

*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.<sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.<sup>28</sup> He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,<sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him.<sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)*

### God Chose Nobodies

Nobody likes being a nobody. In high school, I was one of those kids who went to parties and wound up sitting by myself, because I just wasn't cool enough to be part of the popular crowd. I may even have engaged in some attention seeking behavior that didn't make me any more popular, but did make me less ignored. Have you ever known people who did that? It really stinks to be a nobody. Nobody likes being reminded that they're a nobody. When you're the new person at work and no one listens to you, when people ignore your opinion or your feelings, it feels like you're having your nose rubbed in being a nobody. Of course, it would really sting if someone just flat out said, “You're a nobody!” That's actually what St. Paul does today. He said it to a specific group of Christians in the city of Corinth. But what he says could apply to most Christians in most congregations in almost every time and place. He calls us all nobodies. But there's a twist here! God loves nobodies. God puts nobodies first. **God chose nobodies.**

#### I.

There's a lot we could say about that truth. In this letter, Paul is going to compare us to parts of a body. He's going to talk about how God honors the parts that seem more modest and how much the body needs the parts that seem to be weaker. There are tremendously important applications to make to those of us who feel isolated and beaten down. But before he gets there, Paul makes a more basic point: **God chose nobodies to show us who really does the work.**

Paul says, “**Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.**” How many people in this room have Ph.D.'s? How many of us have reporters calling to ask our opinion about the latest news stories? How many of us even have the mayor or a city councilman on our speed dial, to say nothing of a senator or a president? I don't know of one. The truth is, every member of Peace Lutheran Church could move to Australia tomorrow and Wayne County wouldn't even notice we were gone. You know what? That's not at all unusual. The vast majority of churches are made up of Christians who are nobodies as far as our society is concerned.

Does that bother you? It might. But you are the ones God chose. Before the world began, God selected you and me to have faith. God knew us. He knew that he was picking the nobodies, and still he picked you and me. St. Paul says, “**But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are.**” I don't know how many more compliments like that we can take. Paul calls us the foolish things – and the Greek world really means “the stupid things.” It's the word that we get our word “moron” from. He calls us the weak, the lowly and despised things of this world. He calls us the things that are not. In most people's minds, we don't even exist.

And God chose us. Why? To shame the wise and the strong. To show them how little they are actually worth. God chose the things that are not to nullify the things that are. He chose the weak and despised things to wipe out any claim to value that the people on top of this world have. What is Paul saying? God doesn't care what we accomplish. God is not impressed by how smart we think we are. God doesn't care if you win a Nobel Prize or figure out how to do cold fusion or come up with a cure to the common cold, because he already knows all that. God doesn't care if history remembers us or if the paparazzi follow us around trying to take our pictures. God doesn't care if presidents wait their turn to talk to us. Because even if we accomplish all that and more, we're still ants crawling on the floor and he's still the boot that can step on us any time he wants to.

None of those things will get us to heaven. Every human being who ever lived is a sinner – except for Jesus. We all think we're a lot smarter and stronger and better than we are. For that sinful pride, we all deserve

to spend eternity in hell. And God loves every single one of us. He wants us all to get into heaven to live with him. But do you know what he can't abide? Us taking credit for getting there. God loves us all so much that he sent his Son to die for the whole world. That's the only way to get in. But when we sinners, we morons, we weak, little nothings act like we made it to heaven on our own, that offends God to his very core.

I'm not very good at working with my hands. I don't know a lot about plumbing or electricity. I don't know how to shingle a roof or tile a floor. So when stuff like that needs to get done around the parsonage, I call somebody from the church. I often hope that maybe they'll teach me how to do some of that stuff. But what usually happens is I hand them tools while they do the work and then I get them a beer afterwards. Well, imagine how someone would feel if they spent their whole Saturday at the parsonage doing some dirty, difficult job while I handed them tools, and then on Sunday morning, they heard me bragging to everyone that came to church about how I fixed that problem. Wouldn't it be even worse, if everything I did was wrong and it slowed the whole project down and they finally had to go back and redo it?

Well, that's a faint glimmer of what it's like for God when a sinner claims that he deserves to go to heaven. Our society is full of people who think that everyone deserves to be forgiven. Our society believes that we're good people and it would be terrible if God didn't let grandpa into heaven just because he wasn't a Christian. He was such a nice man. God chose the foolish things, the weak things, the lowly and despised things to teach everyone who thinks that God owes them something that he does not. He owes them nothing but death and hell. But he gives them everything. God chose us who could never have figured how to get to heaven on our own. God chose us who fall flat on our faces in our lives of faith over and over again. God chose us who sometimes look like hypocrites because we drink or swear or just plain act selfishly. God chose us who can't always defend our faith against all the smart guys with their Ph.D.'s. God chose us to show the world that there is only one way to eternal life: through Jesus. Thank God he did because he chose us to know Jesus and to live with him forever.

## II.

**God chose nobodies to give us a real reason to boast.** When I was growing up, I was taught that you shouldn't boast about your accomplishments. Good sportsmanship meant that you never gloated over the losing team. If you got an A on a paper, you didn't shove it under the nose the kids that got B's and C's. But it seems to me that our society embraces boasting today. If you get a touchdown, you do a dance in the end zone while the other team grinds their teeth. If you get an A, if you win a scholarship, you put it out on Facebook or Snapchat or whatever the current social media venue is. You talk trash and make sure that everyone hears it. If our society embraces all that, what is it going to say about getting to heaven? What is it going to lead us to think about the work we do for our churches?

From God's perspective, boasting isn't just being rude or a poor sportsman. It's claiming something. Most people today claim that they deserve heaven. They boast about their goodness or their intelligence or their contributions. Do we Christians do that? It's really easy for that to creep up on us. I make a lot of visits to people in hospitals. Sometimes, I ask them, "If you were to die tonight, why would Jesus take you to heaven?" Many times, the answer I get is, "Because I'm a good person." "Because I tried to love my spouse and kids." "Because I did the best I could." All those reasons are really boasting in ourselves. Now, most of the time, when I remind those people that we don't do anything to get to heaven, Jesus did it all, they agree with me. Were they rank unbelievers until I set 'em straight? Of course not. They were Christians who are sinners and saints at the same time. The sinner in us is always telling us that we're good people and God is going to let us in. The saint in us has to fight that every day. As long as he's there, fighting the battle and trusting in Jesus, we are going to go to heaven when we die. But the danger is that the Old Man might win. Little by little, he gets us to think we're good people, so of course we're going to heaven.

One of his sneakiest weapons is the gifts God gives us. The Old Man gets us to pat ourselves on the back because we do so much for our church. He gets us to smile about how good we are at listening or administering or contributing. Very subtly, we start to boast in ourselves and not in Christ. Does that mean we can't recognize the gifts God gives us? Of course not. They are gifts from God. It would be false modesty for me to pretend like I can't preach a sermon. After 23 years, I think we have enough evidence to conclude that God has given me that ability. But it is a gift of God. If I have stroke tonight and I can never preach another sermon, as long as I die trusting in Jesus, I will reach heaven. And not one sermon I've ever preached will get me there. I could spend my whole life telling you about Jesus and then die trusting in how much good I've

done for the church and discover that I was boasting in my heart about myself. I made myself into an idol and I lost Christ. Do you think that could ever happen to you?

Of course it could. We're all sinners. That's why Paul reminds today that God chose us. Paul says that Jesus **"has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."** The wisdom of God was to send his Son to take on human flesh and live and die in our place. Just as God chose us nobodies, he made his Son a nobody, the son of a carpenter. Even the people he grew up with scoffed at him being the Savior. Jesus slept on the ground and depended on the charity of others. On the day of his greatest triumph in this life, when he marched into Jerusalem as her promised king, his honor guard was a bunch of fishermen.

How was that wisdom? The Son of God took on human flesh so that he could live a life of perfect humility, of perfect devotion to God, of perfect righteousness and holiness. Our perfect righteousness and holiness. That life brings us to God. And in God's infinite wisdom, his Son took on human flesh to die and pay for all our pride and sin, for all the times we made ourselves god, for all the times we thought God owed us something. He died and paid for all the sin of all the world. He rose to tell us that God has accepted his payment. We are redeemed – bought back – from death and hell. We are his. God chose us to know that. God reached out to us with the gospel and taught us to know our Savior. So, Paul says to us today, **"Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."** There is nothing greater for us to trust in. There is no greater victory than the one Jesus won. There is no greater glory than heaven with him.

That's what he chose us nobodies to have. God chose you and me to know Christ. God chose you and me to be his children who can always come to him in prayer. God chose you and me to defeat the devil and overcome the pains and sorrows of life here and to live and reign with Jesus. God chose nobodies. Be glad that he did. He chose nobodies so that we would know that it isn't up to us to get to heaven and it isn't up to us to preserve the church and it isn't up to us to bring the world to faith. It all up to him. God chose nobodies to be his somebodies. You are now somebody: a blood bought child of God, stronger than the mightiest conqueror of this world, wiser than the smartest Ph.D. here, more exalted than the greatest man alive. God chose nobodies. He chose you. Amen.