

I. Introduction

Good morning! This morning we will take a look at how Paul concluded his message in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch and we will see how his listeners responded to the message. Paul has already spoken about the prophecies of a Messiah to come that were given throughout the history of Israel. Paul also showed how the words of the prophets were fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now Paul will close his message with a warning.



Let's read Acts 13:40-52.

II. Scripture Reading: Acts 13:40-52 (NIV, 1984)

40 Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: 41 "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you." 42 As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. 43 When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

III. Teaching

Paul cautioned the people saying (Acts 13:40), **"Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you."** Take care! Be careful! Paul warned them of the danger and quoted from Habakkuk 1:5 (Acts 13:41), **"Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you."**



Bible study is a great blessing. Knowing the Scriptures strengthens our faith and helps us in our Christian walk in many ways. But, when we interpret the Scriptures we should be careful not to fall into the trap of becoming overconfident about our own interpretations. In the time of the prophet Habakkuk, the Jews thought they knew what God would and would not do, but God surprised them. Six hundred years later, the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time seem to have fallen into the same error. They thought they knew what God was going to do and how He was going to do it. The Roman Empire had conquered their homeland of Israel, but the Jews were sure that God would send the long-prophesied Messiah to save them from the Romans. They knew the prophecies, but their interpretation was wrong.

The Messiah came, as they expected, but He did not come to free Israel from the soldiers of the Roman Empire. No, Jesus did not come to provide a political or military salvation. Jesus came for a much higher purpose. Jesus came to provide salvation from sin and death for all who trust in Him. Paul explained this to the people at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch in the first part of his message.

This was a very different kind of salvation than the Jews were expecting and many of them found it difficult to understand. In particular, these two points from Paul's message would have startled the Jews:

First, Paul emphasized the resurrection of Jesus Christ. **Acts 13:32-33a, "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus."** Jewish expectations about the Messiah did not include a death and resurrection. The prophets had spoken of these things, but these prophecies had not received as much attention as others that met the expectations of the Jewish leaders and teachers.



Second, Paul emphasized that the salvation and forgiveness of sins that was offered through faith in Jesus was for all of the people of the world and that it was superior to the Old Testament Law of Moses. **Acts 13:38-39, "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."** The Jewish people of the time thought the Messiah was coming only for the Jews. They were aware of the prophecies that said God was going to save other nations and peoples, but their interpretation was that God would save others by having them convert and become Jews, thus bringing them under the Law of Moses. They had no thought of salvation apart from the Law of Moses, although this also had been prophesied.

Paul knew that the things he was preaching would be surprising and difficult for the Jews to accept, but he warned them not to fall into the trap of unbelief and scoffing. Some of Paul's listeners ignored the warning and refused to believe, but others wanted to know more about these things. **Acts 13:43, "When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God."**

At this point, there was no indication that trouble was coming. Paul and Barnabas were welcomed at the synagogue, invited to speak, and even invited to come back the following week to speak more about Jesus. And, at the end of the meeting, many of their listeners followed after them in order to continue learning about this new teaching.

We don't know how Paul and Barnabas spent the week. Maybe they spoke to people on the streets and in the markets. Or maybe they visited people door to door. Or maybe they didn't do anything special. But somehow, by the following Sabbath, the whole city had heard that something special was going on at the synagogue. Luke, the author of Acts, records in **Acts 13:44** that, **"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord."** The city of Pisidian Antioch was probably fairly small, but even so, this must have been an impressive crowd that filled the synagogue and all of the streets around it.



Unfortunately, not everyone was happy about the large turnout. **Acts 13:45, "When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying."** The Jews living there had probably been working for years to invite the people of the town to come and join them for worship at the synagogue. They must even have had some success, since we are told that there were converts to Judaism there. But they had probably never imagined anything like these crowds.



When the crowds showed up that day, the Jews had a choice. They could have rejoiced that so many people had come to their little synagogue to hear the Word of God. But that is not what they chose. Instead of choosing joy, they chose to be jealous of Paul and Barnabas's sudden popularity. The green-eyed monster of

jealousy is one of the most destructive emotions. Jealousy has destroyed families, churches, and even nations. We all need to guard our hearts against the destructive green-eyed monster. Jealousy is very dangerous and can bring many temptations with it.

The situation at the synagogue had become difficult, but Paul still managed to speak of the gift of salvation and some people embraced the Good News and made a better choice than the jealous Jews. **Acts 13:48, “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”** The Gentiles were glad. They chose to honor the Word of the Lord. We also would do well to rejoice in the Good News of salvation and honor the Word of the Lord.



Paul and Barnabas brought the message of Jesus and the Good News of the resurrection to Pisidian Antioch. But different hearers responded differently. Some chose to scoff. Some chose to learn more. Some chose to be jealous of the messengers. Some chose to believe and rejoice. We all make choices about how we respond to God and God's Word. But the Bible makes it clear that God also chooses. In verse 48 it says, **“all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”** These words indicate that God made a choice about who would believe and be saved. Some people are uncomfortable with this because they feel that God's choice takes away their own choice. But I think it is better if we choose to rejoice in God's choice.

We don't have time today to dig into the many Bible verses that relate to the issue of how God chooses and how man chooses, and how both can choose without creating a contradiction in doctrine or logic. In fact, theologians have struggled with this issue for years. But the Bible clearly reveals that God chose and that we are also urged to make a choice. All analogies are imperfect, but just to give an example of another situation where both must choose, I would point to marriage.

For a man and a woman to get married, both must make a choice. Usually the man proposes and the woman accepts. But most men want to be sure that the answer will be, “Yes,” before they propose. Even so, there is some risk of a, “No,” because human beings cannot understand each other perfectly. But God knows us perfectly. God has known us perfectly from before the creation of the world. So God can confidently announce the wedding before we even hear His proposal. The Bible uses the analogy of a couple getting married to speak of the relationship between us and our Savior, Jesus.



In **Revelation 19:7**, we get a prophetic glimpse of the wedding between Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and the church, His bride. **“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.”** Let's say, “Yes,” to Jesus and rejoice in God's choice to appoint us for eternal life so that we can be prepared for that great day of celebration when all of the church goes home to heaven to be with the Lord forever.

Before we leave this topic, let's notice also what **Acts 13:46** says, “Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: **“We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.”** Who decided those people were unworthy of eternal life? Paul says they made the decision themselves. They did not consider themselves worthy of eternal life.

At first, it might seem to be a humble thing to call yourself unworthy. But actually such an attitude comes from pride. Think about this. If God invites you to eternal life, then He has judged that you are worthy. If you say you are unworthy, then you are arguing with God and placing your own opinion above His. If you think your opinion is better than God's, that is self-centered pride.

Of course, none of us are worthy of eternal life based on our own actions or words. Instead, we are made worthy by faith in Jesus Christ because His righteousness is given to us when we trust in Him and His finished work on the cross. In Christ Jesus, we are worthy, because His blood has washed us clean from sin. **Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through**

our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul and Barnabas were finally driven out of Pisidian Antioch because of the jealousy of the Jews. But I don't think they were discouraged by the opposition. They simply went on to the next place where they could preach Jesus and His resurrection. We will talk about what happened in Iconium next week. But we should remember that they did not leave Pisidian Antioch in sorrow. Instead, they and the disciples they left behind were full of joy, **Acts 13:52** tells us, **“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”** I pray that we also will learn to rejoice at all times, even in times of persecution or difficult trials.



IV. Conclusion

Before we close for today, I would like to point out one more thing. First, do you remember what Jesus said in **John 8:12**? Jesus said, **“I am the light of the world.”** Jesus is perfect in goodness and truth. He is the light of the world. Because of His light, we can see how God is working to bring many to salvation even in dark places.



But sometimes people are confused, because in **Matthew 5:14** Jesus also said, **“You are the light of the world.”** At first glance, this might seem like a contradiction, but it is not, because our light is just the reflection of the light of Jesus. The sun shines on the earth and brings light. The moon has no light of its own, but it reflects the light of the sun and so the moon also brings light to the earth. In a similar way, we have no light of our own, but when we reflect the light of Jesus, we bring light to the world.



In today's passage, **Acts 13:47** is a very interesting verse. **“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”** Paul quotes a Messianic prophecy from Isaiah 49:6, but also says, **“For this is what the Lord has commanded us.”** How can a prophecy about Jesus be a command to Paul? Since we just looked at John 8:12 and Matthew 5:14, the answer is easy to see. Isaiah spoke of Christ Jesus as the light of the world, but since the followers of Jesus are commanded to light the world by reflecting Jesus' light, it is natural for Paul to see the same prophecy as a personal command from the Lord to him.



And if this was a personal command to Paul, then it is also a command to us. Like Paul, we also are commanded to be a light for the nations, shining the reflected light of Jesus brightly, so that salvation might come to the ends of the earth. It is a dark world and much light is needed. It is our mission to bring light to the world by shining the light of Christ brightly in the place God has given us.

Let's pray.

V. Prayer