

Let's open our Bibles this evening to Acts 13:42. I hope you have your maps with you. If you don't have them (we've given out maps for Paul's missionary journeys), you can get one from an usher if you happen to see one nearby. If not, on your way out - at the counter - you're certainly welcome to have one. So, pick one up, put it in your Bible, keep it with you. It'll help you, I think, to understand as we go through this last half of the book of Acts.

The book of Acts is about thirty years long in terms of reporting that God gives to us - the report of the first generation, if you will. As a result, Luke gives us kind of in two parts. It is the ministry to the Jews first, as the Lord went to them first as He promised that He would. And with the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles by Peter to the house of Cornelius (there in chapter 12), you really turn the corner, and you're about halfway through the book of Acts, then, in terms of time. The last many chapters look at Paul's ministry but really only cover about the last 14 or 15 years of the book of Acts. So that's kind of where we're at.

Just to kind of get you up-to-speed a little bit, when Peter was led by the Lord through those wonderful steps that God took to free him of his prejudices, especially his religious ones, and got him to Cornelius' house, the gospel was officially proclaimed to the Gentiles. It was always God's idea and His plan to save all men. At the same time, because of the persecution that had arisen when Stephen was martyred, there were men who had traveled as far as Antioch in Syria - about 300 miles or so north of Jerusalem. They weren't all from there, but they ended up there. And they, without really prompting other than the Holy Spirit, began to share the gospel with others - mostly Hellenists (those who were Jews in Gentile or Greek habits; so the further away from Jerusalem you got, the less that became, really, an issue). And God began to save the folks there as well. Almost at the same time, in two different places. When news got back to the apostles still in Jerusalem - of the work of God in Antioch - they sent Barnabas there, who was excited about what he found. He shared with many. He was an encourager. He wasn't a pastor or a teacher in that regard, as far as gifts. He finally realized, "There're too many people here. I've got to teach them." He went and found Paul, whom he had met in Jerusalem years earlier; was able to persuade him to come there from Tarsus which, if you look at your map, is to the left of Antioch, and for

a year, he and Paul taught the church. The church grew magnificently. They were able to take some money to Jerusalem's poor church because of the prophecy of a man who said there was a famine coming. The famine did come. And then Paul and Barnabas returned to the church at Antioch where, in chapter 13, they are sent forth as missionaries - really the first missionary journey, if you will, that we have in the book of Acts (by that kind of an understanding). This church in Antioch would become the focal point for world missions in the next generation. The Jerusalem church would kind of fade out, if you will, in that regard, in terms of influence, and much of the work will be done from this church.

So, we started with Paul in verse 4 of chapter 13 on his first missionary journey. I'll repeat to you what we said last week, maybe just to get it in your minds. Paul's first missionary journey lasted about two years - 46 to about 47 A.D. He then really stayed home for about four years. In 50 A.D., he went back out for a much longer tour - was gone to almost 55 A.D.; came back, really had the itch, couldn't stay very long at all, in just a few months turned around and went back out again from 55 to 57. And then that really was the end of his three journeys, and the rest of the book of Acts, then preoccupies himself with his time in prison in Caesarea and all, and then his travel to Rome (which will cover the thirty years).

In this first journey, and if you have a map (and I think we have it up on the board; I know it's a little hard to see if you're further back; if you have eyes like me, it's probably hard to see from here), this trip that Paul takes, and that we'll talk about as we go, will on the second journey do the exact same trip backwards - leaving out Cyprus again. But, at the same time, he would then extend himself to Europe. So Paul traveled first from Antioch to Seleucia which, on your map, is the port city there in Cilicia. He gets on a boat. He travels to Cyprus, which is the place Barnabas comes from. When Paul and Barnabas came back from Jerusalem, you remember, they brought John Mark - the little nephew of Barnabas - with them. He wanted to go to the mission field. So there were three of them. The sail from Seleucia to Salamis is about 100 miles or so, quite a sail. They did, and they do, at the first what we will find them doing often on these trips - they go to the Jewish center first. "There's a synagogue. Let's go communicate with people that have a biblical background." So if they could get quick fruit there, all the better. And so they go there. Almost in every city that they go, they go there first. Sometimes they are well-received. Sometimes it lasts for a couple of weeks. Sometimes it doesn't last at all. But that's their strategy. We told you, as we went through chapter 13 up to this point, that as they headed around Cyprus, there is not one

report of any fruit. And we talked a little bit about how you can be right where God wants you and not necessarily prove it right away and say, "Well, look what the Lord did." They were just faithfully there. We don't really have a report. They traveled another 100 miles around the island to the other side, to the political capital, if you will, the commercial capital - Paphos, where there was a very smart governor who had heard the preaching, wanted to engage Paul and Barnabas, wanted to hear about this Jesus and the gospel. But working for the governor, like in most of these cities, were soothsayers; they were diviners, they were magicians. They were crooked guys. And there was a fellow named Elymas, who worked for him, who didn't want the gospel to get to his boss. The governor's name was Sergius Paulus. He tried to separate him from Paul and Barnabas. But he said, "No, no. I want to see them." And the Lord dealt with Elymas, this guy, this sorcerer. He struck him with blindness at Paul's prayer. It happened to Paul as well. It shook the governor. He went, "Man, this is a powerful God!" Heard the gospel, got saved, gave his life to the Lord. And from the island we have one salvation that we're sure of.

Paul then, beginning in verse 13 of this chapter, gets back on the boat, and he sails to Perga in Pamphylia. It's about a 175-mile sail, quite a long ways. And when they arrived there it does seem, from what we have in the Galatian letter, that Paul got here very sick. Most commentators believe he had malaria. It is just because of the symptoms that he reveals in different places. Paul had a couple of choices to make if you look at your map. He could go along the coast, kind of heading back to Tarsus, or he could take the much more difficult route inland, over the Taurus Mountains, 3600' high, dirt roads, dangerous, a lot of robbers; and it was just the outlaws' kind of area. It frightened John Mark enough to, at that point, say, "Well, if that's what you're doin', I'm goin' home," and he turned around, and he went home. They pressed on to Antioch, there to the north. Antioch is another 100 miles or so inland. You can imagine how many miles these guys are traveling. They get to the Antioch synagogue, as they had already begun to practice. They were invited to speak as either visitors or, if Paul's reputation over those years had gotten to them or they knew about his persecution of the church, they might very well have asked him to speak then, anyway. We're not sure why. But he was ready to speak. We are given, in this chapter (and we covered it last week), his first sermon from the road. They are very much like most of the sermons in the book of Acts, which ought to teach us a lot. They included, for the Jews, a history of God's dealing with them, His faithfulness and their unfaithfulness as a nation. They included how Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophets, and He was foretold and He had

come; about His ministry and how He proved who He was. And then, invariably, they talked of His death and of His resurrection and an invitation to the people to turn to the grace of God and to be saved. Well that happened last time. We went over all of this sermon last week, if you were with us. If not, they're available in just about everywhere we store stuff. But we stopped at verse 41 with Paul ending with a quote that he brought forth to them to say to them, literally (out of Habakkuk), "Look, the Lord warns us that if we despise what God is saying, we can miss the work of God, and we could not be saved." And that is how he ended.

So tonight we want to pick up verse 42, and we want to go to the end of the chapter. We want to look at the fruit of this work. Remember, only one person's gotten saved so far. They've traveled hundreds and hundreds of miles. They've lost one-third of their party. They are on their own. Paul is healing, we hope, from his illness, whatever it might have been. And they now find themselves in this place, Antioch of Pisidia (a different Antioch from which they came), and here's the result.

So let's read just what we're going to look at tonight. Verse 42, "So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. 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. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. 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. 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."' 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. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. 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. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." So they get to town, they go to the synagogues, they preach a message that is maybe, if we have the whole thing, ten minutes long - if Paul spoke just these words.

But look at the commotion that is brought to a town by the simple preaching of the salvation of God and God's grace. The division couldn't have been more pronounced. The words "preaching" and "speaking," "persuading," "sharing the word of God" - I think they tell you the approach that Paul and Barnabas took. They were good at preaching, but they were also good at talking and just answering questions and explaining why it is they believed what they did. But everything centered about God's Word - their discussions, the hungry hearts, even the challenges from the opponents - they were all centered about what God had to say. It's a good place. If you're going to have conflict, stick with the Scriptures. Right? If that's the controversy, then let it be so. But God's truth had tremendous power. And I'll tell you what you will discover in the book of Acts - nobody is left hearing the Word of God without an opinion. It pushes the envelope. The responder has to respond. You can't be neutral to the gospel. If the Lord says, "Unless you believe in Me, you will die and go to hell; if you believe in Me, you will be saved and live forever and go to heaven," there's no way to stand in the middle of that and go, "Well, I believe both, and I'm following neither." The claims are too radical to debate or discuss for very long. It is individual response that God is looking for.

But notice what happens when the gospel is preached. There's turmoil within, there's turmoil within denominations. There's turmoil within nations as well as within individuals. So Paul shares boldly. Some of the people hear the good news of Jesus here in Antioch, and they turn to the Lord, and they're going to be delivered. And they're "filled with the Spirit" - that's what we read in verse 52. They're "filled with joy." Another group of them - same message, same meeting - turn a deaf ear to the truth even though within, according to the Bible, they would be churning with conviction, that God would expose their hearts. But somehow they resort to speaking against God, speaking against His love, speaking against His messenger, resisting the light of the gospel that is shining upon their darkened hearts. If you go back and read Paul's ministry message in light of what the results are, you find that Paul didn't speak about possessions. He didn't focus on politics. He really wasn't interested in social issues although, if you lived under Roman rule, you had all that to talk about. They were horrible. You think we have it bad, try living under the Roman rule. I mean, it couldn't have been worse. He didn't address Rome. He didn't speak about false worship. He didn't speak about what was going around in that very city itself. He spoke about spiritual needs of hearts, of where people stood with God. They didn't have peace, they didn't have rest. And God, by His power, could make a change. He told them Jesus came as God's fulfillment of promise, that the Lord loved them, that He was faithful to them even though they

had been unfaithful. He offered them forgiveness of their sins, justification by God's mercy, faith in Jesus; pointed to Scriptures that the Jews had for thousands of years and said, "This is exactly what God has done." So, it wasn't persecution for politics or social positions or even a criticism of the culture or the idolatry. It was strictly a preaching of the name of Jesus that caused the turmoil. And then you're all right. What can you do if that happens?

Notice from what we read here that amongst the people in the synagogue, there were lots of Gentiles - Gentiles who would have come out of religions or practices where there were lots of gods, and yet they found that to be empty. And so they were aspiring to the God of the Jews, but they hadn't really found peace any more than that Ethiopian eunuch had found peace at the Feast Day when he came to town. They received what Paul had to say with a lot of hunger. "Can you come and preach to us next week? Can we sit in and talk about this from a Gentile perspective because we don't have that Jewish background? What can we know, and what should we know?" And they had an appetite for more.

In the same meeting were folks who were well-entrenched in their religious ways, and their pride rejected the gospel. But I want you to notice - and it's why I read the whole thing all at once - their rejection was not theological. They didn't go, "Well, according to what we believe....." That wasn't the issue. It wasn't intellectual. It was simply this - they were jealous of the favor that God had given to Paul; they saw their popularity, how people were attracted to them, their success, if you will. They reacted to, and were discouraged by, the fact that they saw in Paul's life these two interlopers bringing this glorious gospel, and their influence over the people was seen in verse 42. People came out of church, if you will, and said, "Can we talk about this some more? Can you come back next week? Can we book you for next Saturday?" And for those who couldn't make it, "Can we just go home with you or buy you lunch? We gotta talk." And verse 43 you find there were folks who really couldn't wait a week at all. So they just wanted to be ministered to. Notice that verse 43 said there were some "Jews and devout proselytes." Proselytes - only the word for converts to Judaism. And they wanted to have questions answered now, and they wanted to know about what God could do. And Paul and Barnabas did this - they encouraged them that they should continue in the grace that God had provided for them.

I should tell you - and maybe you know, especially unless you run out of the door the minute we say "amen" or two minutes before we say "amen" - that sometimes

the most important ministry in church when we gather together is done afterwards, is when we're finished; that people that the Lord is speaking to - sometimes they're embarrassed, don't really want to be seen to go up to pray, don't really want people to know they've got a question, and they wait until half the people are out the door, and then they come. That more people get saved in our services a half an hour after the service is over because that's why they're waiting to talk to someone. "Just let me get over there later." And you see the same thing here. There was a moving of God's Spirit, but there was a carrying away of, "Let me ask you over here. I don't want to take up everybody's time, but I want to hear what he has to say." And I'll tell you what - if you really want the Lord to use you in church services, hang around for a little while, and look around. You'll have lots of opportunities to pray for folks, a lot of opportunities to encourage folks. It's just what God is able to do. And, like I said, the battle is for the soul. Right? And sometimes that battle rages. You can't tell on the outside.

So, Paul and Barnabas meet with these really hungry, persistent hearts. They answer their questions. They pray with them to receive the Lord. They talk to them about continuing on. In Greek, it's a present perfect tense, which means, "Don't stop heading in the direction of God's grace. Every step you take, step in the grace of God," if you will, "or step forward in the grace of God." It's a lesson that's repeated constantly in the Scriptures.

One of the problems when you are first saved (and sometimes if you've been saved for a while) is that you and I come out of a world system that is built, no matter what continent you go to, from the standpoint of works or the concept of works righteousness. It just permeates our life. If you go to school as a kid, and your parents want you to get good grades, they will tie rewards to performance. You get an A, you get \$1 or \$100. I don't know what you get these days. I got a quarter.....I thought I was doin' pretty good. But everything is tied to performance. So, in our minds, the good person gets rewarded, the bad person gets punished. And then when that messes up, we don't know what to do. But that's the way we live our lives - performance. And so it isn't too much of a surprise that when you then go to God, you show up in God's presence with, "I've got a list of things I've done, and I found ten guys that are a lot worse than I am, and grade on a curve, and I want at least 80%." But it's all performance based. So the minute you run into grace - and that's what Paul is speaking to these folks, especially the Jews who are performance driven in every way possible but not any worse than we; he comes to talk to them about unmerited favor - that has to

change your entire concept of your relationship with God. It challenges every place that you stand, especially if you've come out of a religious background. I think it's harder for religious people to grab ahold of grace than people who've never had anything. And most of us have had some kind of religious background. In the days and weeks and years that will follow - now understand, we're in Galatia; this whole area is Galatia, for the most part, where Paul is ministering; there are different provinces, but they are basically the area of Galatia - the Galatians will constantly be bombarded with this idea of making their relationship with God based upon performance instead of faith and grace, trusting God and His grace. When Paul writes a letter to them (the book of Galatians), it is all about the grace of God staring into the face of works. Galatians 3:3, "How can you, who started by faith and grace, now be made perfect in the flesh?" And it just screams, "Knock this off!" because that's what you bring to the table. When he writes the letter to the Hebrews, it is that same issue of faith versus grace. But the major theme of Galatians is the temptation to finish in your flesh what God has given you to start with in the Spirit. So, we are saved by grace, are we not? Apart from works. I know that's easy to say, but living that out is a tremendous trial. Because God's plan for you and me is that we might grow and mature in faith so that we can walk by grace. There is a natural tendency for all of us, in our spiritual lives, to regress back to works. It is so hard to stand by grace because it is ingrained in us, "I want to perform, I want to earn, I want to do, I want to claim that I deserve it." Right? So we will even make rules in church for one another as somehow so we can have degrees of holiness. How to pray. I saw a book in the bookstore the other day (not ours) "How to Pray to Get God to Move." And I thought, "Really?! There's a formula? Why didn't I learn this one earlier?" Or how are you going to dress to be a real believer? Or how long can your hair be? What kind of music can you listen to? Soon our relationship, because of the rules - even in the church, becomes manmade rules devoid of faith, and the missing component, then, is grace because we've reduced our relationship with God to performance. As a young Christian, and to be honest with you - even as a young pastor (because I started pastoring in my 20's, pretty young; had been a Christian for seven or eight years at the time) - there was a lot I needed to learn (not that I don't need to learn that today), but one of the things I struggled with was that I truly believed if God was going to bless me, I was going to have to stand in a certain spot spiritually. So I would go to teach, and (I think I've told you before) I was terrible at it to start with. I'm not saying I'm better at it now, but I'm better at it now than I was then. I was horrible then. I was terrible. I have a cassette of my first sermon. You will never hear it. (Laughing) I'll burn it first, I'm tellin' ya. But here's what I would do - I

would come home after teaching, and I would start to go over what had happened at the service. "How many people showed up? How many responses did I get?" And I would begin to do this - "Did I pray enough? Was I good enough this week? Maybe if I had not sworn at that guy in the car, the Lord might have been able to bless me. Maybe I should have studied more. I didn't put enough time. Maybe I'm not believing enough. Maybe my faith is not pleasing to the Lord." There's this overwhelming pressure that you can put on yourself when you believe that somehow what God gives you is something you have to earn or be worthy of, which is why Paul and Barnabas had to say to these Jews and Gentiles, "Look, continue in God's grace. Every day, remind yourself of how you stand." I would pray things to the Lord, when I was a young pastor, "Lord, I've been pretty good this week." Sitting in the back before I came out to teach, "Please bless Your Word and Your people today. I want them to learn to know You better. And if I've done somethin' wrong, just overlook that so we can get on with this." It would be my prayer. And I learned something, and I didn't learn it the obvious way, but I learned that when I was at my perceived worst, God seemed to do His best. When I didn't earn it at all, when I screwed up all week, when I lost my temper, when I didn't study as I should, when I didn't pray enough, when I realized I'd just dropped the ball on everything, and then ten people'd get saved. And I'd go, "Lord, that's real nice of You, but next week I'll measure up so we can get to twenty." You know? I just began to realize that when I thought I was "on," everything went wrong. And it was a freeing lesson to learn that grace required me to just trust the Lord. If we went by earning, I don't deserve to stand anywhere and neither do you. So, it changed my approach to ministry. I should still strive to be everything that I should be in Christ and battle with the flesh, but I understand now that the work of God's Spirit is a work of grace; hasn't got anything to do with my abilities, my intentions, my performance. That's God's grace. And then you're kind of free to do your best and rest. Because it's the Lord's work.

And I love just I don't know what happened in this meeting on this Saturday afternoon with Paul and Barnabas, or even during the week with these disciples learning about the grace of God. I'd have loved to have been at the meeting. But if you're stuck in the performance-versus-grace battle, you're never going to be happy until you come to grace. You're gonna kill yourself. You're gonna struggle. Everything's gonna have to depend on you. Everything's gonna be about you, and, "It's me and me, and I didn't do, and then I did. You owe me, and I don't owe you, and now I owe you." You'll just go nuts. Now I don't worry about it at all. I know God's Word is good. I know God will teach you. I'm thankful that He allows me to

be a pastor, but I'm not thinking for five minutes He needs me nor am I thinking for five minutes I can earn His goodness. And if you're depending on me, you're hosed anyway. And if we're depending on the Lord, you'll be just fine whoever stands up here. So, I like the present perfect tense. They just told them to continue and persuaded them to continue and spoke to them and ministered to them "to continue in the grace of God."

The next Sabbath, verse 44, arrived, and the work of God in the hearts of these men in the city and the women in the city seems to have touched everyone. It is always, by the way, the way churches are born and growth happens. God reaches a few who reach a few others, who tell some others. It is the one by one by one by one formula. It's the way it works. You can advertise all you like. But God does His best work through you, speaking to someone that you love, that you're praying for, that when you learn, they learn. And God works that way. This week in Antioch, the synagogue had never been so full. In fact, we read there that almost the entire town showed up. This is pretty cool fruit, I think. And the formula that God uses most often in the history of the early church is one person bringing another person bringing another one. Look, there's nothing more exciting than, if you're a pastor or a teacher, teaching a new believer class. New believers are what we should all be - that excited. They want to know everything, what verse, "Let me write it down. Don't talk so fast. It says that about me? Wow! Where's that?" They can't get enough. "Would you pray for me? I just know God's gonna work tomorrow!" And then you find the old Christians, the ones who've been around. Nothin' fazes them anymore. But these are new believers, man. The whole town shows up! If you're not excited, how would they be excited? Well, they were excited. No complacency here. No settling in here. I think that's why Jesus had to say to the Ephesian church (Revelation 2:4), "You've left your first love. You're still as busy as ever, but you're doing it all for the wrong reasons now. Come back to your first love. Let that motivate you." Well, that's what you find here. The first love of the people for the Lord is found in verse 44 as the whole city, almost, shows up. And they show up for this purpose - they wanted "to hear the Word of God." That's what it says. Right? They came "to hear the Word of God." How awesome is that! What if every one of you brought one person to church next Wednesday night? We couldn't fit them all in here. I'd have to apologize. "Well, you have to go home. I'm sorry. You can't stay." What a good problem that would be. When's the last time you shared the gospel with somebody with enthusiasm? When's the last time you brought someone with you to church and shared with them? What did Jesus say? "Go into the highways and byways, compel them to

come in" (Luke 14:23). The word "compel" means to force, which is interesting. I used to bring people to church. Here was my great method of bringing my friends to church when I first got saved. I used to say, "Hey, you want to go to church with me? I'll buy you breakfast." And the flesh always wanted breakfast, so people would go. People would come. They'd sit through it. They didn't like it, but they'd come. "All right. We're gonna go eat now?" "Yeah, we're gonna go eat now." And they'd come. "Compel them to come in." He told the disciples His view of the world in John 4:35 when the Lord said, "Look up your eyes. You say four months till the harvest. I say the fields are harvestable already - white unto harvest."

So, I love just watching Paul and Barnabas minister. I don't think they had this planned. They just went and shared, and God began to do this work. Standing room only. And no fire department regulations to keep them out. You would have thought that everyone was elated. Maybe the chief rabbi of all would be so thrilled. But what we read in verse 45 is just the opposite. "When the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul." Right? The regular synagogue attendees (the religious folks) were not offended by the doctrine of Jesus, but they argued against the message because of their envy over the influence and popularity of Paul. The word "envy" is the word zealous or zeal. They were zealous to have a following like Paul had. They went so far as to blaspheme the Word of God. In verse 44, everyone came to hear the Word of God. In verse 45, there were certain of those in the group who were just the opposite; they wanted to discredit the preaching out of a jealous envy, self-love destroying, if you will, the work. I think they should have been rejoicing God's Word was going out, but that wasn't the case. This competitive attitude - you find it oftentimes amongst churches as well. It's hard to do outreaches with other churches because they're afraid you'll steal their people rather than going, "Hey, we're all goin' to heaven, this is good." You should be involved in a local church. I believe that. Be devoted to a group of people. Make yourself available. However, there are Christians everywhere. Right? The Lord is doing good things in many places. So, notice they spoke out loudly against Paul and Barnabas because the success of their message and the appeal to the people bothered the religious leaders. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to dedicate Him to offering of purification, it was Simeon who met them (there in Luke 2:25). And one of the things that Simeon said to Mary was that "this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against" (Luke 2:34). And here, in the early church, you find it to be so.

Like we said, at every stop - if possible - Paul went to the synagogue first to preach Jesus. But when the door closed, he always immediately turned to the Gentiles to whom he was called. I also want you to notice (in verse 45) that Paul doesn't take this personally. He sees their rejection of God's Word and their refusal to want everlasting life. "If you don't deem yourself worthy of it, then we'll go somewhere else." He didn't force it down their throats. He didn't even stay and argue with them for very long. He just preached the Word, and when they determined to turn away, he turned away as well. It was their choice. Remember what Pilate said? "What am I supposed to do with Jesus?" (Matthew 27:22). That's a question everybody's going to have to answer for themselves. So your eternity hangs in the balance depending on what you decide about the Word of God and, in particular, what you decide about Jesus. Well, Paul's conclusion in verse 46 was, "Look, if you don't want eternal life, we'll go to the Gentiles with it."

And then, in verse 47, Paul quotes out of Isaiah 49:6 which, in the context if you go read that chapter, is a specific prophecy of the ministry of Jesus. Paul took it as a biblical directive for him that he was sent to preach Jesus to the Gentile world. In fact, Paul will speak (in Acts 26) to Agrippa, and he will quote this verse again. It seems to be one of his life ministry verses about explaining what he was doing.

Well, verse 48 tells us that the Gentiles, when they heard that God loved them too, rejoiced. Understand. They weren't told that in the synagogue, that God loved them too. "You can join us. We're the chosen. You can join us. But we're the chosen." Now they hear from Paul, "God loves you." It's a glorious thing to learn that God loves you. They'd been told otherwise for generations. Now they, and I want you to notice verse 48, "glorified the word of the Lord." What does that mean? It means that when Paul told them that God loved them as well, he used the Scriptures to convince them. Right? They were bowing to its authority. They were rejoicing in its truth. They were proclaiming its proclamation, if you will. They were glad, and they glorified God.

And then we have this verse that sometimes is confusing for folks. "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." It's comforting to know, I think, that those in Antioch that God had ordained for eternal life received His words and believed in Jesus. In many ways, that takes the pressure off of you and me - to know that God saves. I think we said a few weeks ago - if you really want to see God work, get involved. You can't save, but you can preach. You can't heal, but you

can pray. You can't win people's hearts, but you can show them how your heart's been won. And then God works. Right? So here's a statement of fact that we should take and hang on to - God assured us (and assured Paul) that those whom He had ordained for salvation in this city had come and that those that were walking away, God would deal with. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" the Bible says (John 6:44). Or he writes to the Thessalonians (Paul does), "Because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

There is an important concept, and I want to go over it at least for a couple minutes with you, and that is this - if God decided to only save a few of us, that would be His prerogative. Do you agree? In other words, you can't really tell God what to do because He's God. That puts you in a difficult position. If the Lord was to say to you, "I'm taking you in the third row and you in the sixth row, and I don't like your hair, and I'm taking that guy over there," there's nothing you could have done about that. You would just be stuck to go, "All right, I don't know how to fight God and win." It's like coming to know God. If God decided He doesn't want you to know Him, you'll never know Him. But He's a God who reveals Himself, so you're at an advantage because you're serving a God who wants to be known. We are told, in the Bible, that God would desire that all men be saved. You can read that in lots of places (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9). Right? That His desire is that all men would come to the knowledge of His grace. So how, then, does the ordaining to life work when God would have all men to be saved and yet not all men are saved? How does that work? Well, from a biblical perspective (and it's not so hard to comprehend), your knowledge and my knowledge are called after-knowledge. Right? If we watch a replay of a football game that we were at, we can turn to one another and say, "Wait till you see this next play" because we've seen it, we know what's coming. God treats eternity that way. God sees all that is coming, and He operates on what the Bible calls foreknowledge. We have hind-knowledge, He has foreknowledge. So God, from an eternal perspective, uses His foreknowledge to look ahead. John says (in chapter 14:29), Jesus said, "I've told you before it happens so that when it happens, you might believe that I'm God because no one can tell you beforehand. That's what I do." So God looks forward, in the biblical sense. He sees those who, in response to His call, respond in love. "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Why? Because God would call every one of us to believe. But you have a part to play; you have an opportunity to say yes or no. The ability to see the choices is given to you by God's grace. Had He not revealed them to you, you wouldn't have a choice at all. You wouldn't know

any better. But God gives you the clarity to make a choice. God looks forward and sees what choice you'll make. He doesn't force the choice. He knows the choice. He loves all, wants to save all. Died for all, shed His blood for all. God didn't pick some and go, "The rest of you can rot in hell." That's a foolish doctrine. It's not a biblical one, either. So God sees ahead, and those that have been ordained to eternal life believed. But God already knew. He understood who was coming. "Blessed be God who, according to His foreknowledge, understands us" (Ephesians 1, 1 Peter 1). So you get to Ephesians 2:10, and it says, "For we are His workmanship," (speaking of Jesus) "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." God gives you opportunity. But God knows what's coming. If you decide not to come to the Lord, to not respond to His grace, to turn away - as these in the synagogue did - God can use your life for any purpose that He wants. He's not forcing you to be lost. He just knows what you're going to do. To you who He knows are going to turn and listen and believe, He's going to formulate and plan and plot out your life every day from the day you come to know Him (or even before) until the day that He catches you up, and you'll be His workmanship. He'll make plans. He'll go before you to the place He's got you going. It's like if I have a son that I can look forward and say, "Hey, he's gonna go to medical school one day. Man, that's gonna cost a lot of money!" And because I know he's going, I start saving so that when he makes that decision, "Here's the money. Now you can go." I didn't force him to go. I acted upon foreknowledge. Same thing with God. Same thing with God. So the choice is yours. And there's this big argument, obviously, between how much choice you really have. Enough choice to make you liable if you choose not to believe. Hell is a real place. There's enough choice in there that making a bad one would have eternal consequences. So you have a choice. We have a responsibility to respond to God. And someone would say, "Well, what if I'm not chosen?" Then I would say this, "Then choose Him today, then you'll know you are." I think it was Moody who, years ago, wrote, "Whosoever wills are the chosen, and whoever won't are not chosen." I think there's a door that, when you get to heaven, will say on the outside, "Whosoever will." And the minute you walk through the gate and look backwards, I think you'll see "Chosen in Him before the foundations of the world." God knew. God prepares your life based upon His foreknowledge. But don't lose the fact that God wants every person to be saved. He doesn't want to lose one. He didn't have Jesus die for some. He died for all. And any believer will tell you they have been saved by the grace of God and work of the Holy Spirit who convicted them; and Jesus pointed them out, and they'll be able to say, "The Lord saved me. He showed me, and I listened." An unbeliever is responsible for choosing to ignore

the work of the Spirit, refusing His calling and, like these folks did, hearing the message and not applying it to themselves and being driven away for whatever reason they might have been. So when you read verses like, "As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed," they were appointed to eternal life. They weren't forced to believe; they made their own choice. It is Paul who said to them (in this very verse), "Since you've chosen not to believe, since you've declared you're not worthy of eternal life because you don't want to listen to this anymore, because you're blaspheming the Lord, I'm going down the street. I'm going to go talk to the Gentiles." But he had peace that God had reached those whom He knew were ready to believe. There might have been some later. He didn't know. But he can walk away with rest because of God has done. It's nice to know you're chosen. You ever play sports when you were a kid, and you were the last one chosen? Or people would say, "We had him last week. You take him this week." It doesn't feel good. But to have the Lord say, "I want you with Me," Ah! That's the best, isn't it? "Lord, are You sure? Have you seen my right arm, the way I throw?" "Yeah, I want you on My team." Awesome.

Well, "the word of the Lord was being spread" (verse 49) "throughout all the region." That's one by one by one. It wasn't long before the entire Galatian area was hearing the good news. It was spreading like wildfire. The saints had an answer for life. Now, understand this was a culture dominated by Greek philosophers, by Hebrew religious bondage, by tons of idols. There was nothing that would contribute to that except for two guys who showed up, having lost their helper, sick as a dog, show up and preach one week, meet for a couple weeks with folks in the area, move along away from the religious folks (so they're not going to waste their time), and then just see God's word catch fire. It's an amazing picture. Right? The opposition could not stop the spread of the good news of Jesus, and that's still our confidence today. Hey, they can pass any rule they want about praying in school, but I guarantee you when the kids are taking tests, they're praying in school. Make any rule you want, man, they're gonna pray. And the church is going to be fine. So, what a great verse, verse 49 is, after this long embattled trip - 100, 200, 345, 400-500 miles - to get here. One convert. And then you hit town and, man, this seems to be a cool place.....at least for a little while.

Because verse 50 tells us as soon as the fruit began to gather, so did the conspiracy and the persecution and the expulsion. There was already this opposition. In fact, when Paul writes his last letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:10), this is what he says, "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life,

purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra - what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me." So, even twenty years later, Paul, looking back, says, "You remember what that was like, what I told you about - how we suffered and yet God was with us. We were hurting. God was with us." Even at the Galatians, we read of how kindly the saints were to him. They said of him, "You're like an angel of God" (Galatians 4:14). He says that (Galatians 4:15), "You would have given me your eyes. That's how much you love me." So the saints loved Paul. But, man, the world certainly didn't, and the rich and the religious stirred up the powerful, and they got whatever happens in the city to now it becomes political. Now they're being moved down the road. But the work had been established. The Word of God was prospering. Paul's ministry team, for now, was over, but the work itself was just beginning.

And so Paul, verse 51, goes on the road. The Holy Spirit leads them, and if you look at your map, they don't go further north (at least not at this point). They head southeast, almost 85 miles, to this place Iconium in eastern Galatia, if you will. "They shook off the dust from their feet." Remember Jesus (in Luke 9:5) said, "If they don't want to hear it, move along. If they don't want to hear it, move along." You might think, "Gosh, that's kinda harsh. Maybe we should hang around." No, no, no. When it comes to this kind of evangelism, if they don't want to hear it, you move along. The gospel invites you to life, but it'll leave you in death if that's where you want to stay. It had brought both to Antioch. Now Paul will later return here - and I hope you'll remember it as we go through it, you'll stick with it - and find a church filled with saints in an area that is just completely on fire for the Lord. He'd have never known this, getting chased out of Dodge on a Friday night with the City Council voting, "You're no longer welcome here." But that's what they did.

So, verse 52, they leave behind them a bunch of believers, disciples, who "were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." Lives that had been changed. Fruit of their presence there. Fruit of their ministry there. I don't know how long they were there. We're only told of it being one Saturday to the next Saturday and then, I don't know, they were glad to have them go to the Gentiles (verse 48). We can't guess how long they may or may not have been there. So, the Holy Spirit stays behind while the boys move on to the next city. And, by the way, it's going to get worse in the next town. In the next town, 85 miles away, they're going to settle in, start sharing; and the people, from 85 miles away, are going go, "We

should go get them and chase them from here to San Diego and then drag them out of town and try to kill them." Things are getting harder. I would have gone right around the bend, right back to Antioch at that point. But he doesn't. Preaching the Word can create turmoil. What will you do with Jesus? You know, people's eternal destiny relies upon it.

So, for me the lesson is always the same in the book of Acts - share God's Word. He blesses it. And it's not going to make life any easier for you, but it's going to make it very fruitful. And God knows we need a country that hears Jesus now. Right? We need to hear the gospel being preached. People are panicking. Killing themselves. They can't find rest. We have rest. We know who He is.

So next week, we'll pick up at chapter 14. So read ahead. You can cheat, and read ahead.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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