

God's Choice

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes God's preference for the humble and ordinary in His divine choices, highlighting the mystery of sovereignty and free will.

Duration: 32:52

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 3:14-15, Luke 9:54-56, John 1:40-42, Acts 1:16-17, Philippians 2:12

Topics: "Decisions"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the mystery of God's sovereignty and human free will. Throughout the Bible, Jesus appeals to people to make a decision to come to him and trust him. While some people choose to have faith in Jesus, many do not. The preacher emphasizes that salvation comes to those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, and that the church is called the body of Christ, with Christ as the head. The preacher also warns against the culture of celebrity, reminding believers that Jesus chooses nobodies and transforms them into somebody's through his grace and power.

Transcript

I want to talk about something called God's choice. When you get to know somebody really well, you know how they'll choose, you know their preferences, you know enough about their personality. If you're married, you know what your spouse likes and doesn't like.

You know what flavor ice cream is their preference. You know whether they like to go shopping or not shopping. When you're with someone and you get to know them and love them, you know sometimes what they're gonna say before they say it.

When you get close to someone and you get to know them, you'll know even like, oh, I know what he's gonna say, I know what she's gonna do right now, right? I want to talk about God's choices, how God chooses, what's his preference. Because in loving him and getting to know him, we should become familiar with how God looks at things and like, what does he like? Now we know he loves everybody, but he has preferences like everyone would. For example, the Bible says God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

So we know he prefers humble people to proud people. Tucked away in Matthew is a portion of scripture that would make you think, what's the lesson of this? Let me just read it quick to get over it. Let me just read it because I know about these things.

He chooses disciples, so let's just read it and then let me get to the next story. But I want to stop and ask you, what can we learn from this passage of scripture about Jesus choosing 12 and calling them apostles? Let's look. One of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God.

Now that just makes you pause. Jesus, he spent the night in prayer. He felt the need to commune with his father and get direction for what he was about to do.

When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose 12 of them whom he also designated apostles or specially sent ones. Notice, when morning came, he called his disciples. How many? We don't know, hundreds.

Hundreds maybe had already been following him and had gathered around him. But out of that multitude, he chose 12 to do special work for him and he designated them apostles. Simon, whom he named Peter, his brother Andrew, James and John, they were brothers, Philip, Bartholomew, that's probably another name for Nathaniel, Matthew, tax collector, Thomas, another James, son of Alphaeus, Simon, another Simon who was called the Zealot or the Patriot, then two Judases, Judas, son of James and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor and that's it.

And that's the passage. If all scripture is inspired of God, what's the point of that passage? What does it matter how we know their names? What lesson is in there for us? Well, the first thing we have to study is this mystery of God's sovereignty and human free will. All through the Bible, whosoever will may come.

All the time, Jesus is appealing to people to make a decision to come to him, to trust him. Some did, most didn't. All through the New Testament, there's a reaching out.

Will you put your faith in Jesus Christ? Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Who's gonna be in heaven? Those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. When is the blood of Christ applied to our sins and washing them away give us new life and a new beginning? When we decide I am gonna give my life to Christ, I'm gonna put my trust in Christ.

And yet at the same time, the Bible says you have not chosen him, he's chosen you. Against the free will of man is another truth which seems to butt up against it, which is the sovereignty of God. That God is sovereign and that God is a ruler.

And God is in charge of the universe. And these truths are laid next to each other with no explanation of how they coalesce and come together. If God is sovereign and knows everything, is in charge of everything, then people don't have free will.

If people don't have free will, then what is their worship and love mean to God? Because God programmed them, they had to love him. They had to choose him. So what glory does that bring to him? Also along that line is if God chose and controls everybody's destiny to that degree and there's no free will, that means he has created people to suffer punishment for all eternity on purpose.

And that makes him monstrous. He designed people to reject him. So then why did he weep over Jerusalem? Why did he say Jerusalem, Jerusalem? How many times I would have gathered you, why did he cry? If he controls everything, he's a bad actor because he's crying over people he programmed to reject him.

Why cry? You made him that way. No, God is sovereign and God is on the throne and yet at the same time, men and women choose and have a free will to do it. And they're punished for choosing wrong.

They're rewarded for choosing to trust him. So this is a mystery in the Bible. And no one has ever figured it out.

I once heard a wise minister say, when you come across verses, you have not chosen me, I have chosen you, preach it as if that's the only truth in the Bible. When you come to verses of whosoever will may come, I reached out my hands but you were not willing, preach that as with all of your heart. Now when you try to put the two together, that's the mystery.

Someone has said it this way, when you go to heaven and you walk through the portals of the holy city, above the door, it'll say whosoever will may come and you'll walk in and then you'll look on the backside of the door on the inside and it'll say chosen before the foundation of the world. But I want you to know that you are here today, yes, because we've put our faith in Christ but in another sense, we're chosen. We're chosen by God.

We're chosen by God. That is reiterated over and over again in the epistles of the apostle Paul and other places in the New Testament. Chosen, to the elect, the chosen of God.

Here we have Jesus choosing. What can we learn about who he chose? Now all his disciples, like us, were chosen in a sense. Some say it's God's foreknowledge that is connected to that choosing but there can't be coercion because if there's coercion, then what does affection mean? If you're a single guy and you like this girl here in the green top and you take a gun and you say, you're gonna marry me and I want you to fall in love with me today or else.

That's not love. How many say amen? That's coercion and it's impossible. You can't choose to love anyone.

It just happens in terms of the human relationships. So the Bible tells us that these two are coexisting in some kind of tension we don't fully understand. And now we have Jesus looking at all these disciples who have chosen him but in another sense, he chose them.

And now he's choosing 12 out of them who are gonna become, shall we say, famous within the kingdom. They are gonna be called apostles. They are gonna go out and really do some exciting things and bless the world in Christ's name except for one.

And there's a mystery. Judas was one of the 12 and then you notice where it says here, and then Judas who became, not who was, who became a traitor. How do you get chosen by Jesus? How do you walk with him? How do you go out and lay hands on the sick and recover because he was part of the 12 that went out and did that? And how do you become a traitor? These are mysteries.

These are mysteries to us. But we do treasure that verse. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

How many say a loud amen? How many wanna just stay close to Jesus? What do we learn from the 12? We got their names. Let's put Judas aside for a second. We got the 12 here and what do we learn from that? What's the lesson? Why did God put that in the Bible? Why didn't he say he chose 12 people and they went out and did such and such? Why the names? Why the details? Who they're the son of? And we

learn a lot about some of these men in the gospels.

Well, the first thing we notice about God's choosing, which applies to us, is notice how totally ordinary and unexceptional these 12 people are. He's gonna be putting them in charge of very important things and they are the most nondescript to the society that they lived in. They are the most unexceptional, everyday, ordinary, I'd say less than ordinary in some cases, people that you could imagine.

But Jesus picked them. Jesus doesn't pick famous people. Jesus here, in this case, doesn't pick one with a PhD.

There's not one PhD there. Some of them were good fishermen. They had no higher learning.

In the world that Jesus lived in at that time, the Jewish culture treasured above all things rabbinical teaching and religious learning. What rabbi you studied under, what famous rabbi like Shammai or Hillel or who you sat under, Gamalia or one of these famous teachers, and how many hours did you study? And these guys are fishermen. One guy is a tax collector.

They were hated by the population. This is the best you could pick? This is the best you could pick? How'd you come up with these 12 people? No PhDs, no religious learning. This is what got them rejected when they went out and started to preach the gospel because the religious leader said, what are you talking about? These people can't be religious leaders.

They can't help anybody. They've never been trained. They're fishermen.

Fishermen don't do religious work. Rabbis do religious work. But Jesus chose them.

The Roman world was enamored with power, money, prestige, a famous general, somebody close to Caesar. And these are not entities. To the Roman world, they would look at these guys, say, you gotta be kidding me, right? This is the representative of someone you say is a king? Wait a minute, he's the king of glory? He's the king of kings, you say? The Lord of lords? These are his ambassadors? You gotta be joking, right? So to the Roman world and the Jewish world, these people are totally like, are you kidding me? And the culture that we live in has a value system that makes we Christians sometimes forget that Jesus likes to choose nobodies and make them somebodies because of his grace and his power.

Can we say amen to that? Because all of us are part of the culture of celebrity. You don't know who I saw at lunch today in this city. I can't believe, she's famous, why? She's on TV, I saw her.

What makes her famous for doing that? I don't know, she's on TV. If you're on TV, you're famous. But what kind of life does she live? What intelligence level does she have? It doesn't matter, she's on TV.

Don't you get it? He can sing, she can dance, he can rap, he can dunk a basketball. He's famous, he's a great football player. And that celebrity culture invades the church so that we brag on what famous person goes to the church.

I hear that all the time. I travel around the country and I hear ministers say, you don't believe who goes to my church. But just because they're famous in the world doesn't make them important to God or more important to God, am I right? So Jesus teaches us something here that you gotta remember.

Down through the centuries, it's never changed. First Corinthians chapter one tells us. Paul says, look among you, you believers in the church.

Are there many wise? Many super educated? Are there many wealthy? Are there many of high prestige? No, sometimes a few, a couple sprinkled in. No, God has chosen the foolish things of this world. Fishermen, ordinary people like you and me.

He's chosen people to show the futility of what the world calls great because all those names will pass away. But those who do the will of God will abide forever. I'm so happy because I'm a very ordinary person.

How many are ordinary like me? Aren't you happy God doesn't choose celebrities? Aren't you happy you don't have to have a PhD to be used by God? I said to a minister who traveled a long distance, a young minister getting his degree from a seminary, he wanted to talk to me and he said to me, pastor, I read your books, could you just counsel me? I said, what do you need, brother? He said, I'm debating now. I feel I have to get my PhD or I won't be ready to really minister. So I said to him, sir, I don't know what God's plan is for your life, but I can only give you an answer from the world that I live in, which I think is pretty representative of the world.

If you go out on Fulton Street or on Livingston Street and somebody's life is empty and falling apart, none of them in their unease and searching, none of them are ever looking up to heaven and saying, God, please send me someone with a PhD, please. I plead with you, God. Not a bachelor's PhD, not a master's PhD.

I say there's not one human being in the world. Now, if God wants you to do that, I'm not to judge that, but that's not what the world means. Jesus chose ordinary people like you and me.

He chose poor people. I'm glad he did that because most of the world is poor. Don't judge by America or by certain other countries.

You know what the state of illiteracy is in certain continents? If God only chose people who really have it together, who would he choose? No, I am so happy, aren't you, that God chooses the lowly, even the rejects of society. Jesus had friends like Simon the leper. This is not the person you really wanna boast in being a friend of back in that day.

So we learn here today that God's choosing is so different than the way the world would choose, and the culture of celebrity means nothing to God. If you're gonna say that you know somebody famous, make it a missionary who is famous to God. Make it somebody in the prayer band who has power with God and prayer.

Those are the great people in the world, not the people who are here or there, and some of them live degenerate lives and hurt other people, and yet we look the other way because, oh, but she could sing. She could sing. That girl could sing.

Yeah, but she hurt a lot of people and abused her own self and caused her, let's say, her own death. No, but she could sing. So we learn first here that God doesn't choose like we would choose.

God is not cutting edge. He's ordinary edge. I'm so happy for that.

If you had to have special skills or special education or special money or be born with a silver spoon in your mouth, I wouldn't have a chance, but I'm so glad that God is no respecter of persons. Come on, one more time. Let's just put our hands together and say amen.

That means God could use you. That means God could use you. A fisherman became an apostle.

A tax collector was used by God. So what are you? What are you? See, we already have now made it unless you have a PhD and went here and went there. That was unknown in the early church.

It was who believes they belong to Jesus? Now go for it, whatever his purpose is for your life. We've already categorized, no, I can't be used. I work in a jewelry store or I work as a secretary or I'm a school teacher.

I can't be used. Who said, where are you going with that? God doesn't choose the way the world chooses. Number two from this choice, very simple but profound.

Notice that the only way God blesses men and women in the world is through men and women. Why did he choose them? Because he wanted to use them. Why did he want to use them? Because he wants the world to know how much he loves them.

He wants to show the world his grace. How's he gonna do it? Notice this, he could use angels. He could speak from the heavens.

He's not. He could give everybody dreams, he rarely does. How does he reach the world that he loves? Through men and women, that's why he prayed all night because who he chooses and who yields to him, that's who he uses.

That's why it's so important that all of us are in the house of the Lord and learning more about him because the secret to blessing New York and blessing the world is on us and other Christians around the city. You can say all you want, well, God's gonna do what God can do and with God, everything is possible but I'm asking you this, who's he gonna use? Who's he gonna use? We find out here that he uses men and women to bless men and women and you can live in a spiritual fantasy world. Well, God's gonna do a great thing and I'll just ask you, through whom? Through whom? No, no, God is on the throne.

I got it but who's he gonna use? Now we're told here, clearly, he uses people, that's why he prayed all night, to choose the right 12. So you're here today and maybe you only have a thought of receive, receive, when I'm in trouble, help me, I've been without a job, oh God, help me and God is looking at something totally different for us. He's saying, who can I send? Who will go for us? Who will represent me? That's why the church is called the body of Christ.

He is called the head of the body. So Christ is the head. What's the body, my body got to do with my head? My body carries out the directions of my head.

My head says, lift your right hand, my right hand is lifted. My head tells me, get some water and give it to someone or hand someone a \$50 bill. So I reach in my wallet and I do that but I'm carrying out the orders of my head.

My hands don't have a will. My hands just obey and we're called the body. Now what if my body is paralyzed? What if I have an accident on my spine and my head is working fine but my body is paralyzed and now I'm in the soup because I got all these ideas and things I want to do but I can't carry them out because my body's paralyzed.

And that can happen to the church of Jesus Christ. We're living in whatever world we're living in and Jesus says, no wait a minute, you're my body. I can't do anything in the earth except through you but we live in this fantasy.

Oh, when God moves and when God comes and all right but through whom? Just tell me through whom? Who's gonna pray that blessing down? When it comes, who's gonna spread the good news of Jesus? Who's gonna stand up against the devil? Who's gonna do the work of an evangelist? Who's gonna be an intercessor? Who's gonna sing in the choir and practice? Oh, I know but God used the choir. Yeah, you got it, he used the choir. He uses people and that's why this passage is in here.

God chooses ordinary people, sometimes subordinary. Sometimes people with a third grade education have been used by God in ways that are incredible. I was reading a sermon this week from an old book that was published in 1870 something.

It's an old book that someone gave me as a gift. Sermons of D.L. Moody. These were stenographically duplicated sermons as I'm listening to Moody preach, it just dawned on me again.

He had no school learning that he used proper grammar. He just couldn't. Instead of saying he doesn't, he said no.

God, he don't do it like that. And he shook the world. He couldn't speak properly.

He don't. I was reading one sermon that just made me laugh. He was so ordinary, didn't know any rules about speaking.

He just got up, he's starting to preach, he gives the text and then he says, oh, I see a couple of people sleeping in the front here. You lady next to that man, could you please shake them? I don't want anybody sleeping while I'm preaching. Who talks like that? That's crazy.

He said, no, no, while I'm preaching, you gotta stay awake. This is the word of the Lord now I'm giving you. That's how ordinary he was.

And he had a speech impediment. He had a lisp of some kind where he couldn't pronounce certain Bible words. People who knew him said when he preached about Nebuchadnezzar, it was a mess.

Could not say Nebuchadnezzar if his life depended on him. And God used him to shake the world. He had a third grade education.

Was selling shoes in Boston when God got a hold of him. See, this is the point. We've got this thing totally backwards in America.

We've got a church culture and you have to have this and you have to be that. Just like the Roman Catholic system, you had to be a priest or a bishop, we've got our own. You have to be educated, you have to be called a deacon, you have to be that.

No, you just gotta be called a Christian. Come on, let's say amen to that. You gotta be called a Christian.

God uses ordinary people to touch other people. Here's the icing on the cake. When Jesus chose them, he knew everything that was in them.

He knew the what is, but overruling the what is, how they were, was he could see what they could be. We only look at what is when we meet people. Unless the Holy Spirit helps us, no, most people just say, no, I know her, that's who she is, but what could she be? I don't think that way, I just know who she is.

We meet people and we look at ourselves, just what is, never what could be. Jesus never looked at just what is. He saw what could be.

He looked with such hope and love that it overruled all the shortcomings of these people that he picked. Listen to me. He saw Peter, fluctuating Peter, full of himself Peter, boasting Peter, jealous Peter, wanting to argue who's the greatest.

He saw all that. It would have made some of us turn away and say, no, I'm not picking you, I'm not picking you, I gotta find somebody better than you. You have too much baggage.

He knew he would deny him three times. And he still chose him. What kind of God is that? What kind of Jesus do we serve that knows you're gonna deny him three times and curse the third time and say, no, I'm still putting my stock in you.

Why? Because I see what you are, but I see what you could be. And when I get through with you, come on, you're gonna be somebody awesome. You're gonna be a blessing.

He saw James and John. You know, John, we know as the writer of the Gospel of John and first, second, third John. But John and his brother James, they were spiritually dense most of the time they were with Jesus.

Oh yeah, Jesus sent them out and said, go to these certain cities and tell the town to prepare for my coming, I'm gonna visit them. So he went to one city and then another city and they said, Jesus of Nazareth is gonna come. We're his disciples.

We want you to get ready for his coming. And they said, get out of here. We don't want him to come.

So they came back and told Jesus, Jesus, we went to one city. They don't want you to come. Can we call down fire from heaven and destroy them all? But all in the name of the Lord.

We wanna burn them to a crisp, but in the name of the Lord. We don't want this thing to be messy and carnal. We want it in the name of the Lord.

Can we call down fire from heaven? Then they'll know. Oh, y'all don't want Jesus? Fine, you're gone, all right. Okay? That's who he chose.

He chose people that dense, that have been traveling with him and didn't even understand his heart. He chose a guy like Thomas, and Thomas reminds me of us all in this sense. Every one of us has a structural weakness.

Every one of us has a weak part in our temperament and in our spiritual formation. Every one of us. Thomas's was, he just doubted.

He had struggled with trusting. You know, right at the end, even his fellow disciples said, we've seen the Lord. He's risen from the dead.

Thomas said, no, no, no, no. We saw him. We've been with you three years, Thomas.

We wouldn't be lying to you. I don't care. I don't see the nail prints in his hands.

I don't see the spear mark in his side. I'm not believing. See, that was his structural weakness.

I have one, at least one. There's some area where we're weak. You know, one person would never touch drugs, but they'll gossip and destroy 10 people's reputation every day.

But touch drugs, ooh, I don't want that. A needle in your arm, I would never. And someone who would put a needle in their arm would never talk about another person who wasn't present.

It's just the way it is. We're structurally unsound. And the person who gossips looked down at the drug dealer, and the drug dealer, at least it's not a gossip.

Jesus saw all of this and said, no, I see everything, but I know what I can make you. I know what you are, but I see what you could be. Oh, God, help us to look at people that way.

It's so easy to see what is. I'm with people who think they're discerning and they're spiritually perceptive because they're really fault finders. They can see faults in people.

Hello, you don't need to be a prophet to see faults in people. And look in the mirror, and you'll see a lot of that kind of stuff, right? I grew up around that kind of stuff, where people thought discernment was finding faults in people. But you know what it takes? Real spiritual person does, says, you know, I see that, but I see something else here.

Oh, what God could do through that person. God gets a hold of that person. I'm gonna root for them, even though I see their faults.

So you that are here today, all of us, what do you mean you that are here, all of us, don't be worried that you're ordinary if you are like me. If you have no exceptional talent or trade or education or money, don't sweat it. God can use you just the way you are.

He specializes in using nobodies to bring down somebodies so that everybody will praise Him and give Him honor and glory. When God uses just ordinary people, who's gonna get all the praise? God. If He's using people who are already highfalutin and have all this stuff, then the temptation is for them to walk around and say, I'm part of this thing.

But boy, when God uses Peter, James, and John, after all their mess-ups and structural weaknesses, they're just like, I give all the praise to God. I give all the praise to God. If you only knew where I came from.

Oh, Peter, let's say someone met Peter like five years later after the resurrection. Oh, Peter, what a magnificent preacher are you. You must walk with God and never make a mistake.

You must be like the holiest man of God I ever met. And Peter's going, shh. Just look at Jesus.

If I told you what I did the night He was betrayed, you wouldn't even wanna know. So if you're ordinary and even feel your weaknesses and you cry over your sins or your besetting sins, there's hope for all of us because Jesus doesn't choose the way the world chooses. But He chooses us so that we can be a

blessing to other people.

Let's close our eyes. If the devil's been knocking you down, condemning you, and getting negative thoughts in your mind because maybe how ordinary you are. You always wanted to be special.

You always wanted to like go to here, go to this college, get this degree, learn this. And now you find yourself like that looks like it's not gonna happen. Don't sweat it.

You are who you are, but thankfully God is who He is. And He can take anybody, use anybody in ways that you can't imagine. He'll bless you with every spiritual blessing.

But don't think bad about yourself. Don't think negative. That's not humility.

That can be just condemnation. If you've failed God, if you've messed up, He put this in the Bible so that we would remember He uses people despite who they are. Not because of who they are, despite who they are.

You don't earn the gifts of God. If you earned them, they wouldn't be gifts. It would be salary.

No, He gives it to those who just come and trust Him. Thank you for choosing us. What you saw in me, what you see in us, we have no idea.

But we thank you for your mercy and your grace. Help us to believe in you and your purpose in our lives. Grant us more faith.

Take away fear, complexes, insecurity, negative thinking. I'm too young, I'm too old, I'm not educated enough, I'm not wealthy enough, I don't speak well enough. Help us to give that all to you and just say, God, move and work in me according to your purpose.

Thank you for bringing into partnership with you, Lord, bringing us into partnership with you. We love you. Have a great day.

Hug one another, love one another. Everybody, handshake, hug. Make somebody feel welcome and loved.

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