

- The Israelites had a “**ble**s-ed problem.” Back in the days of Father Abraham, God declared, in his plan, that he had predetermined that the nation to come from Abraham would be his **His**—God’s people. He “**cho**se” them, as we would say, and thus they became “the **cho**sen people of God.”
- It sounds nice to be “*chosen*,” but one probably should ask, “*Chosen* for what?”--before deciding the exact nature of that “honor.”
- The Prophet Isaiah records this choosing in the the Lord’s statement: “***But you Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen...***” Then later the LORD declares, “***You are my witnesses...***” That is, you were **chosen** to be witnesses.
- Another prophet, Amos, made one, perhaps unexpected, aspect of this choosing clear. “***You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.***” What? It seems being chosen to be “God’s representative people” brought with it some greater responsibility and accountability.
- Isaiah recorded the LORD speaking to that responsibility of the chosen ones finally being carried out only by a single Israelite—of course that was Jesus of Nazareth—God’s **SUFFERING SERVANT**.
- It will be helpful this morning if we keep those two words in that title for Jesus in mind—**SUFFERING** and **SERVANT**--as we think about the nature of being chosen to be “God’s representative people” in this fallen world. **Suffering and Serving** others were characteristics of that and they are still characteristics of that “chosen” role today.
- Isiah also recorded, “***It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentile, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.***” (*Isa. 49:6*)

- The “tribes of Jacob” and “those of Israel” were indeed the **chosen** people of God! However, they were not chosen to shine God’s light to the Gentiles by lording it over them as superior humans who were a great success either collectively or individually by the standards of the pagan nations around them.
- There **paradigm**—that is their “**framework**” of values, reality, and purpose for life was to be different from that framework of the world’s values, reality and purpose for life.
- Clearly many of the people of Israel missed this different paradigm point from the very beginning on in the nation. So, for example, when they are struggling early on in the wilderness, they decide to do what the world would do in that situation and make their own golden god to worship so they will be safe.
- Sadly, this sort of idolatry, that is, chasing the world’s vision, the world’s success in the world’s ways, autonomously without needing the real God, became characteristic of the chosen people throughout the narratives of the Old Testament.
- Remember, when the One Israelite who would eventually fulfill this choosing of God showed up, one of the things he emphasized was his separation from the paradigm of the world with its ways and measures that didn’t need God.
- Jesus preached in a sermon about his sermons, “*I only speak what God my Father says.*” *My kingdom is NOT of this world and therefore we can infer its’ success is not a worldly success by worldly means.*” *Etc.Etc.*
- Although it is not something I wish to dwell on this morning, some today would suggest, if Israel had obeyed God as his chosen people and been light to the Gentiles instead of seeking worldly success, then they would not have suffered as they did.

- Instead, they would have obtained this-**worldly** success and comfort as their payment or reward for obedience.
- That is a complicated thought. Indeed, some of Israel's suffering was a direct result of their sin. However, if that sin were removed, does it follow they would have lived a *charmed* existence in this world—comfortable, safe, happy and successful by the standards of a world with a paradigm that didn't need God? I think not.
- One look at Jesus, the ultimate Israelite representative, who **did** indeed live a perfect, sinless life tells you this likely would not have been the case. Why? Because he was "*not of this world so this world hated him.*" Because his opposition was not simply flesh and blood and the stuff of this world but was the evil spiritual, powers of darkness who have hated God stood against him and against all those who are his for a long, long time.
- In other words, all of God's people, God's chosen people, the Israelites,—God's chosen Israelite representative, Jesus of Nazareth, and God's chosen representative people today, the church of Jesus Christ, should expect opposition from evil spiritual powers and thus, expect some tough times. This is not always because of sin on their part. It is because there are forces that hate God and his people and his work.
- The role of God's chosen people is, very often, painful because of the reality that they are chosen to be representatives of God while there is still **LITERALLY** a great **war** against God in all this earth! They and we are at war on God's side so there will be suffering as we are serving in war! We should expect and accept that.
- I've taken the time to emphasize this this morning lest some of you conclude from the deeply embedded *quid pro quo* theology of the world that most of us can't dump completely, "we only get what we

deserve.” I emphasize this lest some misunderstand that I am suggesting you deserve suffering as a person and we deserve suffering as a church.

- Some of us have misunderstood and that means we don’t like me to talk about what I am talking about right now. We would rather I find a way to preach sermons that provide answers to make all our suffering stop rather than the reminder that since we were chosen by God, we will suffer along with Jesus for the redemption-mission of the world.
- The Apostle Paul described his own calling, as part of that called-to suffering role, in this way to the *Colossian* church. **“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, the church.”**
- Because we, the church of Jesus, were chosen and called by God to be his representatives on earth, in this time, we are called like Jesus our Lord, Savior, Head, example, and all else he is to us, to **suffer** in the war in order to **serve** God and others. **Suffering and serving**—two words we probably ought to remember so we are not surprised by them in our lives.
- **Are you OK with that? Is that easy for you to understand and to accept?** It was not OK and was never easy for God’s chosen people the Israelites—at least never collectively as God’s people with all that community was meant to display to the world about God.
- Just as Jesus’ church is meant to be a collective demonstration of the *imago dei*—the image of God—that is, to show the world what God is like through love, unity, and shared purpose—Israel was meant to do the same not by any worldly success but by suffering and serving.

- However...Just as Israel was often caught up in the world's ways and measures of success, I am suggesting so is the church of Jesus Christ in our own culture and context—caught up in it.
- I believe WE (***please*** note I said "***WE***" and that is not meant to be a royal "we" or a plural of majesty"—it is a meant-to-include-***me***, we—and me even sometimes as the "chief of sinners" in this sin).
- Sometimes ***we*** get caught up for our selves and our community as the church in the ways, means and expectations of the world because these feel better than the suffering and serving of the spiritual warfare to which we are called.
- Sometimes, whole generations—even whole eras of God's people, just as happened with the Israelites, are caught up and find they have encountered the ***superglue of flypapers***. They become stuck there. Then, if they ever realize they are stuck, it feels the glue is so strong that they will have to sacrifice a "stuck" arm or a leg to be free from what holds them to the thinking and measuring of the world.
- Maybe that was what Jesus had in mind when he said, "***If your right eye offends you pluck it out!***" And "***If your right hand offends you, cut it off!***" Get unstuck even at great expense! These are harsh statements to our ears—actually harsh sounding ***commands!*** But, hey, in war, if your arm is stuck so you can't get away from the enemy wouldn't it be better to cut it off and go armless but live to fight another day? These harsh words are necessary because we are called into a harsh war and sometimes we get stuck to the wrong way of thinking!
- Time out: Please pause and remember that these are Jesus' words and not Raleigh's words. I am just the lucky guy who gets to deliver them to the battle troops of FBC right now 😊

- What I have been trying to say over the past years, months, and now especially these few weeks, and I believe it is biblical, is that sometimes God's people, from every age become stuck to the world's unbelievably powerful *flypaper*—the world's paradigm for life without God.
- So, God in his wisdom and grace—yes his **grace**—brings a signal—a **wake up call**. I have chosen to refer to these wake-up calls as "**resets**." I have chosen that now controversial word on purpose to contrast it to the current call of the world for a "reset" in their terms.
- The world wants to use this time of "**reset**" to move humans even further away from God. God sends **resets** to bring humans, and very often especially his chosen humans for his imago dei mission—today that is the church of Jesus—back to his ways. He uses historical **resets** to make us ask questions like wait a second, "who am I really trusting for my life? And, "where am I really at home these days—both individually and collectively?"
- If God's chosen people awaken, they sometimes discover they can't move very far from what they have become used to and comfortable with because they seem to be stuck—stuck to a very sticky worldly flypaper. It may feel that they drastically have to give up an arm or a leg to escape its glued-to-the world effect.
- Sometimes, the suffering comes in the form of having to let go of what makes them comfortable as the church in this world. Some of that may be the very things that have come to define "church" when they are actually are human traditions, patterns, and preferences.
- Last week we looked at the beginning of an early "wake up call" to the *First Jewish Church of Jerusalem*—a gracious **reset** sent by God to open the eyes of his people to something bigger than what they

were used to and something outside their comfort zone—something different than they expected.

- Last week, I tried to make it clear, that Jesus' first church in Jerusalem was, by many standards, a success in those early days. People were joining them by the thousands. People were being healed. People were learning Scripture and how Jesus fulfilled Scripture as the Messiah. People were lovingly caring for each other's needs. They were meeting and sharing the Lord's Supper.
- ***Then God sent a reset.*** They faced internal struggles and growing opposition from the outside. *"What were they doing wrong to deserve this pain?"*—some probably asked. Nothing. ***Resets*** are often not about sin and failure for God's people but about opening their eyes to something different than they might have expected.
- They had been comfortable with being a successful very Jewish church. It just *felt* right to exclude Gentiles from the Gospel message of salvation and from membership in the NT people of God. Why? Because Jews didn't like and didn't respect Gentiles and their non-religious ways and Gentiles hated Jews for their exclusiveness and feelings of superiority. They didn't accept each other's lives and cultures. In general, they didn't like each other and they kept apart.
- There was generally a cultural and ethnic prejudice on the part of both. It wasn't racial per se —it wasn't based on something as undefining of who a human really is as the color of their skin—as the amount of melanin in their body.
- I suggested to you that, like most of us *might* have reacted when God sent a ***reset*** to open everyone's eyes to a church made up of both Jews and Gentiles united in Jesus Christ—when God said, look up, I want to show you something bigger, I bet they first tried to struggle through the wake-up calls by attempts at ***fixing*** things back

to the way they wanted them and the way they were used to them being as the successful First Jewish Church of Jerusalem.

- I suspect in their heads they heard thoughts like: *“Maybe this will all settle down and we’ll all go back to Jerusalem and we’ll all be that successful **JEWISH** church we were always meant to be forever and ever. Don’t let these hard, painful things that are happening to us change your thinking about our church! Instead figure out how we can **fix** this back to how it was.”*
- So, now, let’s finish this story of that **reset** and a time of change in that early church. Please look at **Acts 10** and scan along with me through that chapter and the next. I find the narrative is fascinating! That is—what it took to open the eyes of the leaders of the first church in that reset makes a great story. **READ Acts 10:1-11:25.**
- Guess where Antioch is located? It’s not in Jerusalem. It is not even in Israel. It was in what was ancient Syria—now modern Turkey.
- Guess who lived there? Mostly Gentiles. Guess who was first called CHRISTIANS? Those hated, rejected unacceptable Gentiles.
- How enlightening it is for Luke to tell us what he tells us in *Acts 11:26* that... **“...the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”** Not Jewish followers of the Jewish Messiah now but now Jesus disciples of this bigger idea--this *inclusive* name and nature of God’s people that we, and the world still recognize today is because of this **reset** and these events... **CHRISTIANS—Jews and Gentiles together!**
- Obviously, this shaped Jesus’ church in a different way than those first believers expected. This reset and this change has had impacts so great that most of us, who are Gentiles, are part of the church of Jesus without first becoming Jewish.
- Do you think this was a painful **reset** for those human, Jewish believers? Do you see how God *graciously* brought a reset, as painful

as it probably was, through persecution, scattering, and then connecting people hated as enemies but now as brothers forever???

Do you see it? Can you feel it? Would you expect anything like it in our day? Would you accept anything like it?

- Did you also notice how the Gentile believers reciprocated in that loving unity by sending and offering to help their now Christian brothers in the very Jewish Judea? God did something bigger than any on them would have dreamed from either side of that great divide. God sent a reset to open their eyes as well so he could do that work *they* would never have invented on their own. God uses his gracious resets in uncountable, different ways in different lives and communities.
- God did this to Jesus' church back then so they would stop and listen and change paradigms. I should say, better God graciously did this **for** Jesus' church back then so it would not remain stuck in its too narrow of view of the church, redemption and the *missio dei*.
- Again, I repeat the question. Do you think God might ever graciously give Jesus' church **today** a time of painful **reset** to open our eyes?
- OR, have we reached the pinnacle of success as Jesus' church—never needing to change much—never stuck in ways that hold back the mission?
- If so, by what metrics are you measuring that current success that needs no change?
- Maybe our metrics of success are more often, "*It's what I am used to. It is what I like. It's what feels successful and significant to me, so it must be what God wants.*"
- Last week I used the racial divide in the United States only as an example of how two people could generally not like each other as

whole groups of people—just as a parallel to understand the animosity of the Jew and Gentile division in their day.

- Neither that sermon nor this one was meant to be directly advocating any certainty I have that God has given FBC a *reset* so that we will figure out how to fix the racial divide that still exists in the church of Jesus in the United States today.
- It is, however, a sermon that says God has indeed sent us, FBC, a *reset* experience with our decision to use the resources of this expensive piece of land in a different way for the mission. We decided we would be willing to move to do that. Then Covid, national strife, political warfare were added to the sense of reset.
- It seems to me that it could be that the racial divide that displays disunity to the world rather than the supernatural unity of God in Jesus' church is one part of what he wants us to wake up and see. Let's not so easily rule that out just because we can't concoct a master plan to fix it in three easy steps.
- In my time, here in FBC, I have seen a people of God who are very often as open as any I have met in the world to people who are different from them. We actually have welcomed people into our midst that have been thrown out of other churches for what they or their children are like or what they have done in their past. You guys are good at that sort of loving people who are not necessarily like you.
- But, could there be an even bigger picture we need to see? Was this a wake up call to our thinking to cause us to see the need for a new paradigm for church? As I have said, I believe it was and still is.
- I will over generalize right now, but I will say our kids and grandkids are not called to be Jesus' church in America the same way we have been that church for many comfortable generations. I'm not simply

talking about preferences of music or choices of carpet color. It is much deeper than that.

- Our world—our nation—our own local missional context is different whether we like it or not. More than most of us have ever experienced, the next generations will absolutely have to be cross-cultural missionaries even taking the Gospel to their own homeland.
- When we have an opportunity to look at this with understanding will we automatically hand them a church that looks like what makes us comfortable—what we are used to—maybe just a little smaller building at a different address—or will God’s *reset* opportunity, I am claiming, open our eyes and hearts to something bigger than our own experiences of church?
- You will need to decide if God would even send any sort of reset today or if we have instead found the final form for Jesus’ church for all the rest of time until he returns—*nothing needed but a little tweak now and then*.
- If you allow that maybe he might send such a reset, you will then need to decide if I am right and he is doing that for us right now.
- If you decide that is possible and that maybe it is right now, you’ll need to decide what that means for you if it turns out there is sacrifice of preferences and things that make you comfortable involved.
- I hope to put it to you next week—you may ultimately need to decide if you too are going to **jump**. I’ll tell you what I mean by that next week, Lord willing. Then I plan to finish with just a couple more sermons along these lines for now. One will tell you what I think we should hold on to as we jump. Another may suggest, just in my humble opinion, some things we might let go as we jump.