

# When it all began

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I'd like us to think this evening for a little while about the verses that we read in chapter 1 of Ephesians verses 4-7 These verses focus on the work and the wonder of God but that which she envisaged and planned as it says before the foundation of the world one reason why I was drawn to these verses this evening is mindful that yesterday we were looking at in terms of the last judgment this has already been made reference to in prayer the last judgment we might say is the end of all things the end of all things certainly in time in so far as God has appointed a day as we look at in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 17 there appointed a day in which he will judge the world if there is a day then there must be time in that sense remember how it says at the beginning the evening and the morning were the first day the passage and the marking of time is what we understand in terms of day and night but as we read in Revelation when it comes to heaven when it comes to glory there shall be no night there so there won't be the evening and the morning there won't be night and day there won't be the debarkation of time in eternity not in the same way as we understand it here but there is obviously a day appointed the last day the last judgment and in so far as that is the last day of all things that is how things before we enter upon the fixed state in which we shall be either in a lost eternity or a blessed eternity as we look towards the end of all things there let us also remember the beginning of all things like think well the beginning of all things that is creation you know that is when God says let there be light and there was light in the evening and the morning or the first day that is the beginning that is the beginning of time but it is not the beginning of all things before all things were

God was in the beginning God in the beginning was the world as again you have heard previously this is what we read then in these verses according as you have chosen us in before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself according to the pleasure of his will to the praise and the glory of his grace when he hath made us accepted in the beloved in other words before God even spoke the first words of creation he had from all eternity from the very beginning of all things his plan before even he brought the world into being before any of us were conceived in the womb of our mothers before Adam was formed from the dust of the earth God already intended to bring unto himself as his children in all eternity from all eternity a set number of men and women and boys and girls who would be his own family who would be his own children

I would suggest to you this is one reason why we're taught to address him as father because he delights to have children he wants his beloved and believing sons and daughters to be his children to have his children around him in eternity and this being his divine plan to bring these children into being he desires not only to love them but that they should love him and if they are to love him of course then love is something which must be freely given it cannot be programmed like a computer you cannot simply create so many million robots and say look how they love me if they are to be able to love it means they must be free and if they are to be free then it means that that love may be given or it may be withheld that the love of the Lord may be received and accepted or it may be rejected and with that sin in which all of us except for our first parents are conceived and brought into the world we are by nature at enmity with God we are by nature rejecting him but with the praise of the glory of his grace his free gift by his grace he changes our hearts he converts us he turns us to him so that we turn away from our sin and we often stumble and fall into it rather like for example if you are if you are stumbling through the moor in the dark and the daylight was just beginning to break and then you saw the light of the house or the cottage you are aiming for and you fix your mat and you are stumbling over the moor and as you stumble with your eye fixed in the light you might fall in the bog you might fall in puddles you might go up to your knees in a mire in the moor or whatever it might be and you push you pull yourself out you feel a suction in your legs you put your hand down and it hits something sharp or you scratch yourself on sharp bits of heaven or stones and you keep on going your eyes are fixed on the light fixed on where you are going but you still fall and you still stumble and you still get cowering in dirt and filth and so on such is it with the child of God who is focused on the Lord and on the light and on the destination but in seeking to get there may often fall along the way sometimes it is because they aren't looking where they're putting their feet because they're looking straight ahead other times it's maybe because they think the piece of ground that they're about to stand on may be solid but in fact they just squelch right down into it sometimes where we put our feet where we think it's going to be safe ends up being a sinner or a mire or a bog of deception but by the praise of his glory of his grace when we get there we are washed we are cleansed we are clothed it doesn't matter how much bog and mire you're covered in it is his free gift of grace this has been his intention from before he brought the world into being to bring this set fixed predestined number of the elect to himself to gather them around to him as his children now as well as a fixed set number of the elect we must take it that because

God does everything precisely and nothing is unknown to him or vague or uncertain to him that there is likewise a fixed and set number of angels whom he has created they are created beings angels and from all eternity he must have known exactly how many would end up there is implication as I think I've mentioned on previous occasions previous different subjects and so on there is implication that perhaps two thirds of the angels who were created remain as elect angels and perhaps a third end up being fallen angels or lost in terms of becoming demons again we can't say that for certain but there's implications of it in Revelation for example we've got the picture imagery chapter 12 where we read of the dragon and the beast and his tail drew a great red dragon having seven heads ten horns seven crowns upon his heads his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth now stars of heaven okay that doesn't mean angels except at the beginning of

Revelation again in the picture language that is used we read of the seven stars and the seven candlesticks and when it says in chapter one at verse twenty the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches now it doesn't follow that every star in Revelation is automatically an angel but there's an implication there that in the picture language of Revelation stars may on occasion be equated with angels that they are the picture imagery of angels and if the dragon drew a third of the stars of heaven down to the earth it's possible that may imply that a third of the angels he brought with him when he was cast out or when he left heaven and when he brought maybe a third of the angels with him now a third of all the angels we might say well that's just a proportion that's just a fraction it's not precise but if God knows the exact and precise number of the elect then we cannot imagine that he doesn't know the exact precise number of the angels who he has created himself it's just like you know throughout scripture we find the encouragement to be precise you know look well to the state of thy flocks and herds you know a shepherd who knows well the number of his flocks and herds if somebody says oh how many sheep have you got here he's not going to say oh about 200 roughly he's having a shepherd 238 and then there's maybe 17 lambs so far or whatever he might say I've got 243 he might say 197 he's going to know exactly if he's diligent if he's faithful he's going to know exactly how many sheep and how many lambs are in his pen he's going to know precisely the number if he's diligent likewise the Lord has an eye to precision if you look at the book of numbers and if they run through all the heads of the tribes and the families how many fighting men were rendered from each tribe it's a very precise number in each case it's down to the last detail it doesn't name every single individual but it names all the heads of the tribes and it names the exact number and it tells you exactly how many rams and lambs and sacrifices all the different heads brought for their sacrifices at the tabernacle it weighs out precisely the amount of flour and the amount of fine meal and incense and how many golden spoons and so on there is precision in what God does therefore it is inconceivable that he would not know not only exactly the number of his elect children but exactly how many he would have created all together even of those who would be lost exactly how many angels he had created exactly how many angels remained faithful to him exactly how many became fallen and became fiends or demons everything is known to

[ 11 : 16 ] God in the last precise detail if we can it's hard for us to an extent to think in terms of God being an individual father to so many millions and millions of elect children all those who have ever been saved down through all the ages and yet this is exactly what he is capable of and has done he has chosen us in and before the foundation of the world he intended to have precisely these people now it's difficult for us to think in terms of that large a family nowadays for example I realise in a former age people would often have 9, 10, 11 kids in the same cottage and families were bigger in their former age nowadays if you have 4 or 5 kids people say that's a big family if you have 10 children that would be a huge family nowadays so it's difficult for us to think in terms of all these different children with different characteristics and different things they're good at and little temper tantrums about this but then all such good nature about other things and gifts and abilities and all the ways that they're different

I mean if you had 10 children of your own then all 10 would be different in some way they'd all be unique the easiest I would suggest to you an easier illustration is if you think in terms of a teacher a teacher with her class of say 30 children and if she's teaching these 30 children she's going to come to know over the course of the year the badly behaved ones and the ones who are as good as gold and those who are good at their maths and those who can write very neatly and those who struggle a bit with their spelling and maybe there's some very very difficult child and then as they're trying to teach over the course of the year finally you'll hit on some subject some one thing that brings them alive and that they really end up being good at because they're enthusiastic for and you nurture that and because you nurture that and you unlock the thing in them that is good that brings them alive it affects the rest of their work and their behaviour and so on and then you multiply that in terms of say a teaching degree of say 20-30 years how many classes of children will have passed through your hands how many different individuals before they go on to have kids of their own and maybe become grandparents and so on they say oh yes

I remember so and so she was in my class from 15 years ago or I remember when I used to teach so and so oh he was quite badly behaved to begin with but he was very good at this or whatever now a teacher who had a love for her children over the years even though she may have had hundreds of children passed through her hands she will probably have a fair memory of most of them and she will probably remember the different characteristics of if not every single one then a great many of them and although it's not exactly the same as a parent because there's quite the same close relationship it's not dissimilar because you're investing so much of your time and your energy and your love it's not wrong to say your love in trying to bring the best out of these children and that's what you're seeking to do in terms of what they will grow up to be as you see someone growing up and making the most of your lives the great benefit you feel nobody's going to turn around and say oh it's all down to you miss so and so or whatever no but you'll have had your input you'll have had the impact you've made the shaping of that child now try to clean away now the human illustration and think in terms of God

God who is able not only to shape a child or to direct its path or to instruct and teach it with knowledge but who is actually the one who brought them into the world who is actually the one whose father they are because if you think about it again without wanting to be indelicate human parents cannot conceive a child in and of themselves they can only create the conditions in which conception might take place the bringing together of the individual seed of the mother and of the father and the fusing together of the two elements that make that one new unique human being bring that human soul into being that is not a physical human work it's not something that the mother and father can actually make happen it is something which God causes to happen it is the conceiving of that he does in bringing a human soul into being and every human soul he brings into being he has a purpose for and some of those whom he brings into being a set fixed known number he has chosen already for his own and we know that he has chosen them for his own because the

Bible tells us according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him without having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ some people don't believe in election they find it easier to think it's going to be down to what you do if you respond to Christ's invitation that's fair because then it's your response and it would be unfair if it was simply down to God and not your own response I think I've mentioned in the past I think it's Spurgeon who is credited with having said God must have chosen me before works there is nothing in my life to make God want to choose me for his child nothing that I have ever done to carry favour with him it must be his work it must be his choosing it must be his free gift that is what we are told to the praise of the glory of his grace now

[ 17 : 20 ] I can't do better than remember what the answer that was given by one of these visiting preachers I can't exactly remember which one it was speaking in a couple of years back and somebody asked from the audience what he thought about predestination and whether or not he thought that was something that a preacher should teach and whether or not it was something he believed and his answer was so succinct he said well the bible teaches it so I believe it how's that for a succinct answer and the bible does teach it that it is from all eternity that the lord has chosen his children not only so but we are faced with the awesome reality which as I mentioned a few minutes ago this is the whole reason for why god did everything that he did so that he would have the final result of all his family all his children all his children all his children all his children around him with him in glory last last one of them not one missing and there would be amongst them those who may have never seen the light of day those who never made it out of their mother's womb but were nevertheless erect infants dying in infancy an immortal soul within the womb of their mother which may have never made it as far as birth and yet they will be there amongst the elect they will be there with the lord in glory there will be those who live to be of any old age and yet they won't be ancient in heaven there will be those of all tribes and nations and colours and tongues they will be there in glory with them because god has intended from the beginning of time before time to have these his children all around him god is if we could put it reverently a family man in that sense the trinity is a relationship father son holy ghost god is not a mere mono entity he is not a mere unity he is a trinity this is why as we mentioned in the past let us make man in our image not my image but our image and so he made man in the image of god male and female created heath them because inevitably children will be like their parents you could tell quite often by looking at a little child if you look at a bunch of adults you can see which child they belong to because you can see the appearance of their parents is there in their child and many of the characteristics for good or ill will likewise be there in the child now ideally we want to reflect the character and the nature of god to become more like him mentioned in the past you know sometimes perhaps it's also true with women but particularly with men you will notice that as the boy goes into manhood and then particularly as the young man becomes an older man he begins to look more and more like his father did at that age and you see boys becoming men and men as they get older they become more and more like their fathers were at that age now there's a physical lesson for us that ideally in a spiritual sense as we mature as we grow in this world if we are in

Christ we should become more and more whether we are men or women boys or girls we should become more and more like our heavenly father and that's what of course 1 John tells us we should be like him for we shall see him as he is for we shall be like him this was God's intention this is why he did what he did this is why he brought creation into being that it should be if you like the nursery to bring forth his children they would be his children you know Isaiah 53 talks about this you know when he had made his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed he shall prolong his days and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand he shall see the travail of his soul as mentioned often in the past he shall see his seed that's in the masculine sense the father's seed and the travail of his soul that's a word he took childbirth that's the motherly sense bringing forth his children into being by his knowledge shall my righteous serve and justify many this is what God intended all along

Hebrews tells us looking unto Jesus the offering the finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God this is joy that have his children round upon him for consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds in other words think of what he went through for us in order to bring his children to this place where they are able to love him freely God knew well it means they're going to fall into sin or be born and conceived in sin one way or another there is no way they can get out of it unless I do something unless I do something which is going to be so costly it's going to cost me everything it's going to cost me life itself in the person of my beloved son I am going to have to in a sense be prepared to die that they might live such is love of God which is love which is strong as death that's what the song of

Solomon tells us remember set me as a seal upon my heart in chapter 8 as a seal upon my arm for love is strong as death jealousy as cruel as the grave the coals that over coals are fire which have the most vehement flame many waters cannot quench love neither can the floods drown it the man would give all the substance in his house for love it would utterly be contend it cannot be bought it cannot be purchased it cannot be sold it can only be given freely this is love that the lord has strong as death stronger than death even the death of the cross so that having given that love given that life that he would be able to birth his children to himself this new birth this being born again this is the whole reason the ultimate reason for why he did everything that he did down to creation and history and the unfolding of all the universe and the planets and the stars and the world in its detail so that he could bring forth from it from as it were the nursery of the world bring forth his children to himself it was needful in his great plan to do all this to bring them to himself that was the reason from all eternity churches often referred to as the body of

Christ and Hebrews 10 of course we read verse 5 wherefore when he cometh into the world he saith sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not but a body hast thou prepared me in burnt offerings and sacrifice for sin thou hast had no pleasure then said I know I come in the volume of the book it is written of me to do thy will what a body hast thou prepared me the body of Christ the church of Jesus Christ the Lord has prepared his people for himself all that he has done he has done to this end likewise in chapter 11 at verse 16 now they desire a better country that is in heavenly wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared prepared for them a city now I don't know but quite often I read that and I think in terms of oh yeah the Lord looks down from heaven he sees us slugging away here and he sees the struggle and he sees the difficulties and he sees the hardship and the heartache and following Christ and this fallen world and almost sort of as a reward he has prepared for them a city so he can say it's okay it's not so bad look look what I've made for you almost as a response to our something it's not really a response to our something he has prepared for them a city that means he has made in advance a city I go to prepare a place for you in other words he has done in advance that which they are going to enter into it has been done not in time but in eternity from all eternity this is the reason he has done everything he did blessed be the God and Father of our Lord

[ 26 : 56 ] Jesus Christ Peter writes which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again conceived brought into being for a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away reserved in heaven for you prepare in advance reserved in advance who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time it's already there but it's not revealed yet if you were if you can picture say you're at a theatre and the curtains are about to go up or open and all the cast are there ready to fulfil their different roles or whatever it's not a case of oh look there's lots of people in theatre oh okay let's go and take different positions I'll speak these lines you speak those lines let's all put on costumes and see what we can do no by the time the curtain opens not only are all the players and actors and actresses ready in their position and ready with their costumes and their make-up the lines already learned not only are they ready in place by the time the curtain opens but they will have rehearsed to perfection they will have gone over their lines and walked their way through all the scenes and the acts and all the anticipating of every detail of it they will have addressed the hangersals they will have gone through everything so that when the curtain opens what the audience behold is the finished product not just oh well what are we doing oh my goodness the curtain's opening let's think of something quickly no it is ready to be revealed in the last time not because God has just done it in the last minute but because when the curtain opens upon eternity all has been prepared rehearsed and made ready down to the last detail just like the managed supper remember when the guest and advice said

I'll explain my beats everything is now prepared come to the managed feast come to the banquet it's all prepared all made ready when the ready he greatly rejoice though now for a season if need be your unheaviness to manifold temptations that the trial of your faith being much more precious than gold that perisheth though it be tried with fire might be found under praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ in other words he has been through everything for you even death itself what are his children prepared to go through for him this love it can never match the love of Christ but it is called to reciprocate the love of Christ our widow's might can never seriously enrich the glory of the temple and all the gold of the altar but it is a reciprocation it is a response it is all that we can give it is all that we can do our light affliction for a time here the trial of our faith is nothing compared to what Christ went through on the cross but it is our response it is our reciprocating of that love whom having not seen ye love in whom though now ye see him not yet believe in ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory you see in the last day of time when the Lord judges the world in righteousness by Jesus

Christ he is completing the work which was begun not on day one of creation but from all eternity in the heart of the Father who already knew exactly how many children would be around his throne at the end exactly who they would be exactly what their names would be exactly how many teeth would be in their mouths exactly how many eyelashes would be on their eyelids exactly what color their hair would be what tone their skin would be what speech and language they would have spoken upon earth though in heaven perhaps we all speak the same language for all that I know he would have known every detail of their lives all from all eternity according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and will have blamed before him and not before the foundation of the world so when we come to the Lord's table we remember not simply that Christ has died to purchase redemption for us but also if we think back earlier than that we think that he knew from all eternity that this was what he had to do in order to purchase salvation and childrenhood if you like belonging sonship daughtership for us in glory from all eternity he knew this would be the cost and it is why he has taught his children to remember it not as an end in itself but as a means to an end to bring to pass that which

God had planned and provided for from all eternity having predestinated us why do I believe in predestination and election I could say because the Bible teaches it that would be true but also if you think about it it is completely totally Christ centered God centered and it is the the hub and the heart of a God shaped universe and a God centered creation which focuses on a Christ centered new creation it gives all the glory to God and it reserves none of it to man's little keeping in his pocket some little thing for himself all that is required of us is response and reciprocal love and even that response itself as Ephesians tells us we have not of ourselves it is the gift of God the free gift gratis the praise of the glory of his grace gratis free gift when he hath made us accepted in the beloved the riches of his grace the gracious plan from all eternity that somewhere within that vast number which is yet a fixed number known in perfection only to God there should be each one who has responded in love been enabled to come to him by faith and there is that place around his song which he intended for them and prepared for them from all eternity before even he spoke the first word of creation he had prepared the number the place the identity and the means for every single one of the children of God the through the beans that

Dr. John and of God