Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

This is the second time that I have preached a series of sermons in connection with the Canons of Dort. The first time I did this was in my former congregation. And soon after, the elders received a letter from a person who had been worshipping with us a guest for a while. And this person expressed their horror that I had preached that it is already decided, by God, who will go to heaven and who will not.

And what this person was talking about is the **E-word** – (*say it quietly*) election. And I say ‘election’ with a hushed voice because the fact is that you might be getting along famously with many Christians until you drop the E-word. But when you do, it soon becomes clear that they now think of you as one of ‘them’ – one of those strange and cold Christians who believe in election. So, we need to talk about election today.

Last Sunday, we saw that all human beings are guilty sinners who deserve eternal condemnation. And we used the illustration of all human beings beginning life inside a spiritual prison because of their sin and guilt. And we saw that God causes the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ to be preached to those in this prison. And in response, some choose to repent and believe, and receive salvation, which we described as ‘leaving the prison,’ but others reject the gospel, which we described as ‘remaining inside the prison.’ And so far, none of this is controversial; this is universally recognized and acknowledged by all Bible-believing Christians – not everyone who hears the gospel repents and believes.

So, the next most obvious question is: Why? Why is it that some choose to believe and not others? Well, the answer of the Canons of Dort is election – God chooses some to believe. And as we are going to see, shortly, this is the answer of the Canons *because it is the answer of Scripture*. And it is very important that we see that – election is all over the Bible. And this is what made the letter of the person I mentioned a moment ago so surprising, because they rejected the idea of election outright. And that is not where the disagreement on this doctrine is usually found. Even those whose views led to the Synod that produced the Canons of Dort believed in election. Where the disagreement usually arises is in relation to *why* God elects some and not others. And we are going to look at that today also. And we do this, brothers and sisters, not as an academic exercise, but to see that rather than embarrassingly whisper the e-word, we should shout it and sing about it. And it should be a source of humility and assurance, and a motivation for holiness and evangelism.

Now, some of what we do today will be a little bit unusual in that we will hear lists of Scripture references. But we do that very deliberately to see that our Canons’ articles are faithful summaries of God’s Word. So, in our first point, we will see that **the God of the Bible is a God of election**. And then in our second point, we will look at **the why of election**.

1. So, first of all, let’s see that **the God of the Bible is a God of Election**.
   1. And as I said, we are now going to hear a long list of Scripture references. We just want to see that election or choosing or predestination – the choosing of a person’s eternal destiny before they are even born, is repeatedly and very plainly the teaching of the Bible.
      1. And we begin with Deuteronomy 10:14-15, which speaks about the people of Israel as God’s chosen people: "*Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and* ***chose*** *their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day*."
      2. And Psalm 33:12 says the same thing: "*Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom He has* ***chosen*** *as his heritage*!"
      3. Psalm 65:4: "*Blessed is the one you* ***choose*** *and bring near, to dwell in your courts!*"
      4. Psalm 106:5: "... *that I may look upon the prosperity of your* ***chosen*** *ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation*."
      5. In Haggai 2:23, we see election in relation to an individual: "*On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have* ***chosen*** *you, declares the LORD of hosts*."
      6. And in Matthew 11:27, we see election connected to the Lord Jesus: "*No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son* ***chooses*** *to reveal him*."
      7. And I am sure you have heard Matthew 22:14 before: "*For many are called, but few are* ***chosen***."
      8. And in Matthew 24, Jesus said: "*And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the* ***elect*** *those days will be cut short.... For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the* ***elect****.... And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His* ***elect*** *from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*."
      9. Luke 18:7: "*And will not God give justice to his* ***elect****, who cry to Him day and night?*"
      10. And one very important passage that we will come back to later is Romans 8:28-30: "*For those whom he foreknew he also* ***predestined*** *… And those whom he* ***predestined***." And then a few verses on, as Paul continues to speak about this group of predestined people, he says in verse 33, "*Who shall bring any charge against God's* ***elect***?"
      11. Romans 11:28: "*As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards* ***election****, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers*."
      12. Colossians 3:12: "*Put on then, as* *God's* ***chosen*** *ones, holy and beloved*..."
      13. 1 Thessalonians 5:9: "*For God has not* ***destined*** *us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*."
      14. Titus 1:1: "*Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of* ***God's******elect*** *and their knowledge of the truth*."
      15. And then we have the words of 1 Peter that we have been looking at in our morning sermon series:1:1: "*To those who are* ***elect*** *exiles... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*." And 2:8-9: "*They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were* ***destined*** *to do. But you are a* ***chosen*** *race*."
      16. And finally, Revelation 17:14 speaks about the enemies of Christ and His church: "*They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with Him are called and* ***chosen*** *and faithful*."
2. Phew! But I trust you will agree that the God of the Bible is *plainly* a God of election. Election is not obscure or a secret Bible code or some technical interpretation of one or two verses; it is all over the Bible and it is as plain as the nose on your face! Anyone who is horrified by the idea that God elects or chooses people just isn’t reading the Bible, or they are allowing other ideas or feelings to cloud what the Bible plainly teaches. But as we noted earlier, that the God of the Bible is a God of election is accepted by most. Where the disagreement usually arises is in relation to **the Why of Election**; why has God chosen some and not others? What is the basis for His election of some and not others? And this is where we turn our attention, now.
   1. Our text or our launching point today is **Acts 13:48**. There we read about Paul and Barnabas preaching to “*almost the whole city*” of Antioch – a very large crowd of Jews and Gentiles or non-Jews. And on that occasion, the Gentiles responded with faith while the Jews rejected the gospel and caused trouble for Paul and Barnabas and the believers. And in relation to the Gentiles, 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*." (repeat last phrase)
      1. And it is that last phrase that is especially interesting and appropriate for our consideration of the doctrine of election today. You see, everything else in the passage is just what you could see and hear if you were watching a video of what happened that day. Paul preached to a large, mixed crowd, and the Jews got angry and started heckling Paul, and the Gentiles started rejoicing and, I guess, repeating the things that Paul had preached, with big smiles on their faces. But Luke also tells us something that couldn’t be seen or heard on video: “*and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed*.” For this is Luke’s **theological interpretation** of this event. You see, Luke knew the Old Testament Bible verses we listed in our first point. And Luke had heard the teachings of Jesus. And Luke knew Paul who would write Romans and Ephesians, which teach election. And so, there was only one way for Luke to interpret what happened that day – it was the result of election. So, we could paraphrase verse 48 in this way: the elect ones or the chosen ones, out of that very large group of people who heard Paul’s preaching, responded by believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and they received eternal life. It was very simple logic to Luke – if God elects some to eternal life, then any who truly believe are elect.
   2. there is more that we can and need to say about election. And again, we want to let the Bible do the talking:
      1. So, first of all, **who does the electing or choosing**?
         1. And hopefully, in light of the Bible verses we heard in the first section, we can answer this very quickly: The Lord chose, “*You chose*,” meaning God, the “*Son chooses*,” “*God's chosen ones,” “God's elect,” and “His elect,” meaning God.*
         2. But turn with me to **Ephesians 1:3-4**; this is one of the clearest and most helpful Bible verses about election. Verse 3 talks about “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” And then in verse 4 we read, “… *even as He* (That is, the Father) *chose us in Him* (meaning Jesus Christ).”
         3. On one occasion, recorded in Acts 18, the Lord appeared to Paul and encouraged him to keep preaching; He said, “*Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and … I have many in this city who are my people*.” And they were God’s people because He had chosen them and He was going to use the preaching of Paul to bring them salvation.
         4. So, who does the choosing? God does the choosing. God is the one who elects some to salvation.
      2. And secondly, we can stay in Ephesians 1:4 to answer our next question, which is: **When did this election or choosing take place**?
         1. And verse 4 continues, “*… before the foundation of the world*,” or, as the NIV puts it, “*before the creation of the world*.” And just keep your Bibles open there because we will return to verse 4 in a moment.
         2. But 2 Timothy 1:9 says of God, “… w*ho saved us and called us to a holy calling … which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”*
         3. And in John 17, when Jesus spoke about the elect as ‘those that the Father had given Him,’ He located this giving in the love that the Father had shown Him “*before the foundation of the world*.”
         4. So, election to salvation took place even before the world was created!
         5. But the Bible is also clear that the other side of election, which is called **reprobation**, or God’s decision to leave some in their sin and guilt and not save them, was also before the world was created.
            1. Revelation 13:8 says this of the End times beast and his followers: "*And all who dwell on earth will worship [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life*."
            2. And Revelation 17:8 uses the same language: "And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world..."
         6. So, the choosing to salvation or the leaving some to the hell they deserve is something God did *before the creation of the world*.
      3. And that brings us, thirdly, to **the reason why some were chosen and not others**.
         1. And what we see in the Bible is that God's choice was **not based upon any foreseen merit** residing in those whom He chose, **nor was it based on any foreseen good works** performed by them.
            1. Romans 9:11-13 says this of Jacob and Esau: "*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-[their mother] was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.""*
            2. And then in the next verse, Romans 9:14-15, God says, "*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy*." And then we read, “*So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy*.”
            3. And in Romans 10:20, God says: "*I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me*."
            4. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29: "*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; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God*."
            5. And 2 Timothy 1:9 says the same thing: "*[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace*."
            6. The analogy I used last Sunday was that of all human beings beginning life in a ‘spiritual prison cell’ because they are guilty sinners. And for the sake of illustrating the point we are currently considering, imagine **a real prison** with 1000 real criminals in it, who all have life sentences because they have all committed serious crimes – rape, terrorism, murder, etc. And then imagine that the parole board decides to release 500 of them. So, they choose 500 and release them. Is that fair on the 500 who remain? Of course it is! The parole board does not have to release anyone; they all deserve their sentence; they are all wicked, guilty criminals; none of them are worthy of being released. So, the release of some is **entirely an act of grace** – undeserved favour.
            7. And that is how it is with election – no one deserves it; in fact, what we all deserve is hell. There is nothing in any of the elect that made them worthy of God’s gracious and loving choice.
         2. In fact, the Bible is also clear that any good works we do are **the result of, not the basis of, of election**:
            1. Look at Ephesians 1:4 again: “…*even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be (or so that we would be) holy and blameless before Him*.”
            2. Ephesians 2:10*: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before hand, that we should walk in them."*
            3. John 15:16*: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."*
            4. So, we are not chosen because of good works we will commit, we are chosen that we might do good works when we come to faith in Christ.
         3. And before we draw to a close, there is one more thing we need to say about the why of election, which is that God's choice was also **not based upon foreseen faith**. And this is what Article 9 of the Canons is about. You see, the Arminian party, whose views led to the Dort Synod and the Canons, agreed that the Bible taught that God elects some to salvation. But they understood it in this way: God looked ahead in time and saw every person that would believe in Jesus, and so He chose them as His elect. Do you see how that works? I can illustrate it like this: At home at the moment, we are play a guess the daily covid case numbers game. And the closest guess gets a chocolate fish. It is the sort of twisted fun that lockdown produces :-) Well, even though it is just a guess, each of us chooses the numbers ahead of time. So, my chosen number comes entirely from my brain. Now, if I could look into the future and somehow know what the daily numbers were each day, and I then chose those numbers, the basis of my number choice would not be my brain but those who in the future get Covid. And that is the Arminian view – God does not independently and sovereignly just choose whom He wants to save in Christ, He looks ahead and sees all who will believe in Jesus in the future, and that becomes His ‘chosen number.’ But that is not what the Bible teaches.
            1. Look again at our text in Acts 13:48: "*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*." So, they were not appointed to eternal life because they believed, it was their appointment to eternal life, or their election, that led to them believing.
            2. And the whole point of Romans 9 is to recognize and preserve God’s sovereignty in salvation: Romans 9:18: “*So then He has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills*.”
            3. And one of the clearest verses in this connection is Ephesians 2:8-9: “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this [meaning faith] is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast*.” Faith in Christ is a gift of God; it is not some independent act of our own; it is a fruit of election, not the cause of election.
            4. And one more passage that I want us to look at is **Romans 8:28-30**. It is the passage footnoted in our Canons article and it is a key plank of the Arminian view that election is based on foreseen faith. We read, “*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*.”

And our interest here is the word “**foreknew**.” Literally, to foreknow is to know something before it happens. And so, our Arminian friends say, See! There it is! This is the biblical proof that the ones God predestined or chose or elected to be called and justified and glorified are the ones that He knew beforehand would believe.

Now, it is true that God knows everything about everyone, beforehand. He is omniscient – all knowing. So, before the creation of the world, God did know all those who would believe and all those who would not believe. But faith, as we have seen, is the gift of God. He gives faith to all those He has chosen! The choosing comes first! In other words, the faith that God knows about beforehand is the faith He creates and gifts to those He has chosen to salvation.

But even more importantly than that, you know that **when the Bible talks about knowing it often has much more in view than a knowledge of facts**.

Think of the how the Old King James Bible describes sex - Adam knew His wife Eve, and she conceived and bore a son.

In Amos 3:2, God says about Israel, “*You only have I known of all of the families on earth*.” That knowing is God’s special covenant love.

And in Matthew 7:22-23, Jesus said, “*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.'*” And that knowing means that I never loved you in a saving way.

And people of God, this is why Bible translators who try and be fuller in their translation of Greek words translate Romans 8:29 in this way: “*Those whom God set His heart upon beforehand (or set His love upon beforehand) He predestined*…” Isn’t that beautiful? If you are a believer, you are one that God set His heart on or set His love on in eternity past!

And you have heard me speak about this before. But unlike how my imaginary parole board randomly chose 500 prisoners to release, and unlike how I pluck a covid case number out of thin air, God’s choosing of some to save is **an act of love towards individuals**. God looked at you in that spiritual prison cell, in your filthy guilt, and with you not even seeking Him or asking for release, and He said, Oh, Anita! I set my love upon Anita! I will save Anita! I will give faith to Anita! I will present Anita to you, my Son, at the end of time! And you can put your name where I said Anita.

And this, beloved people of God, is why, rather than embarrassingly whisper the e-word, we should shout it and sing about it! When Paul finished explaining election in Romans 11, he didn’t go, Oh well, there it is. It’s a bit tough to understand and a bit theoretical... No! He said, "*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever*."

If you believe in Jesus Christ, it is all of God’s grace. You are not cleverer than anyone else and you are not in any way more worthy than anyone else. It should deeply humble you. And to know that you were chosen by God; that He *has* always loved you and that He *will* always love you, should be a powerful source of assurance! As the hymnwriter put it:

*I find, I walk, I love, but O the whole*

*of love is but my answer Lord to Thee!*

*For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul;*

*always, always, Thou lovedst me.*

And then this must also be a powerful motivation for holiness:

*Lord, take my life and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to Thee.*

*Take my moments, my days, my hands, my feet,*

*my voice, my lips, my silver and gold,*

*my intellect, my will, my heart, my love, myself,*

*and I will be, ever only all for Thee.*

And thinking again about our text in Acts 13, when Paul and Barnabas arrived at Antioch, they didn’t head for the pub because God is a God of election, so, you know, He will bring people to faith when He is ready; no, they preached to all who would listen! And that is because they knew that it is through the preaching of the gospel that God draws His elect ones to Himself. So, **election motivates evangelism**! Earlier I referred to Acts 18 where God told Paul that He had many of His people in that city. Well, God has His people in your neighbourhood and workplace and in PNG and Vanuatu and everywhere else. But they need to hear the good news of salvation in Jesus from you and me.

And then, notice also that Paul and Barnabas did not say to the people of Antioch, Guys, try and work out if you are elect; it was, If you believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, you shall be saved. And that is what we must preach also, because it is true – anyone who believes in Jesus will be saved! In fact, if you have heard this sermon today, and you have never heard about election before, I would encourage you to forget everything you have heard and just concentrate on this message – if you repent and believe in Jesus today, you will be saved!

But for those of you who already love the Lord Jesus, please *don’t* forget everything you have heard. Let your election in Christ it be a source of deep humility and strong assurance, and a powerful motivation for holiness and evangelism. Amen.