

In our passage last time, we read about Paul and Barnabas on their mission to Antioch in Pisidia. As was their habit, they went first to the local synagogue to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul used the Old Testament scriptures to show that Jesus is the Messiah, and made an appeal to faith in Him. He finished with a warning from Habakkuk, that if they refused Jesus and His sacrifice, they would perish. In tonight's passage we read of the people's response, and gain insights into the reaction of people today when they hear the gospel. Please read along with me, Acts 13:42-52.

This passage of scripture reminds us that no matter how much things change, human nature, and the response to the gospel message, have been the same throughout the history of the church. While there have been periods of spiritual awakenings, and periods of predominately spiritual darkness, overall we can conclude that when we share the gospel, some people get it, and some do not. Some surrender their lives in faith, while others oppose the gospel, and the messengers that bring the hope of God to the lost world.

The initial response to Paul's message seems to have been very positive. The people were so moved that they wanted to hear more. They begged Paul and Barnabas to come back the following Sabbath. Those who responded in faith, and touched by the message, couldn't wait to hear Paul preach another sermon. Many of the people followed Paul and Barnabas and encouraged them in their ministry.

On any given Sunday morning, here at Hickory Hammock Baptist Church, there are 400 or so people in attendance. We always have visitors, and I praise God for that, but the heart and soul of the church is the people who have believed the message, who hunger for God's word, who follow the leadership of the pastors, as we encourage one another in the ministry. About a fourth of the adults, that attend on Sunday Morning, return on Wednesday evening to feast on the word of God in the middle of the week. A smaller number take advantage of other bible studies offered throughout the week.

The reason you come, is that you want to hear more. You receive the message with joy and try to apply the biblical principles learned to your lives, so that you can grow in your relationship with the Lord. Through discipleship, and self-discipline, you find new meaning and purpose for your life that comes from the Lord.

When the church is healthy, it creates an excitement that is infectious. When God inhabits our praise, He draws people to Himself. People hear about what God is doing, and they want to come and see for themselves, and be a part of it. All of this is good. It is the way that we hope and pray that God will bless all of the efforts of our ministries.

I could not find a definitive estimate of the population of Antioch Pisidia at the time of the first missionary journey, but I did find a reference that told of an amphitheater in the city that seated 15,000 people. This was no small village, and the bible says that on the next Sabbath, almost the whole town gathered to hear the word of the Lord. The excitement generated by the movement of God, coupled with the people spreading the word about the message Paul preached, resulted in a huge crowd coming out to hear the next message.

Thousands of people came out, so Paul did not preach in the Synagogue. He must have preached either in the amphitheater, or out in the open to accommodate the crowd. The picture that comes to my mind is that it was similar to a Billy Graham Crusade. I attended a couple of his crusades as a child, and have watched many others on the television. In each of those crusades there was a huge crowd, and a clear presentation of the gospel, with a call to a response

of faith. At the conclusion of each crusade there was always a mass movement of people coming forward to receive Christ.

This, I believe, is a contemporary picture of the events described in our passage this evening, and it gives us a sense of God's blessings upon Paul's ministry. But with every great movement of God, the devil does his best to stop people from coming to faith in Christ, and to destroy the person, or persons, God may be using, at the time, to advance the kingdom.

None of us are immune to these attacks. I certainly am not. Brother Carl is not, and neither are you. The devil does not allow the advance of the kingdom to go unchallenged, and he doesn't care how much he hurts us. He always seems to attack us where we are the weakest, and the most vulnerable. If he cannot get to us directly, he attacks our loved ones. He uses every opening that people give him to destroy lives, and testimonies. He robs us of our joy and tries to get us to give up.

It is in such times that we must learn from Paul's words, "Greater is He that is in me, than he that is in the world," and "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." When faced with these challenges, in order to have victory, we must solidify our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and rely upon the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, as we gratefully receive the prayers, and encouragement, of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The bible says that when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. Rather than recognizing a great movement of God among the people, and praising the Lord for the salvation of lost souls, the Jews became jealous. The people paid attention to Paul, in ways that they had never paid attention to them. Paul drew a crowd many times greater than they could even fit in their Synagogue. Nobody listened to them, while Paul was in town.

The devil saw that jealousy was the Jewish weak spot. Using the spiritual power at his disposal, he worked in their minds and hearts to message and build upon this jealousy until they reacted in opposition to Paul, and the advance of the Kingdom that God brought through him. Jealousy may not be your weak spot, but whatever the weakness, the spiritual battle is fought in the mind. No matter what happens, we have to process it in our minds. This is why the bible commands us to take captive every thought, and to dwell on things above. Don't let the devil get into your head, or he will use you to oppose what God desires to do.

The Jews had pangs of jealousy. They dwelled on those emotions. They talked among themselves so that they felt justified, and reinforced one another's feelings. The result was that they contradicted Paul. In so doing, they denied the gospel of Jesus Christ. They also used abusive language against him, to undermine his authority, and his ministry.

So far as I know, we do not have this problem in our church, but I have seen how the devil works to divide a church. When there is a false or ungodly perception in a person's mind, and they do not deal with it biblically, they can become the true source of a problem in the body of Christ. Where there is jealousy, hurt pride, or a general unwillingness to do what is right, people sometimes talk, and stir up feelings of animosity against the leadership, or someone perceived to be an enemy. First thing you know people take sides. If left unchecked, the church splits, or the people in leadership positions leave.

How did Paul and Barnabas react to this opposition? The Bible says that they spoke out boldly. Whenever we have to take a stand, let it be that we stand upon the truth, and let us speak with boldness. Expect for the world to oppose you when you stand on the truth. It has always been this way, and it will continue to be this way until the Lord's return. But, if we want to be blessed by God, and used by God, we have to stand upon the truth, no matter how unpopular, or how much opposition may come because of our stand.

Notice that the bible says that it was necessary that the word of God be spoken to the Jews first. If we understand this to be true, we can understand why Paul always preached in the Synagogues first, in each town he entered. God promised the Jews their Messiah. Jesus came in fulfillment of that promise. He was a Jew, who came to the Jews. The gospel was first preached to the Jews, but Jews and Gentiles alike must respond to the gospel in faith, in order to be saved. The Jews who believed were saved. Those who opposed the gospel remained lost. Once the Jews had the opportunity to trust Jesus, God extended His grace to the Gentiles as well.

Paul and Barnabas quoted Isaiah 49:6, a passage that the Jews would have been familiar with, to show that this was God's plan all along. Jesus came as the Messiah for the Jews, but He came as the Savior for the whole world. This infuriated the Jews who rejected the gospel, but this was truly good news for the gentiles who believed. The Gentiles rejoiced, and praised God, and received Jesus into their hearts as Savior and Lord, that is, all who had been appointed to eternal life.

Being appointed to eternal life is not a phrase to be used to defend the doctrines of Calvinism. I think it may speak to the issue of the foreknowledge of God, but we might just as accurately translate this verse as, "all who believed have been appointed to eternal life." Faith and eternal life are two sides of the same coin. We have to keep in balance the concepts of God's sovereignty, and man's responsibility before God in deciding how to respond to the gospel, so that we do not go over a theological cliff, and miss the pure message of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and that Jesus sacrificed Himself for all people.

When Paul and Barnabas stood up to the Jewish leadership, the Jews incited the religious women of high standing, and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul, and Barnabas, and expelled them from the city. I find it interesting that in the Synagogues, the women were not even allowed to speak, but the Jewish leaders went to these women first, to try to stir up trouble. This brings to mind 1 Timothy 5, where Paul talks about idol women who are gossips and busy bodies who say things that they ought not to say. Maybe he was thinking of his experience in Antioch of Pisidia when he penned those words. In any event there were women like this that the Jews used to cause trouble for the missionaries.

They also stirred up some of the leading men in the city, which suggests Gentile, non-believers, with some political clout. They got politicians to take up a godless cause to oppose the truth of God. Aren't you glad that nothing like that happens today?

Many of the stands that we must take right now are a result of the agendas of godless politicians. We know that no good will come from selling liquor on Sunday in Milton Florida, yet the mayor and some members of the city council are determined to change the ordinance to allow it. They disguise their personal goals under the pretense of letting the people decide. But I guarantee that if the people rise up with one voice, and say not to Sunday liquor sales, they will continue to push the issue, so long as they are in office. This is one more reason why it is so important that Christians vote.

We know that marriage is between a man and a woman. It is a common sense truth that is affirmed by the word of God, yet because of political agendas, our culture has been thrown into godless confusion. Homosexuals, bisexuals, and transvestites have no right to impose their godlessness on my family, or our culture, regardless of what the political elite decree. I will do whatever I have to do to keep perverts from following my precious and innocent granddaughter into the bathroom, even if the president of the United States says otherwise.

Lord help us, if we do not stand upon the truth and shine some light into this dark world. Discredited, and run out of town, Paul and Barnabas did not cower. They stood upon the truth.

When a group of the people rejected the gospel, they shook the dust off of their feet, and continued on in their missionary journey to share the gospel with as many people as possible so that they would have the opportunity to be saved.

This passage reminds us that everyone we reach out to is not going to get saved, but no matter what the opposition, we have to continue to share the gospel, and stand upon the truth. Those who ran Paul and Barnabas out of town must have felt really good about themselves, as if they had won a great victory. Little did they realize that they missed their opportunity to be saved. Those who believed, on the other hand, were filled with joy, and the Holy Spirit. While we live in the physical world, we will be caught up in all manner of spiritual battles. Those battles require us to sometimes take stands against the evils of this world, as we take our stand for Jesus Christ. Our world is becoming increasingly dark. Evil is becoming the accepted norm, which suggests that the end may be near. In whatever time we have left, let us stand together on the truth of God's word, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. If there are any here who want to know more about how to be saved, we will be glad to answer your questions, so that you may come to know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.