

Chosen For Glory

Today we are going to confront what is probably the greatest mystery in the Bible: if God alone saves people, and if He wants all people be saved, why isn't everyone saved?

Why is it that when Peter denied Christ three times he was restored to faith and became the leader of the apostles, but when Judas betrayed Jesus he was allowed to die in sin and despair?

Why is it that King Saul of Israel, who failed to follow a battle plan God gave him, was rejected by God and committed suicide, while David, an adulterer and liar and murderer, was forgiven by God and became Israel's greatest king?

Why does God say, "*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*"—while they were still in their mother's womb?

Fraternal twins, yet God loved the one and hated the other before they had done anything to deserve His approval or disapproval?

WHY?

Why does God choose some to be saved and not others?

In today's Epistle lesson from *Paul's letter to the Ephesians*, the apostle refers three times to the fact that God **chooses** those who are saved.

Vs. 4: "For God **chose us** in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

Vs. 5: "In love he **predestined us** to be adopted as his sons, through Jesus Christ, **in accordance with his pleasure and will...**"

And Vs. 11: "In him we were also **chosen**, having been **predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.**"

So does the choosing and those who are saved are the chosen.

Jesus Himself said to his disciples on the night before He was crucified: "You did not **choose** me, but I **chose** you."

Why them? Why us?

Perhaps the best way to approach this mystery which is so deeply embedded in the Scriptures is to begin by asking a question: why were the Scriptures given to us in the first place?

And the answer, of course, is that the Scriptures were given to us so that by reading and hearing them, we can be saved.

Not so that we could understand everything that God does, but that we could understand enough of it to be saved.

At the end of his Gospel, John says: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you many have life in his name."

We are saved by faith, faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of God.

The Scriptures are the story of God's plan of salvation for mankind, and those who read or hear it and believe it are saved.

So let's look at this story once again and see if it provides an answer to the question: if God wants everyone to be saved, why isn't everyone saved?

Our story begins as you might expect in the first book of the Bible, in the third chapter of the the *Book of Genesis*.

Immediately after Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God pronounced a curse upon the serpent who had tempted them to do it.

But the curse upon the serpent included a promise to Adam and Eve: a promise that a descendent of Eve would one day destroy the power of the serpent.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

In other words, the power Satan gained over God's creation by tempting His creatures to sin would be taken away from him by a descendent of Eve who would crush his head (that is, destroy the source of his power).

Satan, however, would *strike* the descendent of Eve, that is, severely wound him when he took away Satan's power..

God then set things in motion by choosing a man, Abram, to be the father of a nation of people whose task it would be to deliver God's salvation into the world.

Finding Abram in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans God said to him: "*Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing....and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*"

This is the first place in the Scriptures where we encounter the idea of *election*, which is also called *predestination*.

God elected a people—His CHOSEN people—to whom he gave the name "Israel" and commanded them to show forth His glory to the rest of mankind.

The Israelites would be glorified by God so that they could show forth HIS glory to the rest of mankind.

They were to be a *light to the nations* and a *kingdom of priests*: a human means of grace through which all mankind would be drawn to worship God.

Israel's perennial problem, though, was that she forgot half of the reason that God had chosen her.

Remembering only that she had been chosen for glory, she forgot that she had also been chosen to radiate God's glory to the rest of mankind.

Instead of serving as a kingdom of priests and a light to the gentiles, Israel went her own way and became a recluse.

Instead of being a beacon of light to other nations by pursuing holiness of life, she took to pagan ways and sank into gross immorality.

Her sins were so vile that she even became an embarrassment to the pagan nations that surrounded her.

The bride of Yahweh became an adulteress who abandoned her husband, Yahweh.

But God's promise was sure and His divine plan could not be frustrated—neither by the power of His enemies nor by the failure of his chosen ones.

Over the years He kept alive a faithful remnant in Israel, a small number of Israelites who “had not bowed the knee to Baal,” and who worshipped the God of Abraham with the faith of Abraham.

And in the fullness of time, God brought forth out of this remnant one perfect Israelite: the long-promised deliverer, the Messiah, who would crush the head of Satan and free all mankind from his power: Jesus of Nazareth, descendent of Eve and Son of God.

And who would be wounded unto death in doing so.

Do you know what the word “Christ”—which is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “Messiah”—means?

It means “chosen” or “anointed” one.

And it is in Jesus that we encounter election or predestination or “chosen-ness” in its purest form.

God *chose* Jesus to bring his salvation into the world.

And Jesus, in turn, chose us to go forth in His Name and be a light to the rest of mankind.

We are chosen for glory, but we are also chosen for responsibility.

We are chosen to be ambassadors of our Great High Priest Jesus who has interceded—and continues to intercede—for the sins of mankind before the throne of God.

Like Abraham, our father, we were blessed so that we would be a blessing to the rest of mankind.

That's why we were saved and chosen: *so that we would be the means through which others become chosen as well.*

In His inestimable wisdom, God has chosen to effectuate His plan through us!

HE HAS ENTRUSTED THE SALVATION OF HUMAN SOULS TO YOU AND ME!

Do you have any idea of the magnitude of responsibility that places upon us?

You and I are the difference between some people spending eternity in hell and eternity in heaven!

If we fail, those people may die forever.

We can't do it. It's too great a responsibility.

We certainly will fail.

We are tired, weak, worn and cowardly.

We can't do it and we won't do it.

We are no better than ancient Israel: we hoard God's blessings with nary a thought of sharing them.

Blessed beyond measure, we refuse to be a blessing.

We come to church and sing "I love to tell the story of Jesus and His love"—and then go out into the world and refuse to tell the story to anyone.

We don't even tell our own families!

And so as James Dean once said, "Well, now, then, there."

What is in store for us—failed priests and dim lights that we are?

Will God withdraw his salvation from us?

Will he allow the serpent to destroy our church and carry us off into captivity as He did the Israelites?

Will we lose our salvation by refusing to allow God to extend it to others through us?

Will we be "unchosen" as punishment for our stiff-necked ways?

No.

God chose us "*in Christ...to be holy and blameless in his sight*" so as long as we remain in Christ through our faith He will never cast us away.

In St. Paul's words, we have been "included in Christ."

When God looks at us he doesn't see the shame and cowardice and stubbornness which infects our thoughts and words and actions; he sees only Christ because we have been **included** in Christ.

And so even though we deserve to be cast off and rejected based upon what we are and what we do—and don't do—we are NOT cast off and rejected because we have been dressed and armored with the righteousness of Christ.

When through your faith you live **in** Jesus Christ you are washed clean with every confession of sin, with every prayer that comes from your heart, and with every word of praise that falls from your lips.

In Christ, you are a new creation each and every day of your life.

So what about those who are lost?

God wanted them to be saved and He extended His salvation to each and every one of them.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross He paid the penalty for every sin of every sinner who ever lived or ever will live.

In that sense, God chose us all.

But He also gave us the right of refusal.

And, tragically, many choose to refuse.

Man was created in the image of God but when sin entered the world, that image was erased and man acquired the desire to worship to an altogether different image.

The image of the one who said, "You're not gonna die! You can be like God! You can know what God knows? Just trust me and don't worry!"

And many are drawn to the likeness of this image.

Many choose to worship **unbelief** and God honors their choice.

But you and I have been chosen for glory AND chosen for responsibility.

If we fail to exercise this responsibility, it is a tragedy.

We are choosing to allow people to die because we are unwilling to tell them that they too have been chosen.

That should make us very sad.

But we can use this sadness wisely and not foolishly.

We can let it prompt us to let the joy we have in being chosen overflow the walls of our fears and our spiritual cowardice and bend our stiff necks to the purpose of showing forth God's blessings and His glory to people who desperately need to see it.

We can let it show forth in how we live our lives so that life and light can shine forth from us into a dark and dying world.

God chose us so that through us, others may be among the chosen.

If we focus on doing the divine work that God has entrusted to us, we will come to understand very quickly what we were chosen for.

Amen.