

Series: Acts

Lesson #76

Title: Times and Bounds Appointed

Scripture: Acts 17: 22-34

Date: July 9, 2009

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey

The Lord Jesus says life eternal is God knowing you.

Matthew 7: 22: Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23: And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

The Lord Jesus Christ tells us life eternal is you knowing God:

John 17: 1: These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: 2: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 3: And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

God knowing you and you knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, that is life eternal.

How do sinners come to know God? How do sinners come to believe that they are complete in Christ, to adore the Savior, to be made a willing bond servant to Christ the Master? This is the very issue that Paul is addressing in his message to the Athenians.

Acts 17: 23: For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship...

There are various words in Hebrew and Greek which is translated "worship". Sometimes you find it describing those in the temple of the Lord; sometimes you find it describing idolaters as it does here. Sometimes it describes the believer offering the very sacrifices God ordained and sometimes it describes the unbeliever in the temple of the Lord offering the very sacrifices God ordained. Sometimes you find it used of the believer not in the temple but in the wilderness or at Christ's feet in tears. So what is true worship and where is it found?

Acts 17: 24: God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25: Neither is worshipped with men's hands as if he needeth anything seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things

The word "worship" here is a different word—ther-app-yoo-o. This is the only place it is used in scripture. It means to complete, to adore and to serve.

God is not completed, adored and served with men's hands as if he needeth anything seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. It is God who completes a sinner in Christ, who creates adoration in the heart, and who causes the believer to willingly serve him.

Paul is declaring what Christ Jesus told the woman at the well when he proclaimed to her that "true worshippers" worship in spirit and in truth—in the spirit of the new man given by God, created by the Holy Spirit and in Christ the Truth.

Paul is declaring what we have heard Christ Jesus declare on his sermon on the mount:

Matthew 5: 8: Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

The purged in heart, have singleness of heart, simplicity of heart, a heart set on Christ alone; Happy are the pure in heart because God knows you and you know the living God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent and you see God by faith. God needs no aid, no images, no strength of man or man's hands to draw his people to worship him, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

Tonight we will take the rest of this passage. Paul continues to take away all vain confidence in the flesh.

Acts 17: 26: And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

Not only were the Athenians proud of their knowledge, of their temples, their images and their service, they were also proud of their race. They boasted that they sprang up out of the soil of Greece. They considered themselves better than those outside of their nation. These were all devices they imagined whereby they set themselves up.

GOD MADE OF ONE BLOOD ALL NATIONS OF MEN

All men are of Adam. In that part of us which is the product of Adam we ARE spiritually dead and that part of us will always be so. That goes for believers and unbelievers.

Romans 8:10: And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness.

The life of the believer is the hidden man of the heart. When Peter instructed the wives, concerning adornment, he said:

1 Peter 3:4: But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

God made all men of one blood for to dwell on all the face of the earth. In Adam all died. So we can find no confidence in father or mother, our race, our nationality, etc—trace it back and we all come to Adam.

GOD HATH DETERMINED THE TIMES BEFORE APPOINTED

We have seen the various nations and monarchies as we study Isaiah—the Assyrian reigned until the time which God had before appointed then their reign ended; the Babylonian empire lasted till God's appointed time then it ended; the Moabites reigned until God's appointed time then it ended.

No matter what sinners do to this earth, God has before appointed seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, day and night. They shall remain during the whole time that God has appointed for this earth to remain.

Genesis 8: 22: While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

Likewise, the times of a man's life are before appointed by God.

Job 7: 1: *Is there* not an appointed time to man upon earth? *are not* his days also like the days of an hireling?

He has appointed a time when this earth shall be dissolved but the Lord said:

Acts 1:7: And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

GOD HATH DETERMINED THE BOUNDS OF OUR HABITATION

God determined the bounds of our dwelling. He determines how long you will live in a certain place and when you will move to another.

There are three things that we can be assured of:

1. Our life will come to an end; our days upon earth are numbered.
2. Our times are determined, in the counsel and decree of God, how long we shall live and when we shall die. Disease is the servant of God.
3. The bounds God has fixed no man shall pass; his counsels are unalterable. Nothing comes to pass by chance. We are no more governed by the Stoic's blind fate than by the Epicurean's blind fortune.

Why are our times and our bounds set by God in this way?

Acts 17: 27: That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: 28: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

God set our times and our habitation for this chief end: that they should seek the Lord. It says merely feel after him, and find him.

He is not far from every one of us. Are you alive physically? You are alive because in him you live. Are you able to move about? You move about because in him you move. Do you have a being? You have a being because it is in God that you have that being.

THE POINT OF THE MATTER

So what is Paul's point in bearing out that all nations are of one blood, our times and bounds of our habitation are set? Two things:

1) The reason sinners do not seek the Lord, don't even feel after him, is not because of God's distance from the sinner, but it is because the sinner hates God and has no desire to even seek him, much less find him. When we hear the Lord Jesus say, "No man can come to me except the Father draw him" no man should think, "Unfair." Though God is so near to every one of us,

Romans 3: 10: As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12: They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Sinners will imagine philosophies, we will build temples and images, we will worship our piety and service to God, we will exalt ourselves in pride of race, face, place, and grace, we will attribute our times and our habitation to luck or blind fortune—but there is none that seeketh after God!

2) Secondly, God set the times and the bounds of our habitations because the people whom he has chosen are his portion and he will save them. In Deuteronomy 32: 8, the Spirit of God is referring to the tower of Babel when the LORD scattered the sons of Adam, and he says why he did it.

Deuteronomy 32: 8: When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. 9: For the LORD'S portion *is* his people; Jacob *is* the lot of his inheritance. 10: He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. 11: As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: 12: *So* the LORD alone did lead him, and *there was* no strange god with him. 13: He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; 14: Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape.

Read Psalm 44: 1-4.

Read Isaiah 43: 1-7.

Everything God did in appointing the times and setting the bounds of the habitation of the nations was done so that those heathen nations would be the caretakers of the land of Canaan so it would be ready when God delivered his nation Israel into it. And this was done when as yet the nation of Israel did not even exist. So it is with spiritual Israel: before the foundation of the world, the inheritance of God's elect was promised, prepared, provided, secured and reserved in Christ. Everything in this world serves to bring God's elect into our inheritance. Because the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He shall have his people.

If your body is the temple of the living God it is because before the foundation of the world God determined that you would be his habitation. God appointed the time and bounds of your habitation that you would dwell in him and he in you through the blood of Christ Jesus.

If there was a time when God sought you and drew you in sovereign grace to the feet of Christ Jesus, he appointed the time of love and the bounds of your habitation in Christ.

Every nation is bound for your sake, believer. Every time appointed is held in place because of you, believer. God's people are his portion and his inheritance and he will have them.

Deuteronomy 32:39: See now that I, *even I, am* he, and *there is* no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither *is there any* that can deliver out of my hand.

Seeing how sovereign, how omniscient, how omnipotent the true and living God is in salvation and in providence, let us flee to God and confess:

Psalm 31:15: My times *are* in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.

THAT IS PAUL'S APPLICATION

Acts 17: 29: Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

God is Creator, we are the created. He is the Potter we are the clay. Every sinner is at the mercy and grace of the triune God.

Acts 17: 30: And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Christ has come now! Turn from everything else and flee to him!

Colossians 2: 8: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Be not spoiled by philosophy, the vain deceit of men, the tradition of men, the beggarly elements God ordained to point us to Christ--and not after Christ.

Colossians 2: 9: For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

Come to God on no other ground but his mercy and grace. All things which the sinner needs are the gift of God and all fullness dwells in Christ.

Justifying righteousness.

Sanctifying holiness.

Remission of sin.

The new spirit wherein we are made complete, wherein we adore and serve Christ in spirit and in truth is the Spirit of Christ

The gift of faith and repentance and all the graces given.

Strength to perform good works.

Strength to bear and suffer reproach and persecution for Christ.

Our preservation to the end.

Our final resurrection with a right and title to eternal glory.

All are of God in the person and finished work of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 11: 35: Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? 36: For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen

God delights in mercy because he delights in Christ Jesus his Son. But God does not delight in your sacrifice.

Matthew 9:13: But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Acts 17: 31: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Do you want to meet God and answer to justice based on the sacrifice you have made? Do you want to stand in your own righteousness? There is a day appointed by God in which he will judge the world in righteousness by Christ Jesus, the LORD our Righteousness.

Isaiah 28:16: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. 17:

Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. 18: And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. 19: From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only *to* understand the report. 20: For the bed is shorter than that *a man* can stretch himself *on it*: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself *in it*.

HOW CAN I BE SURE GOD WILL JUDGE THE WORLD BY CHRIST JESUS?

Acts 17: 31:...he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

To the believer the resurrection of Christ Jesus is reason for great joy. Why?

Romans 4: 25: Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification

By his obedience and death Christ Jesus made satisfaction to God for us. In raising him from the dead, God testifies to the believer that God is satisfied, everlasting righteousness is ours.

But the unbeliever finds no joy in the resurrection of Christ

Acts 17: 32: And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: 32: and others said, We will hear thee again of this *matter*.

SOME MOCKED

They called Paul a babblers because he preached Christ Jesus the Lord to them. Now they mock because he says Christ is raised from the dead.

Unbelievers mock at the resurrection because if men are truly resurrected then it might just be so that Christ Jesus is truly raised. If Christ Jesus is truly raised then sooner or later every knee will have to bow and confess him to be King of kings and Lord of lords. Natural man tries to put out of his mind that one day his very best deeds will be judged next to the perfection of Christ's righteousness and the sinner shall come up wanting. The carnal heart hates God so much that a sinner would rather die and go to nothingness than to be made to bow to Christ Jesus the Lord.

WE WILL HEAR THEE AGAIN OF THIS MATTER.

Consider the pride and arrogance of that statement.

Would you listen to God speak then say, 'I will give you another opportunity to speak to me about this?'" Through Paul, the God of heaven and earth just said to these men that he is God and there is none else. God drew very near to them. The problem was that their hearts were very far from him.

Isn't that what you are doing when you hear the gospel of Christ and do not flee to Christ!

PROUD MEN DO NOT DICTATE IF THEY WILL GIVE THE KING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH ANOTHER HEARING

Acts 17: 33: So Paul departed from among them...18: 1: After these things Paul departed from Athens...

The Lord moved Paul away. As far as we know they never heard the gospel again.

But look at verse 34:

Acts 17: 34: Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

All men showed outward respect and heard Paul preach the gospel of Christ. But who worshipped Christ that day? Certain men whom the Father everlastingly loved, certain men for whom Christ made satisfaction, certain men who the Holy Spirit purged in the heart—who were drawn in power to Christ's feet, certain men for whom this time of divine visitation was appointed, certain men whom God had hedged about to bring them to be his habitation through the Spirit. This is the grace of God which is sovereign, irresistible and will bring all God's elect to repentance.

For those who do not yet trust him, Repent and believe on Christ Jesus. For those who believe on him, Repent and believe on Christ.

A broken and contrite spirit ever draws near on the ground of the mercy and grace. We never stop depending upon Christ to be our completion, to draw us to adore him, to give us a heart to serve him, to renew the inner man day by day.

The sinner who draws near in spirit and truth is one that God has cleansed and drawn. They have a part in the first resurrection. They shall stand, not having their own righteousness but the righteousness of Christ in that great day of judgment. They are blessed in Christ Jesus, holy in Christ Jesus and shall reign with Christ Jesus forever.

Revelation 20:6: Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

1 John 4:17: Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

Now, what will you offer to God? How will you glorify God? Whether in the house of the Lord or on the bank of the river, whether singing with the voice of songbirds or sitting silent, whether in a throng of fellow saints or in your closet alone, the LORD God says,

Psalm 50: 14: Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: 15: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.