

September 28th, 2025 Sermon

Scripture Intro:

How do we become faithful followers of Jesus?

I've had the privilege of knowing some truly wonderful followers of Jesus over my life, and one of the things that often strikes me is not that they're the most successful, or the most outgoing, or pushy about their faith, but that they are genuinely confident in it. Their confidence doesn't come from themselves, it comes from something much deeper—someone much deeper.

Their faith, and their faithfulness to God, comes from a deep sense that they are secure and loved by God, in a way that is not easily shaken.

I remember speaking with one dear saint who was about ninety. She had lived a pretty tough life. She shared with me that she had lost her parents young, and was raised by an aunt and uncle. She then lost a child of five, her second child died of cancer, and her husband who had served in the war had died in his sixties, leaving her a widow for nearly thirty years. She was emotional as she shared, and I didn't know what to say to her. Then she said, "but God is always with me, and I know that he has a good plan."

I don't know what I would do if I had gone through all of that. I hope I would respond like she did. I've found that often it isn't the good times that build a person's faith, it is the difficult times. I've experienced that as well. And I wonder if part of it is because difficult times test our faith. We push a bit to see if God is still there, and whether he's going to let us go or if he's as good as his word.

If there is one main theme in the scriptures it is that God is steadfastly loving and kind to his people. Faithfulness is at the heart of who God is, and who he calls us to be. It's what gives us hope, because throughout all of our own failures and ups and downs of life, we need to know that our God chooses to stick it out with us. God's love for us is greater than our failures and our troubles.

Many of us secretly fear that God might reject us. When fear overshadows faith, we stumble through life wondering if we're even on the right path. We all want to belong, and until we do, most of our actions are out of fear, not love.

That struggle for belonging we feel is something that Paul explores. He reminds us that God calls us to belong before he calls us to become, because in Jesus, belonging leads to becoming. So let's open the scriptures to Ephesians 1.

Prayer for illumination:

Holy Spirit, as we get ready to hear from your Word, open our hearts and our ears to hear and be changed by the power of your word. Speak to us, and be present with us. Make your Word stick in our hearts so it changes how we think and how we live.

Speak to us today, Lord. We're listening. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-23

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will:

To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus.

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him. ⁵ He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the right time—to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him.

¹¹ In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will, ¹² so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might bring praise to his glory.

¹³ In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. ¹⁴ The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵ This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.

²⁰ He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens— ²¹ far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And **he subjected everything under his feet** and appointed him as head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

Sermon: “Chosen to choose”

God is not fickle, he’s faithful.

You probably know that. At least in theory. But it doesn’t always feel like it. When you stub your toe and say Jesus’ name, does he still love you? What about when you haven’t prayed for a week, or a month, or a year? What about when you give in to that same old temptation that’s always creeping around in your mind? Sure, we read that God adopts you as his child, but does he disown you just as quickly?

As we read through those beautiful words from Paul, you probably noticed some themes. There are words and thoughts repeated and repeated because Paul doesn’t want us to miss that this is who God is, and who he is calling us to be, in Christ.

That’s one of the first phrases you might have noticed. “In Christ”. Paul uses it six different times in that short passage. “Christ” is a word that comes up a lot, especially in this passage, and Jesus is the one who the early church knew came and showed that he was the “Christ”, or in Hebrew, the “Messiah”. Christ isn’t Jesus’ last name, it’s his title. The “Christ” is the one who is chosen, who God would send to bring his good plans to earth, and unite him with his people.

As we have explored, this is a pattern that Jesus follows: choosing people like Paul (an apostle is someone who is sent out) to go to others. That’s why Paul writes to people in the city of Ephesus whom he calls faithful saints. Saints are not people who never make mistakes, they are people set apart, or chosen, for a purpose; and Paul is clear that these saints are chosen *in Christ*.

What does that mean for us? Paul says that God has blessed us with *every spiritual blessing*. How? *In Christ*. And he revealed his will to us that he purposed *in Christ*. It is a plan for just the right time to bring everything in heaven and earth together *in Christ*.

Paul continues to flesh out what this means by promising that we have received an inheritance because God had a plan. The world is broken, and we go our own way, but God works everything out in agreement with his will, so that we who put our hope *in Christ* might bring praise to his glory. How do we know this is true? Because God exercised this

power *in Christ* by raising him from the dead and over everything both now and in the age to come.

It's a lot to wrap our minds around. But to start with, Paul clearly wants us to come away with the truth that everything that God does for us, and everything that we do, is *in Christ*. More than that, our very being and identity is *in Christ*. You might remember the verse that says, "anyone who is *in Christ*, is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

God wants us to know that we are not just acquaintances to him. Because we really are a part of Jesus' body, we are *in Christ*. He doesn't know us from afar, or stumble upon us. You might be tired of hearing this, but there is a reason that Paul speaks about it so much. God doesn't want us to lead our lives disconnected from him and from one another. He doesn't want us to feel like we're on our own, or that we need to earn his love: he wants us to know that we are his children.

Children don't get to decide what family they are born into, or are adopted into. But once they are a part of that family, they get to decide whether they will be faithful to their family, or live like they're on their own. Any parent who has experienced distance from a child knows the heartbreak that choice to turn away causes. It doesn't make them any less a part of the family, but it does rob them of the relationship and goodness of knowing they are loved and belong.

From before the world began, God had a plan for you, and for me. He adopted us into his family, and "he chose us in [Jesus], before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him." We are not robots. God does not choose or control our every action and reaction, but he does choose to set us apart and forgive us in Jesus. Before there was even a world for us to call home, God had chosen to do this for us.

We might wonder, "how can God do that with all that I've done, or with all that that person has done?" But that's why it's so vital to recognise that God doesn't love us or forgive us because we have earned it, he loves and forgives us because *Jesus did*. We get caught up with this idea because we're so focussed on ourselves, and what we have done or not done, but the true focus is Jesus. It's why another phrase repeated Paul's letter is "to the praise of his glory."

When we make everything about us, and forget God, we miss the point. Everything that God does for us is also *in Christ* so that when people see his plan at work in our lives, it is Jesus who receives the glory. Often, debates about exactly what words like "predestined" and "chosen" mean cause us to miss this central truth. God has a purpose and a plan, and it will

come to pass. We can try to stand in the way, or we can join him—and those choices really will matter—but they will not stop God’s good plans from coming about.

Because regardless of what else we may believe, it is true that God has called us, and chosen us, and predestined us, and has a plan for us, and that his will, will be done. Why? Because God says it is true. And Jesus said it was true. And Paul affirms that it is true.

So here's the question that matters: if God has already chosen us, why does our response still matter? How do we hold together God's choosing with the call to follow Jesus, to have faith, and to persevere?

I remember struggling through this in 2020. I couldn’t quite understand it all, because on the one hand I saw that God loved me and guaranteed that he would complete what he had begun, but it also seemed like my choices really did matter. A good friend helped me to understand that God’s purpose and his choosing didn’t take away my ability to choose, it was the very reason that I could choose.

On my own, I don’t have hope. Just after the verses we read today, Paul says in Ephesians two that we are dead and enslaved in our sins. We are helpless on our own, and it is Jesus who comes and gives us life and freedom to partner with him, but the freedom only comes after Jesus has paid the price. We don’t choose to be free, Jesus frees us so that we can choose.

Part of understanding that beautiful mystery is recognising how relationships work. I’ve heard it said that relationships are not 50/50: with each person taking on half of the responsibility, they are 100/100. Each person in a relationship needs to give fully and freely for a relationship to become all that it can be. That doesn’t mean that both sides give equally. Our daughters love us, but they don’t pull their weight when it comes to household chores! God’s 100% is far greater than our 100%, but he chooses to do amazing things through us.

So, do we need to choose to follow Jesus in every moment, and be faithful to him with all that we are? Absolutely! And at the same time, it is also true that it is God who chooses us and works all things in agreement with the purpose of his will.

Jesus puts it like this:

“¹² “This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose

you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.

Jesus is completely comfortable saying, “you did not choose me, but I chose you.” He wants to remind and comfort his followers so that in the ups and downs of our lives and choices we will remember and be confident that our hope does not rest in ourselves, but *in Christ*. At the same time, Jesus is very clear that he calls us to follow his commands and to lay down our lives for one another. Jesus’ faithfulness to us is the model for our own faithfulness to others.

We are called to love one another *in the same way* that Jesus has loved us. And as long as we believe that Jesus might let us go, or that it is we who choose Jesus and not the other way around, we will love one another with the same half-hearted love that we feel Jesus has for us.

Knowing that we are chosen by God shouldn’t puff us up, it should give us humble confidence. God has already given us far more than we would dare to ask for, because our security and hope does not depend on our strength, but in Jesus Christ, and his unwavering love and commitment to us. When we truly believe that we are held in Jesus’ hand, and that he will never let us go, we are free to love others with the same kind of faithful love. But if we stay in our insecurity, and live in fear that Jesus might cast us out, then we will never be able to love as Jesus created us to love. In Jesus, belonging leads to becoming.

God has chosen us because he loves us and has a plan for us. Some people think that if God chooses us that it gives us a free pass to do whatever we want to, but just the opposite is true. The more that someone loves you and is faithful to you, the more it makes you want to love and be faithful to them. The promise that we are completely secure in Christ, is what gives us the confidence to give all that we are in service to him. Because it matters what we do, here and now.

When you forgive someone who hurt you, you’re living out your identity in Christ. When you tear down a friend, you’re forgetting who you are. Every choice either reflects your secure identity or reveals your insecurity. God has chosen you because he wants you to see, and know that you are secure in his love so that you can share that love with confidence. Because God is faithful to us, we can be faithful to God.

Once again, Jesus said:

“Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day.”

When we know that we belong in Christ, we become like Christ. But as long as we try to become on our own, we will always feel like imposters who might be found out, and that isn't God's plan for us.

A number of years ago I worked at a summer camp. I was hired as staff director, but many of the staff were people I had worked with as peers, and I felt a bit of imposter syndrome. Fortunately, Bob, one of our elders here at the church, and director at the time, said, "you were hired for a reason, and the staff want and expect you to speak into their lives." That has stuck with me all these years. When I felt like an imposter, I couldn't fulfil my purpose, but when Bob reminded me that I belonged and had been chosen, I could become who I had been called to.

God has chosen us and set us apart. We belong, not to a club, but to God himself. This gives us confidence in the face of callings that seem impossible, and addictions that attack us, and friends who fail, because in Christ, and through his body, we have all that we need.

When your kid has a meltdown in the store and other parents are staring, you don't need to prove you're competent - you're already perfectly loved by God. You can respond with understanding instead of anger.

When you don't get the promotion you deserved, your identity isn't tied to that title - you're already chosen for something far greater. You can congratulate your colleague without bitterness eating you alive.

When the doctor delivers difficult news, your hope isn't in your body's strength - it's in the one who conquered death itself. You can grieve honestly while holding onto unshakeable hope.

You are chosen. You belong. Not because of what you've done, but because of what Jesus has done. The question isn't whether God will be faithful to you - that's settled. The question is: will you live like you believe it? Will you love your friends, your children, your coworkers—even your enemies? Because that is who God has made you to be, and in Jesus, belonging leads to becoming.