

## A Chosen People

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 19th Sunday after Pentecost, October 14, 1990. Scripture Lessons: Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Psalm 135:1-12; Matthew 22:1-14.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

"The Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession" (Psalm 135:4)

Introduction

There are few doctrines which are more associated with Presbyterians than the doctrine of election, a doctrine which asserts that God has chosen a people, a nation as his own possession. There are few doctrines which have been the subject of so much ridicule and rejection. "How absurd for intelligent, educated people to believe that almighty God should have favorites, that he should pick out one small tribe among all the families of humankind to be the special object of his attention" (Newbigin). "And yet it's plain that the doctrine of election is central to any true" understanding "of the Bible. From the very beginning God chooses, calls, and sends particular people. God is always the initiator" (Newbigin).

- Suture - Robert Burns, Holy Willie

- ① As with so many other things, however, Jesus turned upside down the Old Testament understanding that Israel was God's chosen people. Jesus told a story about a king who threw a big party to celebrate the marriage of his son. Those whom the king had previously chosen, whose names were on the guest list, were invited by the king's servants when the feast had been prepared. But those whom the king had chosen made excuses and turned down the invitation. Some actually beat up and killed the king's servants. The king was outraged. He sent an army to destroy his chosen people and burn their city.

Rekl story

The king then sent out other servants to invite those whom he hadn't chosen, whose names had never been on the guest list. The servants went into the main streets crowded with people, both good people and bad. "Come

to the party the king has prepared to honor the wedding of his son. All of you are invited. All of you are welcome. There's plenty to eat. Plenty to drink. We'll dance and sing and celebrate the marriage of the prince."

Throngs of people came to the palace in response to his invitation. None of them had been chosen by the king but all were invited. So, many, many were called, even though only a relative few had been originally chosen.

*Interpretation: Israel rejects invitation* (2) This story describes what really happened in history nearly two thousand years ago. Long ago the Lord chose for himself Jacob and gave him a new name, Israel. He chose to invite <sup>all</sup> the children of Israel to feast with his Son Jesus. But the chosen people refused the invitation, rejected Jesus, and killed those whom God had sent to invite them to trust in Jesus.

In A.D. 70, about 40 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the armies of Rome put down a Jewish rebellion. Many Jews were killed and the city of Jerusalem was burned and destroyed. Early Christians saw in these events the judgment of God against his chosen people.

But the rejection of God's chosen people didn't thwart God's plans. God sent out other servants to invite those who were not chosen to the party prepared in honor of his Son.

*It describes what happens today* (3) The story that Jesus told describes not only what happened nearly 2000 years ago. It describes what's happening right now. God has invited you to a party. God wills to show his mercy, grace and love on those whom he hasn't chosen. The invitation to enter into the joy of salvation comes to all... to those few who can claim to be God's chosen people and to those many whom God has not chosen. God wants us all to come to a party. He invites...

- young and old
- rich and poor
- well educated and poorly educated

- male and female
  - democrat and republican
  - capitalist and communist
  - Red and Yellow, Black and White
- They are precious in his sight.

He invites-

- believers and unbelievers
- religious and non-religious
- conservatives and liberals
- Americans and Iraqis

Now think of that! God invites us. God doesn't order us. God doesn't send down a decree or a command or a law requiring that we respond to the invitation. It's a real, honest to goodness, invitation. And it's an invitation to a feast.

Sometimes, maybe, you've heard the Gospel preached as a threat. As a boy I remember the Gospel being preached as a threat. "God loves you very, very much. God loves you so much that Jesus died for you and if you don't respond to the invitation to receive Christ as your Savior, God will torture you forever in hell."

But God addresses us as a friend in the Gospel. "I've prepared a feast. You're invited. Will you come? I want to feed you. I want to fill the hungry with good things. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with them and they with me."

"True, (God) demands of us obedience.... But first he *gives* us something, first he simply invites us to come" (Thielicke) "Repentance and remorse always come soon enough, but joy can never come too soon. We who know

God invites...  
not commands

Jesus Christ have only to proclaim joy. We need only to remember how the King does it. He invites and calls and gives" (Thielicke).

Men without garment ⑤ Finally, what do we do with the guy who shows up at the wedding feast without a wedding garment? In the story Jesus told he said that the king came in and saw one person who wasn't dressed appropriately. The king asked him how he got in without a wedding garment. The man is speechless. The king calls a bouncer, "Show this guy out." The bouncer picks him up by the scruff of his neck and seat of his pants and gives him the heave-ho out into the darkness where he can see the lights inside and hear the laughter and music and maybe even smell the food. And there, hungry, cold and dirty he weeps and gnashes his teeth.

Now what difference does it make what he wears? Does God have a dress code? Well, I imagine this guy's clothes were pretty dirty, pretty sweaty and smelly. Maybe he'd been feeding pigs. He hasn't changed his clothes in weeks, maybe months. They're all mucked up. They must've also been uncomfortable. When I was in college I once wore the same bluejeans for 1 month in row. I got a rash. I imagine this guy had a terrible rash. At any rate this guy responded to the invitation and came to the feast in his dirty clothes.

At the door the butler says, "You look so uncomfortable in those clothes. I'm sure you'll be glad to get out of them. Here! Take them off and throw them in the garbage. The king has provided beautiful, new and clean clothing for all his guests. They're free." The butler shows him all the styles to choose from. "Smell how fresh they are. Feel how soft and smooth they are. Let me take those old, dirty clothes and throw them away."

But the guest is offended. "No! I prefer my own clothes."

The butler responds, "But think of the other people. Do you realise how you smell. Do you realize that nobody will want to come near you."

"What do I care about others?"

And with that he barges into the feast without a wedding garment.

We seat ourselves at the banquet table without a wedding garment when we allow our sins to be forgiven but still want to hang on to them. We do this when we say to ourselves, "This is great stuff; I can remain self-centered, I can continue to hurt others and live without concern for others without worrying, since this God of love can never be really angry."

And that's where we, you and I, need to hear God's warning. Who ever thought it a sacrifice and a burden to change your clothes and put on festive garments in order to go to a banquet you've looked forward to for weeks? If we seek the Lord, if we respond to God's invitation... if we come just as we are-- seeking faith, seeking pardon and a new life, we're welcome to the feast and God will provide the new garment of penitence.

Let us pray :