

“APPOINTED TO ETERNAL LIFE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: Acts 13:42-52

Prayer: Holy Father, by your Holy Spirit you caused your Word to be written down for us through your servants, the prophets and apostles. Now by your Spirit cause your Word to be written on our hearts, through me your servant, and may it bear fruit in our lives for your glory.

Introduction.

We live in times that try men’s souls, in a time of great conflict, strife, and division. We live in a time when civil discourse seems lost, in a time when battle lines are drawn and defenses are up, offenses are quickly taken. Respect is out the window and reviling of leaders and hurling accusations is the order of the day.

And just when we are thinking we live in a unique time, in an unprecedented time, we read something from 20 centuries ago that sounds like today. Mobs are being incited, speakers are being interrupted and shouted down, authority is questioned and disrespected, and truth is being pushed aside for lies.

Polarization is nothing new, divided opinions and worldviews are nothing new. There is nothing new under the sun, we live in a world divided between light and dark, truth and lies.

Acts 13:42-47, rejecting in spite of truth.

You may remember when Paul and Barnabas started this first missionary journey on the island of Cyprus they encountered opposition from one man, Elymas the magician. And nothing came of it. All of that is about to change.

At first there was a great response to the Gospel and a real hunger for more of the Word of God, begging for more. But the next Sabbath when almost the whole town shows up to hear the Word of God, everything goes south. Filled with jealousy and contempt, some of the Jews reject the Gospel as fake news.

Over what? Over the numbers, popularity? Over the Gentiles were being treated equal to the people of God? Did they see what they thought to be their inheritance, being divided up and trampled under the feet of pagans outside of the covenant?

Pride, envy, jealousy, ambition, competition, stir up so many ungodly emotions is all of us. When argument and debate don't work, out comes blasphemy, vile accusations, lies.

This is our world, we have lost the ability to have civil discourse. We are past talking, listening, understanding, having our differences in a civil manner. Now it is violence, blasphemy, open rebellion against God.

They reject Christ and the Gospel, and cast judgment on themselves as unworthy of eternal life. They are rejecting the greatest blessing ever offered the church. The Jews had been the chosen nation from among all the other nations. They had the place of preeminence and honor, they had the right of the first born, theirs was the law and the prophets, theirs was the adoption, and they rejected it.

Who throws away eternal life? Can you imagine throwing away eternal life? Can you imagine treating eternal life like something cheap, to be discarded? How hard must a heart be to throw away the most valuable thing ever offered on earth, Jesus Christ?

Like Esau giving away his birthright for a bowl of soup.

Paul gave the Jews the honor of having the right of first refusal. It was theirs for the taking.

This shows how serious is their sin and their rejection of God and God's grace.

Jesus didn't come to earth to fail, to shed His blood in vain. He came to save and save He will. His light will shine and His glory will be seen, in every nation. Now is the Gentiles time, now is the time for the Gospel to be spread to the end of the earth as a blessing to all the families of the earth. Eternal life is offered to all by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Acts 13:48-52, rejoicing in spite of trouble.

When the Gentiles heard this they were overwhelmed with joy. May your salvation always be a source of joy for you, that you have been adopted and made an heir of so great a gift.

But why did they believe?

Why did they believe a man they had never met, telling them fantastic stories about someone raising from the dead in a faraway place? This is the stuff of myths or

conspiracy theories. How in the world would pagans with their own set of gods and ways of thinking about the world, just abandon all of that on the word of one stranger?

Try to imagine hearing about Jesus for the very first time, from someone from Mozambique. How likely would you be to drop everything and believe everything they told you, and totally change your life and philosophy?

The conversion to Christianity of the Greco-Roman world with all its gods and goddesses and fertility cults and sexual immorality and pagan rituals and competing philosophies and philosophers and polytheism and atheism is nothing short of a miracle, an act of God.

Luke tells us in ten words. “And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”

Up to this point Luke has emphasized the human side of the drama of salvation. We have heard about Paul and Barnabas coming to their city, we have heard Paul preach the Gospel to them and enlighten them concerning Jesus, they have seen the light, and we have heard about their responses, both positive and negative.

In ten brief words, Luke inserts a theological comment to show the other side of the coin of salvation, God’s side, God’s work, God’s hidden, mysterious, foundational role in salvation.

There are two sides of this coin called salvation, human and divine.

From our side, from the ***human perspective*** we believe by faith. We become sons of God by faith in God. What must I do to be saved? I must believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that Jesus is Lord. All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom 10:13).

In that moment or slowly over time, you saw the light, you warmed to the truth, you believed by faith and you embraced it, claimed it, made it your own. In our text we see the Jews refusing to believe, refusing the offer of eternal life, and we see that is on them, the guilt is theirs, the responsibility is theirs.

But there is another side to this coin of salvation, God’s side, the ***divine perspective***. It is a profounder mystery. God doesn’t chose us after we believe, but before we believe and plants the seeds of our faith in our hearts, it is a free gift, it is by grace, and not by any merit of our own.

When Lazarus was dead in the tomb, Jesus cried out in a loud voice and called him, saying, “Lazarus, come out!” At that point, Lazarus didn’t ponder Jesus’ words and decide whether or not he would come out. The call of Jesus breathed life into Lazarus’ dead body and he was raised from the dead. And after that Lazarus obeyed and came out.

When we are spiritually asleep or dead, and God calls us awake, we don’t say at that moment that we did it, God did it. We don’t make ourselves into Christians, God makes us a Christian. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Dead people don’t make themselves alive, it takes a resurrection.

If you find a turtle on the top of a fence post, you know it didn’t get there by itself. When you find a proud, selfish, spiritually dead sinner turning to God, acknowledging his sin, humbling himself and submitting himself to Jesus Christ, when you see that, you know the person didn’t get to the top of that fence post by himself.

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, also raises us from the dead. It is the power of God that must work first.

You are loved because God first loved you, before you loved Him.
You are saved because God first saved you, before you received His salvation.

If God had not acted first, if God had not taken the first step, none would be saved, all would be lost.

We saw in Paul’s outline of history last week that God is the God who acts, who initiates, who chooses, who calls, who works. Just as God was active in every event in Israel’s life leading them to salvation, so He is active in every event in our lives leading us to salvation. This is the action of an infinitely loving heavenly Father.

We know these things to be gloriously true, life-changingly true, because God enabled us to. The Gentiles are rejoicing, not because they have found Jesus, but because they have been found by Jesus. You can share the good news about Jesus with total confidence God will apply it savingly to those appointed for salvation.

Nothing can stop the spread of the Word of God.

Acts 13:50 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.

Picture yourself a brand new convert, hearing and believing this new Gospel from these outsiders. You are filled with a new joy, with a new life, with a new faith.

And then you see the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city all opposing this new teaching. All the important people, the rich people, the smart people, the leading business men, the people who hold the purse strings in town, the people you had looked up to, they are opposing, resisting, shouting down, and running out of town these messengers.

Imagine how confusing that might be. Why are they hostile to this Christ and His Gospel and His servants? What do they know I don't know? What are we to think of this new teaching when it has this kind of opposition?

What do you do when all the cool kids make fun of your faith? When the university professors look down from their ivory towers and say the Bible is full of errors? What do you do when the scientists mock your belief in creation? What do you do when all the people, in the name of compassion, ridicule your opposition to abortion?

What do you do when you feel ashamed or embarrassed to let it be known that you actually think sex before marriage is a sin or same-sex unions are contrary to the wisdom and will of God? What do you do when you are accused of being a hater because of your faith in Jesus Christ and your belief the Bible is true? What do you do when you are accused of being on the wrong side of history, on the wrong side of common sense or worldly wisdom?

These new converts were being shaken to the core of their new found faith. They were novices, rookies, they were weak in understanding, they couldn't debate with these people, they were low-born, unimportant, insignificant.

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Acts 13:49, 52 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. ... 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

What a beautiful conclusion. This is remarkable considering what has happened to them. They are filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit have been counted worthy to suffer for Christ and His Gospel.

If the whole world should align against us, if the whole world should say we are wrong, if those at work or on the playground or on our social media say we are false or stupid or whatever, may we have the peace and joy and faith from the Holy Spirit.

Like when Martin Luther appeared before Emperor Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, and was told to recant his reformation writings, answered back, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God, I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither honest nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

When Luther was praised for his role in the reformation he said Philip Melanchthon and I just sat in the tavern drinking beer, the Word of God did everything. God does it all the Word of God spreads and those He has appointed to eternal life believe and are saved.

Implications and application.

Continue in the grace of God. Submit to the grace of God, wherever you see it or hear it.

The grace of God will never be found wanting in those who desire it, seek it, submit to it.

Appointed to Eternal Life

The Jews thrust aside eternal life, the Gentiles were joyfully appointed to eternal life. Christians today may be said to be on the wrong side of history, just make sure you are on the right side of eternal life.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

What is the point of this truth? It is truth that exalts God as the God of our salvation, He gets the glory. It is truth that humbles us, it is cause to be grateful and cause to worship. If we had been left by ourselves we would be lost, without hope.

Ephesians 1:3-6 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, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.