

Chosen

1. Warm-up Question: Tell us something that happened (good or bad, big or small) during your Christmas or New Year celebrations.
2. We began a new sermon series on Sunday where we will take a microscopic look at a single chapter in the Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. This is widely believed to be the first book of the New Testament to be written. For the five Sundays of January, we will study chapter 1. Jeff chose this chapter for intensive study because, in a few short words, it manages to capture the New Testament mindset. Read I Thessalonians 1:1-9.
3. Sunday's sermon focused on two verses, starting with verse 4, "We know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that God has chosen you." Jeff said that the New Testament mindset begins with the phrase, "God has chosen you." For many of us, the idea of God "choosing" people is a scary thought. When we humans choose people it almost always becomes a competitive process of "winners" and "losers." Think back to your childhood days when teams were being chosen on the playground, or for school sports, or elsewhere. What memories does that dredge up for you? Were you one of the "chosen?"
4. When we hear the word "chosen," many of us imagine God looking up and down a line of people, picking only the most spiritually gifted people – those who seem to have the most innate spiritual potential. But, thank heavens, that's not how God chooses. We know because Jesus says so. Read Luke 14:15-24.
 - a. Here the Kingdom of God is pictured as a great banquet. List all the categories of people who get invited to this banquet.
 - b. Which category of people ends up not accepting the invitation? Who do these people represent?
 - c. Which categories of people end up at the banquet table? Who do these people represent?
 - d. Jeff described the second category of people as "the spiritually disabled – the spiritually crippled, spiritually blind, and spiritually lame." Do you see yourself as one of them? Why or why not?
 - e. Jeff showed us a picture of a doggie with a tail growing out of its forehead. (The picture is reproduced on p. 3.) When you see it, how do you feel toward this doggie? Do you think it's possible God feels the same way about us?
 - f. Why do you think Jesus was so passionate about those who aren't considered the spiritual elite?

- g. The point of Jesus' story in Luke 14 seems to be that everyone is welcome at the banquet, especially the spiritually challenged, but not everyone accepts the invitation. Some of us come from church traditions where we do things to consciously indicate that we accept Jesus' call to follow him. E.g., responding to an altar call or baptism. Have you ever consciously accepted Jesus' invitation? Did you do something to memorialize that decision?
5. If we are "chosen," that raises an obvious next question. Chosen to do what? I Thessalonians 1:3 gives the answer. Paul says, "We always . . . mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ." Elsewhere Paul identifies these as the Big Three (I Corinthians 13:13), but here he throws an adjective in front of each noun to give us a better feel for the kind of faith, love, and hope we're called to embrace. Our faith, Paul indicates, is not supposed to be passive. We're expected to have a working faith; we're supposed to act on our faith.
 - a. Read James 2:14-17. What do you think this means?
 - b. Tell us about a time in your life when it wasn't enough to simply ask God to make something happen, but you had to put feet to your faith.
 - c. In your life right now, what great Work of Faith are you called to engage?
 6. We don't normally think of "love" and "labor" as going together. But Paul says we're called to the Labor of Love.
 - a. Rev. Glenn MacDonald says, "Sharing life with another person pretty much guarantees that before long, in one way or another, you're going to drive each other crazy. What happens [then] makes all the difference." What do you think he means? Do you agree?
 - b. Josemaria Escriva says, "Don't say, 'That person bothers me.' Say, 'That person sanctifies me.'" What do you think she means?
 - c. In your life right now, who is God calling you to labor to love?
 7. We are also called to Steadfast Hope.
 - a. What's the difference between Steadfast Hope and regular hope?
 - b. Give us an example of a time when you saw someone display Steadfast Hope.
 - c. In your life right now, where is God calling you to have Steadfast Hope?

