

A Gospel For All

Have you ever felt like you were special, part of a select few, and likely an essential piece to a significant project or plan? Maybe you were the first person picked for a playground game. Maybe you were given the impression that the selection process used to identify you was extensive. Maybe your employer has tasked you to oversee an important venture. Regardless of the circumstances, each of these scenarios give us the sense that we are distinct, extraordinary, or favored. It would surely bruise our ego if we found out that we are quite ordinary, one of many, and that success would have little to do with our talents or abilities - our choosing had little to do with any qualifications.

This was the hard truth Israel needed to come to grips with. In the Old Testament, Moses reminded Israel that they were special: “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” (Deut 7:6). No doubt, Moses’ description would cause even the most downcast Israelite to puff out his chest with pride, pat his fellow Israelites on their backs, and say, “Wow! Did you hear that?! We are chosen, set apart, and treasured! Apparently, God has recognized our skill, strength, and spiritual potential.”

However, Moses continues in verses 7-8:

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 ...

Clearly, God’s selection has little to do with Israel’s religious credentials and all to do with God’s glorious character. It is His steadfast love and His faithful promise that ultimately aims to give them purpose and change their destiny. Unfortunately, over the course of Israel’s history, God’s chosen people lost sight of their inadequacy and continued need, and rejected the One sent for their redemption.

So, as Jesus launches His earthly ministry in Galilee, specifically, in His hometown of Nazareth and its synagogue, the Messiah confronts Israel's religious leadership with their failing and with their need (Lk 4:14-30). As He receives the scroll of Isaiah, reads from it (Is 61:1-2), and returns it to the attendant, all eyes are on Him. Those present are riveted, awaiting the rabbi’s insight, and after sitting down, He

states that “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21). Their surprise in hearing these words from the carpenter’s son quickly turned to anger, as Jesus refused to give them miraculous validation of His claim. He knew that no amount of miracles would satisfy them, because their reaction was simply a sign of their unbelief. Their response was indicative of their need for the Messiah as described in Isaiah’s words. Despite all of their God-given advantages - holiness, choice, value, love, and faithfulness - Israel was still in need of a redeemer.

The prophetic text that Jesus shares (Lk 4:17-19) contains three proclamations, each heralding good news delivered by the arrival of the Messiah. The announcement proclaims (1) that the bankrupt will become rich, (2) the captive will be set free, and (3) the debts will be settled. In other words, Jesus has come for those lost, broken, and needy. He has come for all people, Israel and Gentiles, alike (Is 42:6-7). However, based on their self-righteousness and sense of importance, Israel and its spiritual leaders’ crashed headlong into Jesus’ message. They considered their good works sufficient, while God found them to fall woefully short of His perfect standard. Despite their desperate distress they rejected the all-sufficient Savior.

We are no different! We often compare ourselves to others, evaluate our “goodness” on a sliding scale, and consider God impressed by our spiritual status. It is easy to forget that without the Savior and the Good News that He provides, we are spiritually poor, captives to our sinful desires, blind to God’s love, and oppressed by a debt that we are incapable of paying. Yet, Jesus came to save the lost (Lk 19:10)! God loved us before we loved Him (1 Jn 4:19) and chose us to be His own without being qualified or lovely. What a gracious and merciful God!

Isaiah 42:6-7 (NIV) - “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”