



Chosen!

by Mark Brunner

“A Blinding Light!” (1 Timothy 1: 15-19)

When we slip in wondering about God’s glory let us be content to know there are simply some things we can not look at nor stand in the presence of. My friend, life’s a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Here’s a story. A small band of Jewish sojourners slowly made their way down the dusty pathways leading northwestward toward the large Aramaean metropolis of Damascus. This was obviously a party of some importance since before and aft were armed guards, prepared to defend against the many robbers and plunderers that inhabited these parts. For the most part the scenery was the same throughout and it was hardly noticeable that one had passed from one border to the next. With the exception of the beautiful pink granite walls of Petra and the lushness of the shores surrounding Lake Tiberius, all they had seen was dust, dust, and more dust. The roads had wound through precipitous passes and snaked its way around swamps and the ever-present Roman garrisons.

But now the way was straight and the small band was within a day’s journey of the city where cool palms and soothing river waters awaited them. It had been nine arduous and grueling days on the road, a journey of many miles. But now their goal was in sight. The leader of the expedition, Saul, was a man dressed in the clothes of a Jew of some importance as he wore the frock and gable of a

pharisee. It would now be but a few short hours before they would pass through the gates of the city. There they would meet their party, leaders of the synagogue. Saul anticipated their meeting and longed to grasp their forearms and kiss their cheeks. There was so much work to do. He sometimes wondered why God had placed him in such an important role for such a time as this. Suddenly, a high-pitched buzzing exploded inside of Saul's head. He reached up to push on his aching ears but lost his balance and toppled from his mount. His mind was blinded with a brilliant and aching light. He could see or hear nothing but a voice that pierced into his very soul. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!" Saul was blinded, incapacitated as he lay crumpled in the presence of God and His unfathomable wisdom and power. His journey, he thought, was at an end, it was really just beginning.

It is so with us when we attempt to interpret the mystery of God's grace in choosing us to serve Him. As we ponder the seeming contradictions of God's will that all might be saved and His revelation that He has chosen those who will be, we must fall from our theological mounts, laying prostrate in the dust of our ignorance and inability to understand or comprehend the mysteries of our God. Such speculation will only lead to spiritual blindness. Rather, when we slip in wondering about such things let us be content to know there are simply some things we can not look at nor stand in the presence of. By the way, the fact that we so question His choosing only reveals one thing, we have a good conscience and a faith that is tuned into knowing our God. That is a good thing and an excellent indicator that we do indeed live in God's grace.

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34)

"Cause I Bought You!" (John 17: 1-9)

That an innocent man, Jesus Christ, should suffer the beatings and torture of crucifixion, is the height of injustice. We are haunted by the images thus portrayed. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Here's a story. "A little boy built a sailboat. He built the sail and had it all fixed up, tarred and painted. He took it to the lake and pushed it in hoping it would sail. Sure enough a wisp of breeze filled the little sail and it billowed and went rippling along the waves. Suddenly before the little boy knew it, the boat was out of his reach, even though he waded in fast and tried to grab it. As he watched it float away, he hoped maybe the breeze would shift and it would come sailing back to him. Instead he watched it go farther and farther until it was gone. When he went home crying, his mother asked, "What's wrong, didn't it work?" And he said, "It worked too well."

Some time later, the little boy was downtown and walked past a second hand store. There in the window he saw the boat. It was unmistakably his, so he went in and said to the proprietor, "That's my boat." He walked to the window, picked it up and started to leave with it. The owner of the shop said, "Wait a minute, Sonny. That's my boat. I bought it from someone." The boy said, "No, it's my boat. I made it. See." And he showed him the little scratches and the marks where he hammered and filed. The man said, "I'm sorry, Sonny. If you want it, you have to buy it." The poor little guy didn't have any money, but he worked hard and saved his pennies. Finally, one day he had enough money. He went in and bought the little boat. As he left the store holding the boat close to him, he was heard saying, "You're my boat. You're twice my boat. First you're my boat 'cause I made you and second you're my boat 'cause I bought you!"

If you ever think that you aren't worth much and if you think you're cheap, just remember what God thinks of you. He thinks you're His. Twice His. First you're His because He made you. And second you're His because He bought you on the cross. He paid a price to redeem you. So let go of your stress to God's care, and let go of your sins to God's cross." (Good News Publishers, Westchester, IL.)

"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word." Thus stated Jesus about you and I. That an innocent man, Jesus Christ, should suffer the hideous beatings and the torture of crucifixion, is the height of injustice. We are, doubtless, haunted by the images thus portrayed. As Christians we ought to find a deep awe and sense of guilt in the passion of Jesus Christ. It shows us how unworthy we are to stand in the presence of Almighty God. Nonetheless, there is a sweetness that is left behind for each of us to share despite the

gruesome reality of our Savior's passion. We are redeemed and twice bought. The burden of guilt this inspires is, thankfully, left behind, laid down at the foot of the cross, washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ.

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“All Saints Great and Small!” (Romans 12: 1-8)

God works His will through choice and selection. Of that we can be certain. But, He is no respecter of persons. That normally falls to our selective hearts. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Here's a story. “His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a teeshirt with holes in it, jeans and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college. He became a Christian while attending college. Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his T-shirt, and wild hair. Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed and he can't find a seat. By now people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer to the pulpit, and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet. By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, a deacon is slowly making his way toward Bill. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this young man, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor? It takes a long time for the deacon to reach the young man . The church is utterly silent, except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do. And now they see this elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him so he won't feel alone. Everyone chokes up with emotion. When the minister gains control, he says, ‘What I'm about to preach, you will never remember.

What you have just seen, you will never forget.” (James Westervelt–
Semoncentral.com)

God works His will through choice and selection. Of that we can be certain. But, He is no respecter of persons. He chooses whom He will and accomplishes that which must be accomplished in His time and by His manner of choosing. He often works through little saints that which He has not asked the big saints to do. The ministry of our Savior was such. He worked through the woman at the well, the adulteress, the sinner. He chose to work through the faith of the thief on the cross even while Peter, his own disciple, had denied Him. Why? In so doing God shows us that the measure of His grace is not the measure of the person we see but rather the measure of the soul that He sees. He measures in a way that He has chosen and that we are not privy to. When we acknowledge this and understand it in our own lives, it then becomes clear to us and to all believers that we should not think more highly of ourselves than we should. God is not a respecter of persons. He is the God who gives faith in accordance to His will that all might esteem Him more highly; that the glory is His and not ours.

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“First In Line?” (Matthew 20: 1-16)

He who thinks himself last before God shall be considered first. He who thinks himself poor before God, shall be revealed rich in spirit. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Do you have to be poor to be a Christian? Doesn't Jesus say that it would be harder for a rich man to enter into Heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle? Undeniably, the Bible is calling us to a different way of life, a way of life that embraces the humility and purpose of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Truth be told, there is a role for every man in this life, including those who are blessed financially or have been given great power and authority. In His unfathomable grace, he has chosen some to possess and other not, some to excel and others not. God is not a God of material equality. God is more

concerned with our souls than He is with our wallets. What is then the purpose of His choosing? Why does He choose some that are rich and many that are poor, some that are powerful and the many who are not?

Here's a story. "The weekend following September 11th, syndicated columnist and former presidential speechwriter Peggy Noonan drove to Lower Manhattan to witness the relief effort taking place at Ground Zero. She found herself focusing on the convoy of trucks filled with rescue workers coming off their 12-hour shifts. The men in the trucks were construction and electrical workers, police, emergency medical workers, and firemen. It was a procession of the not-so- rich and famous. Nonetheless, these New Yorkers were celebrities in a human drama more significant than any Broadway act. Noonan joined the growing crowd of onlookers cheering the workers with shouts of 'God bless you!' and 'We love you!' They clapped and blew kisses. Noonan writes: I looked around me at all of us who were cheering. We had been the kings and queens of the city, respected professionals in a city that respects its professional class. And this night we were nobody. We were so useless, all we could do was applaud the somebodies, the workers who, unlike us, had not been applauded much in their lives.... I was so moved and, oddly I guess, grateful. Because they'd always been the people who ran the place, who kept it going, they'd just never been given their due." (Peggy Noonan, "Welcome Back, Duke," Wall Street Journal)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ speaks to all men, rich or poor, powerful or weak, who are poor in spirit and do not think of themselves as powerful. If we elevate ourselves above others, we shall find that they will always be beyond our reach, striving upward, advancing toward heaven without us. He who thinks himself last before God shall be considered first. He who thinks himself poor before God, shall be revealed rich in spirit. No man is too high or too rich before God that he cannot be struck down. No man is too downtrodden or poor that he must think himself forgotten of His Father. If you have much and rule over much, be humbled in your blessing. If you do not, be assured that much power and riches await you when you reach your eternal home.

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“Standing On His Shoulders!” (1 Corinthians 13: 1-13)

There is a reason that love never fails; it is quite simple. Our love, the love that we serve one another with daily, is not established in us but in Christ. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Most of us have gone through some sort of hurt in our lives that may have left us numb, even empty. You know the times; we stare through objects rather than recognize them. Minutes can go by and we have no recollection of them at all because our senses had just shut down completely due to the load on our heart. These are the times when, beyond feeling, we sink into the softest chair in the house and time, for the moment, loses its essence and we drift. When life's daily encounters deposit us on the shoulder of life's highway, will love always be there to fix the emotional blowout or restart the cold, flooded engine of the heart?

Should we put our trust in a love that often seems so far away, nearly lost over the horizon of this life? Is there really a love so powerful, so searching and sustaining that it can move our hearts and uplift our troubled souls no matter what the burden?

Here's a story from Bryan Chapell: Two brothers were playing on the sandbanks by the river. One ran after another up a large mound of sand. Unfortunately, the mound was not solid, and their weight caused them to sink in quickly. When the boys did not return home for dinner, the family and neighbors organized a search. They found the younger brother unconscious, with his head and shoulders sticking out above the sand. When they cleared the sand to his waist, he awakened. The searchers asked, "Where is your brother?" The child replied, "I'm standing on his shoulders." With the sacrifice of his own life, the older brother lifted the younger to safety. The tangible and sacrificial love of the older brother literally served as a foundation for the younger brother's life. (Sermoncentral.com)

Scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ is willing to be like the older brother to us: The Apostle Paul writes: "Both the one who makes men holy [Jesus] and those who are made holy [us] are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call

(us) brothers. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death (Jesus) might destroy (Satan) who holds the power of death and [that Jesus might] free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." "Love never fails." There is a reason that love never fails; it is quite simple. Our love, the love that we serve one another with daily, is not established in us but in Christ. We stand on His shoulders and He lifts us up with His empowering love. This is what makes love strong even when it seems that troubles and hardships are overpowering. His love cannot fail and because His love supports ours, ours won't either. Our shoulders are ready to support others because He supports us. He died to make that possible. Can there be a better friend?

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