

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #30

Acts 13:44-52

There is a very dangerous, in my opinion, demonic movement in churches that promotes the idea that we need to make church as attractive as we can for unsaved people. We need to do things to lure them in and we need to present a non-offensive program that will interest and entertain unsaved people. This is why bands are showing up in churches; to draw in the people. In the book "Pop Goes the Gospel" John Blanchard writes if the purpose of Christian rock music is to communicate sound truth about Jesus Christ, it is failing, because "it doesn't...communicate that particular message" (p. 101). One person said this kind of music is not meant to be understood; it is meant to be felt.

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul going on some missionary journey with the philosophy that we need to do anything we can to attract people? Can you imagine Paul going to some city and saying I am going to conduct a marriage seminar or financial investment forum with the goal of sneaking in the Gospel? Can you imagine Paul going into a synagogue and saying we need to make sure we don't say anything that could ruffle feathers? Absolutely not and the proof is the book of Acts. Paul went from place to place to preach the Word of God and the Gospel of God's grace. He did not go to entertain people but to communicate the truth of God to people.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said years ago there are two kinds of Christians: 1) Those who want to change the world through the preaching of the Word; 2) Those who want to change Christianity by making it more acceptable to the world. Paul was type number one, which is the way God wants it (*Acts 13:42-52*, p. 3).

In Acts 13, Dr. Luke gives us an incredible look at what it was that Paul preached concerning the Gospel of the grace of God. He did not preach light, fluffy ten minute sermonettes. He preached inspired truth and inspired doctrine. **What we see is when he preached these things, some hated him and his message.** This teaches us an important point; if you are accurately communicating the Word of God and if you are accurately presenting the grace of God you can expect a variety of reactions, including a tremendous amount of satanic opposition.

WHEN PAUL AND BARNABAS PREACHED GOD'S WORD AND TAUGHT THE GRACE GOSPEL MANY BELIEVED, BUT MANY RELIGIOUS LEADERS WERE JEALOUS AND DID EVERYTHING THEY COULD TO STOP THEM.

Now we may recall that the specific doctrinal message that Paul was preaching was that sinful humans could only be justified by faith in Jesus Christ. All sins could be forgiven by faith in Jesus Christ. They could not ever be justified or have sins forgiven by trying to keep the Law of Moses (*Acts 13:38-39*). When Paul first taught this, the people had never heard anything like it and they asked him to come back the next Sabbath day and teach them more. All of this was taking place in Pisidian Antioch and there are eight Antioch facts Luke records:

ANTIOCH FACT #1 - The whole city assembled to hear the Word of God. **13:44**

Do not miss this point because this is critical to a ministry that is biblical. The major priority of a biblical ministry is that people gather to “hear God’s Word.” Do you see this and do you understand this? It is true these people had never heard anything like Paul. He could open up the Word of God and proclaim the grace of God and the Scriptures came to life. He didn’t try to put on some show; he simply preached God’s Word.

The result was people went to hear the Word of God. Notice what they gathered to hear, the Word of God. This was their reason for gathering. These people wanted to know God’s truth; they wanted to know God’s Word and finally God had sent them a man who could preach it.

I love what one old Bible scholar used to say, when a church is functioning right before God the Word of God will be primary and everything else will be secondary. The reason these people went to the synagogue is because they knew there was a man there who would teach God’s Word accurately and they wanted to hear it.

ANTIOCH FACT #2 - The religious leaders were jealous and tried to contradict his teaching. **13:45**

God’s hand was on Paul. When that happens, other people sense it. God saved Paul and gave him a tremendous grasp of Grace Age truth and doctrine, and he could preach God’s Word with full authority and great precision. Other religious leaders didn’t like that. Paul was no nonsense in his approach to accurately communicating God’s Word and other religious leaders weren’t and they were jealous. When he spoke, God’s Word came to life; when they spoke, it was dead.

Years ago there was a ninety-one year old minister who said to some leaders in his church who were pathetic, “when I die, don’t shed any tears for me because I’ll be no deader than you have been for years.” That is the way it was with these Jewish leaders. They had been dead for years in their relationship with God.

The Jewish leaders were jealous and envious of Paul’s grasp of Scripture and his impact and so they tried to contradict his teaching. That word “contradict” (αντιλεγω) means that they would try to say the opposite of what Paul was proclaiming. They would preach law, not grace. They would preach works, not faith. They tried to sway people away from grace and put them back under the O.T. Law or under their man-made rules and traditions. Paul was preaching pure grace and these religious leaders were doing everything they could to stop him and his message.

Notice what God calls this; “blasphemy.” Do not miss this. When religious leaders try to convince people that God’s grace found in Jesus Christ is not sufficient to justify and save from sins, they are blaspheming God. Those religious leaders who preach O.T. Law or religious traditions or man’s works are involved in blasphemy.

Apparently, by Paul’s response (**v. 46**), one of the things the religious leaders was telling people is that they are the Jews who really have a relationship with God through the Law and Paul and Barnabas are in this Gentile area presenting something foreign to Mosaic Law and the man-made traditions of the synagogue.

ANTIOCH FACT #3 - Paul and Barnabas defend their message and ministry. 13:46-47

Paul was not intimidated in the least by these religious bird dogs of the synagogue and he said the only reason we came to this synagogue is because the Word of God teaches that the Gospel goes first to the Jews. The pattern that occurs over and over again in Pauline ministry is that he goes into a city and does his best to preach first to the Jews (Acts 14:1; 17:1; 18:1,4; 19:8; 28:17). Wouldn't that be an interesting missions philosophy. The fact is God's program is Jewish. Jesus Christ came first to Israel to establish a literal, physical kingdom on earth and when Israel rejected Him, the Church program began. But the Gospel was to first go to Israel and Paul never forgot that.

However, Paul says, at the end of **verse 46**, since you “repudiate” (αποθεω) which literally means to reject in the sense of thrusting or pushing something away from you (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 56). Paul says by your rejection of the grace Gospel, you judge yourselves unworthy to have eternal life, so we are taking the message to the Gentiles. In **verse 47**, Paul says God has commanded us to take the Gospel of His grace to the Gentiles. This Gospel of grace that you reject is that which will bring salvation to any sinner.

Don't miss the theology of this verse. If you rely on your works or you rely on your attempt to keep the O.T. Law you are judging yourself unworthy of eternal life. You will never be good enough for God. Your works will not ever save you. You may try to be a good person, but you will never be worthy of everlasting life because everlasting life is found by faith in Jesus Christ.

ANTIOCH FACT #4 - The Gentiles respond to the grace Gospel. 13:48

This is the first context in which we get to see a complete message preached by Paul and you do not want to miss the great truths and doctrine found in this verse. This verse should revolutionize every single minister and missionary. There are three responses to Paul's preaching of God's Word.

(Response #1) - Gentiles rejoiced to hear the truth of God's Word. 13:48a

These Gentiles couldn't get enough of the Word of God. When people come to church rejoicing to hear God's Word, you have something powerful. Gentiles knew when they went to hear Paul preach God's Word, they were going to hear truth and they rejoiced because of it.

(Response #2) - Gentiles glorified the Word of the Lord. 13:48b

The imperfect tense of the verb “glorified” means that they started to glorify God for the Word of God the first moment they heard it and they never stopped. In other words, the first time these Gentiles heard God's Word accurately preached, it rang with them and they glorified God. They knew there was something different about the Word of God because it came to life for them. For the first time, the Bible came to life for these Gentiles and made sense.

If you go to church and the Scriptures are accurately taught and you are not excited to glorify God, you may want to check where you are really at in your relationship with Jesus Christ. If you go to a church and they are not carefully teaching you God's Word, you will not be able to completely glorify God. When God's Spirit is powerfully at work, the Scriptures come to life for people and they glorify God in that. By the way, **they glorify the Word of God; not music, not fellowship, not entertainment.**

(Response #3) - Gentiles who had been appointed by God believed and received eternal life.
13:48c

When most of us come to faith in Jesus Christ and cry out to God for salvation, we view it as our choice. In fact, in many churches the stress and emphasis is on free will. But the fact is our choice to believe on Jesus Christ was due to the fact that God chose us. We had an "appointed" time in which we came to faith in Jesus Christ. Like it or not that is exactly what is taught here.

In fact, that word "appointment" (τεταγμενοι) is a perfect passive participle, which means we were assigned by God's appointment a specific moment in past time to believe on Jesus Christ, and the results of that moment carry on into eternity. The word actually carries with it the idea of a military order (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 440). What that means is that God ordered and appointed your salvation and He ordered and appointed the very moment you believed and were saved.

Do you see what is revealed here? **This is the God exalting doctrine of election.** Isn't that interesting? **In the middle of a passage that shows the missionary evangelistic outreach of the Gospel of God's grace is the doctrine of election.** God is the one who convicts people and God is the one who saves people and all of this happens by His appointment.

Now Arminians who love to exalt man don't like this verse and actually try to change the grammar and syntax of it to fit their doctrine. They will suggest that this verse really says "as many as believed, God appointed to eternal life." But that is not what the Greek text says here. I challenge any Arminian to refute this analysis.

The main verb is "they believed" and the modifying clause says the ones who believed were appointed unto eternal life. My Greek translation is "they believed, whoever they were who had been appointed unto eternal life" (επιστευσαν οσοι ησαν τεταγμενοι εις ζωην αιωνιον), which is basically how the New American Standard translates this.

One old Bible scholar used to say, "no matter whatever dung hill God's people are hid, His doctrine of election will find them and fetch them."

Now perhaps someone in this sanctuary today says, "Well suppose I am not one of the elect." Why don't you rather say, "Well suppose I am one of the elect." As Spurgeon said why don't you stop supposing and believe on Jesus Christ and that will settle the question of your election. If you sit here today and say I don't want to believe in Jesus Christ to save me from my sins, and I would rather rely upon me and my works, then you may assume you are not one of the elect. In fact we will also assume you are not one who is very bright.

By the way, from this verse notice what you are supposed to do knowing the doctrine of appointed election-rejoice and glorify God.

ANTIOCH FACT #5 - God's Word spread throughout the whole region. **13:49**

That verb "spread" is interesting. It is an imperfect passive verb. The word actually means to carry something through an area in such a way that it makes a difference (Ibid., p. 112). Now what intrigues me about the verb is that it is passive. What I understand that to mean is that there was no active solicitation or demand placed on the congregation to go out and spread the Word of God; God caused the people to do this. In other words, God moved in people's hearts and minds to the point where they wanted to go out and tell others about God's Word.

Now this verse is interesting because one of the arguments against the doctrine of election is that if you believe it then you will sit back and won't do a thing. Well apparently that is not true because this message of God's sovereign grace spread like wildfire throughout the whole region. Paul kept preaching the Word of God and the Gentiles went out, completely unsolicited, and started telling people about all the things they were learning. By the way, notice what they were spreading-"God's Word." Not their politics, not their religion, not their ideas of social or moral reform. They were spreading God's Word.

When God's Word is accurately taught people go out and tell others. It will spread. Word gets out because God sees to it. People will be moved by God to go out and say you need to hear this. You need to understand grace. You need to come and be part of what we are learning. That is exactly what happened in Antioch.

ANTIOCH FACT #6 - The religious leaders stir up religious women and men to persecute Paul and Barnabas and run them out of the area. **13:50**

There were religious leaders and women and men who did not want God's Word taught. They were out to persecute and stop Paul. That word "persecute" means they wanted to use hostile means to drive Paul and Barnabas away and put them to flight (Ibid., p. 119).

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said here is one reason why many people do not want to actually preach the Word of God; it is divisive. If you preach God's sovereign grace in a religious world that emphasizes law and works, you create tension and things can become explosive. I believe the greatest lack today in churches is a neglect to preach every verse of the Bible. But here is the thing. When some Scripture is neglected, it grieves the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures. God did not reveal sixty-six books of the Bible so we could pick and choose verses we like. Our responsibility is to teach the whole counsel of God and when you do that you will discover you stir the pot.

ANTIOCH FACT #7 - Paul and Barnabas shook the dust from their feet and left Antioch and went to Iconium. **13:51**

Iconium was the nearest city about eighty miles to the east of Antioch so Paul and Barnabas headed for there. It is interesting that when they get to Iconium the first thing they do is exactly the same thing that got them run out of Antioch. They go straight to the synagogue and preach the Word of God (**14:1**).

There is a point of time when a minister needs to take his ministry elsewhere. Let us be clear on this point. If a ministry is carefully and accurately preaching God's Word and there is a tremendous amount of opposition, there does come a point when you shake the dust off your feet and go somewhere else. I have never subscribed to a philosophy that says you must hang in there and hope it gets better. Sometimes God will use adversity to get a ministry to move on.

It is amazing to me that just before Paul dies years later, he was reflecting on his ministry and he will remember this very first missionary trip and how the Lord delivered him from all his enemies who were in Antioch (II Timothy 3:11). In that same book he will also ask Luke to bring to him John Mark (II Tim. 4:11).

ANTIOCH FACT #8 - The believers were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. **13:52**

God's true people didn't collapse when Paul and Barnabas left, because they had the Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit would guide them and would direct them.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the people who believed on Jesus Christ and knew their sins were forgiven rejoiced. Do you have that joy today? Do you have the joy of knowing that all of your sins have been washed away and that you have eternal life? If you have never known this joy, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.