

God's Choice of Instruments (I. Cor. I. 27, 28)

by Seth Rees

God chooses foolish, weak, despised, and base people to accomplish His purposes and bring glory to Himself.

Scripture: Exodus 14:16, Judges 7:16, Mark 6:37, Luke 6:13, 1 Corinthians 1:27

Topics: "God's Sovereignty", "Spiritual Humility"

Description

Seth Rees preaches about how God chooses the foolish, weak, despised, base, and things that are not to confound the wise and mighty. He emphasizes the importance of being willing to be counted among these categories to be used by God for His greatest achievements. Rees uses biblical examples like the fall of Jericho, feeding the multitude, and choosing uneducated disciples to illustrate God's unconventional ways of achieving victory through seemingly foolish or weak means.

Transcript

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" Cor. I 27, 28).

Corinth was a city famous for wealth, culture, science, and arts, and infamous for vice. It abounded with philosophers and rhetoricians. It was a great center of learning; and yet in this first chapter of the epistle which the Holy Ghost had sent to the church at Corinth, He gives expression to these important truths set forth in our text, viz., that God, the great God, has chosen the foolish things to confound the wise. We have in the text a list of persons and things which God chooses for the battles of faith and triumphs of grace.

It may be that you will be surprised tonight to find yourself left out of God's first choice, and yet you have an excellent opportunity to come in if you will. You have your choice -- you can be among the foolish things, or among the despised things, or among the weak things, or among the base things, or among the things that are not at all; for these five things cover all that is expressed here as God's choice of persons and things for the accomplishment of His greatest achievements.

The first in the list is "the foolish things." God has chosen foolish things with which to confound the wise. The Corinthians must have been terribly chagrined and humiliated to find that if they were to serve God and be used of Him they must ignore their culture. Corinth was a sort of modern Boston, and Paul tells

them that God holds their culture in derision, and if they serve God they must give it up or at least ignore it and be among the foolish things. This was an awfully hard saying for the Corinthians, but God's Word is settled forever in heaven; when He makes a choice the best thing we can do is to say, "Amen." If God counts us in, it is not wise for us to count ourselves out.

God chooses the foolish things. It must have seemed very foolish to the people of Jericho or the army of God, 600,000 men, to march around Jericho with no weapons but ram's horns! Think of it. What artillery! What cannonading can they do? To the military wiseacres this was worse than nonsense; but still the 600,000 men marched and did nothing but blow ram's horns until the time came to shout, and when they shouted the echo of their shout was answered by the roar and crash of the falling walls of the doomed city. The thing that seemed foolish proved the greatest triumph possible on that occasion. "Foolish things" hath God chosen. It must have seemed very foolish to smart men for Christ to tell twelve disciples to feed five thousand men and possibly fifteen thousand women and children with nothing in sight but five loaves and two fishes. They would have said at Harvard, or Brown, or Yale, or Oxford, that that was all nonsense, but it proved the victory that He intended.

It seemed very foolish for Jesus in choosing disciples to ignore Jerusalem with the Sanhedrin and all its culture. How strange that He ignored Rome; Rome ruled the world, and was in the height of her splendor. The Son of God goes down to the shores of Galilee and gets twelve men, unlearned, hard of heart, with broad, brawny hands accustomed to handling the oar and tugging at nets. Not one of them were educated. What a foolish thing to put them at the head of a movement that was expected to evangelize the world! But, sir, when He had chosen them and fitted them with fire out of the skies, the wisdom of this world was not able to resist the power with which they spake.

If you accomplish the things that God wants you to accomplish, you may have to ignore what little you may have above the collar button, and turn in with the foolish folks, for they are the people who thresh the mountains and beat them small as dust. They are the people that God uses to confound heady, high-minded, lofty folks. I see clearly some of you do not care to muster here. Well, you have another chance.

The next choice that God makes is the choice of "the weak things." How easy it is for God to do things when He undertakes to do them. Pharaoh thought that his oppression of the people of God would result in the extermination of the nation, but the very edict he sent forth opened the door for the little Moses to slip into his own house and be treated as his own son, finally overthrowing his throne and scattering the Egyptian tyrant and his people upon the shores of the Red Sea. Thus was the wisdom of Egypt confounded. The time has come when we ought to stop long enough to remember that in the whole of history culture has often been associated with the darkest ages. Egypt was the center of learning when Moses lived, and he had received an education that was at the top of everything; he had been "through the schools," for we are told that he was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Yet God would not let him use his culture. Egypt knew the art of embalming and the science of medicine as they are not known today. There is no undertaker now who can embalm as old Pharaoh was embalmed. Look at him today in the British Museum. The Egyptians had culture and wisdom; they had the arts and sciences that seem to have been lost, and some people wonder if the lost arts are more numerous than the living arts; but their culture did not save them; their learning did not redeem them.

Babylon was once the center of culture, but what did Babylon come to? The king said, "Is this not Babylon that I have builded?" and that very night God's word came, and the king went out under a strange form of

insanity and ate grass like an ox, and the sight of Nebuchadnezzar's grandeur can not be identified with certainty today.

Greece was the center of learning at one time. Some think that the highest form of culture that this world has ever known was in Greece about the time that Paul stood at Athens when his soul was stirred within him and he denounced the whole thing, and preached to them just as he preached at Corinth, and just as I am preaching to you tonight. All our culture and refinement aside from salvation do not and can not help us. We are in bondage in these days, making a god of culture, making a god of the things of this world. God help us to keep things in their right order.

No one will understand that I have any war with education or with learning. For these sixteen years I have been a student, and I am applying myself more closely than ever, but we do not want to let our heads get in the way of our hearts; we do not want anything to prevent us from sitting at the table of the Lord and eating a good square meal. We want to be so humble and childlike that God can use us as He wishes.

"The weak things." What was weaker than Moses' rod? God sent Moses against the mightiest empire of the world. Egypt then ruled the world. When Moses was wanted for God's service he was found on the back side of a mountain feeding sheep. God found him with just a shepherd's stick, and said, "What is that thou hast in thy hand?" and he answered, "A rod," and God said, "Throw it on the ground," and when he had done so it became a serpent, and Moses was afraid of it, but God said, "Take it by the tail," and he trusted God and took it by the tail, and it became a rod again. He stretched that rod over Egypt ten times, and ten times the heavens parted and God sent judgment on that people. With that rod he smote the waters of the Red Sea and they parted. With that rod he struck the rock at Horeb, and a vast Mississippi River sprang forth, enough for three and a half million famished souls, with all the flocks and herds. God chose "the weak thing." What was weaker than David's sling? It was just such a sling as any boy could make. David slipped down to the brook and picked up five stones, and gained a victory for God that all the army of Israel had failed to gain. Many a time God takes a single man or boy or girl to win a victory that a whole army of folks can not win. God knows how to use weak things. He knew how to tumble a cake of barley meal down into the camp of the Midianites, and have it confuse them so that they fell to slaying themselves, and the victory was the Lord's.

What could be weaker than "Gideon's three hundred," and what were their weapons? Nothing but lamps and pitchers, and the lamps would not shine until the pitchers were broken. The earthen pitcher represents the majority of Christians today who have never been smashed to pieces by the power of the Holy Ghost. But when the pitchers were broken the light shone out, and three hundred men with nothing but light were enough to scatter the enemy and give victory. If General Grant had been going to fight a battle he would have wanted more men than that. The American forces called for something more than that in our recent struggle. But when God wants to fight a battle He delights in getting hold of the smallest thing He can find.

I have a special friend who was saved from an awful life. He used to be a drunkard, and would lie on the streets night after night, and wake up in the morning with his long hair all frozen to the sidewalk; but God saved him, and he has had ten thousand converts for God. When he was saved and sanctified he could not spell a-b-c, but he trusted the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost taught him to read, and he read the fourteenth chapter of John without ever learning to read. I can furnish you good men with reliable Christian characters who will testify to the truth of what I am saying. He read the fourteenth chapter of John in a miraculous way. He is a wonderful success in soul saving. I wish we had more like him. He can jump the highest and shout the loudest and get more souls for God than any one I know. God knows how to use the

weak things, and I say, "Amen." It is very seldom God chooses a man with a "plug hat." He hardly knows what to do with folks that undertake to add a cubit to their stature, but He does know how to work with weak things. He knows what to do with a worm. Why? Because a worm has no backbone. He says He can thresh the mountains with a worm; but He can not with you, because you have swallowed a yardstick, and you go about erect and stiff and haughty with a will of your own, not having submitted yourself to the righteousness of God. God can not get a chance at you, but if you were willing to be weak, He could use you and would.

The next in the roll of honor are the despised things. God has chosen the despised things .And, by the way, men do not live very close to God very long without meeting a great deal of opposition and a great deal of persecution. A man who walks with God will feel many a time the hot breath of persecution upon his inner spirit as it comes from the regions of the damned. He will frequently feel the persecution if he is in this holy war for God. He will be persecuted by whole regiments of devils, and, as all the devils have once been angels, they know how to play the angel and deceive people. Many a preacher is deceived and is leading his people down to hell, because he is duped and blinded by Satan in angel's clothes. What we want is a salvation that is real, lets us know what we are, and gives us a persecution which will make us despised. When you get the genuine thing you will not have to seek persecution.

Sometimes people seek persecution. I know a man in Boston who, I think, rather enjoyed going to jail. He was put in jail because he preached on the street. They offered to give him a license, but he would not take it, but continued preaching and going to jail. It is possible for a little bit of self to get in here, and seek persecution, but if you have the genuine thing you will not have to seek it; it will come without any attention on your part. Some people read that fourth chapter of Acts where it says, "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus," and think that when they get the genuine thing every one will like them, but they ought to read on further in that chapter and see what they were going to do with the disciples when they knew they had been with Jesus. You will find they wanted to kill them. This experience will make this world want to kill you. God save us from our nonsense, from our fallacy. God hath chosen the despised things. He uses things that are cast out.

When Jesus heard that the man was cast out of the synagogue he took him in, and when we are rejected and despised and driven and scattered, then God comes and gives us the victory. It was when the church was persecuted, when she was despised, that she had the greatest power.

When the Methodists had no tall steeples, when they had no grand, groaning pipe organs, when they did not have a D. D.. LL. D., Ph. D. in the pulpit, when they did not have schools and libraries, and popularity and a name in the earth as they have now; it was then they had ten converts where they now have one. They were "despised," and the name "Methodists" was given them in derision, because they did not have any method. You can not say that about them now.

Take the early Quakers. The people used to hang us and burn us; they hung people for preaching the very gospel I am preaching to you now, and it was in those early days that the power of God spread all over the country. When all the Quakers were in jail and children ten and twelve years old held services while their fathers were in prison there was more power evident than in this "the day of Christian liberty." Those preachers sometimes preached to acres and acres of faces in the open air, and hundreds of men fell in the grass under the old fashioned slaying power of God.

Some are coming back to primitive piety and power, and I have sometimes seen in our own Church whole congregations fell under the power of God. Some one said today: "Did you ever see anything such as we had last night?" I have seen four or five times that much in the most staid and proper meetings you ever saw, where the fire swept from the altar back to the door and spread allover. We are despised for it. We belong to the Sheep Skin and Goat Skin Brigade of whom this world is not worthy. We are not in this world to reform it. We do not believe this world is going to be saved as a whole, but our duty is to get people to take for the lifeboats and be rescued. We are not here to organize great institutions. We are here to do a little service for God until He gets through with us, and then we are going to heaven.

It was when the Salvation Army had six hundred captains and officers in jail in nineteen countries that they had four times as much power with God and souls as they have tonight. It was when they sang and prayed and shouted in the streets when snow and slush and stones were thrown at them, and they were dragged off to jail; it was then that they had their power.

I pray God He will raise up some folks nowadays who will arouse the animosity of the devil until there will be persecution worth talking about. God takes the "despised things," and when the devil is through with a man the Lord takes him up.

There are people here who would like to be "somebody." Well, you never will. You had better give that up now, for you are bad mud to begin with, and the only way you can be any good is to be saved and sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost. The angel of God met Joshua, when Joshua thought he was captain, and he said, "Who is this?" and the angel said, "I am captain of the Lord's host," and Joshua said, "I thought I was captain," but he resigned and recognized the angel as captain. It is time we understood that the angel of the Lord is captain of the Lord's host, and that it is our place to resign, but we sort of hesitate about throwing in our lot with these "second rate" folks. God always takes the second rate folks. He does not know what to do with the "first rate" folks.

The next in the roll of honor are the base things. God has chosen some of the vilest persons that ever walked this earth. There was St. Augustine. He was not only licentious, but his body was literally falling to pieces as a result of excesses, and God took him and saved him, and healed his body; and you read about him as the sainted Augustine. God gave him a half century of unparalleled usefulness, and then took him home, although he had been one of the vilest men whoever walked this earth.

God chose Jerry MacAuley from Water Street to accomplish more for Him than all the white cravated preachers in the city. God went down to Water Street and picked him up. There were lots of people up town who were awaiting an appointment, but God never makes use of a person who is out of a job. If he wants some one to do something he always chooses the one who is hard at work. Jerry MacAuley had a job. There was nothing they wanted in hell that that man would not do, and God saw there was good stuff in him, and He took out the devils and put in angels.

One of the basest souls who walked the streets in the Bowery district was that frail little Jessy DeVie, thirteen years in street life, at the age of twenty-six. Think of it. Yet God chose her and called her, and planted that wonderful shelter for fallen women in Mulberry Bend, that has been such a monument of divine grace in the last few years. God chooses "the base things."

We have learned to sort of side in with everything that God chooses, for we want Him to choose us every time there is anything to be chosen. So we side in with people who are next to God. If we can not be with them in any other way we can pray for them, and it will pay us to do it.

You have only one more chance, and some of you are not in yet. If you do not get in pretty soon you will not get to muster in with God's folks. He has chosen "the foolish things," and "the weak things," and "the despised things," and "the base things," and then his last choice is "the things that are not." Oh, you had better have come in sooner. God takes the things that are not to bring to naught the things that are. It is wonderful to be willing to be counted foolish and weak, and willing that folks say you are weak minded; it is wonderful to be willing to be despised, and rejected, and scattered, and kicked out of town; that is wonderful, it is blessed. It is a wonderful thing to be willing to be counted with the base folks, but it is more wonderful still to be willing to be seen among those who are "not at all." Paul was that kind. He says "I, no not I, I made a mistake; it is not I, but Jesus Christ." He declared he was crucified with Christ, and that Christ was all and in all.

We can have an experience where we have "sunk down" out of sight and the Son of God is come to the front; where we are nobody, with no reputation, nothing to pay, nothing to gain, nothing to lose. have lost everything in the fire, and we have gained everything. So we are not running any risk. We have no reputation except what the devil gives us, and we do not have to take care of that. Some folks run around taking care of their reputation. I remember a blacksmith whom the people advised to look up some things that had been said against him. They said his reputation would be ruined. He was hammering on the anvil at the time, and he said, "Well, I could soon hammer out another one." And so I am so full of preaching that if they take away my reputation I will preach out a new one, and if they take that away I will preach out another one, and I think each one will bean improvement on the old one.

When the New York Herald took me up and just spread me out among nearly a million people, folks said, "You ought to answer." I said "I have no time, I am preaching. What time have I to fool with a little thing like the New York Herald?" When the Philadelphia papers blew me up so high, they said to me, "You ought to just make them smoke." I said, "The most of them smoke now; and that is not all. The smoke of their torment is going to ascend up forever and ever. They are going to have enough to suffer. I would not add anything to it. They are giving me a free advertisement; that is what they are doing." I believe I may say, without egotism, that in the last thirty days I have refused four calls to where I have accepted one. Yet, I see preachers sitting around looking for a job, and they even advertise in the holiness papers. God have mercy on us. I would not do that. Oh, beloved, do you know when you get to be nobody you never feel disturbed. I can say to you I never slept sweeter when a child than I did when pulpits and papers were against me. I held a ten days' camp meeting in my soul.

Well, you will have to be willing to be nobody, to be nothing, or stay out. You hung around the edges when we were talking about "the foolish" and "the weak" and "the base" and "the despised." You did not like them, but this is your last chance. To be nobody means to get sanctified wholly, and let people kick you and roll you and tumble you and you not complain.

Oh, for something that will awake folks and bring out the best there is in them for God. If you will come just now and let God send the sin killing baptism on your soul and put out all the pride and vanity and just melt you down at His feet, He will know just what to do with you and make use of you, and you will have a blessed time being one of "the things that are not."

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