# Called and Chosen and Faithful

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This morning I’d like to reflect on a single verse. This is not something I usually do. I think it’s more faithful to scripture to deal with the its whole stories, and songs, and bits of practical and theoretical theology. But last week I went to a little church in Alabama, Shady Grove Baptist Church for gathered worship. And every year, they invite the people who come to lead songs, because this is the day after the annual Shady Grove singing, and a number of singers usually stay after for worship. I had talked to a couple of the leaders of the church the day before, and, based on what they said, I thought they might could — er, might — be in need of some encouragement. The song I led was this —

What poor, despised company

Of travelers are these,

That walk in yonder narrow way,

Along the rugged maze?

Ah, they are of a royal line,

All children of a King;

Heirs of immortal crowns divine,

And loud for joy they sing.

And I was looking for a Scripture that might could (there I go again) that might go along with it, and found this, from the book of The Revelation, 17:14; actually just the second half of the verse:

[God] is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

This is in one of the scary chapters of The Revelation — well, I guess most of them are — but this is even more surreal than most. The scarlet woman is there, Babylon the whore, “The mother of harlots and abominations of the earth,” is described as being drunk, and her strong drink has been the blood of the martyrs. And we have the great Beast, with its seven heads and ten horns that has crawled out of the depths of the bottomless pit to harass and destroy the church. The Beast and Babylon conspire together, with their great power and focused attention, to destroy God’s church. If there ever was a church in need of encouragement, it is this church.

I supposed you’d like me to spend at least a little time identifying whom this Revelation means when it talks of Babylon and the Beast.

Are they the Roman empire and corrupt systems, which surrounded the early church and threatened to destroy it, sending its people underground, throwing them into the gladiatorial arena to be burned or devoured by lions for sport? Amen, they surely were.

Are they the church and state that surrounded the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement in the sixteenth century? The Roman church and state on the one hand, and the Protestant church and state on the other, that hunted down and murdered the Anabaptists because they preached a gospel of non-resistance and the necessity of adults making up their own minds about following the call of Christ? Amen, they surely were.

Or perhaps Babylon and the Beast were found in Nazi Germany, where the Thousand Year Reich sought to exterminate the confessing church, to say nothing of all Jews, Gypsies, and homosexuals. Amen, they surely were.

In these extremes, it seems easy to identify Babylon and the Beast. But I think we’d agree that Babylon and the Beast are alive today —

* in a world system that says it’s more important, and makes it more important, to make a lot of money and spend a lot of money to have a sense of being worthy,
* in a world system where a tiny, tiny minority hold wealth and power,
* in a world system where weapons of mass destruction are commonplace and terrorist actions seem to be on the news, daily,
* in a world system that, at times, ridicules those who try to live a life of devotion to God,
* in a world system that wants the church to identify itself with one political party or the other — that declares to be an evangelical Christian means you’ll be a Republican, or that declares that to be a socially-conscious Christians means you’ll be a Democrat,
* in each of our human hearts, where we see the ways we fail, daily, to follow God faithfully, but instead lust after the pleasures of this world.

I’m sure you can think of other examples.

But, says the Revelation, in this conflict, in the Lamb’s War, we are given a promise, and this is the promise of Revelation 17:14:

“God is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and they that are with God are called and chosen and faithful.”

We can say with confidence that God reigns over everything that oppresses us — the world system, our hearts, illness and pain, poverty, family conflict, job disappointment, even the governments we like and the governments we don’t.

And that three-fold statement at the end, “that that are with God are called, and chosen, and faithful.”

Many of us can attest to God’s call on our lives, that either directly, or wooingly through family and friends, or sometimes through great distress, God has called us to follow and to be with God. When I, in junior high, felt in the depth of my soul a burning desire to “be good,” and that somehow, that meant going to church; as naïve as that might be, that was God calling me. When our family moved “up north,” and I attended a small country church the first Sunday, but decided to sleep in the second, the overwhelming sense of guilt I felt while lying there — that also was God calling me.

And later, I began to doubt this call — perhaps it was just because I was a middle child, and that’s the classic pattern of a middle child, especially of divorcing parents, who wants to make things right. Well, ok — then it was good to remember that I was chosen.

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew

He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me.

It was not I that found, O Savior true;

No, I was found of Thee.

I began to understand that even being a middle child was part of God’s plan to choose and call me.

And, having been called and chosen, God tells us that we are “faithful.” People will disagree on the specifics of what this mean. Some might say it means God calls us to have faith, to trust in God for the salvation that God brings to us through the Lamb. Some might say it means that we are to be faithfully fulfilling the call that God has placed on our lives; in fact, to be good as I hoped I could be, but to be good every day, to be trustworthy. But, of course, these are not at all in conflict. We are to have faith and be faithful. We are to trust in God, and prove trustworthy to God. We are to be dependable soldiers in the Lamb’s War, but also to depend on the Lamb who was slain to protect us in the battle.

Brothers and sisters, when you are feeling “poor and despised,” I hope that you’ll remember these words, that God is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and that you are called, chosen and faithful. Someday we will hear a great voice saying, “Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen.” Some day we will hear a multitude crying, “Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Someday, we shall see the New Jerusalem come down, and the dwelling of God will be among God’s people.

Alleluia, come, Lord Jesus.