

Sermon Series: Outsider**Sermon Title: Outsider or Insider? Your Choice!****Sermon Presenter: Pastor Larry****Sermon Text: Luke 23:26-43 and Ephesians 1:1-14**

Sermon Summary: This study wraps up the Outsider sermon series! There are three main points in this study. It begins with an overall look at how choices were involved in each of the main texts dealt with in the series. Secondly we take a look at the choices that people made on the day of Jesus' crucifixion. And finally we take a look at Scriptural support for the belief that people have a choice in whether or not they are eternally saved. No one can do anything to earn their salvation, but they do have to be willing to receive the salvation offered to them by Jesus! God chose to love us before we were even born, but in His sovereignty He also chose to give us a will and the ability to make choices. It is God's desire that we chose to accept His love and love Him in return. Jesus made that choice possible through His death on the cross!

Introduction: "I cast my mind to Calvary where Jesus bled and died for me! I see His wounds, His hands, His feet! My Savior on that cursed tree!" Folks, how can we see the extreme cost of suffering Jesus paid for our sins and just flippantly continue to live in ways that dishonor all that Jesus taught and lived? We have God-given choices in our lives. These choices are real and have real consequences! Beginning with our choice to believe Jesus was really who He said He was, admitting we need Him, and accepting Him as our Savior, all the way to our daily decisions of whether or not we will allow Jesus to be Lord of other choices we make in life! I pray that we will all make our major life decisions of morality, honesty, integrity, and priorities by "casting our minds to Calvary where Jesus bled and died for you and me!" Let's pray!

Before we get started today with this last message in the outsider series, I want to review where we've been, the connection to today's message and give you some Scriptural reasoning behind the thesis of my message today. This reasoning is so important that it has formed a foundational pillar for my lifelong ministry. It also serves as a powerful motivation for my ministry, and factors into my goals for ministry. Reaching others brings glory to God and in sharing the gospel with others I am in effect worshipping God with my life and testimony. Just so you know where we're going, there's three main parts to the message today. Review of the Outsider's Series, a look at choices people faced on the day of Jesus' death, and then my Scriptural reasoning for believing we actually have a choice. So sit back, buckle up and we'll take off!

1. Where We've Been - Review

We started this series with a message called Making the Most of Every Opportunity in which we talked about how we should take every opportunity to share the gospel with outsiders! We discussed three ways in which we can do that:

1. Share the good news from Scripture
(Romans Road)
2. Utilize an evangelism illustration
(The Chasm and the Cross)

3. Use your story (Share your testimony)

If you missed that message you can find the podcast, notes and diagrams on our website northshorechurch.net. Dr. Jake Roudkovski then shared with us a message from Isaiah pointing out that no matter the difficulties we face in our lives God is still on the throne, God is still Holy and God is still to be served. Amen to that! Dr. Don Pucik then shared a message with us that pointed out how important one lost soul is to God and how Jesus talked about leaving the 99 to search for the one lost sheep. Man, if that doesn't tell you something about the love God has for lost people, right? Then we had three messages from the gospel of Luke that each give amazing illustrations of our final Outsider message today. We had our story of the sinful woman anointing Jesus with the alabaster jar of perfume! We learned this woman had made a decision to accept the forgiveness of Jesus and become an insider while Simon the Pharisee made a decision to treat Jesus with contempt and remain an outsider. One accepted, one rejected! Then Dr. Nave spoke so powerfully about a demon possessed man whom Jesus traveled across the sea to set free! The man desired to follow Jesus and was given a mission by Jesus...

Luke 8:39 "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

You would think the townspeople would have been thrilled for the man and happy to no longer have a madman roaming the seashore, they were not! They were afraid by what they saw and chose to remain outsiders and asked Jesus to leave them. He left! Jesus will not force His love or His will on any one! That's not in His nature to do. And then last week our Student Pastor, Zach, preached an awesome message on the Rich Ruler, who chose to cling to his idol of worldly wealth rather than receiving the riches of the Kingdom of God which Jesus offered to give him. Remember?

Luke 18:22 ...He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Matthew tells us...

Matthew 19:22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

What was the choice the rich ruler was confronted with? Are you going to continue to chase worldly things for your happiness or are you willing to trust Jesus with your life and follow Him? We may never know, but I think if the guy had said, "Okay, It'll take me a few days to get that done, but sure, I'd rather have a personal relationship with You Jesus than to have worldly riches and fame. I trust you!" I think Jesus would have said something like this, again, I'm just saying I think, or maybe Jesus would have said something like this... "well, now that your heart is in the right place and money is no longer your god, I'm going to show you how you can use your wealth and your ability to gain wealth for a greater good. Now that money is not your

priority you will no longer be its slave and you can make wealth your servant to help others!" Well, we all know that's not what happened and this is another important thing to note: Jesus didn't chase him down and say, "Hey wait, come back, let's negotiate, let's bargain, let's compromise!" That didn't happen. Listen, Jesus will leave the 99 to go after the one, but the difference between sheep and people is that we can choose to refuse the shepherd. Now this little bit is not a review but it will help you see that people's choices impact Jesus' response. Jesus encountered the outsider Zacchaeus, who was a tax collector and wealthy. Jesus went to spend the day with him and this happened...

Luke 19:7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner'."

Luke 19:8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Luke 19:9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

The rich ruler went away sad, Zacchaeus went away saved and a changed man! Now for our final example of Jesus' outreach to outsiders we turn to...

2. The Crucifixion - A Day of Choices

Luke 23:26 As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

Don't miss this: Where were the disciples? A stranger has to help Jesus carry the Cross? There was not a single disciple in the crowd willing to step forward and help Jesus carry the cross? Nope, they weren't there or were unwilling to come forward! We have choices in life and they're not just about salvation for eternal life! There are all kinds of choices we must make that matter and affect our lives here on earth. The disciples were making choices on that day. Simon from Cyrene had no choice but to carry Jesus' cross, but the choice to allow the One who would be hung on that cross to be his Savior was a choice only he could make. Look at the next verse...

Luke 23:27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.

Don't miss this: For women to sing funeral dirges, mourn and wail at a funeral procession was a customary funeral ritual given to those who had respectfully died. This was not done for condemned criminals. But there were women there who knew Jesus was an innocent man so they were bold enough to treat the walk to the crucifixion site as a funeral procession for Jesus. These ladies were also making choices that day. Choices that were dangerous for their personal

safety, but they made them because of their love and dedication to Jesus Christ! But Jesus had an interesting response to their mourning...

Luke 23:28 Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.

Luke 23:29 For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’

Luke 23:30 Then “ ‘they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!” ’

Luke 23:31 For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

Don’t miss this: Jesus was letting the women know that their beloved Jerusalem had rejected the Messiah that God had sent to be their Savior and that very terrible days lied ahead of them. We know from history that there was to be great persecution from the Romans towards the Jews at the fall of Jerusalem. So bad in fact that people with children would wish they had never had those children because things would be so bad! Let’s continue reading.

Luke 23:32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.

Luke 23:33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Luke 23:35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

Luke 23:36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar

Luke 23:37 and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

Luke 23:38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

Don’t miss this: Mark’s Gospel tells us that people passing by mocked Jesus, the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked Him, and then states...

Mark 15:32 ...Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

So both of the criminals had been insulting Jesus, but something happened with one of these criminals. Something changes. He sees what is happening. He begins to listen to himself and the others and realizes how wrong they are about Jesus. And remember, he had just heard this...

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing...”

He sees genuine love in action! He sees an innocent man praying for those who had falsely accused Him, mocked Him and condemned Him to death. So watch what happens next in Luke's account...

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

Luke 23:40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"

Luke 23:41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Luke 23:42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Folks, that's unconditional Love! God's love is not based on your past accomplishments or failures! It's not based on your present abilities or weaknesses! It's not based on your future performance or struggles! Jesus does for you what you could never do on your own! You can't earn your salvation! You can't buy it! And none of us deserves it! But we do have to accept it or reject it! On the day of Jesus' crucifixion there were two criminals crucified with him! One rejected, one accepted! Choices were made. Jesus was on the cross for both men, but only one received forgiveness. The one who called upon the Name of the Lord! That man was nailed to a cross! He was going to die that day! He could make no amends for his past, no reparations for his crimes, not one thing. He could only ask for forgiveness. He could not change anything about his present circumstances. He could do no good works to earn salvation. He could only call upon the Lord Jesus! He could make no promises to God about future behavior, he had no earthly future, no bargaining chips. He could only trust what Jesus had told him concerning his future. "Today you will be with me in paradise!"

If you could ask the thief on the cross who cried out to Jesus what his thoughts were about that day he might say something like this:

"This man beside me was different and while I too had mocked Him, I knew I was wrong!
After I heard His prayer for those who crucified Him I was aghast!
I had nothing good to offer, just a broken, troubled and devious past
I had always been trapped by my choices, now I was bound by those choices to a tree of death.
There was nothing I could do but call upon His name
And at that moment I knew my life had forever changed!

Now I want to spend my remaining time sharing with you my...

Scriptural Reasoning for "Outsider or Insider? Your Choice!"

When I say: Outsider or Insider? Your Choice! I'm relying on God's Word for my rationale. If you want to read along with me we will be in Ephesians 1:1-14.

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...

Paul made sure that everyone knew his authority to teach and lead was not based on his own goodness or wisdom or power, but based on a Divine call from God!

"An apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God!"

Paul was a called out one. And just in case you're thinking God would never call you to be an insider because of your sins and your past, think again. Paul was a persecutor of Christians and had even supported the stoning of Stephen in the early church. He was on his way to arrest more Christians when God called out to him on the road to Damascus.

Paul goes on to say in this verse...

Ephesians 1:1 ...To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Saints are not the few special people appointed by the church to be saints, Saints are those who have received Jesus as their Savior and who are faithful in Christ! You don't have to be a minister, or a priest, or a full time worker in the church to be a saint! The Hebrew and Greek words for Saint mean "Holy". You might be inclined to say, "well if that's what it means, I'm no saint!" Listen, if you've allowed Jesus to come into your heart and soul, His precious Blood washed away your sins when you asked Him to forgive you and you are made holy by what Jesus did on your behalf on the cross! Paul continues...

Ephesians 1:2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a beautiful greeting and he starts off with the word "Grace!" This word is found two more times in this text and eight more times in The Letter of Ephesians. Membership into this special assembly or congregation of insiders was available to the "called out ones!" based on the Grace of God which had been given freely, not to the worthy ones, but to the needy ones willing to admit their need. And what is grace?

Grace [defined] - Undeserved favor of God!

And I love what Paul says later in the book of Ephesians...

Eph 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--

Eph 2:9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

Two statements that go hand in hand...

You don't get saved by works and you don't stay saved by works. You get saved by grace and you stay saved by grace!!

Paul then says...

Ephesians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Make no doubt about it, the blessing of grace can not be earned, it's not for sale, and you and I don't deserve it, but God gives it. He blesses us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ!! Grace is just one of them. You'll discover so many more blessings as you grow in your faith and in your spiritual walk with Christ!!! John put it this way in his gospel...

John 1:16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Now the next few verses are a real stumbling block for some folks, and they were for me until I read them in context...

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

So He chose us before He even created us. Before we had done any good or any bad! He chose us to be holy and blameless in His sight. Now I've got a question for you. Anyone here that can raise your hand and say "I'm holy and blameless"? "I've never done anything wrong and have lived a perfectly holy life"? If we're honest, none of us can say that. God's desire was for us to live holy and blameless lives in His sight, but, as Romans 3:23 says,

"we've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

But all is not lost. There is hope. Let's continue in Ephesians...

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

Ephesians 1:5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

Predestined [defined]

pre - destino

pre - appoint

In the 1828 Noah Webster American Dictionary of the English Language we find this definition...

"To predetermine or foreordain; to appoint or ordain beforehand by an unchangeable purpose."

Now let's read that verse again and add the next verse...

Ephesians 1:4b ...In love

Ephesians 1:5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

In other words, God pre-appointed or pre chose us to be adopted as His children. It was His pleasure and His will to freely give us forgiveness in order to showcase His glorious grace that comes through Jesus, the One He loves!! In fact, let's read on...

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Make no mistake about it, redemption, which includes forgiveness, salvation, mercy, cleansing, new life, eternal life and so much more, comes only through His blood!! There's nothing you could ever do to bring about your own redemption. It's all in accordance with the riches of God's grace - undeserved favor!

Let's read on...

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Ephesians 1:8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,

Ephesians 1:9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

Ephesians 1:10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

He lavished His love and grace on us. He has made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ! And let me point out that it says according to His GOOD Pleasure. God wants what's best for every man, woman, boy and girl in the world. Remember the definition of "predestine"? To predetermine or foreordain; to appoint or ordain beforehand by an unchangeable purpose. God's purpose has never changed from the moment of creation to today. He created us in love and desires to fellowship with us and to love us and to care for us and to walk with us in life. That has never changed. What changed was us.

Isa 53:6a We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...

Let's read on...

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

Okay, it says we were chosen, having been predestined, or pre-chosen, according to the plan of Him who works everything in conformity with the purpose of His will. Remember, the Word says, according to His good purpose. So the word predestine does not mean that God arbitrarily chose some folks to be saved and others to be forever lost. In fact everyone is called to be saved, but not all accept the calling. You might ask, "How do you know this"? 2 Peter 3:9!

2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The late Adrian Rogers, who was an amazing man of God and preacher of God's Word, said this in a message about a doctrine known as 5 point Calvinism.

"Now, if you say that only certain people are elect and only certain people, therefore, can be saved, you take all the "whosoever's" in the Bible and make them a lot of mumbo jumbo. The Bible is full of "whosoever will." Turn to Matthew 23. This is the story of Jesus on His way to Jerusalem... the crowds are there and they're casting their palm branches and their garments in front of Him and saying "Hail Him! Hail Him!" Soon they're going to be saying, "Nail Him! Nail Him!" They're going to be crucifying Him and Jesus knows what's about to transpire and begins to weep great salty tears. Jesus begins to lament over Jerusalem and this is what He says in verse 37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that kills the prophets and stones them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." Now, friend, if they **could not** rather than they **would not**, this is the biggest charade in history. Jesus is weeping salty tears, and He said, "I would, but you would not." That's not unconditional election.

Jesus put it this way when talking to His disciples about the Kingdom of God. He compared the Kingdom of God to a wedding feast a king was planning for his son. Many who were invited refused to come. So they went out into the streets and invited everyone they saw. Listen...

Mat 22:14 "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

The ones who got in are the ones who responded to the invitation. The ones who accepted the call. The ones who put on the robe of righteousness Jesus had died to give them. In fact let's just see if this matches up with the rest of our Scripture from Ephesians...

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

Ephesians 1:12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

Ephesians 1:14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

There you go! Salvation goes to those who put their hope in Christ. Those who choose to believe. Those who accept God's invitation, His call to come out of the world and into His assembly, to come out of the darkness into the light, to repent and turn from the world to Jesus and to be adopted into the family of God. To become an insider, no longer an outsider. Paul could be no clearer than he is in verse 13..

Ephesians 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

So God has chosen to love us, predetermined to love us, but we are included in Christ when we hear the message of truth and believe! So the question is will we accept His choice to love us by choosing to receive His offer! I like the way the writer of Romans put it in the verses surrounding a verse we've already read. Let me show you...

Rom 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Rom 3:24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

When we believe we are clothed in His righteousness, His holiness. Our sins have been forgiven. Remember the wedding feast I talked about. Many were called, but few chosen. The chosen ones were the ones who accepted the invitation. And you might remember, that only one guy was sent away. He wasn't wearing a wedding robe. All guests had been given a wedding robe to wear. The guy that was sent away had refused to wear the robe of righteousness Jesus had died to give him. Will you choose God's mercy, His grace, His love, and to be clothed in His righteousness. Your own righteousness and goodness will not do! You can't work your way to heaven. You can't be that good. You must depend on Him!! Today, you can be a part of God's amazing family. The church is God's family assembled. He wants you to be a part of His family. The adoption papers are ready. You've been a spiritual orphan for too long. You're poor and needy and your clothing is stained, dirty and soured. God wants to put a beautiful, clean robe on you and welcome you to the family. He has invited you, He has called you to be an insider not an outsider! But it's your choice. God will not force His will, His ways, or His love on you. Whatever you decide, Jesus will always love you and God's purpose to love you will never change.

Romans 10:9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Romans 10:11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

Romans 10:12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

Romans 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Saving faith comes down to this: Do you Believe about Jesus or believe in Jesus? Do you know about Jesus or do you know Jesus personally! There is a choice! God's Word is explicitly clear on this! To as many as received Him/to all who call upon the Name of the Lord/repent therefore/ and turn to Christ! This is not about being perfect or getting everything right, it's about your willingness to let Jesus begin a work of grace in your life that will be a lifelong process! If you are unwilling to let Jesus begin the process of sanctification in your life, then that is a rejection of God and His offer of salvation. Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Jesus and allowing Him to help you live a life of holiness, not so you can become holy enough to be saved, but so you can honor God with the holy life you live by His power and grace. We are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus if we have believed in Him, trusted in Him, and called upon His name allowing Him to wash us clean by His precious blood. Listen, you don't get cleaned up to come to God, you come to God for Him to clean you up, but you have to let Him! If you refuse to put on the wedding robe, to be covered in His righteousness you can't be saved. Why? Because we can't save ourselves! The old hymn Just As I Am says it beautifully...

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee
Oh, Lamb of God, I come, I come

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt
Fighting and fears within without
Oh, Lamb of God, I come, I come

Will you come, just as you are? Will you accept Jesus' offer to no longer be an outsider. Let Him begin the transformation of your life today! You won't regret it, I promise!!
Let's pray.