

The Chosen One Has Chosen You!

A sermon on Acts 10:34-38

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

There's a lot of responsibility that goes along with the title, the Chosen One, wouldn't you agree? In football, sometimes the first pick of the draft is dubbed the Chosen One, the player who everyone is looking to to turn around the entire team and to singlehandedly make them winners. In the movies, you often have the protagonist, who at first is a nobody, but then he/she becomes the Chosen One, the hero, with the burden of having to save the world. Or even in real life, maybe it's the President. I'm sure there were people who thought President Obama was the Chosen One, the one to get our country on track, to raise us up out of the economic hole we were in.

The Chosen One. It's a high and lofty title, one accompanied with great expectations and responsibilities. A title not everyone is cut out to bear. But today, we see someone who can. Today we see THE Chosen One. Today, we see that the Chosen One Has Chosen You!

You know, the season of Epiphany is all about Jesus being revealed, Jesus being revealed as the Savior of the nations. He didn't just come to save the Jews. He came for all people.

We saw that last week with the visit of the Magi, not from Israel, but nonetheless, they came to worship and adore Christ who was their Lord, too. Today, we have another example of how Jesus is the Savior for all people, with an event that took place after Jesus had already finished his earthly work and returned to heaven.

Now, we know that the words of our text were spoken by Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends. But to really understand what Peter meant by his words, we need to know the context, the whole situation that led him to say what he said.

It all started with a Roman centurion named Cornelius. He and his family were God-fearing, meaning they believed in the God of the Jews and respected and followed their moral teachings. For being a Gentile, Cornelius knew quite a bit about the Jewish beliefs and he knew a lot about Jesus. But he was missing out on something, the best part, the good news of salvation...the good news that Jesus lived, Jesus died, and Jesus rose.

Well God had someone in mind. I guess you could say he had already chosen someone to share that good news with Cornelius, Peter. But I'm not so sure Peter would have been all that gung-ho about proclaiming the gospel to a Gentile...at first. You see, Peter grew up in a society which believed that God cared only about the Jews and only accepted them simply because they were Jews, and that God rejected the Gentiles simply because they were Gentiles. Peter was taught to judge by the externals, and he thought God would judge in the same way. But God changed Peter's perspective, and more importantly, his heart, with a vision and with this punch line: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

So, with this new mindset, Peter was off to share with Cornelius to share with him the greatest news he had, the news of Jesus and his salvation, not just for Jews, but for all people.

Read through his words carefully again, and hopefully you can see how Peter's sermon here is just saturated with the sweet gospel throughout even just our few verses. Can you see some of gospel phrases? Like, "God does not show favoritism," aka, God loves all people, not just a few select people, and so his love and his grace, shown through Jesus, is for all people.

Or, "You know the message God sent...the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all." On the heels of Christmas, with the angels singing about the Christ-child bringing peace to all mankind, the peace between God and us that comes from the peace of knowing our sins forgiven.

Or, there's this line, "You know...how [Jesus] went around...healing all who were under the power of the devil." Yeah, Jesus often healed physical ailments, but the greatest sickness, being infected by sin and being under the power and rule of the devil? Jesus has healed that as well. You can see how Peter points to Jesus again and again. It's all Jesus, chosen by God to save the world.

So, if Peter's point is that it's all Jesus, then why do we have something like verse 35, where Peter says, "[God] accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right"? Because when I read those words, I have red flags shooting up in my mind. I mean, listen to those words again, "God doesn't show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."

Doesn't that almost sound contradictory? God doesn't have favorites but he accepts those who do good things. Sounds like God is playing favorites, right? You know, I wonder if the translators didn't do us a disservice here because literally, it's not "God accepts those who do what is right." It's "those who do what is right, or even, who are working righteousness, are pleasing to God." Now, that makes more sense, wouldn't you agree? God is pleased with those who do right, who fear and respect and honor him and please him by obeying his laws...by their right living.

That lines up with what God's Word tells us, but I'm guessing I'm not the only one who doesn't like to hear that, or at least, my sinful nature doesn't like to hear that. You know why, don't you?

Because we do want God to show favoritism. "I work hard to live a good life. I treat others with respect, I'm tolerating, even accommodating, to other people and their lifestyles. I do my best to always be living in a moral way, and I'm always trying to do the right thing. I freely give, to church, to my community, to charities. God should love me more than these other people, who go out and get drunk, it seems almost every day of the week, who constantly curse and swear, who live sexually promiscuous lives, who are greedy, who live for the dollar, who care more about satisfying their own desires than wanting to please God. I deserve God's love more than they do."

We want God to show favoritism because we often show favoritism. "Those people who are living immorally, not only do they not deserve God's love as much as I do. They don't even deserve for me to care about them enough to tell them about Jesus and about God's love."

You know, I don't think any of us would readily admit that we show favoritism, but if our actions speak louder than our words? Tell me you're not being conceited when that co-worker is going through a tough time and you delight in his grief instead of maybe sharing a comforting Bible passage with him. "Well, he's the office jerk. He's getting what comes to him. Doesn't deserve my sympathy."

Tell me you're not being arrogant when you're with a friend and she's bragging about something she did that you know is a sin but you say nothing. "Why should I? It's her life. After all, it's not me doing it, so it's not my problem."

Tell me you're not showing favoritism when someone's a first-time visitor here, and you do whatever you can, whether intentionally or not, to avoid him. "I don't need to go welcome him and make him feel comfortable. That's not my job. I don't have to be a good host at my church."

If God played favorites like we tend to, his list would be pretty short. IN fact, there would only be one person on it, Jesus. Because, if those who are working righteousness or are doing what is right are acceptable to God, then we can't be on that list. No person can because no one does what's right. On our own, we can't work righteousness. We can't living God-pleasing lives. And by ourselves, we don't deserve to be favored or accepted by God.

If God played favorites, I guarantee he wouldn't choose. If God kept a record of our sins, that would be bad news. But thankfully, Peter has some good news for us, the "good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."

If you're looking for proof that God doesn't show favoritism, we only need to look at the Chosen One. Peter talked about how God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power. Do you know when that happened? Our gospel gives us the answer. At Jesus' baptism, God anointed him. He chose him as the only one who could carry out the difficult task God set before him, to be the Savior of the world. His words, "This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well-pleased," God was saying, "Jesus, he is acceptable to me." In Isaiah 42, God said the same thing, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one, in whom I will delight."

And as God's servant, as the Chosen One, Jesus had a big responsibility. He had to make us acceptable to God. And here's what it took. Jesus himself had to be acceptable to God first, by being righteous. You know Jesus lived the perfect life without any sin.

For us, Jesus had to become an acceptable offering to God. You know he did when he gave up his perfect life to die on the cross for all of our sins, to take them away. For us, Jesus' sacrifice of his life had to be acceptable to God. We know it was by looking at his resurrection, how God brought Jesus back to life, the mark of his approval of the Chosen One's work, the sign that it was all done!

If you look at the next few verses of Peter's sermon this morning after our verses, you Jesus' work is done because Peter points to himself as being a witness, seeing Jesus' death and resurrection, assuring us Jesus did win us forgiveness.

Because of what the Chosen One has done, his life, death, and resurrection, we are now acceptable to God. God looks to us, and, as he said to Jesus, he says to every one of us, "You are my son (or daughter), whom I love, with you I am well pleased."

You know when that first happened, don't you? Well, at your own baptism. Through those precious waters accompanied by God's Holy Word, you were chosen by God. He washed your sins away. He made you his dear child. He chose you.

And now, you have a big responsibility. Jesus is the Lord of all. Peter makes the clear. The Bible makes that so clear. God's grace is for all. We can't hang on to it for only ourselves. There are people out

there who need it. There are people out there whose souls need the healing and the peace only Jesus can give.

You have the antidote to the poison of sin. The Chosen One has chosen you to share it with the world. We are the Chosen Ones. We have that high and lofty title. We have an awesome responsibility. So brothers and sisters in Christ, no more favoritism. We have the precious message of salvation, of Jesus, and by God's grace, we will eagerly and gladly share it. Amen.