

Who Are the Chosen People?

Psalms 33:1–12

Because of our theme, “Psalms and Psalms,” we are taking a one-week break from our series in the book of Numbers to consider a text from the Psalms: Psalm 33. The title of this sermon is “Who Are the Chosen People?” taken from verse 12, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people He has *chosen* as His own inheritance.” Here are the people of God, chosen to be God’s own inheritance, chosen for worship, chosen to know his very heart. Here is the privilege of being God’s covenant people. There is no greater privilege! We will consider these three points in this order, starting with verse 12, then picking up from the beginning of the Psalm. We’ll spend most of our time on the first point,

1. Chosen to be God’s own inheritance

Once again, listen to verse 12: “Blessed is the *nation* whose God is the LORD, the people He has *chosen* as His own inheritance.”

Notice that the people of God are called a “nation”—a *chosen* nation. Now generally when we use the word *nation* we think of a political order, a nation-state. But that’s not how the word is being used here. The word *nation* comes from the Latin *natio*, meaning *birth, race, nation*. What it means here is *people-group*, a people of shared birth. But the birth of which it speaks is not physical but *spiritual*. This is a marvelous truth. God’s people are united not by race or nationality but by *covenant*. They belong to Christ, the covenant head, and are members of one another. They are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. In the providence of God they come from every kingdom, tribe, tongue and people-group—Jew and Gentile alike. The truth that is in view here is that God has determined to save not just the Jews, not just the Anglo-Saxons, not just the white race, but men, women and children from every kingdom, tribe, tongue and nation. Here is God’s eternal purpose.

This is big—very big, actually—but sometimes, amidst all the clutter, we miss it. Consider a string of stirring promises that include the term “all the ends of the earth”—important markers in the Psalms and Isaiah. Listen to the inspired Word of God: “God shall bless us; and *all the ends of the earth* shall fear him. . . . He shall have dominion . . . from sea to sea, and from the river *unto the ends of the earth*. . . . He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: *all the ends of the earth* have seen the salvation of our God. . . . Look unto me, and be ye saved, *all the ends of the earth*: for I am God, and there is none else. . . . It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation *unto the end of the earth*.”¹ Unto the *ends* of the

¹ Ps. 67:7, 72:8, 98:3; Isa. 45:22, 49:6

earth! God gave the gospel—the good news of his saving work in Christ—not just to save a few stragglers from a single obscure tribe in the Middle East, but so that his glorious gospel would impact *the ends of the earth*: a great multitude of people from every kingdom, tribe, tongue and nation. We are in the midst of seeing that worked out in history.

This is a great comfort, dear child of God, as often we who love the Lord and love his worship labor in obscurity in small fellowships often barely hanging on. Don't forget, dear flock of Christ, that you are part of something far bigger than what can be seen in any one place in the world at any given moment of time. God has his elect people, those chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, for whom he took on human flesh and went to the cross: saved by him in time, so that they might be with him for eternity, singing his praises in the courts of heaven forever and ever.

The church is a chosen nation. This important truth is clearly stated in both Testaments. In Exodus 19 the LORD told Israel at Sinai, so recently delivered from enslavement in Egypt: “you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a *holy nation*.” The great apostle Peter reminded the church: “you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). The word “holy” (Heb. קֹדֶשׁ, Gk. ἅγιος) means *set apart for God's use*. Setting apart is closely related to *choosing*. Think of a woman setting out the clothes she wants to wear for a special occasion. She might have a number of dresses, but out of all of them she chooses one and sets it apart for the special occasion. Maybe she takes it out of the closet and hangs it on a hook on the wall, so it is ready for the special moment. Maybe she irons it, so it will not have any wrinkles, or checks it over carefully to verify that it has not lost any buttons. What has she done? She has chosen her special dress, and she has set it apart from all her other dresses. This is what God the Father has done with us his church. When did he do that? The apostle Paul answers the question: “according as he hath chosen us in him *before the foundation of the world*” (Eph. 1:4). God does nothing on the spur of the moment, nothing just on a whim. He does not grow in knowledge or understanding, for he is perfect. He does not have to wait to gather enough information before making a decision, for he knows all things perfectly from the beginning. So when did God choose his people? Before the foundation of the world—from eternity past. He didn't make a tentative choice at the first and then revisit it later. His initial choice was perfect and final.

Note that our Psalm teaches that the one who chose us is *God*—“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people He [that is, God] has *chosen* as His own inheritance.” Out of the whole human race, descended from our first father

Adam, and fallen in him, God chose some to everlasting life, by his grace and mercy alone.

Frankly, a lot of people get very nervous when they hear this. They like to imagine that man is the captain of his own fate. They are convinced that would-be converts will be turned off if they be told that God, out of the good pleasure of his will, chooses some undeserving sinners to everlasting life, and passes by others. They believe the gospel will be more attractive if the determiner of who is saved and who is lost is *man*. It seems so much more fair and democratic: those who choose God go to heaven; those who do not, go to hell. The problem with this line of thinking is that man, since the fall, is “*dead* in trespasses and sins”—*spiritually*—not physically—dead. Fallen man runs from God. He will not “come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”² Your duty is to say *no* to sin and *yes* to Christ—to reckon yourself dead to sin, so that you do not fulfill its lusts, and alive to Christ, through the gospel. This you can do through the power of Christ! May God enable us all to live every moment of our life for his glory. Amen!

So who are the chosen people? The dispensational and Judaizing heresy is that God’s true chosen people are the *Jews*, that when Christ came and offered his kingdom to the Jews, but they rejected him, he had to suddenly change course and go with a Plan B. The church therefore is a parenthesis in God’s plan. At the Second Coming God will resume his original plan with his true chosen people, the Jews. Though a lot of American Christians believe this, it is *not* the teaching of Holy Scripture!

According to the Bible, who is the blessed nation whose God is the LORD, the people he has chosen as his own inheritance? Those who are in covenant with Christ. Paul makes this crystal clear in the book of Galatians: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). *The covenant is fulfilled in Christ, not in the nation-state of Israel*. The church is not a parenthesis. Christ’s true chosen people are those who look to him alone for salvation.

Are you still outside the covenant, lost and on your way to hell? Then become Christ’s follower! As John so tenderly and simply puts it in his Gospel, “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13). Write that reference down: John 1:12–13. Your duty, my dear hearer, is to receive and profess Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior, and to believe on his name. Tell him: “Lord, I know that I am a sinner. I have no hope of eternal life apart from you. I believe that Christ, the perfect and only Savior, died for my sins. I cannot save myself. My only

² John 3:20, NASB 1995

hope is Christ. God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”³ Christ says: “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”⁴

Dear people, *we* are the chosen people, adopted into God’s forever family, not by blood-relationship, not by mustering up inner resources in our own flesh, not by another person willing it on our behalf, but by God himself.⁵ It is much the same way that adoption happens in human society. A couple decides: *we would like a family; here are some fatherless children; we would like to make them ours*. So they go through all the legal steps to make it happen. There’s paperwork to be filled out, background checks, fees that have to be paid, permissions that have to be granted. They have to appear in court. They have to make certain public affirmations. The adoptions have to be approved by a lawfully-appointed judge. There are a lot of steps they have to go through, but ultimately the whole process begins at the instigation of the *parents*, not the child. There are a lot of homeless children in this world who would love to be adopted by a loving family, but they don’t have the legal standing to make that happen. Adoption begins with a loving *father*, not with a fatherless *child*.

So it is with being “born” of God. If you believe on the name of Jesus Christ, revealed in Holy Scripture, you are adopted into the family of God. You are invited to confess him before men and be received as a part of the covenant people—the chosen people. In Christ you are chosen to be God’s own inheritance. Second, you are

2. Chosen for worship

Look back at the opening words of our Psalm—Psalm 33: “Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the LORD with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy.”

Psalm 33 is a Psalm of *worship*. We sang the first part of the Psalm before the sermon.

Notice: the righteous person is invited to “rejoice in the LORD.” He (or she) is assured that “praise from the upright is beautiful.” He is invited to praise the LORD to musical accompaniment (not an *element* of worship, but a circumstance). All true worship involves singing—lifting up the voice in praise to the One who saved us, as we are able. Praising the LORD with song and making melody to the LORD are an element of worship. Whether we sing *a cappella* or to musical accompaniment is a *circumstance* of worship. The important point is to *sing*. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, *singing* with grace in your

³ Luke 18:13

⁴ John 6:37

⁵ John 1:13

hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). We are chosen for *worship*. This is part of our birthright in Christ.

The whole Psalter (book of Psalms) ends with the exhortation: “Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.”⁶ As long as you are able to sing—even if you are a monotone—then you should sing. A beautiful 19th century hymn has the words “I sing, for I cannot be silent.”⁷ Here is a description of a Christian: “I sing, for I cannot be silent.” Does this describe you? Do you sing, because you cannot stay silent? If so, that is a good indication that you are born again, that God has given you a heart for worship. If you can remain silent when the congregation sings praise to God, then you must ask: *Do I have a renewed heart?* At creation, God breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. The Father’s plan was that man the creature would respond to his gift of life with Psalms and hymns of praise—“that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”⁸

What is the meaning of the last clause of verse 3, “Play skillfully with a shout of joy”? What does a shout of joy have to do with playing skillfully?

I think of a classical pianist whose music I greatly admire. I see him in a live recital, walking onto the stage to great applause. He bows silently to the crowd, then sits down at the piano. As the applause dies down, and before he plays even one note, he focuses for a few moments on what he is about to do. The whole performance hall is quiet, even if it is the BBC Proms in Royal Albert Hall, with thousands in the audience. The performer is a skillful musician—a virtuoso. He can play an entire concert of exceedingly difficult music, executed brilliantly, without a single mistake. Two hours from memory stored all in his head! Believe me, the musician I have in mind does *not* shout during his performances! I cannot imagine an expert church musician, devoting full concentration to the task of playing skillfully before the LORD, emitting shouts interrupting his performance.

My guess is that “playing skillfully with a shout of joy” (the shout, by the way, is singular in the Hebrew—not a series of shouts⁹) refers to a godly Levite who shouts with joy at the prospect of using his God-given gifts to accompany God’s worship at the tabernacle on a feast day. Maybe even a shout of “Whoopie! I am chosen for the honor of playing before the LORD in public worship today!” That same attitude ought to be ours as we prepare to for worship. *I have been chosen for the great honor of worshiping before the King! I want to do my best. I don’t want to mess up. This is my moment, the moment I have been preparing for during years of*

⁶ Ps. 150:6

⁷ Fanny J. Crosby, “Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It”

⁸ Phil. 2:11

⁹ ESV has the plural: “play skillfully on the strings, with loud *shouts*,” but the Hebrew is singular.

training and practice. Can you believe it! I get to use my gifts in the worship of the LORD today! Does such an attitude of excitement fill our souls with anticipation?

The prospect of worshipping the LORD ought to fill our hearts with great joy. Is that *your* attitude? Or are you thinking: *Bummer! Another Lord's day. I'd rather be out doing something else, but I'll do this because I have to.* If that is your attitude, then it might be best if you did not come at all. Worship is a great privilege, and God's people best learn that. Worshipers go to heaven. Those who refuse to worship go to hell. "Let those refuse to sing / who never knew our God; / but children of the heavenly King / may speak their joys abroad."¹⁰

Thirdly, consider:

3. Chosen to know his very heart

Consider verse 11, "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, *the plans of His heart* to all generations." Let that phrase "the plans of His heart" grip you. The little word *heart* (לֵב) is used some 600 times in the Old Testament. As humans, we don't need an EKG or an MRI to know that we have a heart. We can feel it beating in our chest. Nature itself teaches us that if our heart is beating, we are alive; if it stops beating, we are dead.

The Bible speaks of our physical heart. We read in 2 Kings 9:24 that "Jehu drew his bow with full strength and shot Jehoram between his arms; and the arrow came out at his *heart*, and he sank down in his chariot." Jehoram's heart was pierced with a deadly, perfectly-aimed shot, and he sank down, dead, in his chariot.

But most uses of the word *heart* in the Bible are figurative. We intuitively understand this language. We speak of someone who has a big heart, or someone who has a cold heart. We might encourage someone with the words "Take heart!" Such figurative language is in the Bible too. All the way back in Genesis 6 we read that "the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His *heart*." Man's heart was wicked; the LORD's heart was grieved. Now God is a simple being and does not have a separate heart. But the language "it grieved him in his heart" means that God was so offended by the gross wickedness of men, it was as if they had wounded his heart.

In Jeremiah 24:7 God promises: "*I will give them a heart to know me*, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." If we sincerely desire to know God, and to do his will, he will draw near to us and reveal himself more and more. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant."¹¹

¹⁰ Isaac Watts, "Come We That Love the Lord"

¹¹ Ps. 25:14

Here, then, are the people of God—not Old Testament Israel, but those who are in covenant with Christ—*chosen to be God's own inheritance, chosen for worship, chosen to know his very heart*. There is no greater privilege than the privilege of being God's covenant people! May God draw us all into intimate, life-giving fellowship with himself through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.