

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

26 Brothers and sisters, 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. 27 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.

28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 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. 31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

### **The People God Chooses 1 Corinthians 1:18-30**

Last year our neighbours to the south chose the person they thought would make the best president of the United States and trusted him to become the most powerful person in the world. They had to choose carefully. Of all the possible candidates, who had the best education, who had the most experience? Who could best boost the economy and command the military? Who was best equipped to bring about change? It came as a great shock to some when they found out who it was the American people had chosen. But it might have come as an even greater shock to know who it was God had chosen. Perhaps instead of the billionaire he had chosen the janitor. Perhaps instead of the Senator he had chosen the secretary. Perhaps instead of the passenger riding in the back of the limousine he would choose the driver in the front of the limo. It would not surprise me at all, because that is the way God works.

A British parlour maid named Gladys Aylward grew up among the poor of England, and because of a learning disability, dropped out of school and become a domestic servant

for a well-to-do British family. Her job demanded long hours, hard work, and low pay. When she was in her late twenties, she was riding a bus, reading a newspaper. There was an article about the need for missionaries in China. From that moment on, Gladys resolved to go to China. She applied to the board of the China Inland Mission, but they turned her down. Crushed with disappointment, she returned to her small upstairs room, opened her purse, and turned it upside down. Two pennies fell onto her Bible. She said, "O God, here's my Bible! Here's my money! Here's me! Use me, God." She started saving every penny she earned, and she finally realized that while she could never save enough to travel to China by ship, she could scrape together enough for a train ticket across Europe and Asia.

A few bewildered friends and family members gathered to see her off. She travelled from England across Europe to Moscow, and across Siberia toward China. She carried her bedroll, two suitcases (one stocked with food), and a bag filled with pots and pans. Day and night the train pressed on into the frigid, Siberian wasteland, and finally stopped in the dead of night in the middle of a war zone. The other passengers, all soldiers, disembarked and headed in the direction of gunfire. Gladys got off and starting trudging back, suitcases in hand, the way the train had come and nearly died before she found the nearest railroad station.

When she recovered she pressed on toward her destination and by sheer determination Gladys Aylward finally arrived in China. She moved in with an older single missionary woman who didn't know what to do with her. Gladys stayed in China for many years and she became one of the most influential missionaries of the twentieth century, a woman who has been called "the most noted single woman missionary in modern history."

Gladys once said, "I wasn't God's first choice for what I've done for China. There was somebody else . . . I don't know who it was who was God's first choice. I don't know what happened. Perhaps he died. Perhaps he wasn't willing. . . . And God looked down . . . and saw Gladys Aylward and God said "Well, she's willing." Gladys Aylward was mistaken. She wasn't God's second, third, or fourth choice. She was God's first choice. Why do I think that? Because she is exactly the kind of person God chooses.

Have you ever wondered why God chose you to be a part of his family? Have you ever asked yourself what there was about you that attracted God's attention? Was it your good looks? Was it your intelligence? Was it your good education? Was it because you come from an important family? What was there about you that made you worthwhile to God? If you have asked yourself the question and are still trying to find an answer, you will find the answer in our text for today.

26 Brothers and sisters, 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. 27 **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.

28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. 1 Cor 1:26-29

Paul is describing here the people God chooses. God chooses people the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And what could be more foolish in the eyes of the world than to trust in Jesus. And God chooses people that the world considers weak and powerless in order to shame those who think that they are powerful. And what could be more weak in the eyes of the world than to be completely dependent upon God? God chooses people who are despised by the world, people who are considered useless and worthless and he uses them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.

That is what there was about you that attracted God's attention.

God chooses what is foolish. God chooses what is weak. God chooses those who are ordinary and common and despised and lowly. These are the people God chooses. That is how God works. This does not mean that God does not sometimes choose people who are educated, and have status and power. Occasionally he does. But when he does he cannot begin to use them until they have learned that their usefulness to him does not come from their position or their education or their wealth or their athletic abilities, but rather from their weakness and their total dependence upon God.

Is it not strange that we think so highly of the wisdom of the world when God thinks so little of it? We think so highly of wealth and fame when it is of no interest to God whatsoever. 15 Jesus once said, What people value highly is detestable in God's sight. Luke 16:15

One of the greatest awakenings of the 19th century began in Cambridge University in England when D. L. Moody and his singer, Ira B. Sankey, came to that University. The whole university was outraged that this backwoods American preacher would dare to appear and speak in the centre of culture of the English world. They well knew that he "murdered" the King's English. Many of the students decided that when Moody spoke in the chapel at Cambridge they would hoot him off the platform.

Moody began by asking Sankey to sing. As soon as he finished, Moody stepped to the edge of the platform and looking directly at the students who were gathered there, he said these remarkable words, "Young gentlemen, don't ever think God don't love you, for he do!" The students were dumbfounded by that beginning. Moody went on and in a few minutes he said again, "Don't ever think God don't love you, for he do!" Something about the poor grammar of these words captured them. The intense earnestness of this man spoke right to their hearts, beyond all the superficial, external things. A great awakening came to Cambridge University at the hands of that humble servant of God.

Not many of those whom God chooses and uses are wise by human standards. Though he made the human mind, and he encourages us to use it to search for wisdom and

knowledge, when it comes to using this knowledge there is only one place we can learn to use it rightly, and that is in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Why does God do this? Why does God seem to be so against all the "wisdom of the world" Paul says that God seeks deliberately to shame the wise and the strong, to bring to nothing things that are. Why? The answer is given to us in Verse 29, where Paul says God does this, ...so that no one may boast before him, so that no one may stand in the presence of God and boast about their achievements.

We are all experts at boasting but God does not like it. Human boasting is always based on an illusion. When we boast in ourselves or in our abilities we are thinking that we have some power in ourselves that will make us successful. But we are deceiving ourselves. We are living in a fantasy world. Therefore, the kindest thing God can do is to find a way to shatter that illusion of self-sufficiency. He does this by using the obscure and the weak and the things that are regarded oftentimes as foolish.

A successful business man explained it this way: "It's my pride that makes me independent of God. It's appealing to feel I am the master of my fate; I run my own life, I call my own shots; I go it alone. But that feeling is my basic dishonesty. I can't go it alone. I have to get help from other people, and I can't ultimately rely on myself. I am dependent on God for my very next breath. It is dishonest of me to pretend that I am anything but a man, small, weak and limited. So, living independent of God is self-delusion. It's not just a matter of pride being an unfortunate little trait and humility being an attractive little virtue, it's my inner psychological integrity that's at stake. When I am conceited, I am lying to myself about what I am. I am pretending to be God, and not man. My pride is the idolatrous worship of myself, and that is the national religion of hell."

The Apostle Paul has his own story to tell. On one occasion he had been caught up into Paradise and heard things that he was never allowed to repeat. Therefore, to keep him from boasting about the great honour he had received he was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment him. He writes in 2 Cor 12:8-10 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I was reading about an interview with William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. In the interview he was asked, "What has been the secret of the Army's longevity? What is it about this ministry that God has blessed it so much?"

William Booth said this: "I will tell you the secret: God has had all that there was of me. There have been smarter men than me. Men with greater opportunities. But from the day I got the poor of London on my heart and caught a vision of what Jesus Christ could do with me and them, on that day, I made up my mind that God should have all of William Booth there was. And if there is any power at all in the Salvation Army, it is

because God has had all the adoration of my heart. All the power of my will. And all the influence of my life."

There is a moving passage in the book of Jeremiah: Jer 18:1-7

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

Then the word of the Lord came to me. He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.

Like clay in the hand of the Potter, so are we in God's hands. Abraham was too old. Jacob was a cheat and a liar. Samuel was just a kid. Joseph was sold into slavery. Moses had a stuttering problem. Gideon was afraid to trust God. Rahab was a prostitute. David was an adulterer and a murderer. Elijah was suicidal. Jonah ran from God. Job went bankrupt. Peter talked too much. Martha worried about everything. Onesimus was a runaway slave. The Samaritan woman was many times divorced, Bartimaeus was blind, Zaccheus was too short Saul persecuted the church, Timothy had a stomach ulcer, the widow in the temple was desperately poor. Samson had serious problems with lust and anger, Noah got drunk

Every one of them was a spoiled and ruined pot. But God took the clay and reworked it in his hands into someone both beautiful and useful, as it seemed good to him. The next time you feel like God can't use you, just remember: God chose you and he can rework you and use you to your full potential. All you have to do is give him all the adoration of your heart, all the power of your will, and all the influence of your life. All you have to do is make yourself totally available, to offer yourself to him as clay in the potter's hands. All you have to do is say along with Gladys Alyward "O God, here's my Bible, here's my money, here's me. Use me, God." And he surely will.

Jesus said: You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Go now into the world and bear fruit.