

The Gospel will Go Forward **Acts 13:44-52**

Into:

What a time to think about the church. It is amazing to see how a national pandemic can call everyone of us to pause and take evaluation of many areas in life. One of those areas that I have heard a lot of people talking about is church. It has been good to see people who have not been engaged with a local church start to realize the importance. It has been good for us to see and evaluate the most effective ways to make disciples during this time. In many ways it has caused us to simplify and to keep the main thing the main thing. As with everything in life, we can be easily distracted with good things, but they pull us away from what really matters. In the midst of these times, when our program schedule has been largely cancelled, our services have been limited, and the our ability to have scheduled times to fellowship, I have been praising the Lord for the way Wheelersburg Baptist Church continues to Be the church, and we have not missed a beat in ministering to each other and this community.

However, there are a couple of temptations that we need to be careful of when it comes to church. The first one is the longer we are in this mode the more likely this will become the new normal. One of the big reasons that we were able to see the Lord use our church family was the intentionality of our people. We were actively looking out for one another, seeking ways to minister, and making the effort to contact each other. Discipleship ministries still took place and in some ways picked up when the pandemic first hit in large part because the Lord allowed us to be focused and intentional. However, as we are settling into a new normal we can be tempted to lose the focus, and then develop many of the same old patterns under different circumstances. By the grace of God, we will continue to focus on Him and his Son, which will allow us to then focus on things of eternal significance. The second temptation is to just jump back into the same old routines and patterns once society starts to get back to "normal". In doing this we would have wasted a God given opportunity to evaluate, learn, and grow! This can be true for our personal lives, the church, and all other areas of our lives.

This is one of the reasons I was excited to hear that we were going to jump back into the Book of Acts. Back in 2018, we spent about ten months going from Acts 1-12. Over the last month or so, Pastor Brad has picked this serious back up starting in chapter 13. Let's take a minute to remind ourselves of what the book of Acts is. The book of Acts is the second of two volumes of Luke. He wrote the

Gospel of Luke as the first volume about Christ, and then he wrote Acts about the early church for a friend Theophilus. What better way to refocus our mission as a church than to look at the early church and the apostles. The Holy Spirit carried Luke along in writing this book for us to know the story, yes, but more than that to teach us about how to view the church. We can read the story of the first century church and learn from them the lessons that the Holy Spirit intended us to learn. There are endless amounts of books out there about the church. What the church is, how to build a church, how to do church, and how to revitalize the church. Many of them are helpful, but they must echo the mission explained in Acts. As Pastor Brad put it back at the beginning of the 2018, "Luke introduces the theme of the book in Acts 1:8. He quotes the final words of Jesus, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Why are we here? Jesus tells us. 1. We need to know Him. And then... 2. We need to make Him known to others. That's the mission of the Church."¹ So I hope that you enjoy this series in Acts! I pray that the Lord will use it to help us as a church to know our mission clearly, and strive to make much of Christ as we live that mission out.

That is the big picture of this series. I think it is good to keep those things in mind when walking through a book like Acts. We can get lost in the individual messages (which are good), but miss out on the point of the book as a whole. Now let's take a minute to remind ourselves of where we have been for the last few weeks. In the beginning of chapter 13 Barnabus and Paul were sent out on their first missionary trip from Antioch. They sailed across the Mediterranean Sea to make a couple of stops on the island of Cyprus. From there they sailed to Perga. We don't know much about what happened there because the text does not tell us. Tradition tells us that it is possible that Paul contracted a type of malaria that gave him extreme headaches and eye pain/issues. Then the team headed north to another Antioch, Antioch of Pisidia.

Let's not rush past that too quick. This team of missionaries covered a lot of ground in a relatively short period of time. Ministered the gospel to 5 cities by now. Sometimes, we can read through these stories and not take time to appreciate the boat/walking travel that took place during these missionary journeys.

¹ Remembering Why We are Here, Pastor Brad Brand, 2018

Anyway, back to the story. Antioch of Pisidia was in the Galatia region which is in modern day Turkey. It is a city that is mostly gentiles with a small population of Jews. The city was a common place for Roman officers and soldiers to retire. We saw last week that when they arrived they did their normal routine of going to the synagogue first. They did not come in asking to give a message, but rather they sat and listened. They wanted to meet people who needed to hear about Christ, and they had a heart to reach the Jews first. While there, the Jewish leaders recognized them and asked them to give a word of encouragement. Verse 15 says, "After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it."" Paul took this opportunity to share the gospel with the people attending the synagogue that day. Ministry ended that day on a positive note. Verse 42 and 43 says, "As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. 43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God." People were being saved, they were asking for more, and the team was asking them "to continue in the grace of God". The Lord was working! Things are looking great!

Then that brings us to today's text. We have started with the big picture, then moved into the immediate context, and now we hear the next part of the story. I almost said "the rest of the story". However, I felt like that would lead to me feeling obligated to do a Paul Harvey impression, and that would have just failed, so for now we will say the next chapter in the story. Let me show you the road map of where we are going this morning. The main idea is "Gospel ministry may (probably will) be opposed, but the gospel will go forward". In that statement are the two points for this morning. You can write them down now if you are taking notes. 1) Gospel ministry will receive opposition (vs. 44-47) and 2) the gospel will move forward (vs 48-52). I want to read through the text stopping to make some comments along the way. Then we will talk about some implications of the truth in this text.

1) Gospel Ministry will receive opposition

Let's start in verse 44, "The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered". The story continues the very next week with the people gathering in the synagogue. The text says the "whole city gathered". How many people were there? We don't

know, but this term can also mean "Every kind of".² Probably not every person in the city was there that day, rather there was a cross section of everyone in the city. There were Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, young and old, etc. This is pretty remarkable to think about! In just one week a group of Jews told enough people about Paul's message that people from across the whole city came the next week. And why did they come? Verse 42 continues, "to hear the word of the Lord." This is a significant detail. Yes, Paul and Barnabus had a reputation of handing the Word of God and teaching it in a way that the Lord used to open the eyes of many, but the text did not say they did not come to hear Paul and Barnabus. They came to hear the "Word of the Lord"!

Why do you come to church? Why do you listen to sermons online? Do you do it to hear a specific person? Don't get me wrong, I have my list of favorite preachers, and I love to sit under their teaching. However, my primary objective, the thing that should excite me more, is the fact that I get to hear and learn the Scriptures. It is the Scripture that has the power to change lives. It is the truth of the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit uses to shape and mold us in our sanctification. Yes, good teaching and a good preacher can help in that process, but it is the content of the message that we should be most focused on hearing. I hope your go to preachers aren't just celebrity preachers who are great at the act of preaching, but rather men that are skillful at exposing the truth of God's Word and allow the Scriptures to be the main focus. I thank God that there are some famous preachers who are good at the art of preaching.

Think for a minute about the scene. There is the missionary team coming into a town. Jews are have been converted to Christianity. The synagogue is as full as it's ever been with both Jews and Gentiles. I wonder how many times the Jewish leaders had Gentiles at the services on the Sabbath? There is a palpable buzz in the air. People are truly interested in what is going to be taught, not just there to go through the ritual process. How do you think the Jewish leaders felt? Happy, excited, mad, confused, overwhelmed? Verse 45 tells us, "But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy". Jealousy, the emotion that comes around when life, ministry, work, etc is about you and it seems like someone else is doing it better. It is an emotion that reveals an incredible amount of selfishness and pride in the heart. I have had to repent of this many times. However, the Jews leaders decide to take another route. Verse 45 continues, "began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him." Instead of being happy that the

² DBL Greek Swanson, James A.

Lord is working, they decide to publicly disagree with Paul and attack his character. They wanted to turn the crowd against Paul and the rest of the team. I wonder what types of accusations they made against Paul? Did they point out his past? Did they call him a hypocrite and try to discredit him for leaving the Jewish faith? Did they question his motives? Probably all of the above, but mostly that did not like the fact that he was willing to preach to the gentiles. Whatever they said you can see their heart and how they felt about the situation. What was happening did not benefit them, so they were going to do whatever it takes to stop it. They attacked the person, and became contradictory. They were not trying to point out the truth, rather they just wanted to oppose them and talk back in order to make sure they were heard. The NIV uses the word "abusive talk".

Are you starting to get the picture? Can you visualize this happening? The type of demeanor, attitude, and tone these Jewish leaders had when giving opposition to the truth of the gospel.

Also, it is important to note that when people oppose gospel ministry there are two reasons. First, They oppose the message itself. We see this and get it. We see that people who are blinded to the truth and do not like or agree with the message of the gospel. They work to discredit the gospel from an intellectual standpoint. However, most people don't know the true gospel well enough to oppose the message itself. All they know is it is or will be messing up the lifestyle/benefit they get from people living in darkness. They are profiting financially, in the form of power or status, or simply they do not want to feel the conviction of the truth, so they oppose the truth. They know that when people start to believe in that message their lives and priorities change. This will interfere with the life they have set up, and they do not like that change. We can point to a number of examples throughout Scripture and church history of this kind of activity taking place. When our gospel ministry is opposed, how often do we consider the why. I wonder if too many well meaning Christians seek to appeal to the brain and logical thinking, and miss the heart and the fact that they simply and selfishly do not like the affects the gospel has around them. As a result, we either walk away frustrated not understanding why they don't understand, or we fall into the trap of easy believism. We call them to agree intellectually without instructing them to count the cost. If the latter happens, it may be worse than the opposition.

So what is the proper way to face those who oppose you? Let's take some lessons from Paul and Barnabas. Let's pick back up in verses 46-47, "And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be

spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."³

The text says that they spoke boldly. First of all notice the contrast in terms. The Jewish leaders contradicted, "talk abusively"³, while Paul and Barnabas spoke. How did they speak boldly, fearlessly. I think that many times when we see Paul asking for boldness or other leaders of Scripture speaking boldly, we may get the wrong picture. I want to think about what that really means. I often picture someone who has to work up the nerve to speak honestly or passionately about something. Usually something that is controversial or confrontational. Is that Biblical boldness? I would think that it is not. In that scenario, often the person has a fear of man. There is a fear of losing something or someone due to the situation. They are fearful of losing the argument, the ground gained, and who knows what else. In fact the more I think about it that person sounds more like the Jewish leaders than Paul and Barnabas. It is just clothed in spiritual clothing. So, what does Biblical boldness look like? There are a couple of words that come to mind: there is a calmness, confidence, filled with grace and truth, kindness, meekness, and the rest of the Fruit of the Spirit. That's the type of boldness I want! This can only be possible when we are relying on the promises of God and trusting the truth of the message. When we realize we serve under the providence of a sovereign God, who has won the victory, and promised us all that he has in the Scriptures, we can be confident. When we know we are speaking the truth while walking in step with the spirit we can trust in that truth. We don't have to fight for the victory. The Lord has won the victory, we are just called to serve and stand our ground. Are you starting to see the contrast in tone, demeanor, and goal between the Jewish leaders and the missionary team?

Because of their faith and confidence in the person and work of Christ their message was different. First they addressed some of the accusations. Paul explained to them that he came to them first, and they rejected the message. He was not going behind their back, undermining them, or any other accusation they may have said. It is important that we stand for what is true and right. This doesn't mean that we become passive or ignore what is right. We just address it differently. Secondly, Paul took them to Scripture. In verse 47 he quotes from Isaiah 49:6. Paul pointed them back to the truth. The very Scriptures that the

³ NIV

Jewish leaders are supposed to know. If you look in your Bibles, Isaiah 49:6 says, "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Paul reminded the Jewish leaders that gentiles are part of the "nations". That he was doing the very thing that the Lord has called the nation of Israel to do, and they have failed. By the way these accusations don't stop. Paul spends time defending himself in Galatians. A letter written to these people.

Do you see the contrast between the opposition of the Jewish leaders and the boldness of Paul and Barnabus? Which one do you resemble more often at home, in the lunchroom, with family, at church, and on social media? The sad reality is when I scroll through my news feed, I see more believers resembling the Jewish leaders than I do those who resemble Paul and Barnabus. Yes, we need to take a stand. Yes, we need a voice in the public square. Yes, we need to point to Scripture. However, we need to do it in a way that shows Biblical boldness not worldly passion.

How about that for a follow up evangelism event? All of the promise from the week before gone, right? Gospel ministry will be opposed in a fallen world, but let's see what our great God does in the rest of the chapter!

2) The Gospel will move forward

Reading from verses 48-49, "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. 49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region." Amazing! The result of the Jewish leaders opposing Paul and Barnabas is that many gentiles became believers in Jesus Christ. This is not how most strategic plans work. This isn't what we picture when we think of a program or a ministry outreach, but the fact is the gospel has now reached the Jews and the gentiles of the whole region. People from all walks of life have not had their eyes opened to the truth and their hearts changed. How and why does this happen. First, they honored the Word of God. That whole thing about them coming to hear the Word was true, and it was a demonstration of humility. When they heard it the Lord kept his promise in Isaiah 55:11, "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." Secondly, "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed". The Lord has sovereignly elected those who will be called to the Kingdom of the Lord and nothing will stop that from happening. "One of Scripture's clearest statements on the sovereignty of God in salvation. God chooses man for salvation, not the opposite.

Faith itself is the gift from God."⁴ God appoints → humans believe... both are true and the order is important. Salvation is all of the Lord, therefore, no human circumstances are going to stop the Lord from seeing his people called to himself in his timing.

This doctrine is so important for many reasons! First, it points us to worship our saviour! He is worthy! The Lord is the one who has done the work of salvation and deserves all praise and glory and honor! Secondly, it gives us hope and confidence in sharing the gospel! Some would argue that the doctrines of grace would cause us to see no need for evangelism and missions, but I would argue that the opposite is true. The fact that the Lord's elect is out there and the Lord will work through his people to save them gives me hope in sharing the gospel. There is a harvest, and we are called to faithfully spread the seed, and pray for the Lord's working. This is how missionaries have stayed in difficult places for so long. This is how people have endured persecution and still continued on in preaching the gospel. They knew there was hope for a harvest, and that was worth the persecution!

Does that mean the circumstances get better? No, they actually get worse. As the Jews and Gentiles turned their lives to the Lord, they didn't keep it to themselves. They started to share the wonderful news of the gospel to others. Verse 49 says, "the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region". The Lord knew what he was doing when he brought people from every area, class, and ethnic group from the area to the synagogue that day. As this started to escalate the Jewish leaders started to go back to some old tricks to maintain influence. Look at verse 50, "But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district." Just like the chief priest did with Jesus, the leaders of this city turned to the politician to help them out. They ramped up the persecution and through Paul, Barnabas, and the rest of the team out of the city. The CSB put it this way "expelled them from their district".

Now that stopped the Lord's work from going on, right? No, not even close. Paul, Barnabas and the team went on to Iconium in order to reach more people with the gospel of Christ. Their work was not done!

On the way out they did a funny thing? Verse 51 says, "But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium." What is that all about?

⁴ MacArthur Study Bible

This is the language Jesus used when sending out the disciples on missionary journeys in Matt. 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5. It is a "Jewish sign of displeasure and disassociation".⁵ Jews often did this when returning home as to not even bring gentile dust into Israel. Now Paul and the team are using it against the Jewish leaders of this city. John MacArthur notes, "there could have been no stronger condemnation".⁶

Brothers and sisters, the Jewish leaders and followers missed it. They missed Christ. Because of their pride and love for this world all wrapped up in religious clothing, they missed seeing Christ for who he really is and deemed "themselves as unworthy". However, the reality is Gospel ministry will go forward! The question is, which side are you on? Maybe you are one who never considered these things before. You have never heard the fact that Jesus came to earth to die on a cross as the substitutionary atoning sacrifice for lost sinners. As a result of that by simply placing your faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ you can have your sins forgiven and be adopted into the family of God! Maybe you know the story and you have agreed with the story, but you have stopped short of allowing it to dictate the terms of your life. In either case, surrender your life to Christ! You don't need to walk an aisle or say any special formula in your prayer. Just humble yourself before the Lord, repent of your sins, and believe!

For the rest of you who have trusted Christ as your saviour, are you engaged in gospel ministry? I said at the beginning that I decided against the title of "the rest of the story". The main reason is because Acts 13 is not the rest of the story. The story is still being written. The Word of God is powerful and the Gospel continues to be written. We are called to be ambassadors, ministers of reconciliation, lights, ministers of the gospel. Are you standing by and watching it happen, or are you an active participant? Are you ready to share the gospel like we talked about last week. Also, are you ready for the opposition that may come. How will you respond? Will you demonstrate Biblical boldness or will you fight like the world? Despite the circumstances will you keep singularly focused on the mission...focused on Christ?

The persecution did not stop for the new believers in Antioch. Read the book of Galatians for how that turned out. Despite the persecution they continued to experience they "were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." (verse 52) May we be filled with Joy and filled with the Holy Spirit!

⁵ ESV Study Bible

⁶ MacArthur Study Bible