

Take Comfort in God's Choice

I. It does not depend on your will or effort

II. It depends on God's mercy

For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." ¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Perhaps one of the questions people ask me the most is, "Pastor, why did God do that?" Especially this week as we reflected on the events of September 11, 2001, with the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and now Gustav and Ike... why did God allow that? People ask, "Why did God take away my child, my spouse or my parent? Why did God allow me to get cancer or to suffer through this painful disease?" Folks like to look at future events and ask, "What is God's will in this matter?" With our building project, with our 11 week building fund pledge drive, with the 300 prospects we contacted over the past 3 weeks, what will he do in these matters? Why does he choose to do things the way he does at the times he chooses to do them? To all of those questions I must answer, "I honestly don't know."

As a pastor I don't have all the answers. I am called to instruct you and comfort you with what God has revealed to us through the Scriptures. When these questions come up I like to point people to Isaiah 40:13, **"Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?"** There are many things in the mind of God that he has not nor will make known to us this side of heaven. In our lesson this morning from St. Paul, the apostle poses the question, "Does this make God unjust? Doesn't God's freedom to be seemingly arbitrary in his decisions make him a tyrant when he uses his will? This doesn't seem fair to us as human beings, that we don't have a say in the matter." The apostle Paul uses three Sunday school lessons to teach us about God's sovereign choice. We will look at one of them this morning.

As the LORD promised, Abraham and Sarah were blessed with a son in their old age; Isaac. When Isaac grew up he married Rebekah. When Rebekah conceived Genesis 25:21-23 tells us that the twin babies jostled each other inside of her and she wondered, "Why is this happening to me?" She inquired of the LORD and he told her, **"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."** The ancient law of primogeniture provided the firstborn at least a double share of the father's property. But before either child even had a chance to breathe the Palestinian air, God determined that Jacob, the younger son, would grow into a great nation. God made it clear that his Word and his promise determined everything, so that even the hallowed rights of the firstborn would not interfere with his plans.

Some might say, "Well, God made a good choice, because Jacob was a good boy and Esau was a bad son. St. Paul argues back, **"Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad... she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.'"** (Vs11,12) God's choice was not based on any prior condition or future action by the twins, whether good or bad. But Paul is not saying that Jacob and Esau were without sin

before they were born. The Bible is very clear that no one is born without sin. All are infected with sin from conception (Ps 51:5; Rom 8:6,7). Paul is explaining that neither Jacob nor Esau had a chance to do anything to persuade God in his choice.

Paul then quotes Malachi 1:2,3, “**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.**” We might question, “How could God love Jacob and hate Esau even though neither one of them had a chance to prove themselves?” If we’re looking at outward works, it is easy to see why the LORD hated Esau. Remember what Esau did? Esau despised his birthright. He sold it for a bowl of stew. Remember how he intentionally made his mom and dad mad? He married a heathen wife, actually several unbelieving women. He allowed hatred to grow in his heart so much that he wanted to kill his brother. What is hard for us to understand is why the LORD would love Jacob. Jacob, as his Hebrew name reveals, was a deceiver. He came out of the womb grasping his brother’s heel. He bartered Esau out of his birthright with a bowl of stew. He disguised himself and deceived his ailing father Isaac to receive the firstborn’s blessing and inheritance. After he ran away from home, Jacob pulled sneaky business dealings with his uncle Laban while he worked for him. Based on works, God should hate both of them. And yet God, in his sovereign choice, by his mercy alone, selected the younger son.

Does that make the LORD unjust? That’s not fair to Esau, is it, that the LORD elected Jacob on the basis of his sovereign freedom? Paul denies injustice in God’s dealing with Esau and Jacob, by appealing to God’s right to dispense mercy as he chooses. God also had a purpose in electing Jacob, as Paul said, “**In order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls.**” God’s purpose was to bless all nations through the family of Isaac and subsequently through his son Jacob. His will was to keep his promise to bring the Messiah to earth in the flesh through the descendants of Abraham. His will is that everyone who believes in the Savior will not perish but have eternal life. That doesn’t mean Esau was cursed and damned for all eternity. The promise applied to Esau and his descendants, all nations who believe in the promise of the Savior would be saved. Unfortunately, as we look at Esau’s descendants, they chose not to believe. This brings us to another will of God that he has revealed to us through Scripture, “**Whoever does not believe will be condemned.**” (Mark 16:16)

How does this lesson apply to you today? Well, when I look at how God chooses to do things the way he wants, without consulting any human being, and how he does what he pleases, the burning question I have is, “Why did God choose me? And for what purpose? And how can I be sure God chose me?”

Let’s take a walk through the grade school playground. It’s recess time. The kids are about to play kickball. Two captains are selected. They begin to pick from the lot of other classmates standing in a row. Quickly they choose the fastest and most skilled. But then the captains’ picks begin to slow as they weigh their options between the skinny and awkward, the chunky and not so athletic: the leftovers. The whole time there’s that one kid waiting to be picked is saying, “Pick me!” That was me on the playground. I was one of the “skinny and awkward.” It didn’t matter what I wanted. I was chosen last because of my ability and previous experience on the playground.

In vs16 Paul says, “**It does not depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.**” In the Greek language Paul literally says, “It does not depend on the man who wills and who continues to run.” God does not determine who will receive his mercy based on their wishes, their will or their efforts. Even from the time you were just a little embryo in the bowels of your mother’s tummy, God saw in you what he saw in Esau and Jacob while they wrestled in utero: pure evil, totally corrupt with a sinful nature inherited from the mother and father who conceived you. When your mother delivered you, you came out with your fist raised in defiance in the face of God. From that time on you believed that your running, that is, your efforts to be a good student, an obedient child, a faithful spouse, a loving parent, an honest employee or fair employer, that these efforts would somehow save you from God’s wrath. By nature the only choice you would make is to

reject God and look to yourself for salvation. If God looked at what you wanted and at your works he would say, “You’re all a bunch of lousy kickball players. I don’t want any of you on my team!” **But so that God’s purpose in election might stand, it was not by your works** that he chose you to be part of his chosen nation of believers. God did not choose you because of your works or what you wanted. God chose you because of his mercy and his compassion for sinners. My dear friends, take comfort that the LORD chose you by his mercy.

There you were standing in a row on the playground of the world; the skinny, awkward kid or the chunky, not-so-athletic type, the least likely to be picked, and yet God chose you. Again as Paul said, “**So that God’s purpose in election might stand,**” You were not chosen because of some random drawing God had on bingo night with the angels in heaven. God’s purpose in electing you through baptism was so that he might show his mercy and compassion on you. You can always be certain God has chosen you. He made you part of his team through your baptism. It was his will that you were baptized with water and his Word.

Through the washing with water and His powerful Word the LORD showered his mercy on you. Mercy is this: through his underserved love, the LORD gives you a free gift. When you surf the web those annoying pop ups always say, “Click here for your free \$50 gift card!” But when you read the fine print you must fulfill obligations with two other companies. Your free gift from God through baptism has no obligation to fulfill. The Messiah, Christ Jesus, fulfilled all of the Father’s requirements. He was a good student, a faithful employee, an obedient son, a reliable friend, he did all these perfectly. God showed mercy on you by giving you Christ’s perfect life through baptism. That’s your free gift from the LORD!

Through baptism God also showered you with compassion. To show compassion in the Greek language means to be gracious and to forgive. If the Father were to look at all of your acts of defiance and sins of pride in your good works he should withhold his grace and forgiveness. Instead he should bring his punishment on you. But Christ came and took your punishment on himself on the cross. At baptism you were baptized into Christ’s death. Through baptism the Father has forgiven you.

How does this make you feel? This morning we already sang, “Your works, not mine, O Christ, speak gladness to this heart. They tell me, “All is done!” They bid my fear depart.” (Christian Worship 401:1,2) Take comfort that God chose you, not because of your works, but by his mercy and compassion, so that he might make you his dear child, and bring you to live with him in eternal joys and blessing in Paradise!

When we question, “Why does God choose to bring the catastrophic events of nature to our nation? Why does he choose to allow us to become ridden with disease? What is his will for our future?” He doesn’t always reveal the answer. But we can look to the future with confidence and know that no matter what God chooses to do, he chose you. It was His desire to show mercy and compassion on you through his Son Jesus. May that bring you comfort as you seek to do his will this week. Amen.