

Chosen and Loved

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the importance of being born again, the significance of community in the church, and the mystery of God's election of believers.

Duration: 34:58

Scripture: Genesis 1:28, Genesis 12:1, Matthew 7:13-14, Romans 8:30, Ephesians 1:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 1 Peter 1:2

Topics: "God's Family"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher addresses born-again believers who may be struggling with doubts and difficult circumstances. He emphasizes that despite any challenges they may face, God's love for them remains unwavering. The preacher highlights the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as evidence of God's love and encourages the congregation to hold onto this truth. He also emphasizes the importance of free will in conjunction with God's election, rejecting the notion that God's love is limited to a select few. The sermon concludes with a call to praise and a reminder to always remember God's love.

Transcript

We started as a church a series from the book of 1 Thessalonians at the beginning of this year, 2016. And we're going very slowly because every, as I study it and pray over it, I'm finding nuggets jumping up out at me and I feel impressed, like let's, that's important to teach the congregation that. Just a little context for those, again, who have forgotten it, or the visitors, this is a letter from the apostle Paul who was converted miraculously, actually was persecuting the Christian church, then was converted, then became a leader, a leader called apostle, which means someone especially sent by God.

It's a very hard word to define, but he began, after a while, to make missionary trips with companions who would go and spread the gospel. Now remember, no New Testament, no literature to hand out, no texting, no phones, no sound amplification systems. You're living now 2,000 years ago.

So on the first missionary trip, he went through what we would call today Turkey and founded churches. And then on his second missionary trip, he went to Greece and the gospel came for the first time to Greece, to Europe. In Greece, he started in a city called Philippi, and there he preached, started a church, ended up in jail, and from there he went and ended up in Thessalonica, which was a major city.

In Thessalonica, he spent three weeks to three months. Nobody's sure, but he left a church with leaders. People were converted.

As he says later on in the first chapter, they turned from serving idols to serve the living God and wait for his son, Jesus Christ, to return back from heaven. And this church became a model church. One other thing about it, it not only became a model church that the story of it spread throughout along with the gospel that had changed these people, but in this letter, Paul uses terms of endearment, terms of loving familiarity that he hardly has in any of his other letters that make up the New Testament.

This was a church very dear to his heart, and remarkably, this is the first letter he ever wrote. So this is the first time the gospel and teaching about Christ and the church is being put in writing, and it makes up our New Testament. It's not the first chronologically of Paul, but it's the first letter he ever wrote.

He's writing to a church. I wanna turn around and let's say, write it, let's make it this. So there's so many of you out there, I wanna make it like to the choir.

The choir's a church made up of men and women who have been born again through faith in Jesus Christ. I was mentioning to someone who I interviewed this week for a position here in the choir, nobody can be a Christian all their life. No one's born a Christian.

You have to be born again to be a Christian. Doesn't matter if they hold you to church like they did me. It doesn't matter if you have parents who are Christians.

You have to have your own experience with the Lord, and it's not accepting the teachings about Jesus Christ. That's not what makes you a Christian. You have to have an experience where you confess your sins because all have sinned, and if you don't feel you're a sinner, you'll never know Jesus as a savior.

You have to confess your sins and ask Christ to come in to your life that you recognize he died on the cross for your sins, he was the substitute, and you ask him to not only forgive you and cleanse you, but to live inside of you through the Holy Spirit, and then you are truly born again. And remember what Jesus said to a man named Nicodemus. You must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Not going to church, not the Brooklyn Tavern, not even being baptized. Baptism is an outward sign that this inward miracle has happened in your life, where old things pass away and everything becomes new. Now you can't keep stealing, you can't keep hating, you can't keep fornicating or sleeping around.

You can't do it because now God's seed is inside of you, his Holy Spirit is inside of you, and what's the name of that spirit? The Holy Spirit. So you can't live that way anymore because the Bible says no one who's born of God can practice sin. It's impossible.

Do you struggle, do you battle? Yeah, but you can't live in that and sleep at night contentedly, impossible. Because you're born again now, you're a child of God. These people have been born again.

How many do we have whose lives have been changed by Christ? Everywhere, just lift up your hand, well. So this letter was written to a Christian church, so we're gonna apply it now to us. When you read books like this, you first ask the question, what did it mean to them? Because remember, this letter was not written to you, it was written to us, it was written to them.

So the first question is what specific, particular to their environment was for them? And then what is to all of us? What is to all of us? Whenever you read the Bible, remember you gotta understand what's written and God is speaking just to that person, right, and then how do you extrapolate that and say does it apply to us? Just because God says leave Ur of the Chaldees to Abraham doesn't mean you should leave

where you live. He didn't say that to you, he told that to Abraham. When he said be fruitful and multiply, it doesn't mean every couple should have 13 children, right, he didn't say that to you, he said that to somebody else.

This is where we wanna clarify what we can get out of it. And we're only gonna cover a verse today, but a verse with three boom, boom, boom lessons for us. Okay, let's look, we'll read from the beginning.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy, they're in Corinth now and they're writing back because Paul has heard how the church is doing and he wants to encourage them. To the church of the Thessalonians and God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace to you. That's how he greeted them.

Turn to your neighbor right now and say grace and peace to you this morning. Grace and peace, my brother, grace and peace. We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers, we covered that.

We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, faith always produces work. Your labor prompted by love, God's love in us will always prompt labor. You can't stay selfish and self-centered and be a Christian, can't.

Life of Christ is in you. And your endurance inspired by the hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters, loved by God that he has chosen you.

Let's look at verse four all alone. For we know, brothers and sisters, loved by God that he has chosen you. The King James and other translations would have it this way, for we know, brothers, loved by God of your election.

For he has chosen you, it comes out in the NIV, your election. We have here now Paul rejoicing in the church and why is he rejoicing in the church when he thinks about them? Why is he rejoicing in this church? For three reasons. That they're brothers and sisters of his.

Number two, that they're loved by God. And number three, that they've been chosen by God. So we're gonna handle that, those three things in slightly different sequence.

I want you to notice here that most of the older translations would have, we know, brothers. There's no brothers and sisters. The word is brothers.

The NIV has added brothers and sisters. And some of the more modern translations, I think wisely in most places, have added gender inclusiveness. Why? Because the word brothers there didn't mean just brothers.

It was a generic term to mean everyone. Paul wasn't writing just to the men in the church. He was writing to everyone in the church.

And the church is made up of men and women. But back then, the way they said brothers would mean just everybody. Literal translations, which many times people make a great deal of, don't always make sense.

We always wanna try to get from the Hebrew and the Greek the most accurate rendering of the word. And by the way, any of you who are interested in translations and this and that, you know, there's some people running around. If you're not reading the King James, you're gonna go to hell.

It's the mark of the beast if you don't read any other translation, as if, you know, the early Christians were reading the King James. But there's a great book called *How to Choose a Bible Translation for All Its Worth*. *How to Choose a Bible Translation for All Its Worth*.

It's not even 120 pages. Choir, church, if you read it, you'll be blessed. Doesn't recommend one, doesn't put down another.

It explains the difficulty of translating from Hebrew and Greek into the vernacular of English or Spanish or whatever. And sometimes rendering something literally can be very tricky. I was in a meeting one time in Asuncion, Paraguay, I believe, and the guy speaking was being translated by a friend of mine.

And he said, you know what, on that day it was raining cats and dogs. Well, if he would've put that in Spanish, the people would've said, what? Cats and dogs were coming down from the sky? Now that's a rainstorm, right? No, that's an idiom we use to mean heavy rain. So he had it translated, it really poured.

Why? No, that's not what the guy said. Say what the guy said. No, it wouldn't make sense to the listener.

And there's many times that that happens. That book will really help you. So brothers and sisters is a gender inclusive term because that's what, in this case, it means.

When the Bible says God wants all men to be saved, as in the King James, does he only want men to be saved? Or does he want women to be saved too? So some of the more modern translations say God wants all people to be saved. Or God wants everybody to be saved. He addresses those people as brothers and sisters.

Notice, he's an apostle. But he doesn't say, you below me, since I'm an apostle, you folks there. He goes, no, you're my brother, you're my sister.

Literally, the word means, in the Greek, from the same womb. From the same womb. So all of you here are brothers and sisters.

And I'm gonna include myself with you. Even though I'm your pastor, I'm still your brother. Whether you like it or not, I'm your brother.

And you're my sisters, and you're my brother. This is a term that has fallen into wrong use, probably, in our churches. Well, some people don't even use it.

But we don't consider other believers our brothers and sisters. The only siblings we have are the biological ones. And for them, we'll defend and fight and go to the wall.

But our Christian brothers and sisters, and by the way, this is the only family that will be forever. Your biological family, if they're not Christians, you won't see them again after you die or when Christ comes. That's unfortunate.

That's why we gotta love them and witness to them, amen? But the only family that will continue forever is God's family. He's the Father. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have become sons and daughters of God, which makes us siblings.

We're siblings. So one way that that is misused in the world is the brotherhood of man and the sisterhood of man. That everyone in the world is a brother and a sister.

Well, there's a lot of brothers and sisters killing each other, if that's true, right? So in a sense, God is the Father of humanity. But in the deeper spiritual sense, God the Father has only one family. He has taken people from all different backgrounds.

Just look at this group and this group. And he's made us into a family. And he's the Father, and he takes his family very seriously, like I take my family very seriously.

And he loves us like a father, but a billion times more than any father in this room could ever love their children. He loves us more than any father could ever love any child or grandchild. Just think of that.

He's our Father. We're brothers and sisters. The other misuse of it is when we call each other that because of church tradition, but we don't act like we're brothers and sisters.

We just go, oh, hi, sister. Hi, brother. But we don't live like brother and sister.

We don't defend each other. You know, one time my wife and I were in a restaurant and three sisters were having a huge fight with their parents, right? But the sisters were really going at it a long time ago. We wanted to make peace.

So we stepped into the argument and we said, no, you shouldn't talk to her like that. And suddenly, all the three sisters who couldn't stand each other turned on us and said, what's in your business? Don't talk like that to my sister. I said, you were just killing her.

What are you talking about? No, no, no. That's my sister. How many know what I'm talking about on those? Never get in those.

I learned that day. Just like whatever, do whatever. Stab each other with those forks, do whatever you have to do, but I'm not entering into it.

But we're not like that with our brothers and sisters. Oh, I know people who defend their family. The sister could hold up a bank and they would defend it.

She could be on video. They could have all the evidence, DNA, everything. She didn't do it.

That's my sister. That's my brother. And that's good.

We defend our family. We love our family. Oh, they'll bend over backwards for family, for an auntie in Trinidad, an uncle in Poland, or wherever you're from.

Oh yeah, family. Send money back to the family. Work here, send money back.

A lot of people are living high on the hog in other countries because people have come here and because it's family, they send money back. But for Christians, no. You're a make-believe sister.

You're a make-believe brother. You're not really my brother. How that must break God's heart.

To Paul, it was serious. He didn't say it in some cultural way. You're my brother.

You're my sister. So take me by the hand. That must be sad to God in churches when everyone splits, no one cares about each other, but we go to church and then on top of that say, oh, you're my brother.

Brother, so good to see you, brother. So good to see you, sister, and we don't really care. Holy Spirit has to do something in us, doesn't he? How many wanna have a real family of brothers and sisters here? And by the way, God provided that for lonely people who are turned, among other reasons, who are turned on by their own family.

You know, your own biological family can turn on you in a New York second. Am I correct? It can turn, listen, I've heard too many counseling sessions that things you wouldn't even believe family can do to family, but that should never be named among God's family. One last thought on that.

When you talk against some other Christian behind their back, God's listening, and he didn't like what you said about his daughter. He didn't like that. No, no.

If I ever heard you talking about my son James, behind his back, or my daughter Chrissy, or my daughter Susie, and I don't care what wrong they did, I wouldn't like that. Imagine how God feels when some of us play the church game of just smiling and then tearing people apart behind closed doors. What phoniness is that? And I notice in my life, family, biological family, even though people act nuts, they won't do that about their own family.

They'll defend their family, very little gossip about their family, always putting their family in the best light. Beyond that, people, if they're from the same island, they'll defend anything. No, am I correct or not? No, she's Haitian.

She couldn't have done that. Why? Because I'm Haitian. Wouldn't it be nice if we started to make God more happy and started really loving each other and meaning brother and sister and coming to each other for prayer and need? And people who say, look, I just wanna serve God, I want nothing to do with his people, I don't know if you are converted, but you have a very twisted view of Christianity because we are brothers and sisters.

Let's put our hands together. We're brothers and sisters. Just turn to the person next to you, depending what gender, and say, you're my sister, you're my brother.

What a nice family you have, right? And by the way, Paul was saying this to people, the church there was predominantly Gentile, and he was Jew. So imagine the family of God, the barriers it breaks down. Imagine.

What we call black and white tension here in this country, that's kindergarten stuff compared to Gentiles and Jews. Look at the history of persecution of Jews, anti-Semitism, it's older than dirt. And Paul, as a Jew, a self-righteous Jew before he became a Christian, is now saying to Gentiles, you're my brothers, you're my sisters.

That was unthinkable. Jews had no dealings with Gentiles. You were ceremonially impure if you even went in and walked on the carpet or the stones of their house.

So I'm so glad that the family, like they said at Azusa Street, the blood has washed away the color line. Oh, hallelujah. The blood of Jesus, can we clap to that, washes away the color line.

Now, white ministers can play to white prejudice, black ministers can play to black prejudice to get people unified in anger, but that's not Christianity or Latinos or anyone else. Number two, we'll go to the last one. He said, knowing your election of God or knowing that he has chosen you.

Not only are you my brother and my sister, but you are chosen by God. You have been elected by God. Now, that's a term that Paul uses about four other times in his writings.

It's also mentioned by Peter in one place, and I think Jude. Knowing your election of God, knowing that he's chosen you. Now, here's a mystery in the Bible.

God has chosen us. We emphasize usually, have you chosen Christ? Have you decided to follow Christ? Have you surrendered your sin and put your faith in Christ? Did you make that choice? But now, Paul is saying, before you were ever born, God chose you. When did God choose you? Before, sometime in the past.

What does the word mean? The word means, chosen by you or the elect, that you choose out 11 people from this group and you don't choose the others, and the 11 you select. Based on what? On God's sovereignty. He chooses who he wants.

This is what clearly the scripture teaches. That you select a group who become your chosen ones, and it was done in eternity, and it was done by a loving God. But that runs into, obviously, some real problems, because then we're all programmed to be or not be in the group.

And the mystery of scripture is that although the election of God, the selection of God, for he has chosen you, exists at all times, free will is assumed at all times in scripture. Never coercion. The Bible says, whosoever will may come.

Choose this day who you will serve. Who will choose? You choose. In fact, the Bible puts together like a cooperation.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it's God who works in you. Well, wait a minute, who's working? No, you're both working. You choose, you open, God works.

But at the end of time, you're gonna see that somehow they both exist. The election of God and the free will of man. The scriptures never says how we can put it together, but I have to be an honest minister and say both exist at the same time.

Isn't there somewhere in scripture, you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you? At all times, free will is assumed and exercised. Otherwise, for people who go too far with the election part and leave out the free will part, now you've made Jesus, with all due respect, this language, you've made Jesus a bad actor, because he's crying over Jerusalem. Oh, Jerusalem, how many times would I have gathered you? Remember? Like a mother hen would gather her chicks, but you would not.

Now, if they had been programmed that they couldn't come to him because of the election of God, now he's a hypocrite, because he's crying over people that couldn't come to him anyway. How do you cry over someone who had no choice? So at both times, brothers and sisters, in scriptures, we have the election of God and we have the free will of men and women. How does it all fit together? Beats me.

Write that down in your notes. That's my main point today. It beats me.

In fact, when you try to make a system that fits all the verses together, that's where the problem comes. But wait a minute, my ways are not your ways, God says. Neither are your thoughts my thoughts.

And now we see through a glass darkly, 1 Corinthians 13 says. But when we get to heaven, we're gonna understand all this stuff. But right now, we just know that although we have chosen him in some other mysterious, wonderful sense, the God of love has selected Jim Simba.

Can you imagine? Wait a minute, Almighty God has chosen all of you before you were even thought of by your parents. Through his foreknowledge, somewhere in eternity, he chose you. Chosen to what? To enjoy salvation.

To enjoy forgiveness of sin and to know that our sins are forgiven and that we're gonna be in heaven forever with the Lord. I don't know about you, but I am so happy that I'm not a Democrat or a Republican. I am not an American first.

I am chosen by God and part of his family. Can we all say amen? Another point on that. There are Christians who are called reformed Christians or Calvinists who strongly emphasize the sovereignty of God in his election to the point that I think it contradicts Scripture.

There are other people who are called Arminian. Most Pentecostal denominations are Arminian. Methodist, Wesley followers, Methodist church influenced are Arminian, emphasizing man's free will.

As my late father-in-law said, you don't try to put it together. When you see it in Scripture, you preach it. And then when you see something else that almost seems to contradict it, you preach that.

Never try to fit it together because God's ways are not our ways. And when we get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be. Someone said it this way.

When you enter heaven and you go through the gate, it'll say, whosoever will may come. And you'll come in and you'll walk in. Then when you look at the back of the door, it'll say, chosen before the foundation of the world.

Let's put our hands together one more time before we close. We're brothers and sisters, amen? We're chosen by God, elect of God, says it in the book. Lastly, King James would have it, we rejoice knowing, brothers and sisters, your election and that you're loved by God.

You're loved by God. This seems to be a simple fact that you learn when you're a child, if you grow up in church, not so simple at all. He loves me.

We're beloved by God. What's the word used there for love? Not eros, which is where we get romantic sexual love. Not phileo, which is friendly love.

And it's based on the attributes that I see in my sister. She's so kind, she's so nice, that I'm drawn to just be so fond of her or my brother. No, this is agape love, which is the love that God showed when he sent Jesus Christ to die for people who didn't even want him.

The love isn't based on something in the person, it's based on the one who loves. God is love. And that word agape, which was coined really by the Christian church, the Greeks and Roman civilization culture didn't know that kind of love.

It's a love that would lay down its life and would sacrifice anything for the good of the person that's loved. It would hand money away to them, that it might even need. But because you love so much, you give money to the person.

And Paul says, I so rejoice that you are loved by God. You have a loving father, he chose you in love, but you gotta live every day knowing he loves you. Now you would think as kids we would learn, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the, but not all of us live with a consciousness that he loves us.

So let me tell you about this love. It has no fluctuation, no waning, no matter what you do. Do you hear me? The love of God has no fluctuation to it.

You know how human love is? You know, like my brother, he really likes me, we're doing good, we're tight, we go bowling together or whatever, and then I say something or I let him down, I disappoint him, he doesn't love me as much. We were once tight, and now he's like, pastor, what, what's your last name again? It changed, no changing with God. You had a bad week, he loves you.

You had a great week, read your word, had a good week, he loves you. His love doesn't change. Satan will fill your minds with all kinds of fluctuating thoughts about God's love, because that'll take away faith.

How in the world are you gonna trust someone who you think is mad at you? How are you gonna rely on someone who you feel got their hand on you? Who's got their hand up and is ready to whack you? No, God's love is not that way. Behold, what manner of love, John tells us, the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God. Why do you think we're in the family of God? Because he loved us before we even knew Jesus.

This word love means, listen, a love that began sometime in the past, but has continued unabated and stays strong to this moment. He didn't start loving you when you became a Christian. He loved you way back when.

We don't even know where this love began. It's beyond us. It's unfathomable love.

No one can describe this love. Nothing can separate us from this love. Neither height, nor depth, or demons, or principalities, or angels, nor good times, nor bad times.

Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. Can we say amen to that? But pastor, you don't know the kind of week I had. You don't know how I failed God.

I don't, but I have failed God, and I have found he keeps loving me. He loves me. He knew Peter would deny him.

He kept loving him. Peter denied him three times, and cursed the last time. He still loved him.

He was loving the people who were crucifying him. And that's why I close with this. In the little book of Jude, which is the last book in the New Testament before Revelation, Jude says this.

Now brothers and sisters, keep yourselves in the love of God. What does that mean? Think of it. Keep yourselves in the love of God.

Probably has multi-layered meanings, but one of the meanings for sure is don't let the devil have you live one hour without a beautiful consciousness that God loves you. Jesus loves you. I was holding one of my grandchildren yesterday, the littlest one, Charlotte, eight months old, this month.

Oh, just love her. And holding her, but my wife has bonded with her more than me. So as I was holding her, she saw my wife, and she went, oh, oh, oh, she wanted, broke my heart.

I got jealous. And then when she saw her dad, she went totally nuts. She loves her daddy.

Just think if I loved that way. Now what do you think Charlotte could ever do in life that I would stop loving her? Come on. My oldest girl went totally nuts and rebelled against my wife and against God.

Do you think I loved her less or I loved her more? Do you think at Christmas time when I had Sue and James with me, do you think I was happy because I had two out of the three kids there? Do you think I was happy? And she's not listening and blowing any money that I try to give her to manipulate her and just blowing up her life and breaking our hearts. You don't think I wanted that door to open and her to walk in? Come on, look at me, answer me. Of course, and if I love being a wicked man, if I love that way, just think how God loves us.

Just think how Jesus loves us today. So if you're here today, listen quick now. If you're here today and the devil's messing with your mind and you're a born-again believer serving Jesus Christ but you've messed up or you've gone through some difficult times or what the enemy will say, look what's happening in your life.

Look how the bottom fell out. Look at the trouble you're having with your children. Look how long you've waited to get a job.

How could God love you? And the moment you doubt that, he's got an upper hand. No God loves me. How do you know? Because Jesus died on the cross.

You'll never change that. He died on the cross. I can't figure out everything else.

Wait, but I know one thing. God loved me and gave his son for me. His only son.

Not five sons and he gave one. His only begotten son. He loves us today.

For some of you, you're gonna have to wipe away a tear but remember, he loves you today. Don't believe that lie. He doesn't love you.

He loves you. Can we put our hands together and just clap? He loves us. Just close your eyes.

Lord, thank you for making us a family. Giving us so many beautiful brothers and sisters. Thank you, though we don't understand it, that you sovereignly chose us.

We're the elect of God. You had the elect chosen ones in the Old Testament, Israel and now both Jew and Gentile in the church has become your elect people. We don't understand it but we praise you for it.

Thank you for loving us. Help the congregation to stay in the love of God. To live in the love of Jesus.

To be conscious of it. To rely on his love. His goodness, his kindness.

Anyone here, Lord, has been messed with in their mind by the enemy that they think God is mad at them? No, even when he corrects us, we know there's tears in his eyes. Thank you for that kind of love. Where would we be today? Where would I be? How many times have I gone off on some wrong path and you brought me back? And I'm not the only one.

We're here today because of your love. Your love is so stubborn and strong, you will not let us go. Amazing.

We praise you for it. Thank you for your mercy. Part of your love that forgives, restores, keeps us on the right path.

We love you today and we praise you. To dismiss this meeting, God, we're just gonna give you, for your love and your selection and your kindness toward us, we're gonna give you just a hand clap of praise right now. We give you praise.

Give him praise. Everybody, just give him praise. Everybody stand up.

Give a hug to some of the brothers and sisters. Come on, you're dismissed. You're dismissed.

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