made known to us the mystery of his will – to unite all things in Christ. *“He has made known to us in all his wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of times, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things in earth.”*

In NT times the gospel message was a barrier-breaking phenomenon:

Jew and Gentile
 poor and rich
 cultured and uncultured
 black, white and yellow
 male and female
 cosmological

The blessings of the divine movement include:

- election based on love
- sonship
- forgiveness – reconciliation between God and man
- unity – reconciliation between man and man, universe and God

II. The Human Movement or Response

A. It could be a complete rejection of this possibility of understanding existence

B. The positive response

The purpose of the divine music is to elicit praise and adoration from our side.

(1) Let us take notice of the phrase *“to the praise of his glory”*. It is one of the recurring themes in the verses under consideration.

(1:5-6) *“He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace.”*

(1:12) The Jews to praise God: *We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.”*

(1:13) The Gentiles to praise God: *“You also ... were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise ... to the praise of his glory.”*

There is a joyous response to the blessings of God here in this chapter while God and the divine choir are proclaiming the grace and mercy that God is pouring over his people, the human choir, which in this case is the church that confesses Jesus as Lord, appears praising the greatness of God's deed in choosing, forgiving, and giving us knowledge. This is not an isolated case, but the whole response of the New Testament.

(2) The N.T. opens with the songs of the angels on Christmas night:

a. (Luke 2:13) *"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is well-pleased!"*

b. The Apostle Paul and Silas were put in prison for proclaiming the message of salvation brought through our Lord Jesus Christ, but the Bible says that *"at midnight they were praying and singing hymns to God."*

c. In the Epistle to the Philippians, which was written from a prison, Paul wrote the following words: *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice. ... Have no anxiety about anything, but in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*

d. In the book of Revelation the note of praise and thanksgiving is even more intense. When the Lamb – which is our Lord Jesus Christ – opens the scroll which was to tell of the things in the future, the heavenly creatures sang a new song: *"Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain, and by that blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God."*

From our interpretation of this passage in Ephesians, two amazing facts have been brought into focus:

- (1) On the one hand that God blesses man in an unexpected manner and mode.
- (2) That man can respond in praise and thanksgiving.

These are the two movements of the divine symphony:

- (1) The divine initiative which reveals itself from eternity – creates sonship, forgiveness, reconciliation.
- (2) The human response, which is one of joyful adoration and profound gratitude. No wonder there is music. Life has meaning and purpose.

Conclusion:

1. The Christian church is a worshipping community. The church points beyond itself.
My soul sings with joy when I gather together with you to praise God.
The church is not a self-admiration society.
2. The church is a reconciling community. Breaks down barriers –
 - poor and rich
 - cultured and uncultured
 - capital and labor
 - black, white and yellow
 Economic, religious and social barriers
3. The Christian church is relevant to the human situation; points to the future.
Today more than ever we are conscious of the things that divide men:
 - race
 - political systems
 - nationality

When can we sing? ...

In Christ there is no East nor West,
In Him no South or North;
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

In Him shall true hearts everywhere
Their high communion find;
His service is the golden cord
Close binding all mankind.

Join hands, then brothers of the faith,
Whate'er your race may be.
Who serves my Father as a son
Is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both East and West;
In Him meet South and North;
All Christly souls are one in Him
Throughout the whole wide earth.

This is a dream. When it is realized, then we will all sing the Hallelujah Chorus.