

ROMANS 1:1-7 CHOSEN

Paul was called to be an apostle. Those in Rome were called to be saints. All who read, or have this letter read to them, are called to belong to Jesus. These are the first seven verses of this letter to the Romans, and Paul is making it very clear what the whole purpose of this letter is. No one chooses to become a Christian, but rather God chooses them. God has chosen you. He sets you apart from this world to belong to His Son.

How God does this is by what Paul calls the Gospel of God. Gospel is good news. Gospel tells us about what God is going to do for us, is doing for us, and has done for us. Anything that the Bible tells you to do, or reminds you that you've failed to do is Law. This reading is all Gospel. It's all about what God has done for you. The only way you get Law out of this reading is by turning it on its head, which is what I heard one Christian say recently. He said that we have to choose to be a Christian. He got it all wrong, but interrupting his conversation in a restaurant would've been the wrong way to correct him. And so I correct him and any of you today who think that you chose to be a Christian.

Paul says that he's not making this up. This isn't some new teaching that Paul has come up with. It's not the Gospel according to St Paul. Some Christians dismiss Paul because they believe that there are the teachings of Jesus, and then Paul came along with different teachings changing what Christianity was meant to be.

However, Paul says that what he's talking about was promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. This is a public challenge, for people to refute him, to say to Paul that what he says is not supported by the Holy Scriptures, and show him how. We have no such documents showing that Paul was disproved.

Another time when Paul was writing about the resurrection, as he does so here, he also used this tactic, and again there's no one who stepped forward to meet his challenge. That was in 1 Corinthians 15(:3-7). There Paul wrote:

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins **in accordance with the Scriptures**, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day **in accordance with the Scriptures**, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.”

Basically, Paul is telling people that if they don't believe him then they should read the Holy Scriptures, and talk to the witnesses, and prove him wrong. There's no record of anyone doing that.

So, let's try it. What did God say in those Old Testament Scriptures about how people become the people of God? In Deuteronomy 7:6-8 Moses said, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has **chosen** you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love on you and **chose** you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that **He swore** to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

What does Jesus have to say about this matter? In the Gospel of John 15:(16-19) Jesus said, "You did not choose Me, but I **chose** you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, . . .

If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I **chose** you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

Jesus, the Son of God **chose you** and set you apart outside of the world. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead, and He became your Lord when He **chose you** to be His saints.

That's Paul's basic message to you in these opening verses to the book of Romans, but he does say a little more than that to back up his claim, and so let's follow his line of thought and elaborate on that for a deeper insight into who this Jesus is, and what makes Him our Lord. Paul says that Jesus descended from David according to the flesh, which means that Jesus was born. Jesus came into this world as a baby. And that's why we read this text so close to Christmas.

So let's take a closer look at this baby who chose you so that He could be your Lord. Come closer. Peer into the manger, this animal feeding trough. Maybe by the time you get up the courage to come closer you'll no longer find Him in the feeding trough, but rather in the lap of Mary, a young teen. Shepherds are whispering that somehow she's still a virgin. Do you shake your head at those words?

Don't think of this from the point of looking back having heard the Christmas story dozens of times. Think of this as your first trip to the manger. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you think now? Which farmer among you would lay his newborn son in the barn? Think of how unclean that is for a newborn. Now look at Jesus again.

Are your thoughts really on a sweet little baby and a fair young virgin? How could God choose this place for His Son? How could you believe this baby to be the Son of God, unless God gave you faith?

When Martin Luther imagined such an encounter he said. “Look upon this Lord of Peace and your spirit will be at peace. See how God invites you in many ways. He places you before a Babe with whom you may take refuge. You cannot fear Him, for nothing is more appealing to man than a babe. Are you affrighted? Then come to Him, laying in the lap of the fairest and sweetest maid. You will see how great is the divine goodness, which seeks above all else that you should not despair. Trust Him! Trust Him! Here is the Child in who is salvation. To me there is no greater consolation given to mankind than this, that Christ became a man, a child, a babe, playing in the lap and at the breasts of His most gracious mother. Who is there whom this sight would not comfort? Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience, and guilt, if you come to this gurgling Babe and believe that He is come, not to judge you, but to save you.”

Could you walk into a barn and find a young teen who has just given birth to a boy and think all those kinds of thoughts that Luther says? I don't think I could. I'd think, 'What are you doing here?'. I might say, "Let's get you out of here to somewhere clean and warm." But I doubt I'd think that I was looking at the Son of God who had come to save me. Those kinds of thoughts would have to put into my head. God would have to give me faith to believe.

God had to call me, and even then I did the only thing I could do, and that was run away from God. After I left home for college I went to church once in four years, and only then because a friend asked me to go with him. God called me, and I ran away, but after four or five years I stopped running when that thought came into my mind that maybe I should go to church on Sunday.

This is the only logical explanation to us being here on a Sunday morning – God called us to be His people, to be His saints, to have the hope of partaking in the resurrection of the dead ourselves. If you have any doubts that God chose you and gave you faith in Jesus as your Saviour let's close with a few more verses from those Holy Scriptures that Paul talks about.

In 1 Peter 2:4 it says that you are chosen and precious in the sight of God. Ephesians 1:3-4 says that “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He **chose** us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.” Paul tells the Thessalonians that “we are loved by God, and that He has **chosen** you” “as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. (1 Thes. 1:4; 2 Thes. 2:13). Amen.