

48. Paul Turned to the Gentiles

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain to others that every person faces a choice that must be made. We saw that some will make the choice to believe and others will make the choice to reject. The difference is in their hearts. Some are being convicted by the Holy Spirit and are being drawn by the Father to the Son who seeks and saves. Others are rejecting the work of the Trinity in their lives. In our topic today, we are going to see how various people responded as they thought about that choice.

People in the city of Antioch of Pisidia had been talking about the things that Paul and Barnabas had shared in the synagogue the previous week and the things that they had said as they talked with them during the week. Acts 13:44-45 says, “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.” Whether people were in agreement or not with the things that Paul and Barnabas had said, they had certainly been talking about those things. As a result, almost the whole city showed up at the synagogue the next week to hear the Word of God. The Word of God is living and powerful whether people agree with the Word or not. The Trinity also works to convict, draw, seek and save as people discuss the Word.

As a result of the talking that had gone on during the week, almost the whole city came to the synagogue the next Sabbath. The word translated “envy” means either *zeal for a person or thing* or *envy against a person or thing*. James 3:14-16 says, “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.” In these verses, the word is twice translated “envy”. That attitude would certainly describe the way that the Jewish leaders felt when they saw the large group of Gentiles that came to the synagogue that day.

The Jews began contradicting and blaspheming the things that Paul was saying to the people. The word translated “contradicting” means *to speak against*. The word translated “blaspheming” means *to speak evil of or to revile*. They were opposing the teaching that Paul was giving as he spoke. Acts 13:46-48 says, “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.” These verses are key verses, because Paul told the Jews that they would turn to the Gentiles.

The word translated “grew bold” means *freedom to speak or to speak with boldness*. Paul asked other Christians to pray for him that he would be able to speak boldly. Ephesians 6:18-20 says, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me,

that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” This is a key lesson that we want to show our children and others by our example. As we pray for boldness to speak the Word of God, the Lord will give us His boldness to share the Word of God with others.

Paul and Barnabas told the Jews that it was necessary for them to share the Word of God with the Jews first. Peter had earlier said the same thing to the Jews in Acts 3:25-26 where we read, ““You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, “And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities.”” Paul said that it was necessary for them to speak to the Jews first. However, he said that as Jews they had chosen to reject that message from the Word of God. Paul warned those Jews that they had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life.

Then, Paul made the statement, “Behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” God had told the Jews through Isaiah, in Isaiah 49:6, ““Indeed He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.””” The Father had called and sent Christ to restore the preserved ones of Israel. At the same time, He had also given Christ to be a Light to the Gentiles. In fact, it was the plan of God that His salvation should be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Here, we see that it has always been His plan for His salvation to go to the ends of the earth. Most of the Jews had failed to accept that message and certainly had not taken that message to the ends of the earth.

However, Paul realized that God had chosen him and those who would follow him to take the message of the salvation that God had provided to the ends of the earth. At the time the Lord had sent Ananias to open the eyes of Saul, the Lord said to Ananias, in Acts 9:15-16, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’” That is why Paul and Barnabas could say that they were turning to the Gentiles because they were being obedient to the command that God had given to Paul.

The Gentiles were filled with joy when they heard that Paul and Barnabas were turning to the Gentiles. The word translated “glad” means *to rejoice exceedingly*. Even when the Gentiles went to the Jewish synagogues to hear the Word of God read, they could not feel that they were fully accepted by God, because they were not circumcised. Now, they were filled with glory to God because Paul had shared with them the message that they could receive forgiveness of sins. We see that as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. The word translated “appointed” means *to appoint, to assign or to ordain*. Paul used that same word to describe the message that Ananias gave to him in Damascus. Acts 22:10 says, ““So I said, “What shall I do, Lord?”” And the Lord said to me, “Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.””” Those who are appointed to eternal life are those that God chose before He even created the world.

Acts 13:49-52 goes on to say, “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.” God had His plan and that plan was to spread the message of the death and resurrection of Christ throughout that region. Here, we see that nothing can stop the plan of the Lord.

The Jews in Antioch of Pisidia realized that they would never stop the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles by themselves. As a result, they stirred up two groups of Gentiles. First, they stirred up the devout and honorable women. The word translated “devout” means *those who worship*. The word translated “honorable” means *those who are wealthy or influential*. These may have been influential Gentile women who came to the synagogue to worship, because they liked to hear the reading of the Old Testament. They also stirred up the chief men or leaders of the city.

These influential women and men were able to develop persecution against Paul and Barnabas. In fact, this persecution became so strong that Paul and Barnabas were expelled from their region. This was not the first time and certainly would not be the last time that Paul was forced to leave a certain area. Paul and Barnabas just “shook off the dust from their feet against them”. When Christ sent out the twelve, He told them in Luke 9:5, “And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” The Jews would shake the dust off their feet when they returned to the land of Israel to show that they were unwilling to bring even the dust of a Gentile area into the land of Israel. Here, Christ said that this action would be a testimony against the Jews when they rejected the message of Christ.

Meanwhile, we see that there was a much different attitude among the new Christians. These included both Jews and Gentiles. We see that those who had believed in Christ were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. The word translated “filled” means *to make full, to complete or to fill to the top*. The word translated “joy” means *great gladness*. These disciples were filled with great joy. This same thing had happened in Samaria. Acts 8:8 says, “And there was great joy in that city.” They were also filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 says, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” Christians will be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit when they are walking in fellowship with Christ.

We want to show our physical and spiritual children what it means to walk in fellowship with Christ so that they can also be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit even when they face opposition or persecution from others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to experience that joy in their lives.