

"CHOSEN AND CALLED- ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION"

I Peter 1:3-5; Romans 8:28-30

Maybe you have heard this story before so if you have, please indulge me; if you haven't well and good. One day a group of theologians were discussing predestination and free will. The argument got so heated that sides were drawn and the group broke up into two fiercely prejudiced factions. But one theologian, not knowing to which camp he belonged, stood for a moment trying to decide. At last he made up his mind to join with the predestination crowd. When he tried to push his way in, they asked, "Who sent you here?" "Nobody sent me," he replied. "I came on my own free will." "Free will!" they fairly shouted at him. "You can't come in here of your own free will. You belong with the other group." So he turned and went toward the free will group. When he tried to join them, someone asked, "When did you decide to join us?" "I didn't decide. I was sent here," he answered. "Sent here!" They were horrified.

"You can't join us unless you choose to by your own free will." And so he was excluded from both groups.

Well today we continue with our series on John Calvin, that great Reformer of the 16th century who had such an impact on Presbyterian theology. This morning we tackle one of Calvin's doctrines, that of election and predestination, which has been a lightning rod as well as, well, as someone once put it, somewhat of an embarrassment to many of Calvin's contemporary followers. And yes, while it is true, the doctrine of election creates some interesting difficulties, one cannot give up on it because, well, plain and simple, it is a Biblical teaching. Go back to the Old Testament and you read in Genesis 12:3 where God "elects" Abraham and his offspring and calls them out to be a blessing to all nations. Throughout the Bible God chose people- common, ordinary people; people who were chosen to be kings, prophets and prophetesses to fulfill God's divine purposes. And when we read the New Testament we read that Jesus Christ is the elected One of

God. When you think about it the concept of election is really a logical extension of the Reformation belief in grace alone. The practical doctrine of election drives home the point that each and every one of our lives has it's foundation in the gracious will and intentionality of God. And hopefully it gives us precisely this- hope and encouragement and not ulcers. Keep in mind Calvin's situation- this Frenchman was living in political exile in Geneva and the doctrine of election certainly made sense to him and his predicament. How? Well, election gave him a sense of comfort that whatever happened to him, his life was resting secure in the grace of Almighty God. And think of this- election brings out the affirmation that, before we can do anything on our own, any work whatsoever, God loves us, God knows us, God saves us, and God equips and sends us out to serve Him. So let's pull apart this doctrine of election as we focus on God and what He does for us.

First, **God knows us.** Let me ask some questions: Do you ever wonder why you were born to the particular set of parents who made it possible for you to enter this world? Do you ever ask yourself, "What is my purpose in life and what in heaven's name am I suppose to do with my life?"

Here is one approach to these questions and I highlight this approach by asking more questions- Can we say that everything in this earthly life is hit or miss and by chance? Do you believe that everything from birth to death just happens arbitrarily without any rhyme or reason or purpose? Do you really believe that your life is one big biological accident? There are those who have this frame of mind, how about you?

The interesting thing is Calvin had a different approach. Calvin fully believed that everything about you and me- our gifts, our abilities, our birth, everything was God intended. That there was and is a purpose for you and for me for that is what election suggests- that even before we came into existence, God was. That the God of creation had us already in mind and

then that moment occurred that He called us into being. That God knows us through and through, and by name. That God has a plan and a future for us. I mean, listen to what Jesus says John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you...." Throughout Scripture we read about a God who wants, who desires, who had and who has an intimate relationship with His people.

This concept of election that Calvin preached gives us a great glimpse of **a God who is not against us but with us and for us.** Folks, Calvin believed and preached about a God who did not just create us and leave us to our own ways, but rather a God who loves us, wants the best for us, who will go to the extreme for us. But election also tells us our responsibility- for if God is for us then we need to respond accordingly and seek to fulfill and live our lives according to His purpose. And if God is love, then we, in turn are not only to love God but each other. Folks, isn't it wonderful that God knows us?

Second, **God saves us**. I mean it is great that this God of creation knows you and me- that's wonderful. But Calvin's doctrine of election and predestination goes deeper. God not only knows us but election tells us that God is in the business of saving us; He is in the business of bringing about reconciliation and redemption for us. And God has done all of this prior, prior, or ahead of us.

Let me explain. **The doctrine of election and predestination is not predeterminism**. Predeterminism is the notion that God is somewhere mapping out, setting into action, into place everything that will happen to us so that we do not have any free will. Think about it, if I predetermine something then there are no choices, are there? And any talk of the future is left up to someone else, not me, correct? So we are nothing more than puppets and God is the master puppeteer and there is no free choice.

Friends, this is not what Calvin had in mind when he was setting forth his doctrine of election or predestination.

And what people have sometimes done is confuse predestination with predeterminism. Folks, just because we are chosen by God doesn't not mean we have to give up our freedom or will.

Our passage from I Peter gives us assurance that we have not been created by God and then let loose in a world where we are left up to our own devices. God goes with us and yet respects our integrity to choose. I Peter tells us of a future hope that is compared to an inheritance that is there, waiting for God's children. And there is a heavenly destiny that awaits us, for we read, "By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

But there is an issue here that needs to be addressed- if God saves the elect, then there are the un-elect, the unsaved, right?

I mean how else can we read the passage from Romans 8:28-30 and arrive at any other conclusion? For Paul says in Romans 8:29-30, "For those whom he [meaning God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." So if there are those predestined to conform to the image of his Son, there are those who are not and they are the unsaved. Who is responsible for the destiny of the unsaved? Well, Calvin would say the unsaved person is justly punished because they freely choose to follow their own, sinful ways. And yet it is God who ordained it that their hearts are hardened and thereby condemned. Now while many have felt this is very unfair, Calvin's response to this was, "Though we cannot comprehend the reason for this, let us be content with some degree of ignorance where the wisdom of God soars into its own sublimity..." (*Institutes*, III.xxiv.14)

There is a lot more that could be said about this predestination of **the saved and the unsaved, otherwise known as double predestination** and that while some might want to challenge Calvin on his teaching of the non-elect, Calvin was very clear to convey that God deals lovingly and justly with all human beings.

And finally, **God empowers us**. Calvin never believed that just because we are saved that is the end, period, end of story. We have a purpose and mission to be about and our election sets us out into the world to live a different kind of life for God and for the world. This election does not give us any reason to boast or to think we are somehow more special or better than the person next to us. Being a part of the elect hold with it responsibility where we not only are to live for God but for others- there is a purpose, there is a special service we are to be engaged in- service for God.

How many of you have heard about or read any of the writings of Maya Angelou?

In a number of her interviews she has shared the following comment when people have boasted about their salvation, those who think that their growth in grace can stop once they profess faith in Christ or those who are so confident in their status as Christians. She asks, "You are a Christian? Already?" Folks, the reality is that each and every day for the believer we are empowered by God to strive, to work at becoming more and more Christian.

There is so much more I could say about election and predestination. And it is OK to struggle and question Calvin's position that some are saved and others are not. There were many Reformers who accepted some form of the doctrine of election such as Luther, Bucer and others. And yes, there were other Reformers like Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich who preached a single predestination to eternal life. And yet for Calvin single predestination didn't work because he believed if God decreed salvation for some, it only seemed reasonable that God decreed damnation for others. Why, Calvin himself

called double predestination a "horrible decree." And yet since Calvin didn't believe in chance he wasn't willing to leave the fate of the unsaved to chance, because this would then have challenged the absolute sovereignty of God.

We have to keep in mind that most of the Reformed confessions of our Presbyterian tradition reflect a doctrine of predestination as a part of justification by grace, even though some are more explicit than others. And know that many modern-day Presbyterians have been very concerned about the few statements in the confessions that suggest that God has from all eternity condemned some people to eternal death. Throughout the history of the church some have warmly embraced this doctrine and others have had problems with it. But since I have been going over-time in my preaching in this series let me draw this to a close and say I encourage you to read more and struggle with this doctrine of election and predestination. There are Biblical passages that address it and favorites are Deuteronomy 7

and Romans 9 where we read of God calling a chosen people. But let me leave you with the far-reaching implications of election for Calvin in the lives of the laypeople of the church. Back in Calvin's day, the medieval church believed that only the celibate monks were to do the work of the Christ while ordinary people were to live as second-class Christian citizens. But Protestants, the likes of Calvin brought together his teachings on election with the notion that people in all occupations in life have a responsibility to live out an authentic Christian vocation. Calvin believed that God assigns each believer a sentry post in the world for he wrote, "From this [calling] will arise the singular consolation; that no task will be sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight. (*Institutes*, 3.10.6) Calvin believed that whatever we do, it should be done to the glory of God.

Join me next Sunday as we conclude this series and focus on Calvin's view of Sin and Salvation. Amen.

"CHOSEN AND CALLED- ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION"

I Peter 1:3-5; Romans 8:28-30

Introduction: One day a group of theologians were discussing predestination and free will...

Calvin's doctrine of election and predestination

First, **God _____ us**

Can we say that everything is hit or miss and by chance?

Calvin's approach...

Election gives us a glimpse of a God who is not against us but with us and _____ us

Second, **God _____ us**

The doctrine of election and predestination is not _____

If God saves the elect (the saved), what about the unsaved?

Rom. 8:28-30

The saved and the unsaved, otherwise known as _____
predestination

Finally, **God _____ us**

Being saved is not the end of the story

Passages that speak about election and predestination- Deut. 7 & Rom. 9

Conclusion: Calvin believed that whatever we do, it should be done to the glory of God.