

Rev. Dr. Niveen Sarras
John 15:16
May 6, 2018

Who among you think you are for sure going to heaven? Raise your hand, please. Who among you think you are for sure going to hell? Any one not sure if you going to heaven or hell? Obviously not all of you are sure about your salvation. I am sure that heaven is my final destination. I have no doubt. The gospel of John teaches, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" (3:36). Last Thursday, I attended the men's group discussion. It is one of my favorite discussions I have at ILC. We watched a lecture on predestination. According to Calvinists, God predestined or picked those who he will save and bring with him to Heaven before the world was created. They also believe that those people God does not save will go to Hell.¹ We Lutherans are not interested in Doctrine of Predestination. Luther rejected it because it does not have a solid scriptural basis. However, many immigrants Norwegian Lutherans to the United States were interested in this topic. The predestination or election controversy had precipitated the schism in the Norwegian Synod in the 1880s. Many Norwegians in that time wanted to know whether God elected them or predestined them to eternal life.

Chosenness is a critical concept in Scripture. For example, Jesus tells his disciples, in the gospel of John 15:16 "¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you." Jesus has chosen his disciples; not his disciples have chosen him. The election or chosenness is not based on merit.

According to the apostle John, Jesus has not chosen or predestined his disciples to go to heaven, but to bear fruit. Jesus has called his disciples for a particular task. Jesus has appointed and commissioned them to bear fruit that would last. Jesus explains that “If you bring forth the fruit for which I have chosen you, it will follow and come to pass that the Father will give you whatsoever you shall ask in the same sense that I have shown. Bearing fruit is our calling as Christians. This calling is not limited to the disciples. Jesus choice of his disciples is to have a deeper relationship with him and to become more productive followers. Their responsibility is to make disciples. It is our responsibility, too.

Jesus has chosen his disciples not to eternal life but service. “Just as Jesus chose the eleven for this task, so also, now that the Holy Spirit has come, all believers are similarly chosen. We too, like the eleven, were not chosen to receive eternal life, but, having received eternal life by faith in Jesus, we are chosen to serve God and love others.”²

Luther states in his commentary on the book of Genesis that: ‘If I am predestined, I shall be saved, whether I do good or evil. If I am not predestined, I shall be condemned regardless of my works.’ . . . If the statements are true, as they, of course, think, then the incarnation of the Son of God, His suffering and resurrection, and all that He did for the salvation of the world are done away with completely. What will the prophets and all Holy Scripture help? What will the sacraments help?”³ Luther invites us to consider predestination and election in the context of the means of grace: The Word of God and Sacraments. God desires all sinners to be saved through Jesus. God does not predestine

people to heaven or hell. Otherwise, what are you doing here, this Sunday? If we are predestined to heaven, we do not need to come to church and receive the Holy Communion. Let us close the church and go home. You do not need a pastor. I will go home and write articles.

I believe that God has predestined us to one thing. You are predestined to be loved and to be called a child of God. Jesus has chosen you to be his friends not on the basis of anything that you have done for him but on the basis of what he has done for you. Jesus has chosen you to shower you with his love. Jesus has chosen you and his disciples to receive his grace. Our Scripture teaches us that all who believe in Jesus are chosen, or elected, by him to have a place in helping him advance his kingdom on earth.

Now, let us go back to the two questions I asked you at the beginning of my sermon. Who is among you is sure of going to heaven? Raise your hand, please. Who is among you is sure of going to hell? Now you know the answer. But remember my friends. Jesus has chosen you in your baptism to receive eternal life, but, having received eternal life by faith in him, you are chosen to bear fruit and to love one another.

¹Levering, Matthew, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 102.

²Jeremy Meyers, "John 15:16 – Did Jesus Choose Who Would Be Saved?" *Redeeming God*, https://redeeminggod.com/john-15_16-jesus-chooses-election/ (accessed on May 4, 2018).

³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, ed., Jaroslav Pelikan (Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 42.