A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS

SERMON # 4

"What God Can Do With Nobodies"

1 Cor. 1:26-31

It really is amazing when we stop to realize just how profoundly we are impressed when someone famous makes a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. When we see a movie star, or a famous musician or a professional athlete acknowledge Christ, it thrills us to see that. Some where in most of us is the belief that somehow God is able to use "that" kind of person more than he can ordinary person like me! We think that God could do great things with people who have something special to offer. Isn't that right?

Somewhere deep down we really believe that God will be able to use that professional athlete, famous musician or movie star much more than he can just an ordinary person. We think to ourselves, *"Man isn't that wonderful that a person like that made a profession of faith in Jesus and take a stand for him. My God will really be able to use them! God can use someone like that much more than He can a plain ordinary person like me!"* The truth is that this is almost exactly the reverse of what God says in his word. Starting in verse twenty-six I want to bring you a message I have entitled *"What God Can Do With Nobodies!"* This is important because you may not win any awards, you may not star in any athletic events, you may not break any records, or become famous for any major achievements, but cheer up, you are just the kind of person God wants. In fact you are just the kind of person God has always used to do his work. In the text we are going to examine tonight we will see that God not only uses, but chooses to use ordinary people to accomplish the majority of His work. In verse twenty-four Paul says, *"but to those we are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."*

It is the *"called"* that we will be addressing tonight. This is very fitting on Supper Bowl Sunday night, it is the faithful that he is addressing and it is the faithful who have chosen to be here tonight. Then in verse twenty-six he picks up with the called again when he says, "For you see your calling, brethren…" How do you see you calling? What do you understand about God's call upon you life

We want to note two things tonight, the people of God's choosing and the purpose of God's choosing.

First, Paul outlines The People of God's Choosing (vv. 26b-27) . Paul continues in verse twenty-six by saying, *"…. that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."* Please note that verse twenty-six says "*not many*" it does not say *"not any."*

In King James Version translation of James 2:1 believers are warned to *"have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons"* (2:1). The phrase translated *"with respect of persons"* literally means "*to receive one's face.*" When we first meet someone how do we form our initial impressions. Generally speaking it is a snap judgment based on appearance. The passage here in James is a reminder that since God is not a respecter of person neither should we be as Christians. That means that how a person looks, how a person dresses, what person has or does not have, should no enter into an evaluation of a persons worth.

No matter who we are or how important we think we are God is not impressed. If we look again at verse twenty-six we note that Paul sets out how things really are within the church, *"….not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."*

First of all he tells us that God does not only choose the *"wise."* God does not chose his children from among the intelligentsia. Thank God you do not have a certain I.Q. or or have an advanced college degree, in order to serve Jesus. The verse says, not many, not that there are none. There are some very intelligent and educated people who have been believers.

An interesting study is Moses. His 120 year life-span can be divided into three forty year periods. It is said, that Moses spent the first forty years of his life as a part of Pharaoh's household learning to be a somebody (Acts 7:23). Then one faithful day as a somebody he stepped out to exercise what he understood to be God's call on his life. It was an unmitigated disaster, and he ended running for his life, labeled as a murderer.

He spent the next forty years of his life on the backside of the desert learning to be a nobody (Exodus 3, Acts 7:29-30). There in the desert of Midian Moses learned what it meant to be a nobody. For forty long years in the most desolate of surrounding he learned what was to just be a servant.

And the final forty years God took him bring to Egypt to lead the children of Israel out of slavery and across the wilderness (Acts 7:36) showing him how He can make a nobody into a somebody he can use. God can and will strip us to the very depths of our souls if necessary to show us that all the power comes from him.

That is not to say there have not been men and women of great intelligence and holding advanced degrees who have been believers. C. S. Lewis one of the most intellectual men of the 20th century, a man who came to faith from skepticism, was a firm defender of Christianity. Intellect does not have to keep us from servicing the Lord, but most of us can be thankful that God does not choose only those who are brilliant.

Secondly he tells us that God does not only choose the *"mighty." "Mighty"* has to do with power, over people or kingdoms. God does not choose men, as men would choose men. The example of how Israel chose its first king. Israel decided that since all the nations around them had a king, they needed a king as well. That was not God's plan it was their plan. The Old

Testament records that Israel continued to ask God and plead with God to give them a king. Finally Israel chooses a king 1 Samuel 9:2 we find who Israel chose to be their first king. It says that chose, *"Saul, there was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel,….he was taller than any of the people."* The people looked at Saul and said, *"There is a man who looks like a king should look"* but he was disaster. The next time a king was chosen, even before Saul had relinquished the throne, God chose his replacement. God sent the prophet to house of Jesse to pick out the new king (1 Sam 16:1). Each of Jesse's sons was brought before the prophet and the prophet was once again tempted to choose according to outward appearance and so God said to him, (1 Sam 16:7) *"Do not look at his appearance or his physical stature…for man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart."* The youngest son, David would not have been the prophet's choice, but he was God's choice. You and I have been chosen by God because God can look beyond what were and even what we are to what we can be.

Third he tells us that God does not only choose the *"noble."* Again it does not say that God does not choose any but that God does not choose many. "A woman of noble birth once remarked to the great Methodist preacher John Wesley that she was saved by an "m." When Wesley asked for an explanation, she pointed him to 1 Corinthians 1:26, which in the King James Version reads, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." "God did not say 'Not any noble are called," she explained, "but 'Not many noble.' Were it not for that letter, I might be lost." [Today in the Word, April 19, 1993]

God does not choose only the wise, or only the mighty nor only the noble. Wouldn't be a shame if God only chose only those of noble birth to get His work done?

Beginning in verse twenty-seven list the three things that God uses to get his work done.

· God Uses the Things that are Foolish (v. 27a)

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise,"

Two of the world's greatest evangelists of the past were not men of education nor known for their polish and poise. These two men were D.L. Moody and Billy Sunday. *"Billy Sunday was responsible for bringing one million souls to Jesus in the days before radio. But some who knew him said, he was God' joke on the ministry. He murdered the King's English and he never had a course on homiletics or Bible interpretation. He was so unpredictable that he tugged on a man's flowing white beard and went 'honk, honk' right in the middle of the invitation."* [David Jeremiah. "Core Values of the Church: Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians" Vol .1 (1:1-4:5) (Atlanta: Walk Thru The Bible Ministries, 1996) p. 50]

"One of the greatest awakenings of the 19th century began in Cambridge University in England when D. L. Moody and Ira B. Sankey, came to that center of learning…. an Episcopal rector … who had been a member of that class in Cambridge when D. L. Moody came …said that

the whole University was outraged that this backwoods American preacher would dare to appear and speak in the center of culture of the English world. They well knew that he "murdered" the King's English. (Somebody once said that D. L. Moody was the only man he ever heard who could pronounce Jerusalem in one syllable!) So this man said that he and … his classmates who were not Christians determined that when Moody spoke in the chapel at Cambridge they would hoot him off the platform.

Now, 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!" This young man said that he and his classmates were dumbfounded by that beginning. Moody went on and in a few minutes he again said, "Don't ever think God don't love you, for he do!" Something about the very ungrammatical structure of these words captured them. The intense earnestness of this man spoke right to their hearts, beyond all the superficial, external things. That young man said that that day he sought out Moody for a private interview, and Moody led him to Christ. A great awakening came to Cambridge University at the hands of that humble servant of God." [Ray Stedman. "God's Tools." (www.pbc.org/library/files/1 Cor 1:26-31)

· God Uses the Things that are Weak (v. 27b)

"… and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty." The word translated "weak" here means *"sickly, or feeble or impotent.*"

One such person was a lady named Fanny Crosby. *"The hymn writer Fanny Crosby gave us more than 8,000 Gospel songs. Although blinded at the age of six weeks, she never held any bitterness in her heart because of it. Once a preacher sympathetically remarked, I think it is a great pity that the Master did not give you sight when He showered so many other gifts upon you.*

She quickly replied, 'Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been to be born blind.' "Why,' asked the surprised preacher, 'Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior." [Paul Lee Tan. "Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations. (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Pub., 1984) #652 p. 237]

· God Uses the Things that are Despised (v. 28)

'"… and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are."

The word translated "despised" means contemptible. When we think of someone who God uses who was 'despised" the Old Testament story of David and Goliath comes to mind. You will remember that there came a time when the nation of Israel faced a challenge in the form of the Philistine giant named Goliath. Israel and the nation of the Philistines are at war and the

two armies are arrayed on opposite hillsides. Each morning Goliath came out and challenged the army of Israel to select a man to fight with him and whoever won the battle his army would be considered the winner (1 Samuel 17). No one seemed anxious to die at the hands of the nine ft. nine tall giant. Finally David just a young man at the time, goes out to fight Goliath. When Goliath saw David he was not happy, he despised him and he said, *"Am I a dog that come to me with sticks. And Goliath cursed David…"* (1 Sam 17:43). God uses that which was despised to win a victory.

Secondly, notice Paul outlines The Purpose of God's Choosing. (vv. 29-31)

The first purpose of God's method of choosing is in order that no man might glory in his presence. (v. 29) "that no flesh should glory in His presence. "

In Ephesians 2:8-9 the Apostle Paul writes, *"For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. (9) not of works lest anyone should boast."*

The second purpose of God's method of choosing is that all glorying is done in the Lord (v. 30) *"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -(31) that, as it is written,"He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."*

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah wrote (Jeremiah 9:23-24) *"Let not he wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the might man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;(24) But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight, says the LORD*."

The late Dr. Adrian Rogers tells a story about a woodpecker on a tree in south Florida. "As he was pecking on the tree, a bolt of lightening hit the tree and split it right down the middle. The woodpecker backed off and surveyed the situation and then flew away. He later came back later with nine other woodpeckers and announced 'There it is gentlemen, Right there. That's is what I did!' Adrian Rogers then comments, 'When you do that God shuts off the lightening and you really are stuck with what you can do alone!' [As quoted by David Jeremiah. Core Values of the Church. p. 52]

Let me conclude with this statement and this illustration. Perhaps part of the reason that God wants us to focus on him is relieves the pressure of believing that we must have some super kind of faith to be used of God.

> *'Gladys Aylward was a missionary to China more than 50 years ago. (You may remember her story - they made a movie about it called "The Inn of the 6th Happiness").*
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> *She was forced to flee when the Japanese invaded Yangcheng, but she would not abandon the orphans that she had been caring for. With just one assistant, Gladys*

Aylward led more than 100 children over the treacherous mountains toward Free China. Along the harrowing journey she grappled with despair and, at times, a feeling of utter hopelessness. One morning on that journey, after Gladys Aylward had had a sleepless night, a 13 year old girl reminded her of Moses and how he had led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. To which Gladys replied: "But I am not Moses". Then the little girl said, "Of course you aren't, BUT JEHOVAH IS STILL GOD!"

When Gladys Aylward and those orphan children made it through the mountains to safety, they proved once again that no matter how inadequate we may feel, God is still God, and we can depend on Him."