

556 Chosen-and-Called Mercies

Our most recent Reflection, entitled “and ye would not”, concerned the Lord God’s steady calling to His wayward covenant people, that they would repent and return to Him. Occasionally they did this and received God’s blessings, and frequently they did not do this and received His judgments. These divine principles still stand of course today within the New Covenant of Grace, with reaction to Jesus Christ, be that reaction positive or negative, and be that reaction by nations, churches and individuals, now being the key test from which come forth God’s blessings or God’s judgments.

This brings us to those simple if puzzling words of Jesus, “... for many be called, but few chosen” (Matthew 20.16 & 22.14). These two references come at the end of parables in which Jesus has emphasised both the sovereignty of God the Father and the dangers of spiritual complacency by those who assume they are “the first” in God’s sight, His special pets. What exactly is the Lord Jesus telling us here? Who are “the called”, and who are “the chosen”?

In the Old Testament, God first chooses, and then calls into being His covenant people through Abraham and Sarah, and Jacob, and then names them. They are to serve God faithfully as witnesses, being a people separated and divinely protected (egs., Genesis 12.2-3; 15.1-21; 32.24-28 / Deuteronomy 28.1-2 / Isaiah 43.1). So the children of Israel are both chosen AND called! – and, as the Jews, they still are just that, as we know in part from those two “until passages” which are mentioned in these Reflections when relevant (Luke 21.24 / Romans 11.25).

The Gospels differ from the Old Testament in that the long-promised Messiah is now come, calling “the lost sheep of the house of Israel”, who are already God’s chosen people, to respond to Jesus their Messiah: “Enter ye in at the strait gate ... Come unto me all [ye] that labour and are heavy-laden ...” (from Matthew 7.13-14; 11.28a, KJV / also eg., John 1.29,34; 3.16,18,36 / Acts 2.36-40). Alongside this calling we also see Jesus deliberately choosing the few, the twelve, to be His closest disciples. In such passages are three pointers for us: that God’s call in Christ is held forth to all; that the hearers of His call are responsible and accountable for their response to His call; and that God chooses some, from within the “all”, to carry out His required purposes (egs., Acts 9.15; 13.2). All the while of course Jesus Himself had been long-chosen and long-called by God His Father to be “the seed of the woman” and “the Lamb of God” – a choosing and calling which Jesus accepted with

obedience and courage (egs., Genesis 3.15 / Isaiah 53.4-12 / John 1.29 / Matthew 26.39).

After Jesus' rejection by the chosen and called of Israel, by His death and resurrection He opened the New Covenant of Grace and the age of the largely-Gentile Christian Church. The Holy Spirit duly gives us through Paul further teaching about "the called" and "the chosen" in the Christian Faith and life, as in Romans 8.29, a wonderful summary of "the called according to God's purpose": (** denotes God's initiative / ^^ denotes our responsibility): we are **foreknown**, **predestinated**, **called**, **justified**, **glorified**! (See also Ephesians 1.3-12).

Article XVII of the Prayer Book 39 Articles, based on this Romans passage and others similar, lists eight steps in the wonderful salvation process: 1) **God's choosing in Christ, "by his counsel secret to us", those He would deliver from curse and bring to salvation in Christ**; 2) **these are then called according to God's purpose**; 3) they through **grace** ^^obey the calling^^; 4) **they be justified freely**; 5) **they are made sons by adoption**; 6) **they are likened to the image of Jesus Christ**; 7) ^^"they walk religiously in good works"^^; 8) **at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity**.

From these gracious scriptures we see that the Lord God, rather than lost sinners, is by far and away the main Achiever of all these "chosen-and-called mercies". Yet, in treating us as responsible beings, He entrusts to us, as helpless recipients of these mercies, a small but crucial part to play, namely the surrender of our will under the Lordship of Christ; and even that will-surrendering is God-enabled and God-sustained (as in I Chronicles 29.14b / Hebrews 4.14-16; 10.19,22).

We are living in increasingly wicked times, (as the recent stabbing of a 15-year old girl in Croydon and the wanton felling of an ancient, much-loved tree on Hadrian's Wall each demonstrate in their different ways). As chosen, called and committed Christian believers we "hold forth the word of life" (from Philippians 2.16a) to those around us as and when appropriate, thereby participating, how ever feebly, in God's call in Christ to lost sinners. Praise God, those who accept His call are then seen to have been "foreknown" by Him from the beginning. And we praise God yet more in the knowledge that "by his counsel secret to us", He chooses, He calls, and, by the gift of faith in Christ, He saves.