

“Words You Should Know: Election”

Isaiah 43:1-7 • Ephesians 1:3-21

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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Anybody here a do-it-yourselfer? I often enjoy building or repairing things myself. One of the things I like about it is saving money. But an important part of my enjoyment is the sense of accomplishment from actually working with my hands. I don't think I'm alone. Look at the popularity of online videos showing you how to do just about anything you can imagine, along with television channels like Home and Garden Television or the DIY channel, which stands for Do-It-Yourself, and of course big stores like Lowes or Home Depot, where they encourage you to do it yourself. They let you get your own materials from the warehouse and then they let you load your own car or truck. You're really doing it yourself. As humans, we have a built-in curiosity and a drive to get things done and as Americans I think we may have an extra dose of that “get-it-done” gene.

Some of us actually find that we are able to do a lot of things on our own. We get pretty good at it. We say, “I don't need a plumber, I can fix it myself.” But there are still some things that you aren't able to do on your own. Some things we can't do because we don't have the necessary skills, like brain surgery. But even something like brain surgery is done by *somebody*. So it's not impossible, it's just something that most of us haven't learned to do because it's so specialized.

On the other hand, though, there are some things that no one is able to do. For example, this is the **church's automated external defibrillator or AED**. This device can be a true lifesaver if someone is having a heart attack. By the way, this AED hangs on the wall outside the chapel. You all should know where it is.

The reason I brought this in to show you is because as I understand it, this device has sensors that will detect any sort of pulse and will not operate unless the person has no pulse. What that means is that it is impossible for you to use this device on yourself. It's not that you don't have the necessary skills or desire, it's that

it can't be done. It's impossible. Someone else can use it on you, but you can't use it on yourself. Keep that in mind as we talk about today's *word you should know* – election.

All through the Bible we learn that because of our sinful nature we are separated from God. In fact, it's worse than that. As Romans 6 tells us, “the wages of sin is death.” Spiritually, apart from Jesus Christ, you and I are spiritually dead. To push the analogy a little farther, it's like our heart has stopped and we've fallen right next to the defibrillator. But it's useless to us. What we need is for someone else to use it on us. Because of sin, we are unable to save ourselves.

Thankfully, God has taken the initiative to save us and we find his plan spelled out for us in our passage this morning from Ephesians 1. In Reformed theology we call this the Doctrine of Election. It's also frequently called Predestination, and as we will see it's what the Bible teaches us.

The word predestination is made up of the word “destination” and the prefix “pre.” We understand destination to mean the place where we will end up. Specifically, our destination is to spend eternity with God. Verse 11 says, “we have obtained an inheritance” and verse 5 is more specific. “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.” Our destination is to be united with Christ.

When we add the prefix “pre,” which means before, we discover that God has set our destination “before.” Before what? Verse 4 says God “chose us in him (that is Jesus) before the foundation of the world.” This is also why we refer to this as election. When we hold elections for political office, it's when we the people *choose* our representatives. In this case, God does the choosing. He has chosen us for himself. The people of God – that's you and me — are therefore the *elect*.

I find that most people don't really have difficulty with the idea that we are sinful. We don't even mind being reminded of our sinfulness. As one of my seminary professors would say, "people seem to like the 'bad dog' sermon. I've also found that people like the idea that God chooses them for salvation. They will accept the idea of God's election. What many people don't grasp is the idea of *unconditional* election.

When the Japanese surrendered to end World War II, they were forced to sign the terms of surrender. The document spelled out what each side would do from that point on. But the Japanese were not permitted to negotiate any of those terms. The United States and our allies insisted on an unconditional surrender.

Unconditional election is very similar. You and I don't get to negotiate any of the terms of our salvation. God makes all those decisions. More importantly, his decision is not based on anything about you. This is where our American individualism gets us in trouble. We want to earn our way into heaven. We think that if we will do certain things, including saying the right prayer, that God will have to let us in.

But that's not what we find in Scripture. God chose you before the foundation of the world. That means that you didn't even exist yet so how could you have done anything worthy of being saved? The fact is that none of us deserves to be saved. We deserve to be punished. God's mercy means we don't get what we deserve. But he doesn't stop there. As we talked about last week we receive grace, which is getting what we don't deserve – the gift of new life in Christ.

OK, so far we've looked at the "*what*" of predestination – we have been chosen by God for adoption, which means we have obtained an inheritance. Verse 7 says, "In Jesus we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." It also means, as verse 3 says, that he has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." The second thing we see

here is the "*when*." God has chosen us before the world was even made.

The third thing we see in this passage is the "*who*" of our salvation – and that's Christ Jesus. The Father has appointed or predestined our salvation, the work of Christ on the cross accomplishes that salvation and the Holy Spirit applies it to our lives.

The fourth thing we need to see in this passage is "*why*." If we are so sinful and undeserving, why would God go to all the effort to save us? This is a more difficult question to deal with and a dangerous area of theology. John Calvin said, "Human curiosity renders the discussion of predestination...very confusing and even dangerous." He goes on to say that trying to find out the "*why*" of predestination can become "a labyrinth from which we can find no exit." The truth is that everything we need to know about why God saves us is found in this morning's Scripture passage.

Listen to verse 5 again. "In *love* he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, *according to the purpose of his will*. The best we can hope to say is that God saves us because he chooses to out of love. Verse 9 calls this "the mystery of his will, according to his purpose." God has a divine purpose in everything. When we try too hard to discover that secret purpose we can get lost in all sorts of speculation about God.

But there's one more aspect to why God saves us that we can understand from our passage. He predestined us "*to the praise of his glorious grace*." In other words, you have been chosen and set apart by God in order to bring him glory. Not by what we do but by what he has done for us.

So what does this mean for us today? Does this mean that it doesn't matter what we do in life because we're saved no matter what? The answer is a big NO. Verse 4 tells us that God chose us "that we should be holy and blameless before him." Along with this great gift of new life, God expects us to live holy lives. Everything you do in life, all the choices you make, should

be based on what God has done for you already in Jesus. Your life should be a response to God's grace.

So what should your response be? First, faith in the Lord Jesus is most important. Second, we should do everything we can to live holy and blameless lives. Third, as verse 15 points out, we should be working to show our "love toward all the saints." That means serving one another,

taking care of each other's needs. Ministry is not something we hire professionals to do for us. Each one of us is called to serve in some way. And finally, your life should be filled with praise, the praise of God's glory. You were created to worship him. Not just for an hour a week but all the time. Everything you and I do should bring glory to God.

Amen.