

Election
Means of Election
Romans 10:5-21
Parker Evangelical Presbyterian Church
May 22, 2011
Rev. Doug Resler

Pray. As many of you know, Kristi and I had the opportunity to go to Atlanta last weekend to celebrate my graduation and then on to Mobile to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the church I served right out of seminary. It was a special time for us to rekindle some great friendships and to meet some new friends. The only regret we had was that we had to miss Youth Sunday and all the amazing testimonies of our young people and how God has impacted them through the ministry of this church. If I can, I want to take a moment and thank Taylor for the incredible job he did planning that service. He's an amazing youth director and we will miss him immensely when the Lord takes he and Stacia to Hong Kong this summer. However, I also will say that the search team should be wrapping up their efforts in the next few weeks and we hope to introduce you to the next person God has called as our youth director soon. I cannot tell you how excited I am for what God is doing in and through this church. In addition to the strong foundation Taylor has laid for our next youth director, our children's ministry has grown almost fifty percent this year with new families coming all the time and our preschool continues to expand. Our mission team has really begun to build deeply into the four partnerships we established with the Parker Task Force, DC Oakes, Denver Rescue Mission, and Vision Trust and you can expect more from them in the coming months. We highlighted our military ministry earlier. Even our building is being used by God in amazing ways. Starting this fall, we will be housing Community Bible Study – which is an awesome Bible study, by the way – on Thursdays and something seems to be happening here every single day, whether it's the Boy Scouts, the Civil Air patrol, you name it. The other night we had to hunt for a room because of how many

different groups were here. It was awesome. I share all that to make this point. Your generosity is what makes all this ministry possible. We wouldn't be able to do it without the gifts you give so thank you. Thank you for being so faithful and prayerful and sacrificial in your giving. And let's keep it up! In fact, let's go even further. Because I know God wants to do even more through us for the sake of His Kingdom here in Parker and around the world! Amen? Amen.

Okay, we've been talking about the doctrine of election and predestination. And I know this has not been easy for many of us. After my sermon a few weeks ago, I had several wonderful conversations and emails and notes about this subject so I know we are struggling a bit. And I want to assure that's not uncommon. We are approaching a great mystery here in the Scriptures that has to do with the nature of God Himself, His divine character, so we shouldn't be surprised that we can't quite wrap our minds around it. I thought about this as we were flying into DIA on Monday. When we broke through the clouds on our descent, I looked out the window and saw the miles and miles of the plains beneath me. I could see little cars moving along the roads and as we got closer, even the people moving around. Anyone who's ever flown knows what I'm talking about. Anyway, it struck me that this is kind of how God looks at our lives. He takes the thirty thousand foot view. He's not bound by time or space or anything else. He sees it all. The past, present, future all laid out before him just like the plains were before me in that plane. So when we start to talk about God's sovereignty, we have to acknowledge that he sees things on a different level than we do. A guy by the name of Isaiah in the Old Testament understood this and he put it this way, **for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.** There's always going to be a limit to our understanding of God and God's ways. Somehow in the plan of God both His sovereign choice and our free will come together. Now I know we'd prefer it to be one or the

other but the reality is that both are true because both are biblical. We saw a couple of weeks ago that God chose Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau. Before they were born. Before they had done anything at all, God chose them. We saw that God even took an active role in hardening Pharaoh's heart. So God clearly exercises his sovereignty over our lives. At the same time, we can't forget Scriptures like 1 Timothy 2:4 which says, **God desires all people should be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** Or 2 Peter 3:9, **The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.** It seems clear when one reads the Bible and takes it at face value that both God's choices and our choices are real and eternally consequential. Is that logical? No. Does it fit our definitions of reason and rationality? No. But then again, this is God we are talking about and what may seem paradoxical to us doesn't have to be for him. In fact, I would take it even a step farther and argue that if God did fit our definitions of logic and reason that he would cease to be God. That fitting God into our finite human logic box probably is a good sign we are worshipping an idol and not the Living God of the Universe!

I remember talking about this to a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses in college. They came to my door and I didn't have much time so I went right for the heart of the issue. I asked them about the Trinity. For those who are unfamiliar with that term, it's the Christian understanding that God exists both as three distinct persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – while at the same time remaining one God. Now how that happens is a mystery of course. We aren't going to get our minds around how God can be both three and one at the same time and yet that is how He reveals Himself in Scripture. Well, these Jehovah's Witnesses didn't like the Trinity. Didn't like it because it wasn't logical or reasonable. They asked me how I could love a God I couldn't

wrap my mind around. And I responded that this is precisely why I can love and worship Him. Because of his mystery and incomprehensibility! That if I could understand God, truly understand Him, I would end up despising him because he really wouldn't be God, would he?

You see, I think the issue most of us have with faith is not that we too much about life or pain or suffering or the world but because we know too little about God! We try too hard to reduce him to terms we can understand or get our minds around! We don't let God simply be God! What if God were greater than we thought? Too great to be pushed away; greater than the suffering that makes us question his goodness; greater than the losses we think He can't possibly make up. What if He's great enough to be both Lord of the Universe and great enough to have us as a friend, to care about us, and to listen as we whisper to Him the deepest needs of our hearts. What if God were that great? You know, this is the God Jesus talked about. A God who was great enough to mark a sparrow's fall, great enough to number the hairs on our heads, great to know us so intimately – giving us shape and form in our mother's wombs, and great enough to hover faithfully over the clamor and chaos of this world and settle it and us with His peace. This is the greatness of our God, dear friends!

So what if we can't always quite see the plans he has for us? What if we can't quite get our minds around the truths he reveals about Himself in the Scriptures? What if we struggle to live as he's called us to live – overcoming evil with good, loving our enemies, and turning the other cheek? Does that mean we toss the whole thing out? I don't know about you but I've had people call me crazy for believing in a Virgin Birth. I've been told that Resurrection can't happen. Healing? Miracles? They aren't scientific. They're not logical. It's not rational, Doug. What of it? Human science produced nuclear bombs and crack cocaine. Human logic somehow justifies marital unfaithfulness, divorce, and the abandonment of children. Humans

somehow think war is rational or smoking meth. And you want to call me crazy? It must break God's heart.

And yet he still loves. Despite our unfaithfulness. Despite our self-destructive ways, God still reaches out for us. When Pastor Gary spoke about the heart of election, this what he was talking about. He was describing the kind of passionate love that drives God to undertake the most radical, most daring of rescue missions. To seek to save a lost world at the cost of his own Son. Go ahead, call it naïve. Call it a delusion as Sigmund Freud once did or as Stephen Hawking did just the other day. And after you have reasoned your way into a corner, after you have rationalized yourself against a wall and tied yourself in logical knots, then perhaps you'll realize there's a time for naiveté. That there is a naivete about the Gospel and about the Kingdom which is probably why Jesus said only those who become like children can enter in. Christianity is not a religion of the mind, my friends, but of the heart. It holds to a kind of logic only the heart can understand. So it's not another faith we need, it's a greater faith. A deeper faith. This is the faith that saves.

And that's the faith the Apostle Paul is talking about in Romans 10. So let's turn there and pick it up in verse five. **For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).** In other words, nothing we do matters. We can't bring Christ down from heaven nor could we in our own power raise Him up from the dead. Only the Father could do that. **But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord**

and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Now I know some of you are wondering if you are among the elect. Among those God predestined for glory. This verse should set your mind at ease. For if you have confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead for your salvation, then you are saved. You should have no doubts. No fears. For your life is now hid with Christ's. Your heavenly Father holds you in the palm of His hand and nothing can ever move you from that place of safety and security. **For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."**

Now here's the kicker. Some have argued if God has already chosen those he will save, then why share our faith? Why evangelize? Because God has ordained not only the ends of salvation but also the means by which the elect are saved. Paul spells it out very clearly, **How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"** If you ever had any doubt or any question about whether or not you should share your faith with others, this passage should settle it. Every single one of us is a "sent one." An apostle, an ambassador, an evangelist called to share the good news of the Gospel with those who are lost and suffering around us. Christ himself commissions us in Matthew 28:19-20 where he says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Or again in John

20:21, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” Or one more time in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” So hopefully that settles the issue of whether or not you are sent. You are sent by virtue of the fact that you are saved!

The next step is preaching. Does that mean everyone has to do what I’m doing here this morning? Of course not. But it does mean that all of us have a charge to share our faith with those around us who do not know Christ. Now we’ll do it in different ways each according to the unique and wonderful way God made us but make no mistake all of us are called to be preachers. After all, as Paul says, how else will they hear? I hear so many Christians say things like, you need to come to church to hear the Gospel. Or they’ll say, I invited so and so to church so they could hear the Gospel. I once spent time with the elders of a church one evening a few years back and I was sharing with them the opportunities God had given the church I served to share our faith with people in our community. And I had one elder say, I really need to you come and share the Gospel with my neighbor. How long have you known her, I asked. Twenty years and her life has always been a mess. Really, I said, and you’ve never shared with her the Good News of the Gospel? What in the world are you waiting for? I mean, sure I could have gone and shared the Gospel but seriously, how uncomfortable is it for any of us to have someone we don’t know tell us we need Jesus? How many of us would respond well to that? But what if that same invitation comes from a dear friend? Or someone you’ve worked with for years? Don’t you think it makes it a whole lot less threatening? The reality is you will reach people I could never reach. You know people pastor Gary and I will never get to know and you may be the only Christian in their life. And God has put you in their life for this one purpose...that they may hear the Gospel and come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Now the rest is really up to God. After they have heard the Gospel, then it really is between them and the Holy Spirit. And not everyone responds. Let's finish the chapter. **But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me." But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."** My friends, several months ago, I shared with you a prayer a mentor of mine prays each day. Lord, help me see the world as you see it. Break my heart with the things that break yours. And when you call me to act, give me the courage not to duck. All day long God holds out his hands to a disobedient and contrary people. All day long, God reaches out to save sinners. All day long, God passionately pursues those who reject him and push him aside, desiring that none should perish. Does your heart break for the lost? Does your heart break for those who are perishing? Sympathy is no substitute for action. Don't let another day pass without sharing your faith. For you never know what tomorrow will bring and as someone once said, "The Gospel is only good news if it gets there in time." Let's pray.