



CALLED

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, January 31, 2021

² Peter 1:3 By His divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know Him, the One who called us to Himself by means of His marvelous glory and excellence. ⁴ And because of His glory and excellence, He has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share His divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

⁵ In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

⁸ The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.

¹⁰ So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. ¹¹ Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Panoramic View

This brief, but phenomenal, passage spans the panorama of the Christian experience—from beginning to end, from first awakening to final glory!

It starts (verse 3), like the whole of the Bible, with God's mighty power at work, seeking out a relationship with us by calling us to Himself.

“By His divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know Him, the One who called us to Himself by means of His marvelous glory and excellence.” (2 Peter 1:3)

And it ends (verse 11) with our grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of Christ, our Lord and Savior. That's the day when the fullness of God's "great and precious promises" will be realized, when He wipes away every tear of fear or sorrow, heals every scar of guilt and shame, and says to us, "Well done. You have been faithful. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

"Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:11)

Spiritual Growth

In between these bookends, Peter plotted our growth (verses 5-7), from spiritual emptiness to overflowing fullness. Growth is the key to fruitfulness, as he underscored in verse 8: *"The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

By contrast, our failure to develop such fruitfulness, according to verse 9, indicates our own blindness, shortsightedness, and faithlessness: *"But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins."*

Considering all that Jesus Christ rescued us from—how He forgave us all our sin, restored our friendship with God our Father, and gave us the Holy Spirit as our constant Companion—who would knowingly choose to fail?

Yet, Jesus said, *"Many are called, but few are chosen."* (Matthew 22:14)

Next Sunday, God willing, I'll talk with you more about how this failure overtakes many Christians. But today, I want to focus on how spiritual life begins for us, because that's where the seed for our spiritual success is hidden. If you hope, as I hope for you, to become spiritually fruitful and glorify God with your life, you need to protect and tend that vulnerable seedling of your faith (which is much more precious than all the money in the world). You need to protect and tend it as it grows—from the weather of circumstances that threaten to overwhelm it, and evil predators who want to destroy it.

Who Found Who?

Curiously, we often describe the beginning of our walk with Christ with words like “I found Jesus,” or “I decided to become a Christian,” but if we’re candid, it was God who found us, lost and undone, awakening and wooing us until we shed our resistance, quit rejecting His loving advances and called out to know Him.

The Christian life is a *calling*.

It’s not an accident.

It’s not inherited from our ancestors.

It’s not simply a decision one makes after considering the options available.

On many grounds it is reasonable to follow Jesus Christ, but it is also beyond reason (it includes and embraces suprarational elements).

After all of this, my Christian life and experience did not begin with me at all (except as a needy soul who was far from God).

My Way

I used to think that everyone has to find “their own way” in life (a path unique to themselves, discovered by accident and experimentation). As I groped and stumbled through my life, pursuing what I considered “my way,” there certainly were many accidents and many experiments along the way. What didn’t kill me (and, in review, I was extremely fortunate to have survived many of them) made me stronger. But not always in a beneficial way.

Some experiences strengthened my selfish pride. Other experiences strengthened my disillusionment.

Some experiences strengthened my fears and hobbled me. Other experiences strengthened my sinful habits.

Some experiences strengthened my delusions about my place and purpose in the world—even leading me to wonder if there *was* any place or purpose for me in the world.

Into my darkness and inevitable aloneness, Jesus Christ gently inserted Himself. He began to persistently pursue me. He pressed me into an emotional and intellectual corner, until I couldn't ignore Him any longer.

Was He real? Was I real? Were His words true? If so, could I ignore them? Could I ignore Him?

I could not. I admitted that I didn't know what was true or if He was real, yet I asked Him (if He was real) to reveal Himself to me—to let me know.

He did.

That pursuit, which took on a conscious dimension for me for two years, was Jesus calling me to Himself.

Mark's Gospel reports:

“And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those whom He desired, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve (whom He also named apostles) so that they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” (Mark 3:13-15)

Though I do *not* presume to be an apostle, this does mirror my calling—to be with Him, to preach His message, and to exercise authority over demonic powers.

What about you? Have you acknowledged God's call in your life? Did Jesus call you away from charting your own way in life?

Many Are Called

So, you see, “many are called.” Not just the apostles, but also the crowd, and then the Gentile world.

“Then, calling the crowd to join His disciples, He said, “If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. ³⁶ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? ³⁷ Is anything worth more than your soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of Me and My message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of

Man will be ashamed of that person when He returns in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:34-38)

Christianity was originally perceived as the revival of the faith of the Jewish people—the arrival of their Messiah and the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Israel. But the Holy Spirit burst out of the confines of the Jewish religion and began to save Gentiles who put their trust in Jesus.

Now, this was in keeping with God’s promise to their forefather, Abraham, to whom God said, *“All the families on earth will be blessed through you”* (Genesis 12:3), but the priests and the people had lost sight of their calling to extend God’s grace to others; they had become an exclusive religious club.

But the Holy Spirit could not be stopped! So a council of apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to sort out what the Spirit was doing. James, the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, concluded: *“This conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written: ‘Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be Mine. The Lord has spoken— He who made these things known so long ago.’”*

Many are called.

The call goes out to *“whosoever will,”* and *“to the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). It is taking more time than any of us imagined, even with the technology that is presently at our disposal. Yet, *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9).

It’s Personal

And, even though many are called, as the prophet, Isaiah, proclaimed: *“But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the One who formed you says, ‘Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are Mine.’”* (Isaiah 43:1), Paul understood this to reach each individual—to be a personal calling: *“Even before I was born, God chose me and called me by His marvelous grace”* (Galatians 1:15). God calls *the ones* He wants He wants to go with Him.

It Starts With God

Of Jesus it was written: *“No one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He must be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was. That is why Christ did not honor Himself by assuming He could become High Priest. No, He was chosen by God, who said to Him, “You are My Son. Today I have become Your Father.”* (Hebrews 5:4-5)

The same is true of us, whom God has called to be a kingdom of priests in His name. This is why it is inaccurate to say or suggest, “I sought for God and I found Him.” Even our seeking is the result of His work—His calling—in our lives, awakening us to His existence, His power, and His grace.

“For no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them to Me, and at the last day I will raise them up.” ⁴⁵ *As it is written in the Scriptures, ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to Me.”* (John 6:44-45)

What does this “calling” include? *From* what have we been called? *To* what are we being called?

Called Out

Last week, I mentioned the Greek word, *ekklesia*, which has been translated as “church.” It describes people who have been *called out* of their individualism and former associations into a new collective—the people of God.

So, as an initial part of our calling, we have been called out. Out from our old ways, our own ways of doing life, with little to no care for what God wants from us.

“They stumble because they do not obey God’s word...⁹ But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light.

Called With

We have been called to be with Him. To experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, and discover the purpose for which God made us in the first place.

Paul addressed his letter to the church in Rome with these words: *“You... who have been called to belong to Jesus.”*

And he reminded the Galatians that Jesus *“called you to Himself.”*

The Christian life is not a solo journey. We are each called to be with Christ. And we are all called to be together, as one family in Christ, a new nation of trusting, loving followers.

Called To

We have been called to a new way of life—a life of promise—or, as Paul put it to the Romans, *“called according to [God’s] purpose.”*

Paul told the Thessalonians that Christ *“called you to salvation when we told you the Good News.”*

To the Galatians, he said, *“God... is the One who called you to freedom.”* Our freedom didn’t begin with the American Constitution of the Bill of Rights, but with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (And, by the way, the Gospel is the only thing that can preserve our freedom; everything that humans create is subject to change.)

We have been *“called to one glorious hope for the future.”*

We have been called by Jesus to *“receive the heavenly prize,”* the *“eternal inheritance God has promised”* and to *“share in His eternal glory.”*

Called *by God*. Called *out*. Called *with*. Called *to*.

Sounds simple enough. Sounds wonderful!

Out text from 2 Peter urged us to *“work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen.”* For Jesus said, *“Many are called, but few are chosen.”*

And that’s for next week: What does it mean to be “chosen”? How is that different from being called? And, how can we secure it for ourselves?