



Psalm 14 - God came to save fools

Small Group Work Sheet
November 13, 2011

Part 1 - Ice Breaker

- The Spirit Lake football team continues to win! Were you part of a successful sports team?

Part 2 - Sermon Review

1. What does the word used for *fool* in Psalm 14 mean? What is its relationship to intelligence?
2. Jodie Foster said, "I absolutely believe...that there is no direct evidence, so how could you ask me to believe in God when there's absolutely no evidence that I can see?" According to Romans 1:18-23, the evidence of God is all around us. Why can't Jodie Foster see it?
3. What is a practical atheist? What does a practical atheist look like? Is the Holy Spirit convicted on an area of practical atheism in my life?
4. Psalm 14:1-3 (and Romans 3:9-12) tell us everyone is a fool. Why is everyone a fool?
5. What is an Emmaus Road experience? What is a Damascus Road experience? What is the difference? Have I had one?
6. What do John 6:44, Luke 24:30-31 and Acts 9:1-5, 15 teach me about my salvation?
7. While God began my spiritual life, what does Philippians 1:6 teach me about who ultimately sustains my spiritual life?
8. What does the phrase, "God came to save fools." mean to me as I approach the Christmas season?
9. How does this Psalm help me understand why I see the world differently than my friends and neighbors who do not know Jesus?



Part 3 - Digging Deeper - God's election

Several passages in the New Testament seem to affirm quite clearly that God ordained beforehand those who would be saved. For example, when Paul and Barnabas began to preach to the Gentiles in Antioch in Pisidia, Luke writes, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). It is significant that Luke mentions the fact of election almost in passing. It is as if this were the normal occurrence when the gospel was preached. How many believed? "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

In Romans 8:28–30, we read:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, 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 first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

In the following chapter, when talking about God's choosing Jacob and not Esau, Paul says it was not because of anything that Jacob or Esau had done, but simply in order that God's purpose of election might continue.

Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue not because of works but because of his call, she was told, "The elder will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Rom. 9:11–13)

Regarding the fact that some of the people of Israel were saved, but others were not, Paul says: "*Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened*" (Rom. 11:7). Here again Paul indicates two distinct groups within the people of Israel. Those who were "the elect" obtained the salvation that they sought, while those who were not the elect simply "were hardened."

Paul talks explicitly about God's choice of believers before the foundation of the world in the beginning of Ephesians.

"He chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace." (Eph. 1:4–6)

Here Paul is writing to believers and he specifically says that God "chose us" in Christ, referring to believers generally. In a similar way, several verses later he says, "*We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory*" (Eph. 1:12).

He writes to the Thessalonians, "*For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction*" (1 Thess. 1:4–5).

Paul says that the fact that the Thessalonians believed the gospel when he preached it ("for our gospel came to you ... in power ... and with full conviction") is the reason he knows that God chose them. As soon as they came to faith Paul concluded that long ago God had chosen them, and therefore they had believed when he preached. He later writes to the same church, "*We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth*" (2 Thess. 2:13).

How does the New Testament Present Election?

It is a comfort - The New Testament authors often present the doctrine of election as a comfort to believers. When Paul assures the Romans that "*in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose*" (Rom. 8:28), he gives God's work of predestination as a reason why we can be assured of this truth. He explains in the next verse, "*For those whom he*

foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son ... And those whom he predestined he also called ... justified ... glorified" (Rom. 8:29–30). Paul's point is to say that God has always acted for the good of those whom he called to himself. If Paul looks into the distant past before the creation of the world, he sees that God foreknew and predestined his people to be conformed to the image of Christ. If he looks at the recent past he finds that God called and justified his people whom he had predestined. And if he then looks toward the future when Christ returns, he sees that God has determined to give perfect, glorified bodies to those who believe in Christ. From eternity to eternity God has acted with the good of his people in mind. But if God has always acted for our good and will in the future act for our good, Paul reasons, then will he not also in our present circumstances work every circumstance together for our good as well? In this way predestination is seen as a comfort for believers in the everyday events of life.

It is an Encouragement to Evangelism - Paul says, *"I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10).* He knows that God has chosen some people to be saved, and he sees this as an encouragement to preach the gospel, even if it means enduring great suffering. Election is Paul's guarantee that there will be some success for his evangelism, for he knows that some of the people he speaks to will be the elect, and they will believe the gospel and be saved. It is as if someone invited us to come fishing and said, "I guarantee that you will catch some fish—they are hungry and waiting."

A Misunderstanding of Election

Election Is Not Fatalistic or Mechanistic. Sometimes those who object to the doctrine of election say that it is "fatalism" or that it presents a "mechanistic system" for the universe. Two somewhat different objections are involved here. By "fatalism" is meant a system in which human choices and human decisions really do not make any difference. In fatalism, no matter what we do, things are going to turn out as they have been previously ordained. Therefore, it is futile to attempt to influence the outcome of events or the outcome of our lives by putting forth any effort or making any significant choices, because these will not make any difference any way. In a true fatalistic system, of course, our humanity is destroyed for our choices really mean nothing, and the motivation for moral accountability is removed.

In a mechanistic system the picture is one of an impersonal universe in which all things that happen have been inflexibly determined by an impersonal force long ago, and the universe functions in a mechanical way so that human beings are more like machines or robots than genuine persons. Here also genuine human personality would be reduced to the level of a machine that simply functions in accordance with predetermined plans and in response to predetermined causes and influences.

By contrast to the mechanistic picture, the New Testament presents the entire outworking of our salvation as something brought about by a personal God in relationship with personal creatures. God *"destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5).* God's act of election was neither impersonal nor mechanistic, but was permeated with personal love for those whom he chose. Moreover, the personal care of God for his creatures, even those who rebel against him, is seen clearly in God's plea through Ezekiel, *"As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11).*

When talking about our response to the gospel offer, Scripture continually views us not as mechanistic creatures or robots, but as genuine persons personal creatures who make willing choices to accept or reject the gospel. Jesus invites everyone, *"Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).* And we read the invitation at the end of Revelation: *"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev. 22:17).* This invitation and many others like it are addressed to genuine persons who are capable of hearing the invitation and responding to it by a decision of their wills.

Regarding those who will not accept him, Jesus clearly emphasizes their hardness of heart and their stubborn refusal to come to him: *"Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:40)*. And Jesus cries out in sorrow to the city that had rejected him, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matt. 23:37)*.

In contrast to the charge of fatalism, we also see a much different picture in the New Testament. Not only do we make willing choices as real persons, but these choices are also real choices because they do affect the course of events in the world. They affect our own lives and they affect the lives and destinies of others. So, *"He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18)*. Our personal decisions to believe or not believe in Christ have eternal consequences in our lives, and Scripture is quite willing to talk about our decision to believe or not believe as the factor that decides our eternal destiny.

The implication of this is that we certainly must preach the gospel, and people's eternal destiny hinges on whether we proclaim the gospel or not. Therefore when the Lord one night told Paul, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9–10), Paul did not simply conclude that the "many people" who belong to God would be saved whether he stayed there preaching the gospel or not. Rather, *"he stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11)*—this was longer than Paul stayed in any other city except Ephesus during his three missionary journeys. When Paul was told that God had many elect people in Corinth, he stayed a long time and preached, in order that those elect people might be saved! Paul is quite clear about the fact that unless people preach the gospel others will not be saved:

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? ... So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. (Rom. 10:14, 17)

Did Paul know before he went to a city who was elected by God for salvation and who was not? No, he did not. That is something that God does not show to us ahead of time. But once people come to faith in Christ then we can be confident that God had earlier chosen them for salvation. This is exactly Paul's conclusion regarding the Thessalonians; he says that he knows that God chose them because when he preached to them, the gospel came in power and with full conviction: *"For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:4–5)*. Far from saying that whatever he did made no difference, and that God's elect would be saved whether he preached or not, Paul endured a life of incredible hardship in order to bring the gospel to those whom God had chosen. At the end of a life filled with suffering he said, *"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10)*.