

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 - God Gets Glory by Saving Losers - Part 2

If you remember from last week this section in 1 Cor. 1:18-31 is a little bit of a rabbit trail from the main point that Paul will be making for the first 4 chapters. The main is don't be divided over your favorite leader. The rabbit trail tells us one reason why: the leaders at the church in Corinth - Apollos, Paul, Cephas, so on - were all preaching the exact same gospel message: a crucified and risen Messiah that saves those who believe in him from their sins. That message is foolishness to the world, but wisdom and power to those who are being saved.

So like I joked - only somewhat - last week, the main point with this rabbit trail is that God saves losers with a foolish gospel message. That's his plan and that's how he gets glory. Heaven is not going to be filled with a bunch of glamorous people who are "the who's who" in Hollywood or the political elites.

We looked that the foolishness of the message last week. That those who are perishing - on the road to hell - think the simple gospel message is ridiculous and there's nothing we can do to change that. To us who are being saved it's wisdom and power. It's everything.

This morning we turn from the message to the recipients of the gospel: us, the losers. You need to understand that Christians throughout history have mostly been the poor. Mostly been the outcasts. Mostly been the weak and uneducated. The people society thinks are useless.

Just think of the people Jesus ministered to. He went to the prostitutes. He showed grace to lepers. The filthy tax collectors. His apostles were fisherman - not exactly the Israeli elites.

You know who he argued with and condemned the most? The social elites. The rich young rulers. The well-educated Pharisees and Sadducees. The government officials in power like Herod and Pilate. The scribes who had years and years of education and memorized whole books of the Bible.

This has always been God's plan. God chooses the lowest of the low because the lowest of the low know we don't have anything to offer God. We have nothing to boast in before him. And because we know how lowly we are we can rightly focus on the grace and glory of God who saved us.

So let's get to work unpacking this reality that usually who God saves are nobodys - losers.

1) Most people in the Kingdom are not impressive to the world. Read 26

So Paul says consider your calling. Think about who you were when God saved you. Remember, this is the effectual calling. Not just the call for everyone everywhere to repent - that's the universal call.

Here the idea is remember when you were saved, the moment you believed in Jesus. This is the calling of God where by his own will took out your heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh. He gave you new birth like a mom gives birth to her child. Where the Holy Spirit places new desires into your heart as he applies the work of Jesus, according to the plan of the Father to your account. This is who you were when God saved you. Paul says: think about who you were, brothers.

And he mentions 3 things that they were not: not wise according to the world. They were not powerful. And they were not of noble birth. Now, actually, look close. Does he say **none** of them were wise, powerful or noble? No. He says not many.

This is important for us to keep in mind. There will be people from every tribe, tongue, nation and people in heaven. And there will be people from every facet of society.

1 Tim. 2:1-4: we are to pray for all men - kings and rulers and those in high positions. Why? Because it's not natural for us to pray for politicians. It's not natural for us to pray for the influential class or people worth billions of dollars. But God desires all men to be saved. I think the idea is all kinds of men: not just the lowly but the powerful as well. But they are the minority in God's Kingdom.

Those who are first will be what? Last. And those who are last will be first. There will be some wise, and some powerful, and some of noble birth.

What's he talking about here. Not many wise? Well, he was just talking about worldly wisdom. Those who are philosophers, those who are highly educated according to the world.

You go to any college campus and there are very few if any true Christians that hold teaching positions. And even less that are tenured. The radical atheism and secularism that permeates every area of higher education is hard to overstate. It's almost like the more letters you have after your name the smaller the chance you are a true believer or every will be. Knowledge puffs up.

The arrogance and blindness among those who are the elite educators is amazing. And let me just say, as Christians, we need to give up trying to impress the academic world. It's a lose-lose situation. We will never be able to impress the academic world because they hate the core truths we hold dear.

And I am all for education, higher education. But we need to be very careful that our priorities in life are not to gain kudos by the secular academic world.

"But they have to go to the college that brainwashes them to get a good job!" First of all, that's not true. Second, getting a good job is not our highest priority as followers of Jesus. Not even close and especially not if it jeopardizes our walk with the Lord.

The other thing I think we need to keep in mind - especially when it concerns evangelism - is that if God is not in the business of saving many of the wise people in the world, maybe we shouldn't be too concerned about it either. Maybe our evangelism efforts should be on those who are uneducated and foolish in our society. The low and the ignorant.

There's a reason that historically the Christian church has been concerned about benevolence ministry, adoption ministry, alms ministry, food pantry ministry. Most every hospital you've been to is named after some Christian because we, like Jesus, have a concern for the sick.

That doesn't mean that every weak and poor person you meet will come to faith in Jesus. But according to Paul, it seems more likely.

If God calls the foolish does that mean Christians have no interest in education? Absolutely not. Because you know the other thing Christians usually start when they move into a place? Schools.

Christians have always been interested in education because we believe that in the Bible we have the truth. But historically what Christians would do was teach uneducated people the basics of literacy - to read and write. Sunday school began as a way to teach little children to read using the Bible. But what happened over time is that Christian education became more and more refined and only the elite could access it because it now costs so much. Our focus has turned away from educating the lowly in society using the Bible, to educating well-off Christians who can afford an elite education. I like Christian college, and I like seminary - but I think we've mostly forgotten our roots as educators of the poor.

Listen to a man named Celsus who was a critic of Christianity back in 175AD or so. "The Christians aim] is to convince only worthless and contemptible people, idiots, slaves, poor women, and children...These are the only ones whom they manage to turn into believers" (Shelley, Church History in Plain Language, pg. 35). Praise God that he saves the simple.

He also says that not many were powerful. **Read 26**

God has not called many people who are powerful. When Paul says powerful here he doesn't mean strong like professional athletes. More the idea is well connected. I think the NIV actually gets it more accurate when it says not many of you were influential.

This could be politically connected, socially connected. Not many Christians come from the who's who of Hollywood. Not many Christians are on the boards of Fortune 500 companies. There's some - don't get me wrong. But not many. I mean, we've got Kirk Cameron.

But God doesn't typically call the influential - the social elite who have connections and influence in the world. And we need to be very careful here. A lot of times we think that when someone who is influential comes to power somehow it vindicates Christianity. That when a celebrity or actor or whoever starts claiming Jesus somehow, "See, Christianity is right!" It doesn't work that way.

Kanye West made a profession of faith a while back. And I thought that was cool because people I respected highly were encouraged by what they saw. I mean, he started going to church and being disciplined by a pastor who was having church in my Christian college gym - they're legit. Well, whatever happened, I think we can all agree Kanye is not well. And the stuff he is not professing is not Christianity. Kanye never legitimized Christianity nor does any other celebrity.

And when we hear people claim Christianity we need to be careful. Justin Bieber. Russel Wilson. Ted Cruz. Do you realize that only in the last 20 years have politicians **not** identified as Christian. Prior to that every President and most every legislator has given some sort of verbal nod to Christianity and we eat it up like candy like they're on our team and then wonder how they are so corrupt.

It's because God does not call very many who are influential, who are powerful in that sense. He calls you and me.

Not many of noble birth. **Read 26**

The word noble birth is an interesting one. It's actually the Greek word εὐγενεῖς meaning good birth or good family. That's actually where we get the word eugenics - which, of course, has a negative meaning in English. But in Greek it was a good thing - it meant you were part of royalty and

America was founded on the principle that there is no royalty. In fact, I believe it is illegal to officially give someone in America a noble designation. There are no sirs or barons or counts or queens or kings. So this is hard for us to understand. These would have been the ruling class. The governing authorities. The extraordinarily wealthy.

About the closest we get to this in America are the political elites who have money and generations of politicians like the Kennedys or the Bushs. I'm listening to a book by George W Bush called Decision Points and he talks a little bit about the circles he ran in growing up and the money that some people in America are used to, and it is unbelievable. Just the wealth and opulence. Those things are not intrinsically evil - it's not wrong to be rich or involved in politics. But there are some people who have fortunes that we just can't fathom and connections in life we will never understand.

But God does not call many of those people into the Kingdom. God's call is discriminatory and it favors the simple. It favors the non-influential. It favors those who are not in power and not wealthy.

Why does God do this? That's the second point.

2) God chooses the nobody's to shame the somebody's. **Read 27-29**

So why does God call the lowly in society? Or here, why does God chose the nobody's? To shame the celebrities. That's his point. God is on a shame campaign against the proud who think they've got it all.

Now, there's a word in here that we need to deal with before we address the bigger point: the word is "chose." Paul uses this word 3 times here: God chose the foolish, he chose the weak, and he chose the low and despised.

Paul is touching on the doctrine of election. That God chooses those who he will save. Actually he touches on it in various ways even right here in this passage. Our calling, remember from **Vs. 26**, is the effectual calling - God's own work to bring us to faith. And actually Paul says this in **Vs. 30**. **Read**

Why are we in Christ Jesus? Because of God. The reason you're in Christ, you're saved, the reason you believe, is because of God. It's not just that God planned the whole of salvation, although he did. It's that he is the one who placed you in Christ.

This is actually what God has always done. Even with Israel. Look back at **Deut. 7:6-11** for a minute. Have you ever asked yourself: out of all the people on the planet did God choose Israel? Why not Egypt? Why not a country in Asia? I mean, God just pops up on the scene in **Genesis 12** to Abraham - why him? Why not some guy down the road? Abraham wasn't looking for God - Abraham was an idol worshipper when God first came to him. Why chose him? Because God in his wisdom and grace chose to. Why Israel? **Read 6-11**

Why did God chose them? Because they were small and God loves them. God loves choosing the little guy and shaming the elites.

Imagine that you're at the park having a family day and there's a group pick-up game of soccer going on with some kids. And it turns out that one team is just dominating the other team. The score is like 15 to 1. And the good kids are all making fun of the slow little guys and you come over and want to play. Given your choice, what team would you probably chose to be on? I don't know about you, but I'm gonna chose the weak team. I'm going to choose the little guys.

And my dad spirit is going to come out and I'm going to do everything in my power to dominate the supposedly good team. I will outrun them. I will outscore them. I will out foul them. I will trash talk them. I will pick up little Tommy on my team and carry him with me to the goal and let him kick the ball to score a point. And I'll get little Jane and just as I'm about to score for the 75th time I'll pass it to her so she can tap in a goal. And we will end the game 97 to 15. It won't even be close. And they'll all cheer at the underdog story and how I saved the day.

Those little guys - will they have won the victory? Of course - they were on my team. Will they be glad I did most of the work? Obviously. But we will share in that victory together.

This is what God does. He did it to Israel. He chose them to show off his power and grace and love to the world. He picked the underdog team. He picked the losers. **Look over at Deut 9:1-6 Read**

Who's going to do all the hard work for little Israel? God. And it's not because they're a great people. God goes on for the rest of the chapter to detail just how stubbornly sinful they were. God does not chose people based on their righteousness. He doesn't chose people based on what they can do for him.

He didn't chose Israel because they were great or mighty or righteous. And he didn't chose you because you were great or mighty or righteous. He chose them and he chose us to shame all those people who think they're better than everyone else.

Look over at Ephesians 1. Now, I know that this doesn't answer all the questions everyone has about God choosing and election. And, honestly, the Bible doesn't answer all of the questions we have about election. If you want a really good book about this it's called *Chosen for Life* by Sam Storms. It's just a really good overview of what the Bible says on this topic because we can't cover everything here.

Here's what we know: We're not robots. Nobody believes we're just robots or puppets that have no decision making ability at all. Anyone who does believe that is crazy.

We also know that we won't come to faith in Jesus on our own. Unless God works in people they will never come to faith in Jesus. That's why when we pray for someone we say "God please save them." What are we asking for God to do when we pray that prayer? We are asking him to effectually call them. To do an internal

work in their heart that we know we can't do and they can't do. We are asking that God take out the heart of stone, put in the heart of flesh. Raise them to life.

We're not asking God to violate their will. We're asking for God to save their life because they can't.

We also know that God didn't choose us because he knew we were going to choose him. Left to our own we would never choose Jesus. **Rom. 9** says that God's choice of us is not based on human will or exertion. God didn't choose us because we were going to choose him anyway. He chose us simply because he wanted to show us mercy.

And here's the big lesson from Ephesians: when God chose us he did so because he loved us. That's what we see here in **Eph. 1. Read 3-10**

Some people will say that if God really chooses us then he can't be a loving God because he didn't choose everybody. Actually Paul says that one way we know God loves is that he chose us. In love he predestined us. Our being chosen is an expression of God's love.

Just like adopting a child is an expression of love, so is choosing us an expression of God's love. And that love is for sure unconditional because he chooses the lowly people, the weak, the poor. He'll toss in a politician every once in a while. He'll toss in a rich guy. But not often. They're like the bay leaves of the melting pot of Christianity - just a couple here and there for flavor. All of this is according to God's purpose - which is loving and gracious and good.

Does that answer all the questions? No way. But when we come back to **1 Cor. 1** what we understand is that part of the reason that God chose us is to shame the wise. Go back there. **Read 1 Cor. 1:27-29**

Why did God choose us? To shame all those other people. Back to the soccer analogy - we pick the weak team to shame the cool kids who think they're all that. That's why God chooses most of us.

To shame the world. And you're thinking: The world doesn't seem to be very embarrassed by this situation. Usually the world thinks we're lame and weak and foolish for believing the gospel. And that's true. They will think that all the way until the Day they stand before Jesus in judgment. It's on the last day that the weak and foolish and nobodies are vindicated by God.

Let me ask you: Do you ever feel like a worthless Christian? You've got no gifts? No talents? You struggle to even feel like you fit in or have a purpose? Maybe you see other believers and you think "Man, they're just awesome - I wish I was like them." You ever feel like that?

That's how God has designed it. I feel like that too. Why would God choose me? Couldn't he get someone better, someone more kind and intelligent and gifted? Of course he could, but that's not his plan.

And while we're not attractive to the world, there are also no worthless people on the team. Maybe they're worthless in the world's eyes - but not God's eyes. **Read 28**

That phrase: even the things that are not. What that means is literally the nothings. The nobodies. The zeros.

He does that so that no one will ever stand on his team and boast. Can you imagine little Timmy the soccer player thinking we won the game because of his one goal? No, the Kingdom is filled with people who have no boast in ourselves. We have nothing to brag about at all.

Which brings us to the 3rd point:

3) God is our only source of boasting. Read 30-31

What God has done in bringing about salvation and putting together his team of nobodies is assemble a group of people who have no pride in themselves. We have nothing to boast in.

This is what the gospel does: it continually brings us back to the point where we acknowledge that really the only thing we have to offer God is our sin. That's all we add to God.

I mean, there was literally no other way we could get into the Kingdom except for God to take on flesh and ransom us from the mess we made. When someone understands the gospel rightly, it removes all boasting.

Yeah maybe you're a little smarter than me, maybe we're a little richer than most of the world, maybe some of us are sicker than others but you know where we should all be right now? In hell.

But God being rich in kindness and mercy has saved us, not because of our own righteousness, but through the righteousness of Jesus.

And God has placed us in Christ. Christ has become our wisdom and strength our redemption...our everything.

So that our only boast, our only source of bragging is the Lord. Everything I am, everything I have, any good thing in me is only there because of Jesus. Only because God in his grace looked upon a blinded sinner and showed me mercy.

Therefore, Paul says, let him who boasts boast in the Lord.

Pray