

ELECTION: A MYSTERY TO REJOICE IN

(Sermon Summary)

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Sunday Evening – 2nd October 2022

Reading: Ephesians 1:1-14 (Ephesians 1:4-6)

There is no profounder truth than election. Yet there is no truth in Scripture that is not more disputed and reviled. Some people wish Paul had never written it. Or that we had permission to ignore it whenever we come across in the Bible. Or that there is some interpretative key in the Bible where we can interpret it away so that thoughts like 'chosen' and 'predestined' lose their force.

1. This is a reason for praise.

This truth is for the praise of the glory of God's grace, although you would not think this from the controversy that swirls around it. Paul is not setting us here a problem for us to solve nor doing something to be provocative. He is providing a wider context for something that makes sense of what had actually happened to him and everyone else.

Many of us might have wrestled with this truth or still be wrestling with it. We may have backed off it but been compelled by Scripture to come back to it, almost against our will. Certainly, it is not something to be preached as though there was no other truth in the Bible. Neither is it to be preached by riding roughshod over the issues that it presents or spoken of in an unsympathetic manner.

Perhaps the thought that the Lord elected certain people to salvation was less controversial in Paul's day itself. Israel itself was known as a chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). The thought too of the greatness of God was perhaps more embedded in popular thinking. People had less of a sense of agency. In fact, many in the church were slaves with little sense of self-determination. Perhaps too there was a greater sense of the singularity of the gospel being presented to people with the signs and wonders that accompanied the ministry of the apostles. The expression of tangible and visible supernatural power reinforced the 'special' nature of what was happening and heightened the sense of it all being supernatural.

But it has to be said that there is a great mystery at the heart of the Lord's dealings with us. When we think of the purpose of God and the good pleasure of His will, these are things that are beyond us, although we are forced to admit that without the Lord acting in this way, none of us would ever have known Him.

2. Paul knew it.

Paul knew that really he should not have been there, an apostle and teacher of the Gentiles. It had to be God alone who was responsible for this. God alone was acting, making things happen, willing the outcome in Paul's life, but also in ours too. He remarks often about the way the Lord had revealed these things to him (See Galatians 1:1, 1:11-17; Acts 9:3-6; Acts 22:3-8; and Acts 26:9-11). Had the Lord not acted in the way that He did, Paul would still have been a Pharisee. The way of thinking that he was rooted in was very powerful and it needed something more powerful to move him out of it. Like the strong man having his goods secure, it needed a stronger than he to come and over-power him. So Paul is always astonished that this has happened to him. He is amazed, and never wearies of speaking about it and testifying to it. All his previous experience and hope had been overturned, and his world had been turned upside down (Philippians 3:7-11).

Any of us can say with amazement that we had never expected to be a preacher, Sunday School Teacher or whatever else we are as we serve the Lord. We are amazed to be in church, to be praying and to be reading the Bible.

3. God is too small without this truth.

Salvation is not about us working something out or 'getting it'. It is about Him 'getting us', overpowering us and overcoming us. He does the drawing, the revealing and the opening of our eyes. It is not about us recognizing a good deal when we see one and shaking hands with God that He has made the best offer we have ever come across.

If we look at things as coming from us, it gives us too much power. It ascribes too much to our deciding, our choosing, our willing. It takes too much power from God and gives too much power to ourselves instead. Paul would say that it never came from him. So too would the disciples and all the people who were converted in the book of Acts. It was less a realisation of something that we had to do and more a realisation of something that had already been done. Seen in this way, it is logical to trace the source of this in God back into eternity itself.

4. It is all mercy.

When we come to Christ, it is all about crying for mercy. It is the cry of the powerless, not the powerful, not those who have something to bargain with, namely their agreement. The gospel is not a deal we look at in some dispassionate, calm and

uninvolved way. We are not interacting with an offer or some arrangement, We are interacting with God Himself. We realise that we have to do with a being of infinite glory, whom we have disobeyed, and we are reliant on mercy which is in His hand to give.

It is an interaction of the soul in the depth of our being. It is an interaction with the Person of Christ Himself, a dying Saviour, the very mercy we need. We open our hearts to Him and are not aware that we are choosing, or willing, or indeed doing anything other than trusting in Him for eternal life. It is about us falling into His arms or about beggars holding out an empty hand to receive forgiveness. We receive forgiveness as a gift when we behold that Person and work of Christ, laying down His life on the cross.

It remains as something that is amazing to us. We are amazed that we know God and that God knows us. It is all about what He has done for our soul. We give glory to God and rejoice, as the Ethiopian eunuch did (Acts 8:39). We give glory to God and see everything as coming from Him.

There will always be something unknowable in the deeper purposes of God. These are things that God declines to share with us or divulge to us. We have to be satisfied with not knowing. Instead, we are to remain thankful and be giving glory to God in the matter of our salvation. It is not that He did a lot in this matter. He did everything. It is not that He did most of it. It is that He did all of it. We look on a supernatural event where we cried out for help, help we did not even know we needed or could have known where to look to find it, unless the Lord had done something in us. We rejoice, with Paul, as we know, left to ourselves, we would still be where we were before. Instead, we have come to know Him and are now on our way to heaven.