



# The Trinity Pulpit



## The Year It All Came Together Ephesians 1:3-14

Dr. Jeff Roberts  
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In the new movie *Up In The Air*, George Clooney plays a man who spends his time flying around the nation letting people go or, as he would put it, “helping people transition from one job to their future.” He works for a company who contracts with corporations who are laying off employees. Clooney’s character travels the nation 322 days a year delivering the bad news. In the movie Clooney’s company is based in Omaha, Nebraska, but he is really from nowhere. He spends most of his time in airports, on planes and in hotels. He is such a loner that he, in fact, gives inspirational speeches about how to lighten your load in life. He is known as “the backpack man.”

In his inspirational speech, he brings an empty backpack to the podium and asks the listeners to imagine the weight of their backpack. They are to fill it with belongings, responsibilities and work. Then, finally, they are to imagine that they are to fill it with all of their relationships. He maintains that these relationships are the heaviest baggage we carry and the only way to live a life that is free is to lighten the load. However, the only problem is that as the movie progresses, Clooney’s character learns that there is nothing quite as empty as a life empty of relationships and the only way to lighten the load is to share it with others. The movie ends sadly with him alone and his life still up in the air, figuratively and literally.

I thought about the metaphor of the backpack introduced in this movie. What does our 2009 backpack look like? What is in our backpacks from last year? What baggage are

we carrying into 2010? Some of us are carrying disappointment. Last year was disappointing on many levels for so many people. We might be carrying the baggage of failure. It is failure at work, home or in a relationship. We might be carrying the baggage of anxiety. As bad as 2009 was for some folks, we are more worried that the worst is yet to come. Could 2010 be worse? Just the thought has some people who are normally optimistic discovering sarcasm and pessimism, and those who are naturally pessimist are relishing in the thoughts of “I told you so.”

Most of us have some baggage in our 2009 backpack. There are some things that are weighing us down as we enter a new year. What will it take to empty our pack? What do we need to know so that we might enter 2010 with optimism? Well, of course we don’t need just optimism, but we need hope in Christ and faith in God.

This coming year our theme is *Connecting...* The theme is open ended because the possibilities of God are open ended. This year is open ended when it comes to what God wants to do in our lives as individuals and as a church. God always is at work making us like our Lord Jesus Christ. As much as we are willing, God is willing to change us, mature us, and fulfill his purpose in our lives.

Connecting... what if this was the year it all came together? What if this was the year it finally clicked for us individually and corporately as a congregation? I am

going to be challenging us in the weeks ahead as a congregation to think what connecting with each other might look like, but today I want to begin at the only place we can begin: what it means to connect with God. What if this was the year that you finally connected with God like your heart desires? What if this was the year that you finally began to realize the purpose of God in your life? What if this was the year that you started being able to understand what it means to follow the will of God?

Why do I think this is possible? I think it is possible because of what Paul writes in Ephesians 1. Paul's words in these first 10 verses are not one of Paul's logically well-written arguments. It is not one of those passages that you can follow like a legal brief from one point to another with Paul asking and answering the question before it comes to our minds. Instead, this is one of those passages that Paul is waxing eloquently the benefits and blessing of what it means to be connected to God. In this short passage, Paul reminds us of three important aspects of our relationship with God that helps us be optimistic about 2010. Let's look at them for a moment.

First, we need to be reminded that to be connected to God means that we have been chosen. Paul tells us that God chose us to be blameless and holy and predestined or destined us before creation to be adopted as his sons in accordance with his pleasure and his will.

Paul never thought of himself as one who chose God. Instead, Paul always understood that God, in his love, chose him. The relationship between Paul and God was God's initiative. Paul did not believe that he could have just chosen God. Yet, God in his love chose Paul.

Many times we get in our minds that we choose God. We picture God almost as a pathetic character that is wishing and hoping that we might give him some attention. We might not say this, but our actions and our way of approaching God places all of the power in our hands. We place God along other gods in our world and other

things in our life that demand attention; then, we make the choice which god we will choose and which thing will get our time, talent and resources. This is a skewed view of our relationship with God. Instead God takes the initiative toward us. Our relationship with God is God's choosing.

I like how one writer puts it and this is before time began God purposed that we would belong to him. Now please understand the word *chose* and the word *predestined* or destined or purposed does not negate our free will. The words do not indicate coercion on God's part. God does not violate our free will that he so graciously gave to us in creation. Yet, it is God's choice, God's purpose that we belong to him and that we have a relationship with him. We did not choose God but God has chosen us.

The best word picture for this is the term that Paul uses and that is adoption. Adoption, in the Roman world and in our world for the most part, still depends on the parent's intent and love more than the child's. Just like a parent chooses to love and adopt a child not because of whom the child is or what the child can do or not do, so God chooses you and me.

God chose us with a purpose. God chose us that we might be blameless and holy. What do those words mean? To be holy is to be different. It is to be set apart for a purpose. Just like the temple was holy because it was set apart for purpose. The Sabbath day was declared holy because it was to be different and set apart for a purpose. So it is with you and me. God chose us so that he might make us different and set us apart with a purpose.

We are also chosen to be blameless. This word comes to us from sacrificial language of the Old Testament. To be blameless is to be fit for sacrifice. When a sacrifice was blameless it meant it was without blemish. The blameless sacrifice was the best that could be offered by someone at the temple. God chose us to be blameless. God chose you and me to make us the best we could possibly be. God chose us out of love to set us

apart for a purpose that our lives might be perfect that is the best.

We should be excited about 2010 because this could be the year that we finally realize that God has chosen us not because of who we are or what we are but because of whom we can be in Christ. We are connected to God because we are chosen in Christ.

We are not only chosen but we are redeemed. The word translated *redeemed* is actually the word for “ransom.” To ransom someone is to buy them back from slavery or to free them from the penalty of death. The word can also be translated deliverance. The picture is that we have been delivered or ransomed through Jesus. This deliverance means two important things in our lives.

First we are forgiven. God ransomed us, bought us back from our sinfulness through Jesus that we might be forgiven of our sins. Back to that backpack a moment. Some of us might be carrying into 2010 the same old sin that as Paul will write so easily entangles us. There are some bad choices that we are still carrying around. There are some habitual actions that are destructive and we know it and we can name them, but we still want to carry them with us.

Dr. Daniel E. Fountain, a medical missionary in Africa recounts the following story:

One day the chauffeur of our hospital pick-up truck in Africa was driving to one of our health centers. He noticed an elderly lady struggling along the road carrying a very heavy load of firewood on her head. The chauffeur stopped and offered to take the lady and her firewood to her village. He helped her into the back of the truck and then proceeded on his way. However, when he glanced in the rear-view mirror he was astonished to see this lady sitting in the back of the truck with the load of firewood back on top of her head!

What is that heavy sin that you just keep carry-

ing? You have been carrying it from year to year and day to day. It might not be that you keep committing the sin but the guilt from the sin is your constant companion. This could be the year that you let it go, once and for all. You and I have been redeemed for forgiveness.<sup>1</sup>

Our redemption also brings wisdom and understanding. The mystery of God’s will. Paul is speaking of knowing what God was doing in Jesus Christ. To many it seems like a mystery, but God had chosen him and others to know this mystery. In the same way you and I are blessed to know about Jesus and what he can do. There are others for whom Jesus remains a mystery. Yet, beyond this mystery comes wisdom and understanding. These two words are the words that describe all that we want to know and need to know to live. The word for *wisdom* is the word for searching intellect. It is defined as “search for the eternal questions of life.” It is the answer to the problems of life, death and eternity. To have wisdom is to have a peace about all the important questions of life.

The second word is *understanding* and it is defined as “the practical things that concern us.” The person who has understanding is the person who is able to make good decisions in regards to the every day matters of life.

Let’s put this all together. God has redeemed us so that we might be forgiven of our sin and so that we might have a peace about the eternal questions of life and that we might have the ability to make good decisions each and every day. Is this not what all of us want in life? What if we could begin a new year letting go of the burden of our sin and its guilt? What if we can enter a new year with a peace in regards to our eternal questions? What if we could enter a new year with the promise that God is going to give us the ability to make good decisions because of the understanding that comes in relationship to him? Paul says that is exactly what comes to our lives through the redemption of God.

Finally, let me suggest that this could be the year it all comes together because God is not through

with you and me. Paul's words tell us that the goal of history is to bring all things under Christ when everything has been fulfilled. God is at work in your life and there is purpose. The language that is used by Paul suggests the words administration, control and development. They are words of a steward of a household who is working toward a goal and purpose. The steward works daily with a goal in mind. He administers the work, controls the work and develops the work so that in due time the purpose will be fulfilled.

That is what God is doing in our lives. There might be times it seems we are on our own. There might be times when it seems that there is no direction. There might even be years that come and go and leave us wondering what was the purpose of that trial, that moment, that frustration, or that disappointment. Yet, this we can know for sure, that God is at work bringing all things under Christ and that includes us.

What that means is that we can find contentment in 2010 that God is at work in our lives fulfilling his purpose in our lives. Psalm 118:24 is a verse that we quote often in church. The Psalmist writes "this is the day that the Lord hath made I will rejoice and be glad in it."

Leonard Sweet writes this adaptation.

This is the day the Lord has made for me  
This is the place the Lord has put me in  
These are the people the Lord has given me  
Let me rejoice and be glad in them.

That is the confidence that comes to our day when we are connected with God.

This past Monday, December 28<sup>th</sup>, was the third annual Good Riddance Day in Times Square. New Yorkers and visitors could go to Times Square and write on a piece of paper what they wanted to forget and get rid of from 2009. For

some it was a bad relationship with someone or their work. For others it was some extra pounds. For others it was more philosophical such as racism and hatred. Participants wrote their memories on stationary and it could be slammed with a sledge hammer or shredded in a giant shredder. Either way it was the opportunity to symbolically let go of the negative they did not want to carry into 2010.

I want to tell you that the real Good Riddance Day was not this past Monday in Times Square. The true Good Riddance Day was almost 2000 years ago outside Jerusalem. It was not at Times Square but on top of a hill they called the skull. Our good riddance day was the day that Jesus died for your sins and mine. In that moment, once and for all, we no longer had to carry the burdens of our past into our future. In Christ, God chose us to set us apart and make us the best we can be. God redeemed us to forgive us and to give us wisdom and understanding for living. God destined our lives to have a purpose that God will bring to fulfillment.

It's time to empty the 2009 backpack and start this year as a true New Year. It all begins with connecting with God who has chosen you and redeemed you and is not through with your life. This could be the year...2010 could be the year it all comes together. ❁

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*Health, the Bible and the Church*  
(Wheaton, Ill.: Billy Graham Center, 1989), 100-101.



Trinity Baptist Church • 4815 Six Forks Road • Raleigh, NC 27609 • 919.787.3740  
www.tbcraleigh.com • jroberts@tbcraleigh.com