

# Appointed to Eternal Life

SERMON

By

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TEXT: Acts 13:44-48

PROP: That we were appointed to believe means that the church was appointed by God and given a task therefore we must be a part of the church and work to carry out its appointed mission which is to promote and maintain the means of grace to all the nations of the earth.

## Acts 13:44-48 (ESV)

<sup>44</sup> The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup> But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. <sup>46</sup> And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,  
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." [Isa 49:6]

<sup>48</sup> And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

As we journey through the book of Acts we are often told how to be saved. We are told that salvation is of the Lord and he brings his people to himself as he chooses. Furthermore we are informed of the circumstances in which we find ourselves following our conversion. We are not left to fend for ourselves but we are given pastors and teachers to help us grow in grace and we are given elders and deacons to rule the church and maintain it. **Without exception, those who repented of their sins and believed on Christ unto salvation became a part of the organized church.** It is our duty to place ourselves under the leadership of godly elders, and men who are regenerated by God's grace ought to learn the Scriptures and prepare themselves to take positions of leadership in the church. This is the only way in which the church can stand against the devil. It is the only way in which young men can be trained to be pastors and teachers and it is the only way in which we can carry on an effective mission to the world. We simply must be part of the church of Christ and we must subject ourselves to and support godly church leaders. Just because we have been burned by ungodly church leaders and unbelieving liberalism does not mean we should forsake the church. Rather we must belong to and support churches that are faithful to God's word and who exercise godly leadership and discipline.

The text before us speaks of the first missionary journey of Paul who in the company of Barnabas took the gospel to a number of cities in Asia Minor. Sailing from Antioch in north Syria they traveled to the island of Cyprus then on to Antioch of Pisidia. As was their custom they went to the synagogue first. After reading from the Torah, Paul was given the opportunity to address the congregation. He summarized the basic history of Israel which led to the coming of the Messiah noting that God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus. John the Baptist testified that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, whose sandal he was not worthy to untie. He reviewed the events that led to the crucifixion of Jesus and told of his resurrection and of those who witnessed it. Paul reminded his hearers of several Messianic Psalms and concluded with these words, *"For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: "Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.' ""* (Acts 13:36-41, ESV)

As usual most of the Jews refused to believe the gospel but the believing Jews and Gentiles begged Paul to preach the gospel to them on the next Sabbath and almost the whole city turned out to hear him. Paul reminded his hearers that Jesus was sent by God the Father as a light to the Gentiles and salvation to the ends of the earth. We read, *"And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed."* (Acts 13:48, ESV) Once again we are told **how to be saved**. Paul tells us that we must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. As many as believed on the Lord Jesus Christ were saved whether they were Jews or Gentiles. Furthermore Paul tells us how **it comes about that we believe and are saved**. We believe on Jesus because we were **appointed to believe**. The word translated "appointed" is perfect passive, meaning that all who believed had been determined before hand to believe. God chose them from before the foundation of the world to be in Christ. It means that we were determined to believe or predestined to believe.

J.I. Packer wrote:

"While we must always remember that it is our responsibility to proclaim salvation, we must never forget that it is God who saves. It is God who brings men and women under the sound of the gospel, and it is God who brings them to faith in Christ. Our evangelistic work is the instrument that He uses for this purpose, but the power that saves is not in the instrument: it is in the hand of the One who uses the instrument. We must not at any stage

forget that. For if we forget that it is God's prerogative to give results when the gospel is preached, we shall start to think that it is our responsibility to secure them (the results)".

That these believers in Antioch "had been appointed" to believe, indicates that their personal belief in Christ was determined long before they actually believed. It is very clear in Scripture that this is the case.

### **Ephesians 1:3-6 (ESV)**

#### **Spiritual Blessings in Christ**

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

The whole plan of redemption was determined by God before he made the world.  
Speaking of Jesus

### **1 Peter 1:20-21 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you <sup>21</sup> who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

To say that Jesus was foreknown before the foundation of the world is to say that he was foreordained to be the Lamb of God. We must remember that the foreknowledge of God is always causative as well as cognitive. When God foreknows something he renders it certain to happen. There is no sense at all in which our individual salvation depends the smallest amount on what we say or do.

Speaking of the great enemy of God, the "beast," we read, *"Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain."* (Revelation 13:7-8, ESV) The only ones saved are those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life and we see here that the names of the saints were written in his book before the world began. How can there be any doubt that God foreordained his church before he created the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah writes concerning this same understanding where we read, *"But Israel is saved by the Lord with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity. For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the Lord, and there is no other."* (Isaiah 45:17-18, ESV) God created the earth for the express purpose of causing it to be inhabited with people and he created it to be the location of redemption. As such, the earth is unique in the entire universe. He chose his people, then he made the earth to accommodate them and he made the rest of the universe for "signs and for seasons and for days and years." God then sent his beloved Son to die for his church and the Holy Spirit to prepare them for glory. Without question, the creation of man and whole plan of redemption was decreed by God before the physical universe existed and in particular, the decrees of God included our personal salvation, for we as individuals were chosen to be in Christ before the foundation of the world. As our text puts it, *"as many as were appointed to eternal life believed."*

Our personal salvation was decreed by God and comes about in every respect through his power alone as is taught in many texts. Consider for example, *"But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, ESV) Paul tells us that God chose the Thessalonica believers to be saved and he tells us how they were saved, namely, through sanctification by the Holy Spirit and belief in the truth to which they were called by the preaching of the gospel. There is nothing said about any part of their salvation that they provided by themselves. God chose them and saved them and called them in whom he worked faith. The meaning of the word that is translated by the phrase *"as the firstfruits"* is not clear. Some Greek texts use a word that means "from the beginning" and because there is no time reference here it could refer to the beginning of the believer's life or to the beginning of time at creation. The term "first fruits" has the idea of preeminence or prominence which comports well with general context of these epistles to the Thessalonica church. Paul frequently gives thanks to God for the faith and good example of these believers. But for our purposes here we must see that Salvation is of the Lord alone.

Then of course there is that well known passage, *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."* (Romans 8:28-30, ESV) Whom God foreknew, he

also predestined, also called, also justified, and also glorified. God's foreknowledge issues in the complete salvation of his people. As we have noted before, the foreknowledge of God is never merely cognitive but is always also causative. It renders certain what is foreknown.

In 1610, just one year **after** the death of James Arminius (a Dutch seminary professor) five articles of faith based on his teachings were drawn up by his followers. The Arminians, as his followers came to be called, presented these five doctrines to the State of Holland in the form of a "Remonstrance" (i.e., a protest). The Arminian party insisted that the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism (the official expression of the doctrinal position of the Churches of Holland) be changed to conform to the doctrinal views contained in the Remonstrance. The Arminians objected to those doctrines upheld in both the Catechism and the Confession relating to divine sovereignty, human inability, unconditional election or predestination, particular redemption, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. It was in connection with these matters that they wanted the official standards of the Church of Holland revised.

Consequently the Arminians hold that God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. Thus in the Arminian view, the sinner's choice of Christ, not God's choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

The Arminian would like Romans 8:29-30 to read as follows:

"For from the very beginning God decided that those who came to him—**and all along he knew who would**—should become like his Son, so that his Son would be the First, with many brothers. And having chosen us, he called us to come to him; and **when we came**, he declared us 'not guilty,' filled us with Christ's goodness, gave us right standing with himself, and promised us his glory."

This Arminian distortion of the Bible is known as the Living Bible and is the work of a single translator the late Kenneth Taylor. More than 40 million copies of this heretical paraphrase of the Bible have been sold. However, Paul does not say that God merely knew about those who would believe but that he "foreknew them." God foreknew them in that he did something for them. It is tantamount to saying that God set his love on his

people or that he marked them out for saving grace. Paul relates all of these things that God does for us with the conjunction "kai" meaning "and" or "also." Thus the passage literally reads, whom God foreknew, he also predestined, also called, also justified, and also glorified. Since it is obvious that God does not predestine, call, justify and glorify every human being it follows that he does not causally foreknow every human being. God certainly knows all things but he does not foreknow everyone unto salvation.

Another example of this is seen in the text, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"* (Matthew 7:21-23, ESV) Our Lord cannot be saying I know nothing about you. He obviously knew everything about them—their evil character and evil works; hence his meaning must be I never knew you unto salvation. I never set my love upon you. Therefore for these believers in Antioch of Pisidia to be appointed to eternal life requires us to see that no one can be saved apart from the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. God brings his people to himself just as he chooses to do, but what actually happened to the church at Antioch? Everywhere Paul preached the gospel he left the believers in the hands of those who help them and teach them. Often Paul himself stayed for a period of time to teach those who had turned to the Lord. In this case he and Barnabas must have for a period of time such that, *"-- the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium."* (Acts 13:49-51, ESV)

We read that there were many Jews and devout converts to Judaism who followed Paul and Barnabas. These were likely the ones that remained to teach the Torah and its Messiah to the people whom God was pleased to save. The church cannot survive if it remains as loosely connected groups of untaught people. But God in his sovereign mercy not only sets his saving love on many people but he provides for their strengthening through the means of grace and godly leadership. *"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."* (Ephesians 4:11-14, ESV)

We are not left to fend for ourselves but we are given pastors and teachers to help us grow in grace and we are given elders and deacons to rule the church and maintain it. Without exception, those who repented of their sins and believed on Christ unto salvation became a part of the **organized** church. It is our duty to place ourselves under the leadership of godly elders and men who are regenerated by God's grace who ought to learn the Scriptures and prepare to take positions of leadership in the church. This is the only way in which the church can stand against the devil. It is the only way in which young men can be trained to be pastors and teachers and it is the only way in which we can carry on an effective mission to the world. We simply must be part of the church of Christ and we must subject ourselves to and support godly church leaders. Just because we have been burned by ungodly church leaders and unbelieving liberalism does not mean we should forsake the church. Rather we must belong to and support churches that are faithful to God's word and who exercise godly leadership and discipline.

That we were "appointed to believe" means that the church was appointed by God and given a task, therefore we must be a part of the church and work to carry out its appointed mission which is to promote and maintain the means of grace to all the nations of the earth.