

Sermon for Sunday, January 6, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"PICKED OUT PEOPLE FOR A PICKED OVER WORLD!"

Acts 6:1-7

Text: "Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty."
Acts 6:3

Lately I have been learning to do some grocery shopping and I want to tell you men that your wives have skills and abilities you don't know about. If you had to go to the store and do it, I promise you, you would spend probably at least a third more than they do. They have these skills they have gained in shopping. One thing I have learned recently is, never go shopping on late Saturday afternoon. With Sunday coming up the stores don't replenish their stock and by late Saturday afternoon bread racks are empty. The produce counter has nothing but the left overs. The bread truck won't be in until Monday morning with fresh bread and the produce counter is a shambles because the grocer isn't going to put out fresh produce until Monday morning. Everything left is blemished or bruised in some way, so late Saturday afternoon forget it--you have to settle for seconds at the produce counter.

I got to thinking about that several Saturday afternoons ago. I thought, you know in many ways we're living in a picked over world. Take, for example, our natural resources. We have wasted and abused our natural resources at an incredible rate and some of us are just beginning to wake up to the fact of how wasteful we are. Now what we are trying to do is reclaim some picked over gold mines. We are trying to reclaim some picked over oil fields. We are using up our natural resources at a fantastic rate and our descendants are going to inherit a muchly picked-over world.

But as I thought about those things, I realized that humanity is pretty well picked over, too. We men are seconds--we all have bruises and blemishes on us; we have defects and wormy spots. So God's produce counter of humanity is made up of seconds--Saturday afternoon counter of a picked over world--and we call those blemishes, those marks, those bruises "sin." St. Paul says, "There is none righteous, no not one." The Bible says, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." The Bible says, "If a man says he has no sin, he is a liar and the truth is not in him." Yes, a picked over world. God's produce counter of humanity has nothing but Saturday night left-overs. As a matter of fact, that counter never had but one perfect product--only one perfect one--and men took a hammer and some nails and destroyed that one.

The point I am making this morning is this: when the Bible tells us that the disciples told those early Christians to pick out from among them some men with certain attributes, they were picking out men from a picked-over world. And do you know, that early church had lots of problems. People like to idealize the past and paint it with a broad brush of sweetness and light. But it just wasn't so! That early church had problems just like the church today does. They had arguments over things and one of the leading figures of all church history--St. Paul himself--had a falling out with his companion Barnabas with whom he made that first, historic missionary journey. Yes, a picked-over world--a picked-over world because God's produce counter of humanity has only seconds left--people who are spotted and blemished with sin. We ought not to forget that. In this world we are dealing with fallen humanity. We are dealing with men who are sinners. We are dealing with people who are fallen. We are dealing with men within whom the image of God is smashed and shattered.

But the Good News of the Bible is this: God has done something about this bad produce, about broken humanity. God has moved to heal and restore and renovate our brokenness. God has, in fact, redeemed mankind. Because of Jesus God accepts us--picked over produce that we are--as first and finest quality. We are still bruised and broken, but he accepts us in Jesus as though we were without spot and without blemish.

Let me tell you something that I think is terribly exciting: God will do in you as much as you will let him. He will take your life and reshape it as much as you will surrender it to him. If you are not satisfied with yourself this morning, if you are displeased with who and what you are, it is because you have not surrendered enough of yourself to God. The more you give of yourself to him the more he will remake you and reshape you into the image of Jesus. If your life isn't going very well this morning--if there is some sin you can't get rid of, if there is some unhappiness that sits heavily on your heart, if there is some deed that seems to be smothering you, surrender yourself to Jesus and he will make you over into a new creation. We don't have to be as we are. We can be different. It all depends on how much of self we give to him.

It is at this point that I want to bring you back to our scripture this morning. Some of God's people are more surrendered than others of us. Some people have given more of their heart and lives to Jesus than others of us. And that shows. It shows up in their lives. They stand out among us. So, disciples tell the early church, "pick out from among you...." And the fact is, the early church could pick out from its membership certain people who stood out in certain ways. Their surrender to Jesus had tremendous results in their lives. You could spot them. And these were the men that the disciples said the church ought to select to be its leaders.

Before I move on to talk about those qualities of a surrendered life, let me say this to you. All of us can be better than we are. All of us can be different. The more we give of self to Jesus, the more we will be like him. The more we let the inner garbage of self be replaced by the glory of the saviour, the more we will reflect his glory. Nobody ought to leave here today without knowing that you can be better than you are. And if you've got desperate problems, desperate needs, don't leave here today without knowing that you can be different. Life can be better. You ought not to go home without realizing that you can be transformed. It's simply a matter of surrendering more and more of your heart and your mind and your will to Jesus and let Him control it and shape it. You can know the joy and glory of a changed life.

Now, let me talk for a moment about the qualities of a surrendered life that makes a man stand out. The disciples tell the early Christians they ought to pick out men of good repute. Now a man can have a reputation. I've got some friends who have a bad reputation but the Bible doesn't say pick out men with a bad reputation. The fact is most of us don't really have a reputation at all. Now you think about that. Most of us don't really have a reputation neither good nor bad. If someone asks about us, our friends will say, "Well, he or she is a nice person. They don't do this or they don't do that." But that isn't what the Bible says either. The Bible says, men of good repute--that is men who have invested themselves--who have expended their energies in the service of others so that they have generated a good reputation. It's not enough to have a bad reputation--that won't work. It's not even enough to have a non-reputation--that won't work. The disciples told the church to pick out men with good reputations who have invested themselves and created a positive reputation. That is the first qualification.

The second qualification is that we be full of the spirit. The early disciples told the church to pick out men full of the spirit. Now being full of the spirit is not something you do once and then it is over with. The Bible says not only be filled with the spirit--in one place the Greek means be filled and keep on being filled with the spirit. My father-in-law is now a retired minister and back when he was active he once had an elder who was something of a clown and for Christmas one year he gave him this beautiful crystal glass that had all these interesting etchings on it. He invited him over to his home and gave him the glass and suggested he try it out. Well, the thing was, some of those etchings were etched all the way through and when he drank, it dribbled on him and he couldn't understand that every time he took a drink he got wet. I want to tell you that spiritually I am a dribble Christian. I dribble--I leak. I get filled with the Spirit and I leak out. When the level of the Spirit in me lowers what fills it up is the trash and the filth of self and I become a carnal Christian again. The only way I can get that out is not only to be filled but to keep on being filled and float out of my life all of that garbage. The early Christians were told to pick out men full of the Spirit and that means not only to be filled with the Spirit but to keep on being filled and that involves actively participating in your relationship to Jesus Christ so that it never becomes static but that you are dynamic Christians who are constantly being filled with the Spirit.

The third thing is about wisdom. Now I asked you in the beginning when we were looking up scripture to mark Chapter I of I Corinthians and if you look at verse 20 and in Chapter 12 of I Corinthians the wisdom St. Paul is talking about here is not the kind of wisdom you and I think about. Now there are all kinds of wisdom in the world. There is philosophical wisdom. There is scientific wisdom. There is intellectual wisdom. There are all kinds of wisdom, but that is not the wisdom the Bible is talking about because in the first chapter of I Corinthians, St. Paul speaks of the wisdom of the world that by that wisdom the world didn't know God but by the foolishness of preaching, the foolishness of Jesus Christ the world was to know God. Jesus was God's wisdom. The wisdom of God is foolishness to men and then over in the 12th chapter of I Corinthians the Bible tells us of the nine gifts of the Spirit. The first gift of the Spirit is the gift of wisdom. So what is the kind of wisdom that leaders in the church ought to have? Here is what it is. It's the knowledge, the ability to be sensitive to God's will for the church at a particular moment. Now the wisdom we need is not the wisdom of the world but it is the wisdom to know God's will for God's people at a given moment. This is what we must have for the spiritual leaders of our church.

Now your ministers cannot provide adequate spiritual leadership. We have to contribute, yes. But the churches that are going to be great churches--the churches that are going to stand out in the kind of world we live in are going to be churches where people like you have picked out for your leaders men who are full of wisdom. Wisdom to know God's will for God's people at any moment. That is the kind of spiritual leadership we need.

People are talking a lot today about the decline of the church. Well, it's a pretty bad day out there and I want you to look--this church is full! The reason it is full is because God is doing something in our midst. He will keep on doing something only if we have as our spiritual leaders men who are of good repute, full of the spirit and of wisdom to know God's will for God's people in this day. God grant that these men here before me will give us that kind of spiritual leadership and God grant that you will continue to grow into that kind of a people and don't go home today if you need your life changed--surrender it to Jesus and He will make it over.