

Scripture Reading:

Acts 13: “43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. 44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' " 48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 14:1 “Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. 3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 5 And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, 6 they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. 7 And they were preaching the gospel there.

'The World Divided'

Today will bring our third week of considering the reaction to the Apostle Paul's sermon at the Jewish synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia.

- We have seen how when the Gospel is preached there is Good News for everyone!
- We have also seen opposition to the Gospel from God's own people because they allowed a root of bitterness to grow up among them.
- This morning we will bring these together and consider how the world reacts when the followers of Jesus are the witnesses that He commands us to be!

What we see in both cities is a very positive response to the Good News, and a lot of opposition:

- A world divided!

This morning we want to consider why these cities were divided, why there have been such divisions in all of Church history and how we should respond.

Now obviously there is a lot of details in the text we have been reading that could be considered. The commentaries spend a great deal of time discussing the women that Paul mentions and other details about the geography and various persecutions of the Apostles.

However, as we study Luke's orderly account, I think it is important to see how this portion presents us with a BIG picture view of what happens as the Spirit fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus...

We are making the case that this is the story of the Book of Acts and that it continues down to our age.

In many ways what we see here in this account is what has been witnessed down through all of history...

-- The Gospel is preached and great multitudes believe...

-- Suddenly there is opposition and the Disciples have to dust of their sandals and leave.

-- The Gospel is preached to the Gentiles & there is a great response...

-- Then the Jews stir up devout women and the civil authorities and persecute the Apostles driving them away.

-- The disciples are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit

-- The Gospel is preached in Iconium and great multitudes believe...

-- The Jews stir up the Gentiles and poison their minds.

-- The Apostles stay and speak boldly with the Word and miracles

-- There is a violent attempt against the Apostles by the Jews, Gentiles and civil rulers and the Apostles flee.

➤ **Finally we are told that the Gospel is preached in the new regions!**

➤ **Anybody confused yet?**

I think this is one particular place where we need to be careful not to miss the forest for the trees...

➤ **Luke is giving us a big picture about how the coming of the Kingdom causes division...**

In verse 4 we read, “But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews and part with the Apostles.” Before we consider why this should not surprise us, I want to remind us that we should not be discouraged when we see this division continuing down to our day...

➤ **When we come to the end of this missionary journey we will see Paul and Barnabas declaring that it was a great victory.**

If we dropped in on some of the places where they were being opposed or run out of town, it might not have seemed to be going so well. Luke is giving us this BIG picture as a pattern that we will see down through history.

➤ **We will see it here in the accounts Luke records in Acts.**

➤ **We see it in the early church as nations are discipled [mention Wilkins tapes]**

➤ **If you dropped into history just before the Reformation I am sure we would wonder if the Church was going to survive**

➤ **And with the collapse of much of Western civilization in the 20th Century who would blame us for once again thinking things are going badly for the Kingdom of Jesus!**

I suspect that perhaps our great, great grandchildren will look back and wonder how we could have missed what the Spirit was doing in our time in China, Africa and perhaps South America. Of course they will face their own challenges and persecutions that may cause them to doubt the forward movement of the Kingdom.

➤ **This is why the Book of Acts is so essential!**

In Luke’s orderly account, we again and again see all the challenges that we have in the text this morning coming against the advance of the Kingdom into the Gentile world with many up and downs, many personal victories and defeats...

➤ **Until in the end we see Paul at the center of Gentile power, Rome itself, preaching the Gospel with all boldness to all who came to him.**

This is the same picture that the Apostle John is given near the end of Revelation where the Saints reign with Jesus for a thousand years as priests of God and of Christ. And even at the end, when all the nations of the earth have been brought into subjection to Jesus and the beautiful prophesies of Isaiah about the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth have been fulfilled...

- **Even then when Satan is released he is able to find quiet hypocrites to bring forth one last division that is quickly crushed.**

So if the divisions that we see here in the text will continue until the return of Jesus, then it is important for us to understand why they exist. When Paul writes his second letter to the Church at Corinth he explains what we will always see after the faithful preaching of the Gospel:II Corinthians 2: 14 “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.”

Obviously we would expect a bad reaction if the Word of God is being peddled or handled wrongly...

- **But Paul is stressing that you will see this type of division whenever the Gospel is rightly preached as we saw in our text.**

If we know our Bible well, this is not a surprise: God told Adam & Eve in the Garden, as He was first presenting the Good News that the head of Satan would be crushed, that HE would put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

This is the great division we have seen down through history to our very day...

- **Cain and Abel were divided**
- **Noah is divided from the entire world**
- **Abram is divided from his people**
- **Jacob and Esau were divided**
- **The nation of Israel & Egypt were divided**
- **The Kingdom of David was divided**
- **People were divided by the ministry of Jesus**
- **People were divided at the crucifixion of Jesus**
- **People were divided at the resurrection of Jesus**

- **And now people are divided by the preaching of the Good News.**

We see these divisions pictured in many ways by the Prophets and Jesus Himself in several of His parables...

- **Light v. Darkness**
- **The Righteous v. The Unrighteous**
- **Wise virgins v. foolish virgins**
- **A repentant tax collector v. a proud Pharisee**
- **The sheep v. the goats**
- **The wheat v. the tares**
- **Life v. Death**

➤ **Faith v. unbelief**

Jesus in His ministry and the whole of the Word of God present a world that will be divided by the Gospel!

- **This stands in stark contrast with the wisdom of men who do NOT want a divided world...**

As we go out preaching the Good News in our world today we will encounter two major philosophies, or world views, that reject this Biblical division of the saved and the unsaved...

In many religious circles, including some churches you have what we call universalism...

Believing that everyone will be saved. You will hear people say there are many paths to god and many roads to salvation and it will all work out for good for everyone in the end.

- **Why would a loving god want to send anyone to hell is the haunting question that lies behind much of this thinking.**

On the other side you have the atheists or functioning atheists who I call the materialists...

Those who insist that we do not need God but rather can understand all there is to know through reason or science and they make material things eternal and say there is NO life of any kind after death.

- **To them death is just the end of another organism and thus with this world view, no one is saved.**

While these may seem like polar opposites you must notice two MAJOR similarities in this unbelief:

- 1) **There is ultimately no division: All are saved or all are lost so they all see the Biblical division that we bring as wrong.**
- 2) **Neither group has any real basis to condemn evil:
In both camps it has to just be an illusion and so again they are very upset when we come speaking about judgment**

So we are to be those who carry Good News to a dying world, and though it will bring division, we have God's promise that such faithful witnessing will bring results!

In verse 48 of chapter 13 Luke tells us that "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

Now there are many who try to dance around the clear teaching of this verse as they do the early chapters of Ephesians...

- **But Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says what he means & means what he says.**
- **Those who believed had been appointed to eternal life.**

The most common dance is to say that God, who is all knowing, simply looked down through history, saw those who responded well to the preaching of Paul and appointed them to eternal life.

- **Even if we try to ignore the structure and force of this verse there is no way around the complete and very clear explanations that Paul gives in chapters nine, ten and eleven of his letter to the Romans. *[these chapters can be your homework]***

In chapter nine there is no doubt left as to who acted first:

- **It is God who chooses those who are to be given the gift of faith.**

If we truly believe that all the sons of Adam are born dead in their trespasses and sins, then it can be no other way. What we really struggle with is why God chooses some and not others: We can consider some 'what ifs' but in the end, the full answer to that question lies only in the mind of God.

So we study Romans and Ephesians and become strong Calvinists! We understand and can proclaim the doctrine of predestination...

BUT we must be careful not to rip this teaching out of context because then we can fall into the arrogant sins that brought on the root of bitterness that we saw in the Jews last week.

Yes, Paul clearly teaches what we would today call predestination in Romans chapter nine:

- **He does so in such a strong manner that it often causes even reformed Christians to be just a little uneasy.**
- **However, embracing these truths by themselves can leave us silent and / or proud!**

No one is saved apart for God's gracious gift of faith, but this gift is delivered by the Church preaching the Good News under the power of the Spirit. And those who hear are called on to repent and believe!

After presenting eternal election Paul says, "13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

- **A true understanding of God's sovereign plan of salvation leads to the preaching of the Good News: We cannot be silent thinking to ourselves, 'God saves the elect.'**

The other error that we must avoid which Paul addresses at length in chapter eleven is that of pride or presumption...

- **We are in and they are not!**

This was the major problem that led to the Jewish persecutions that we see in our text! They were proud of knowing they were God's chosen people: They even enjoyed others coming by and seeing how cool it was for them to be God's chosen people, but when the Good News brought Gentiles to salvation that offended them! Lest we don't think such things could happen to us, we need to heed the warnings Paul gives in Romans 11: He uses the illustration of the vine, which we know is Christ, bringing forth branches or covenant people. God took out the Jews who were the natural branches because of pride and unbelief and engrafted in some wild branches, the Gentiles, into the vine. He then reminds them, and us, that if God could do that, how much easier to remove the wild branches if they too become proud or arrogant and put back in natural branches?

A good way to check our spirit here is to see if our divisions line up with the division that the Bible says the Gospel will cause:

Those who receive the gift of faith come from all quarters: Jew & Gentile, slave & free, male & female, rich & poor and God crosses ALL racial, national, and ethnic barriers as the Great Commission is carried out. The Jews in our text this morning stumbled on the first, wanting to keep the division between Jew & Gentile. Our own "Christian" nation stumbled badly when it came to slavery and race.

- **How can Christians not embrace someone who comes to faith because of the color of their skin?**
- **Very simple, with the same sin of pride that we see in the Jews in our text.**

Down through history the church has had many sins to confess as she has failed to treat both men & women with Grace as well as the rich and the poor. The proud Jews in our text could not stand to see the power of the Holy Spirit working salvation in such a powerful way among the Gentiles.

We must pray that we never find ourselves reacting in the same way when God moves powerfully today!

While we do know that God will continue to move powerfully in the world as He fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus, we don't always understand or have the ability to see the big picture.

This is why Paul ends his powerful discussion of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility with this reflection: "33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

And I want to leave us with one encouraging thought as we prepare to move on in our study of Acts:

- **In the midst of all the divisions, the miracles, the persecutions, the travels, the trials, the escapes & the preaching we read this in verse two of chapter fourteen:
"Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord."**

As we mentioned last week, God has chosen to fill the earth with the Kingdom of His Son using jars of clay. We are none of us baptized perfect nor mature, whether we take the name of our Triune God through baptism in our infancy or later in life.

- **We are all in need of discipleship and nurture: We all need to grow in wisdom and stature before God and before man.**

This should remind us to not be discouraged when we are not sure if we are up to the task of conquering the world:

- **God loves to confound the wisdom of the world with the foolishness of the cross!**

As Paul told the Saints at Corinth: I Corinthians 1:26 "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. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.""

All of this should remind us about the importance of our daily duties that we must faithfully carry out in our homes and our vocations, in the community of the Church and even the civil realm. Paul and Barnabas did not turn to these new believers and say 'you are on your own because we have more great work to do for God: We must move on to the next great revival!

They will follow the Spirit's leading in the days ahead and see more great revivals but for the time being they are also following the Spirit's leading by properly instructing and encouraging those who have come to faith.

- **We must always be ready to have God call us or others in our congregation to other work for the Kingdom!**
- **But at the same time we must also remember how important the work of covenant faithfulness is as we prepare ourselves & those entrusted to our care so we all may grow in wisdom & stature before God & man!**

Communion Meditation: John 4 The woman at the well is offered the water of life:

"Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.""