

# CHOSEN

By Rev. Will Nelken

*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, December 28, 2008*

---

“Hope” and “change” have been the buzzwords of the recent election, and the President-elect has been a symbol of both to many millions of people. Does it seem curious that people would place so much hope in a single individual? Is it right to do so?

However much we may like the theory of democracy and the privilege of having a say in how we are governed, human history declares that in troubled times, people look, not to the masses, but to an individual, who presents the promise of positive change. In troubled times, we need leadership.

Messianic passages are those sections of Scripture that reveal the nature, manner, and purpose of the Jewish leader known as Messiah. The Jewish faithful were told of a man who was to come, who would be so much more than a man. He would be God’s Anointed One, the Chosen One (because anointing — pouring or rubbing with oil — was the way of identifying a person who had been chosen for a special purpose), who would fulfill God’s plan for His people.

In fact, the mission of Messiah led to some controversy among theologians (those who specialize in understanding and explaining such things) as to whether He could be human, or would by necessity be some divine creature. That He would be both was beyond the conception of most.

Today, on the other side of that Great Divide, we are no better off. Though the story declares the humanity of the Christ (Greek for Messiah), both at His birth and at His death, we still have difficulty believing that He could be anything but divine. This is demonstrated in how little we actually identify ourselves with Him. The things that He has said and done we cannot imagine saying or doing ourselves, in spite of Jesus’ assurance, *“He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do.”* (John 14:12)

Nevertheless, a central idea of Messianic theology is that Messiah identifies with His people in their neediness, due to sin, so that they, in turn, may identify with Him in His completeness, due to righteousness. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians (5:21): *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

He became sin for us, without becoming a sinner, like us. By faith, we may become righteousness with Him, without becoming altogether righteous as He is. This is the wonder of identification with Christ!

In this light, I want to examine with you a Messianic passage from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 42. As we read, you should easily be able to recognize Jesus as the epitome, the perfect example, of the qualities and actions described. And, although you or I cannot perfectly or consistently carry out what is *His* work, you also should be able to see that we may join Christ in His work, sharing in the nature and objective of it, as we do our small part.

So, what has God chosen us Christians to do? And, how are we to do it? Here is the larger passage that we will study.

- <sup>1</sup> *"Look at my servant, whom I strengthen.  
He is my chosen one, who pleases me.  
I have put my Spirit upon him.  
He will bring justice to the nations.*
- <sup>2</sup> *He will not shout  
or raise his voice in public.*
- <sup>3</sup> *He will not crush the weakest reed  
or put out a flickering candle.  
He will bring justice to all who have been  
wronged.*
- <sup>4</sup> *He will not falter or lose heart  
until justice prevails throughout the earth.  
Even distant lands beyond the sea will wait  
for his instruction."*

Today, we will focus only on the first verse.

## **Where Will You Look?**

God has said, *"Let all the world look to me for salvation! For I am God; there is no other."* (Isaiah 45:22)

Yet, people choose to look in a thousand other directions before they look to God.

Perhaps it is rebellious disbelief, but I suspect more often it is simple unbelief: they do not know how to look to Someone who is invisible and indescribable. How do creatures look to their Creator?

Well, the marvelous answer lies in the fact that God has made us in His own image.

- <sup>26</sup> *Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us..."*
- <sup>27</sup> *So God created human beings in his own image.  
In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.*

He has given us eyes to see the world around us. He has given us ears to hear the sounds of His creation. He has given us a mind to explore and understand what He has made. And all this, so that we might learn to see His face and hear His voice, and understand His will.

But this is more than an invitation to merely look in Christ's direction. This is a call to look at Him with respect. Who will turn to Him with respect? Who will recognize the One who hangs in agony on a cross as the Savior who takes away our sins? Who will honor Him as Lord?

And what difference can we expect this to make in our daily lives? It will strengthen and guide our steps in this race of faith. "Keeping our eyes on Jesus" is the way to reach each of life's goals.

- <sup>1</sup> *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run*

*with endurance the race God has set before us.<sup>2</sup> We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.*

How did He come to make this awful, wondrous sacrifice for you and I?

## **Find His Strength**

Those who serve God require not only God's direction and wisdom, but His strength. It may appear at the outset that the task is something we can handle, but when we reach the core of it, it is sure to require something we do not have within ourselves. Just there, God will strengthen us, if we turn to Him and ask Him to do so. If we do not, we will get only what human strength can achieve.

Not even Jesus Christ could fulfill God's will apart from this strengthening, which occurred in times of private prayer. If Jesus had to be strengthened by the Almighty, clearly, my strength, your strength, will be insufficient.

Isaiah 40

<sup>28</sup> *Have you never heard?  
Have you never understood?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of all the earth.  
He never grows weak or weary.  
No one can measure the depths of his  
understanding.*

<sup>29</sup> *He gives power to the weak  
and strength to the powerless.*

<sup>30</sup> *Even youths will become weak and tired,  
and young men will fall in exhaustion.*

<sup>31</sup> *But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.  
They will soar high on wings like eagles.  
They will run and not grow weary.  
They will walk and not faint.*

Prayer is the key. Even for the everyday events of your life, you will find, at times, that your strength is not enough, or that it has waned before the day is complete. Time spent in prayer — even just a few minutes — will refresh your strength and clarify what God wants you to do.

## **Do His Will**

Jesus Christ did not please God because He was chosen; He was chosen because He pleased God.

At His baptism, it is recorded, that the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him and a voice from heaven was heard, saying, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:17)

He had not yet fulfilled God's will. He had not even begun His public ministry. But He had already demonstrated His faithfulness to the Father.

You and I have been chosen because Jesus was faithful and we have trusted in His faithfulness (not our own) to save us. In this simple act of faith, more than anything else we have done, we have pleased the Father. (For if we had done everything else well, but ignored or rejected the Son He had sent, God would not have been pleased.) When we chose Jesus as our Life-Leader, God chose us to be His people.

And God helps us to continue to please Him, even as the stakes in life increase.

*Philippians 2*

<sup>13</sup> *It is God who works in you both to will and to do what pleases Him.*

What you have to work with, or what you have been given to do, may seem small or insignificant to you, but it is not the “task” that God cares about, so much as your faithfulness in the task.

*Luke 19*

<sup>12</sup> *He said, “A nobleman was called away to a distant empire to be crowned king and then return.*

<sup>13</sup> *Before he left, he called together ten of his servants and divided among them ten pounds of silver, saying, ‘Invest this for me while I am gone.’* <sup>14</sup> *But his people hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We do not want him to be our king.’*

<sup>15</sup> *“After he was crowned king, he returned and called in the servants to whom he had given the money. He wanted to find out what their profits were.”* <sup>16</sup> *The first servant reported, ‘Master, I invested your money and made ten times the original amount!’*

<sup>17</sup> *“ ‘Well done!’ the king exclaimed. ‘You are a good servant. You have been faithful with the little I entrusted to you, so you will be governor of ten cities as your reward.’*

Faithful with little... rewarded with much. That is God’s pattern for your life. You have Jesus’ word for it. And Job’s example:

*Job 8*

<sup>5</sup> *But if you pray to God*

*and seek the favor of the Almighty,*

<sup>6</sup> *and if you are pure and live with integrity,*  
*he will surely rise up and restore your*  
*happy home.*

<sup>7</sup> *And though you started with little,*  
*you will end with much.*

Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah who led some 42,000 Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the Temple of the Lord. The people had been taken away captive to Babylon, and during the seven decades of their absence the city had fallen into ruin. In fact, the task seemed overwhelming, even for so many people. But the Lord encouraged Zerubbabel and the people through a prophet:

*Zechariah 4*

<sup>6</sup> *Then he said to me, “This is what the Lord says to Zerubbabel: It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”* <sup>7</sup> *Nothing, not even a mighty mountain, will stand in Zerubbabel’s way; it will become a level plain before him! And when Zerubbabel sets the final stone of the Temple in place, the people will shout: ‘May God bless it! May God bless it!’ ”*

<sup>8</sup> *Then another message came to me from the Lord:* <sup>9</sup> *“Zerubbabel is the one who laid the foundation of this Temple, and he will complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of Heaven’s Armies has sent*

me. <sup>10</sup> *Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand.*"

The size of the beginning does not worry God, because He has all the resources that we will ever need. That the work of rebuilding has begun pleases Him greatly, because He waits for us to catch the vision and join His work in faith.

## **Spiritual Empowerment**

We find in this verse the same language as in the New Testament, concerning the Spirit's power: He comes *upon* His people. It was true for Messiah at His baptism, as recounted by each of the Gospel writers:

Luke 3

<sup>22</sup> *And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him...*

And it is true for His followers, when they are baptized in the Spirit:

Acts 1

<sup>8</sup> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.*

Strength of mind and strength of body are not enough to complete the will of God. The strength of God is not within you. Look within and you will find all kinds of weakness — hangups and coverups. But look *up*, and the Spirit will come *upon* you and bring the moral and spiritual strength that you need. It is this kind of strength that is required to "bring justice to the nations."

## **Justice for All**

I will have more to say about this next week, but I will introduce this theme with two thoughts:

1) "Nations" refers not to geo-political entities, but to people groups, ethnicities. God is well aware of the functions of governments, but He is most deeply interested in people, not systems.

2) God's interest in justice is not confined to theory or principle or law, but reaches to actual relationships between people.

When the Spirit of the Lord is upon us, we will treat one another with respect and equity, despite all the trappings — language, culture, skin color, styles — that tend to distinguish and separate us.

## **Conclusion**

So, what is it that God wants you and I to do with our faith, with our lives?

1) *Look at Christ.* Deeply, thoughtfully. Look at His manner. Listen to His words. Observe His behavior. Make Him your model for the Christian life. If you look to someone (or something) else, eventually you will be disappointed or misled.

2) *Receive strength from the Lord.* Do not trust in your own experience or fitness or wisdom. Call on the Lord. Put your trust in Him actively.

3) *Accept that you have been chosen by God.* You have a purpose beyond your own pleasure. Learn to discern His will and pursue it.

4) *Live your life in such a way that God is pleased,* as you serve His purposes and reflect His nature. You won't do it perfectly, but you should do it persistently.

5) *Receive the power of the Holy Spirit.* As Paul put it, *"Be continually being filled with the Spirit."* (Ephesians 5:18) Only "by the Spirit of the Lord" can you hope to accomplish what God has given you to do.

6) *Treat people with respect.* Learn to appreciate the differences between you, especially those that first rub you the wrong way. Don't be quick to shut the door or label them. Learn to love people.

Next week, we'll learn even more about God's "justice, with compassion."