

“A Chosen Instrument”—Acts 9:13-16

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is “A Chosen Instrument”, is Acts 9:13-16 → *Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to Your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ Jesus,

At a voters’ meeting one day the president of the congregation stood up to share a letter of response from the fifth man they had called to be their pastor. Like those before him, he too had turned down the Call—much to the disappointment of the members present. However, the president shared a letter which he had received from one man giving his “qualifications” for the position they were so desperately seeking to fill. It read:

Dear Friends In Christ,

I understand you are looking for a shepherd to give spiritual guidance to your congregation. I would like to be considered for the position.

Since I am not currently serving any congregation I do not have a permanent residence. Basically, I wander from town to town. I have a difficult time getting along with people, as can be seen by the fact that I've been thrown out of a lot of those towns I enter. In fact, numerous times I've been beaten and on one occasions I was stoned by the people who heard me preach. I've also served a number of years in prison, have gone hungry many times and been severely rejected by those people with whom I've shared God's Word.

I don't have a wife or children—I can hardly support myself in my constant wandering from town to town. If you would consider me, I'd be willing to serve you as your shepherd.

After the president read the letter one member piped up, “What kind of qualifications are those for a pastor?”

Another one added, “We need someone respectable to be our pastor— not a bum!!”

After a mass confusion of discussion, someone finally asked, “Who would send a letter like that, anyway?”

So the president read the salutation: Grace and peace to you . . . The Apostle Paul.

While this story may seem a bit unreal to many of us, it still reflects a basic truth in the way we function: Whenever we endeavor to accomplish a specific

task we want to make sure that we have the proper materials, tools **and people** to do the task. Congregations know what its like to search for a shepherd to guide them spiritually. They have the desire to chose one whom they would consider to be “just right” for the task.

Actually, this is true in many areas of our everyday lives. Having the proper tools or “instruments” is very important to accomplish things in our lives . . . and its frustrating to get involved in a specific task only to find that you don’t have the right tools needed to accomplish it. So before we set out to do something it is important that we choose the proper tools and materials we need to get the job done right.

In one sense, the same can be said when it comes to the LORD accomplishing His work in the lives of people. God uses “instruments” as well . . . people . . . people whom He has chosen in His sometimes very unique ways. The person whom we might consider to be the most unlikely candidate for the task may be the just the one whom the LORD uses as His chosen instrument! This was the case with the Apostle Paul.

When we look at the task which Paul wanted to accomplish it fills the Christian with fear and shock! He wanted to kill Christians. Following proper protocol, Paul believed he was doing this as a service to the LORD under the direction of the religious leaders. (cf. Acts 9:1-2)

At this point in his life Paul considered himself God's "instrument" to wipe out Christianity. After his conversion Acts 22:4 records his speaking to the people in Jerusalem about this task, describing his zeal for God by persecuting *this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women* who believed in Jesus. He felt that he was serving the LORD as a Christian killer. In other words, he thought that what he was doing was very pleasing to God as a service Him! He was doing God a favor!

Maybe it would have made more sense for God to have killed Paul in His wrath and anger. However, Jesus stopped him in his tracks and turned his life completely around! Instead of doing away with Paul, God displayed is wonderful grace in Paul's life, even though he didn't deserve it! (cf. Acts 9:1-9)

Paul even realized this fact throughout his ministry as he strove to bring God's grace in Jesus Christ into the lives of others. In Romans 9:22-23 he asked the question: *What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory?* Paul could totally relate as a "vessel" of God's wrath who had been transformed into a "vessel" of His mercy!

Paul thought he was God's instrument to inflict suffering. Now Jesus would

make him His *chosen instrument* of suffering. According to verses 15-16 of our text Jesus described Paul's new task to Ananias: *He is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name.*

This was not some easy task for which Jesus was choosing him. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 he described the suffering he endured in this task: *imprisonments . . . countless beatings . . . often near death. Five times receiving at the hands of the Jews the thirty-nine lashes of the whip. Three times he was beaten with rods . . . stoned . . . once . . . Three times . . . shipwrecked; a night and a day . . . adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, facing danger at every turn, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.* Becoming an instrument of God's grace certainly did not provide Paul with a comfortable life. Yet, because of God's grace he could refer to these as *light momentary affliction!* (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:17) Really? Really!

When the Lord wanted to use Ananias as His instrument to bring the gospel to Paul, Ananias questioned God's unique choice, as reflected by his reluctance in verses 13-14 of our text: *Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to Your saints at Jerusalem. And here*

he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name. No doubt, our response would have probably been the same as that of Ananias! “Lord, are you really sure this is the one you wanted to choose? Are you really sure I am the one You want to enter into this seemingly suicide mission?”

It reflects God’s choice done in His unique way. Paul never forgot how God displayed His unlimited patience in his life. In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 he wrote: *I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am.* In the midst of all the suffering how did Paul continue to appreciate Jesus’ choosing him? By focusing on the fact that from beginning to end His life was all about God’s **grace in Jesus!**

Through all of Paul’s experiences as a Christian—most of which were filled with suffering—he still thought that being God’s *chosen instrument* was a **privilege**—that it was a gift! He expressed this idea in Ephesians 3:7 → *Of this gospel I was made a minister **according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of His power.*** Can you imagine? Having no choice in the matter . . . living a life of suffering in various ways . . . experiencing rejection at every turn . . . **he still thought this was a gift?!**

I hope you can imagine it because God has done the same thing in your life! Maybe He didn’t stop you “dead in your tracks” and speak to you in the

same way He did with Paul. Still, He has chosen you **by His grace in Christ Jesus** to be His instrument to bring His Word into the lives of those around you. Sure, there may be differences between what Paul went through and what you go through as a follower of Christ but you have still been “called, gathered and enlightened” by the Holy Spirit to go for Jesus even in the midst of persecution, rejection or suffering.

God provides you with many opportunities as His “chosen instrument of Christ” to hold out Jesus to the world by your words, deeds and attitudes. Jesus wants all people to be saved **by His grace!** In many of our situations we don’t have to suffer so intensely for Jesus Christ. This provides the blessing of God giving us the opportunity to freely and openly be His instruments to bring the life-changing Gospel to a sin-dead world!

God has always chosen the proper “instruments” to accomplish His work in the lives of people. Maybe His choices don’t seem so “proper” to us at times. Maybe you’ve even wonder why God would chose **you** by His grace as you look at your own sins, failures and inabilities. But He does! As we focus on the **gift** of His grace in Jesus Christ we recognize the wonderful **gift** of being His chosen instruments each day with the desire to be used by the Holy Spirit to bring His grace into the lives of others! God always gifts the called. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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