

It's nice to be chosen isn't it? When a student raises her hand and is chosen by the teacher to respond, she is delighted. When we are given a spot on sports team or in a band, when we receive a university scholarship or are hired by a new company, we know the thrill of being chosen. When someone befriends you, or invites you to their birthday celebration, or asks you to marry them, you experience the wonder of being chosen. It's nice to be chosen, isn't it?

But when we stop to think about it, much of our being chosen has to do with what we have to offer. Consider the examples I shared. The student is chosen for her anticipated correct response; the soccer player is chosen for his speed and strength and the guitar player for her musicality; more often than not, the scholarship is given to the brightest student, and the job is filled by the most skilled applicant; a marriage partner is chosen for what he or she will bring to the marriage.

Being chosen is nice, but so often we are chosen on the basis of anticipated performance, excellence, or skill. Many of us are left to wonder, "*what will happen when I outlive my usefulness?*"

illus: If you would indulge me for a few moments, by a show of hands, how many of you are pet owners? Keep your hands up for a moment. Now, if you own a dog, a fish, a bird, a snake, hamster or guinea pig, please put down your hand. In fact, the only hands I want remain raised are those belonging to cat owners.

Look around the sanctuary for a moment...we really are a strange group of people aren't we? Two years I became a very reluctant cat owner; our family went to the SPCA and chose a cat to bring home

with us—His name is Seymour. When my wife and kids saw him for the first time—with his orange fur and bright green eyes—it was love at first sight. He had been abandoned, was malnourished, and sickly, but in spite of his condition he was ripping around the cage like his tail was on fire. In retrospect, when we indicated we wanted to take him home, the SPCA seemed overly eager—we realized later what a handful we had chosen.

During his first year with us, Seymour got into trouble at my kids' Elementary School; at least 3 times a week Seymour would break into the school and cause problems. Sometimes he would wait outside the door until someone opened it—he would dash inside and begin to visit various classrooms. Other times he would jump in through the office window and visit with the front office staff. Seymour figured out which classroom belonged to Luke and he would wait outside until someone opened the window and then jump through to visit my son. After 6 months of this, the Principal kindly asked us to keep Seymour at home.

Not long after his classroom phase, Seymour transitioned into his hunting phase. He would roam around our back yard, pouncing on unsuspecting mice, or birds. One day Seymour captured a bird and carried it home in his mouth; when he got to our living room he laid it on the floor and proceeded to his food dish to have something to eat. The problem was that the bird wasn't dead—it was only pretending to be dead. Within seconds of being let go, the bird revived and started flying around our living room, and Seymour gave chase, leaping off furniture trying to catch him in mid flight.

Three weeks ago, early one morning, I was staring out our kitchen window at the front lawn, and I saw a coyote sprint through our front

yard and across the street—Seymour was 15 feet behind in hot pursuit. My cat is insane! To add insult to injury, the cat receives more attention from my family than I do. We recently discovered that Seymour and I share the same birthdate and my daughter has suggested—in all seriousness—that the two of us should begin share a birthday cake.

You can lock up a dog in a closet, keep him there all day, and the moment you open the closet he's excited to see you—instant gratification. But what do we cat owners get from our pets? Absolutely nothing—life with a cat is life on their terms. They strut and meow until we notice them, and the moment we do, they completely ignore us. But when I ask my wife and kids if they would rather have a different sort of cat, theirs' is the response of love—we chose him, we love him, we couldn't imagine life without him.

It's nice being chosen, isn't it? It's especially nice to be chosen because we are loved, not on the basis of performance, excellence, or skill. Our text this morning, Exodus 4:1-31, is story about choices—God's choice, Moses' choice, and Israel's choice. I probably wouldn't have chosen Moses—he was angry and impetuous, a murderer, coward, and failure. But God's choice isn't based upon our performance—His is the choice of love.

At this time, let me encourage you to open your Bible with me to Exodus 4; if you are using the blue Bible in front you, you can find our text on page _____.

As you turn to Exodus 4, let me remind you of where we left off last Sunday. Moses came to the rescue of a Hebrew slave, murdering an Egyptian slavedriver in the process; when Pharaoh heard what his adopted grandson had done, he tried to have Moses' killed. But Moses fled Egypt, and settled in the wilderness region of Midian—he got married, had a son, and for 40 years worked as a shepherd of sheep. One day, while leading his flock through the wilderness, Moses came upon a burning bush, but though it was on fire, it was not consumed. When he went over to take a look, God spoke to him from the fire.

The Lord said, *“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land...So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”*¹

God chose Moses but Moses didn't want to be chosen for this enormous task. When God called Moses, his failure, insecurity, and fear surfaced from within. Moses was so overwhelmed by his inadequacy, he immediately dismissed the possibility that he could participate in God's purposes. As we shall see, in this regard, we are more like Moses than we care to admit.

Exodus 3:10-4:17 records a back and forth conversation between God and Moses. Five times Moses objects to God's call, explaining why he is the wrong choice, and five times God counters his

¹ Exodus 3:7-8, 10.

objections with a promise. Let's look at each objection and promise in turn, beginning in Ex. 3:11.

Objection #1: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”—Ex. 3:11

Promise #1: “I will be with you”—Ex. 3:12

How do we respond when someone tells us that they can't do something? Our response is almost instinctual and often unthinking; we immediately downplay their sense of inadequacy. “*Of course you can do it,*” we reply, hoping our positive response will bolster their self-confidence. Notice that God doesn't give Moses a pep talk, or dismiss his fears, instead, God reframed the situation for Moses.

Moses was asking, “*Who am I? How could I rescue Israel?*”, but God wanted Moses to ask the larger question—not “*Who am I?*” but “*Who is God?*” J.A. Motyer writes, “The Lord does not call us because of our adequacy, nor is his presence conditional upon us becoming adequate”.² The Lord didn't promise to make Moses feel strong, powerful, and wise—self-confidence wasn't what God wanted for Moses, or for us. What God promised Moses, He promises to us—*I will go with you, and I am sufficient for every task.*

Objection #2: If they ask questions about You, I won't know what to say—Ex. 3:13

Promise #2: “*God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’*” I talked about this last Sunday, in revealing His personal name to Moses, God was

making a statement about who He was. **I Am Who I am**—I Am the Eternal, Ever-Present, Ever-Active, Sovereign, All-Sufficient God. God didn't expect Moses to do the work, while He stood off to the side observing, no, God would do the work and Moses would stand by His side. This same Eternal, Sovereign, All-Sufficient God is with us, for us, and in us, no matter the circumstance.

Objection #3: “What if [leaders of Israel] do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’”—Ex 4:1

Promise #3: “I will send you to them with three convincing signs”—Ex. 4:2-9.

A sign is something that points beyond itself to something else; a sign instructs and convinces. What were the three signs? (a) a staff that would transform into a snake, and then back again; (b) a hand becoming leprous and then healthy again; and (c) the water changing into blood. The question is, what do these signs point to? What truth do they confirm?

The kings of Egypt wore crowns that were adorned with a cobra—a symbol of deadly power and hostility. God transformed Moses' staff into a snake—a representation of Egypt's power and hostility—but victory over this snake was as simple as grabbing its tail. The message was loud and clear—God's hand is more powerful than all of Egypt's might.

Leprosy was an incurable disease in the Ancient Near East—those who contracted leprosy died a long, slow, death. But through the

² J.A. Motyer, *The Message Of Exodus*, 66.

second sign, God demonstrates that He is the One who has the power of life, and death in His hands. The Lord can heal and restore.

The Nile River was the lifeblood of Egypt—it fertilized the surrounding soil, provided fish and birds for food, and allowed ships to ferry trade throughout the nation. The one who controlled the Nile, controlled Egypt itself. Turning water into blood wasn't a clever trick, this sign demonstrated God's power over Egypt's well-being—Egypt would thrive or perish at God's command.

Objection #4: Paraphrasing vs. 10, Moses said to the Lord, “You want me to speak before Kings and nations? I’m not so good at talking”—Ex. 4:10

Promise #4: “I will help you speak and will teach you what to say”—Ex. 4:11

Objection #5: “You’re making a huge mistake Lord, please send someone else”—Ex. 4:12.

Promise #5: “Your brother Aaron is already on his way... You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.”—Ex. 4:14-16

Ex. 34:6 describes the Lord as “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.” The Lord was so patient with Moses, but here He reaches His limit. Ironically, in addressing God, Moses names Him “Adonai,” which means: “Sovereign, Master, Mighty One”. This title implies God's ability to do anything—but Moses is convinced there is one thing God cannot do—God cannot use a failure like himself.

God made His choice—He called Moses to go to Egypt, and in turn, Moses was faced with his own choice. What kind of a God did Moses believe in? Was God Great, Sovereign, and Mighty? If so, he must trust God and go. *What kind of a God do you believe in?* Faith and obedience always go hand in hand; faith without obedience is like a corn husk without the corn—it's just an empty shell.

We speak of self-confidence—a confidence in our own gifts, abilities, or expertise, a confidence in our ability to control our circumstances and shape our own destiny. But one of the primary characteristics of God's people is a confident trust in His ability to reveal, lead, and rescue.

What kind of a God do you believe in? Is God Great, Sovereign, and Mighty? If so, we must trust God and go. *Do you trust Him with your life, your family, your career, your health?* In choosing Moses, God presented Moses with a choice—would he trust God? Will we?

I want to point out that God is not cold to our fears and inadequacies; even though He is more than able to make up for our inability, He provides us with tangible evidences of His mercy. Moses was afraid to go to Egypt alone, he would not go without the support of flesh and blood by his side. God, knowing all of this, had already sent Aaron to find Moses. God knows our needs before we ask.

Before I move on to some concluding thoughts, I want to address a question that some of you might be asking. *Why would God choose Moses—or any of us—if He could do a better job on His own?*

God's action in the book of Exodus confirms what we see of God throughout the rest of Scripture—God rarely intervenes in His world, apart from a human agent.

Throughout history, God has always chosen individuals—Noah, Ruth, Jonah, and Esther—but in choosing the one, it is always on behalf of the many. Consider Abraham and Sarah, God chose one couple and from these human agents, God brought forth nation that was set apart for His purposes. Through the nation of Israel, God revealed Himself to all nations, that all might see His glory, know His love, and be grafted into His family.

It is God's loving compassion that causes Him to act on our behalf, but as I said, God rarely intervenes in His world, apart from a human agent. And isn't this why God the Son became man? In the Lord Jesus Christ we see the one God-man at work on behalf of all humanity.

God invites human participation because our participation leads to communion, and communion leads to our transformation. Our wholeness, our peace, our joy, and so much more, flows from our participation in God's life, purpose, and activities.

In many of our relationships, we are chosen for our performance, excellence, or skill, but when it comes to God, **we are chosen because He is Love**. In fact, Romans 5:8 reminds us that God demonstrated His love for us by choosing us while we were still His enemies. Eugene Peterson writes, "*Long before he laid down earth's foundations, [God] had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of*

*his love...Long, long ago [God] decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!)"*³

Jesus didn't choose you because He is overworked. Jesus didn't choose you by mistake, thinking you are fit for a task only to discover you are not. No, Jesus knows how to work with us and through our inadequacies. Have you ever seen a parent baking a cake, or working on a project, with the help of a small child? The parent doesn't ask the child to work beyond their capability—they give them small tasks, and under their patient, watchful gaze, the project is steered to completion. As parent and child participate together in the task, their relationship is being built.

Is it not so with God? Jesus is similarly patient and loving with us. If I can put it like this, contingencies have been written into His plans and purposes that allow for our participation, inadequacies, failures, and fear—even at our worst, we cannot derail His purposes. At every turn, we are invited into His Sufficiency for all of life. As we participate in His purposes, we commune with Him, and He with us.

Concluding Thoughts: As I conclude, you may have noticed some details in the next that I haven't addressed. Verses 21-23 speak about Pharaoh's heart—does Pharaoh willfully choose to resist God, or does God make it impossible for Pharaoh to repent? What is the interplay between God's sovereign will and human freedom? I will pick up this theme in a few weeks' time.

Vs. 24-26 tells a bizarre story about Moses' forgetfulness, Zipporah's quick thinking, and a disaster averted—I won't say more than that,

³ Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, Ephesians 1:4-5.

but if you're interested, find me after the service and I'll offer an explanation.

I want to conclude with a closer look at vs. 29-31. After finally agreeing to go, and being reunited with his brother, Moses and Aaron set off to meet with Israel's leaders in Egypt. This is what we read, *"Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped."*

God gave Moses three signs, and when the people saw these signs we're told they believed. But, when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them—that God is a God of goodness, kindness, and compassion—they bowed down and worshipped. The people of Israel chose to put their trust in God.

Love, devotion, and worship can only spring from one place—from a deep trust in the Lord's goodness. We cannot love God, unless we are convinced that He for us, not against us. Iain Provain, a professor at Regent College, writes, "Faith is not merely believing certain things about God, nor is it simply acknowledging that God is good. **Faith is trusting oneself to the goodness of God.**"⁴

It's entirely possible to conceive of an all-powerful God who is angry, evil, and unpredictable, but the Scriptures do not describe God in this way. From the very beginning, the evil one's strategy has been to cast a shadow of doubt over God's good intentions for us. When

we begin to doubt that God is good, mistrust and disobedience are sure to follow.

As we look at the world around us, as we encounter pain and loss, we wonder what it reveals about God. If God is **Good**, but He does nothing to stop the world's suffering, perhaps He is not **Strong**. Or, if He is **Strong**, but chooses to do nothing to stop the world's suffering, perhaps He is not **Good**.

Is it just me, or do you find yourself yearning for a world without fear, without prejudice, without evil, war, inequity, or loss. I long for a world where marriages don't break down, where people don't suffer from mental illness, or live a life of loneliness. I long for a world where people don't go to bed hungry, and bodies don't get sick, feeble, or frail—I long for a world where loved ones never die.

Is God Good? Is He Strong? We see the answer when we look to the Lord Jesus Christ. The world is not as we want it to be, it is—we are—broken, feeble, and frail. But rather than prescribe a divine medication and send us on our way, God's solution was more personal—the Doctor became the patient. God the Son became man and took upon Himself the sickness, sin, and evil of the world. Jesus Christ died on the cross, bearing this weight, and breaking the grip of sin and death. Through His death, resurrection, and ascension, He has made a new kind of world possible.

The Scriptures tell us that the world that we long for will come to pass—when Jesus returns He will transform **this** world, into **that** kind of world.

⁴ Iain Provain, *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What The Old Testament Really Says And Why It Matters*, 176.

So, then, how do we live today, in light of what He will one day bring? We wait patiently. We gratefully receive His mercies today, knowing that there will be new mercies to strengthen us tomorrow. And all the while we hold on to hope, trusting that God sees our suffering, He is concerned for us, He is present and active in every situation. *God, who did not spare His Only Son, but willingly gave Him up for our sake, will He not continue to be good and kind to us today?*

The essence of genuine faith is a trust in God's goodness—because He is good, because He is faithful, because He is strong, we hold fast to His promises. "Faith is not merely believing certain things about God, nor is it simply acknowledging that God is good. **Faith is trusting oneself to the goodness of God.**"

Psalm 27:13-14 says, *"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."*

Prayer

Worship

Benediction