



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 13:44-52

Acts

"Awakening in Antioch"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] If you have been with us, you know that we are in Acts 13 and we're going to look at verse 44-52. Acts 13 describes the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey. He and Barnabas set out from the church of Antioch in Syria. They traveled to Cyprus. They ministered there, and then they crossed the Mediterranean to Asia Minor and they went through the mountains to the city of Antioch of Pisidian and from Antioch, but this is where they are in much of Acts 13.

And they went in to the synagogue on a Sabbath and Paul preached and the people were excited about what they heard. They invited him back the next week and we read in verse 44, "The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowd, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.'" Now, when they say judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, everyone's unworthy of eternal life. What they mean by that is that you show yourself unqualified. You've judged yourself unqualified for eternal life, because we enter into life through faith and faith alone. And they refused that. they rejected that and so they

pronounced this statement, "You are unworthy of eternal life, unqualified. Behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."

Verse 47, "For so the Lord has commanded us.

'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles/That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'"

"When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying 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 through the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the privilege it is, as Mark said, to come together this Sunday morning and open up the Bible, read it together as we have done, and then take time to consider its meaning. It is not a closed book to us. It is an inscrutable word to us, because as believers in Jesus Christ we have new hearts, we have new natures, we have new minds. We have the mind of Christ and we have that because we have the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity dwells within us. What an amazing blessing that is, one that we fail to comprehend so often, but it is the case for the believers in Jesus Christ. Everyone who is born again has been sealed with the Spirit of God and He teaches us. He's our teacher. He illuminates the page. He enlightens our mind and we ask for that ministry this morning. May He teach us and may our hearts be prepared to receive that which You'd have us to teach. Make us open to it. Make us receptive to Your truth.

We learn, Father, that - or at least we will consider the fact this morning - that all that we are, all that we have is of Your grace. From

beginning to end salvation is God's work and this work of instruction and edification and being built up in the faith, being strengthened and being made to learn is all Your work, Father. We cannot do that in and of ourselves. This is Your work and we pray that it would go forward well this morning and unhindered. Bless us. Build us up in the faith.

We pray not only for our spiritual needs, but our material needs as well, and they are many. We thank You for Your faithfulness and Your goodness and how You have blessed us so abundantly. You faithfully provide for us every day, so much so that we take it for granted. The regularity makes it seem as though it is to be expected, and yet the good things of life, the very beat of our hearts could stop at any moment if that were Your will. But You will us into existence and You will us to continue and You will that we be provided for, and we are, because of Your goodness.

We thank You for that, but we pray for those who are in need and who are lacking in various things, various material needs, lacking in health. We pray for those who are sick. We think of **Doris Murray**. We pray that You would give her healing and restore her to health very soon. We think of **Leana Grooms**. We pray Your blessing upon her. We have prayed many times for Leana and we have seen blessing in her life, but we pray now that You would give great blessing and restore her to health and to our fellowship.

We pray for the young people and the adults alike in Costa Rica. Thank You for the opportunity that they have to go to that place and to have the experience they will have and the opportunity to minister. We pray that it will all be very positive and that You bless them with opportunities and the boldness to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ and be good ambassadors for Him. May their experience be an enjoyable one. May they learn much. May they be kept safe and healthy and return to us safely.

And bless us this evening, Lord, as we return to this place and we fellowship around Your word and around the elements. We pray that You'd bless us as we remember our Lord, remember what He did

for us on Calvary's life and the life that we have in Him, and bless our fellowship afterwards, that it would be edifying and helpful to each one of us.

We commit our time now to You as we sing our final hymn. Use that, Lord, to prepare our hearts. Put our minds in the proper frame, that we would listen and learn and be blessed by our time of study in Your inherent word. We commit that to You. We thank You for the opportunity. In Christ name, amen.

[Message] Have you ever wondered why it is that some people believe the gospel and others don't? People who hear the same sermon or lesson under the same conditions. Maybe it's a Bible study in the fraternity or sorority house, or at a Christian businessmen's breakfast. The gospel is presented clearly, maybe compellingly. One receives it and the other rejects it. It may be a brother or a sister, maybe twins. One believes, the other doesn't.

It happens that way. Paul must have seen a lot of that. He described the gospel in 2 Corinthians 2 as a fragrance that appeals to some as an aroma of life, but repels others as the scent of death. We have that situation in our text in Acts 13. People in the same synagogue hearing the same message, the same gospel, from the same speaker, and responding in two entirely different ways.

It's not recorded without explanation. The reason for this difference is stated in verse 48. Luke writes, "As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." In other words, salvation and faith are all of grace, by divine appointment. Why is it that revival occurs in one city and not in another? And why does our reformation take hold in one part of Europe and not in another? At one time and in not another time? Why is that?

Well, there are various reasons. There are secondary reasons for that, of course. People don't preach the gospel; people harden their hearts to the gospel; they refuse to believe all of that. But ultimately the reason is grace. B.B. Warfield, the great Princeton theologian in its good days said that the whole gospel turns as upon its hinge on this

fact: That salvation is of pure grace. And what is grace? Well, very simply, grace is gift. And divine grace is God's gift, His unmerited favor. It is not earned; it is not deserved. In fact, grace is for those who are underserving. It is given according to God's sovereign good pleasure. It is a gift, and so it is His to give or not give. And He gives it in abundance.

Now, we see that in the synagogue of Antioch and Pisidian, where Paul and Barnabas spoke. They had entered on Sabbath and were invited to speak. Paul stood and he spoke, and he spoke on the person and work of Christ. He called Jesus the Savior. He told the audience that everyone who believes is freed or is justified from all things, from all sin, from guilt, from judgment. The Law of Moses cannot do that, he pointed out, that that occurs through faith in Christ and faith alone.

Well, the people were so impressed with what Paul told them that they invited him and Barnabas back the next Sabbath to speak more about these things. During the week that followed, news of the sermon spread so that the next Sabbath the synagogue was filled with Gentiles. It was basically a Gentile city and the Gentiles showed up, many of whom had probably never been in such a service before, but Luke writes in verse 44, "Nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord."

I think that's significant to note they came to hear the word of the Lord. They didn't come to hear Paul the public speaker. In fact, from what we know, Paul may not have been a very impressive orator. In Corinth, some people described him disparagingly by saying that his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible. Well, that's Paul, according to some. He's not an impressive fellow - not to look at, not to listen to. But then the effective of the ministry is not in personalities. It's not in technique. It's not in style. It's good to have good style. It's good to be a good public speaker. There is no virtue in being bad at anything.

But ultimately the effectiveness of what you and I do in the Lord's service is not dependent on how winsome and winning and attractive we can be, as important as all that may be. If you have a sparkling personality, that's good. That's a gift from God. You are that because God's made you that way. And if don't have that kind of personality, it'd be good to strive to have a good, sparkling personality. And all that should be used in God's service.

But the power of preaching, the power of teaching, of witnessing, is in the message, not the messenger. The word of God is alive. The word of God is powerful. It is swifter than any two-edged sword and we will be as effective as we are faithful to it.

In Isaiah 55:11, the Lord said that His word will not go forth and return empty. It won't return "without accomplishing what I desire," He said, "without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." It didn't return empty in Antioch. He sent it out through Paul and Barnabas and the town was awakened spiritually.

That's how a revival occurs, through the uncompromised preaching of the word of God. The great awakening in the 18th century occurred in just that way, when George Whitfield and the Wesleys went out preaching the word of God. They preached justification by faith in Jesus Christ in a day when it was not being preached, when that was not being heard in the pulpits of England and they went out and they preached it and they preached it in the pulpits and they preached it a lot. Whitfield wrote in his journal entries like, "Preached six times this week and expounded twice or thrice every night," and, "Near nine times has God enabled me to preach this week and expound 12 or 14 times." They preached a lot. They preached the word of God and there are some extraordinary accounts of what occurred in those days. People crowded into the churches and the society halls and the homes where Whitfield was preaching.

Now one of the earliest accounts of that great revival, that awakening, describes how people were so crowded into one church that they hung upon the rails of the organ loft and made the church

itself so hot with their breath that the steam would fall from the pillars like drops of rain.

Sometimes Whitfield wrote almost as many would go away for want of room as come in. People poured out to hear the word of God preached, because it wasn't being preached until these men began to do so. There are others as well who did that, but the point is God's word, God's word read, God's word proclaimed, has an effect.

But it's not always a favorable one. The clergy of the Church of England began to oppose Whitefield and the Wesleys. They were jealous of the crowds that flocked to hear those men as they preached the gospel, the very gospel that the clergy denied and did not preach. And before too long the churches were closed to those men, but that didn't stop the awakening. They just went out into the fields and the preached in the open air to thousands and thousands of people who came to hear the gospel. It is an aroma of life for some and an aroma of death for others, and we see that here.

Many of the Jews in the synagogue of Antioch could only smell death when Paul preached. And so Luke writes that they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things by Paul and were blaspheming. His message, what was drawing crowds that they had never been able to attract - the Gentiles who had never set foot in a synagogue before, and many of their own members. Many of the Jews were showing a strong interest in the gospel, in this message that these missionaries were preaching, and so as Paul spoke, the Jewish leaders would interrupt him.

He said that the Law can't save, and the teaching of the synagogue was that it could save, that you are saved by your works, that it's by keeping the Law of Moses that you gain God's approval and that you gain eternal life and a place in the kingdom to come, and Paul was contradicting all of that so they disputed the teaching that he gave, which was a teaching of grace, the teaching that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, He has come, He has been crucified, but that crucifixion was followed by a

resurrection and He is alive today, He is the Savior, and we are saved ourselves through faith and faith in Him. And so they heard that message and they blasphemed, we're told, meaning they dismissed Jesus as a false Messiah, who was crucified as a criminal, as one who is cursed.

Well, it was clear from their response that the Jews had hardened their hearts to the gospel and that the opportunity for them was now passed, and so in verse 46 Paul and Barnabas respond to them very directly, very boldly, Luke tells us, and they tell the Jews that it was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first. The reason was because of God's love for the Jews. He had chosen the nation and entrusted it with His trust, with the Law and the Prophets. He had given Israel great promises - the promise of the Messiah, the promise of the kingdom to come.

And so it was proper, Paul said, to go to them first with the gospel. That was the pattern of Paul's ministry. He would enter the synagogue, he would give gospel. It is, first of all, a Jewish gospel. A Jewish Messiah was promised to a Jewish nation, and so it is a Jewish gospel. But not just a Jewish gospel exclusively. It's for the whole world. As far as Genesis 12:3, God promised to make Abraham a blessing to all the families of the earth.

And so since the Jews of the synagogue had as a whole - not all of them - but as a whole rejected Christ and judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, Paul and Barnabas declare, "We are turning to the Gentiles." And they state their authority for doing that. It is the Jewish scriptures themselves. Isaiah 49:6, "I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth."

That prophecy in Isaiah was given to God's servant Israel. The nation was to be a light to the Gentiles, but Israel had failed to do that. Israel as a whole was disobedient and the prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, God's perfect servant, who is later described in chapter 55 as "the suffering servant."



Simeon, the prophet, recognized that when Jesus was brought into the temple as an infant by Joseph and Mary. Luke tells us in chapter 2 that Simeon saw Him and he recognized in Him that promised one. He recognized in Jesus the Messiah, and so he took Him in his arms and he praised God and called him a "light of revelation to the Gentiles." Now where did he get that description of our Lord? Well, he got it from Isaiah 49 and he knew that that prophecy was ultimately about the Messiah and was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Our Lord's ministry would be both to the Jews and the Gentiles. The prophecy in Isaiah is that He would raise up the tribes of Jacob and be a light to the nations. Now the very fact that this servant will raise up the tribes of Jacob will save Israel is an indication it's not just Israel that's being spoken of as the servant, but one that would come from Israel. The Messiah would be the Savior of Israel and the nations. There is a future for ethnic Israel, for the Jewish people. The Lord will regather the nation. He is not finished with Israel. The Jewish Paul have been a great blessing to the world and they will yet be a great blessing to the world. The Lord will bless the Jewish people with salvation, but the present is the time of Gentile salvation.

There is a remnant of the Jews that are being saved, but largely this is the age of Gentile salvation and the Lord is carrying out that plan of salvation, that program of salvation through His followers, and Paul and Barnabas understood that. They knew that their ministry was an extension of the Lord's ministry. He is the head, we are the body, and He works through us and He works through His missionaries. He works through you and through me as we proclaim the truth and we are His witnesses.

And Paul specifically saw his mission as being to the Gentiles. That's what the Lord had told him when saved him on the Damascus road. He told him that he would go out and he would preach before Gentiles and before kings, as well as before the Jews. He told them that He would send him far away to the Gentiles and he knew who he

was. He knew what his mission was, that he was the apostle to the Gentiles.

Now when the Gentiles heard that Paul and Barnabas were turning to them, Luke writes in verse 48 that "they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord." Then he adds, "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." That's a fitting conclusion to the ministry at Antioch. Paul began it with an opening reference in his sermon to God's choice of Israel's fathers and Luke ends it with a reference to God's election of the Gentiles. That's the meaning of those words "appointed to eternal life." Those who believe are those who have already been appointed to life.

Some commentators have tried to escape the idea of predestination in those words and make that statement refer to the attitude of believers with translations like "as many as were disposed to eternal life believed." But there are two problems with that. First, where did these believers get that disposition? How is it that they came to be disposed to eternal life? The verb or the participle is passive and the meaning is that they were acted upon. This is not something that they produced within themselves. It's not self-produced at all. No, they were given that attitude by God. So even with this translation they really don't escape the idea of God's sovereignty in distinguishing grace.

But the second problem is really the greater, and that is the meaning of the Greek word "tasso." It means to ordain. It means to appoint, to decree. Luke uses it in a number of places in the book of Acts. In chapter 15:2, for example, we read that the brethren - this is when Paul and Barnabas are back in Antioch - "the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas should go up to Jerusalem." Paul and Barnabas didn't determine that. The brethren appointed them to do that.

In chapter 18, when the Jewish leaders of Rome agreed to meet with Paul, Luke writes that they set a day for Paul and then they came to him. They set a day; they appointed a time. Well, that's the meaning

here. God appointed these believers to life before they had ever believed. F.F. Bruce cites papyrus evidence, which is ancient text, extra-Biblical text, in which this word is used with the sense of inscribe or enroll, as in a book in which if that was the idea in Luke's mind, then he is thinking of the Book of Life.

John writes quite a bit about that in the book of Revelation, the Lamb's book of life, and you read there of the names that have been written in the lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you're a believer in Jesus Christ because your name was written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world.

That's divine election and divine election is unconditional election. Now that's very disturbing to a lot of people. The idea that God would sovereignly choose some for salvation and not choose others, as though He is obligated to choose anyone. And so to come to terms with election - and election is undeniable - it's found throughout the scriptures - the chosen, those who are elect, those who are appointed. We have all those kinds of descriptions, and it's unavoidable. It is there. But to accept it, many people try to define it in terms of foreknowledge. God chose those whom He foresaw would believe, and so based on foreseen faith, He chose people.

But that's not election, not divine election. That is human election of God, and what Paul is talking about is not that at all. Rather, what Luke is talking about it is not that. Luke says that God appointed them, or they appointed. They were chosen. It's not their appointment. It was God's appointment of them to life. That's really the only way election could work according to God's unconditional first choice. Otherwise, none would be chosen.

Let's think about this for a moment. What do you think God would have seen if He had peered down through the ages of time in search of believers? Would He have found believers? Would He have men and women earnestly searching for God? He would not have found believers. What He would have found was a race mankind in

absolute rebellion against Him. Man is naturally an unbeliever and freely, willingly, willfully chooses to rebel against God and reject Him always, without exception. I say that because the Bible's very clear on that point. There is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside. There is none who does good. There is not even one - Psalm 14, Romans 3, David, Paul, the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Bible as a whole makes very clear that man is in absolute rebellion against God. None seek after Him.

So if it were true that election was based on God's foresight, none would be elect, because none would be found seeking God. No, the only way that people will seek God and choose Him is by God first choosing and seeking them. We would all remain fixed in our unbelief unless God corrected that by His grace. And as Calvin said, "The correction flows only from the fountain of election." And it is a fountain, a fountain of grace, abundant grace, free grace.

None of this of course eliminates the need of faith. The elect believe. Those chosen for a life are chosen for a life through faith. It's not apart from faith. Faith confirms election. Faith is the proof of it. And people are responsible to believe. Everyone is responsible to believe. Paul and Barnabas indicate that when they told the Jews that they had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, and as I pointed out, that means unqualified. Unqualified to enter eternal life because they didn't have faith, and no one can enter into eternal life apart from faith. We come into that life through faith in Jesus Christ and everyone is responsible to have faith. Everyone is responsible to respond to the revelation of God wherever it is given, whether it is given in nature or whether it's given in the special revelation of the gospel or the word of God as it is taught - wherever it is given. Election does not eliminate the need of faith, of the responsibility to believe.

Just the opposite. It makes faith possible. It is a fountain of grace. That's why Luke adds this last clause, "appointed to eternal life." He didn't have to add that. He could have avoided the subject by

simply stating that many believed. He would have made perfectly good sense. We would have understood his point. And then he could have said, "And the gospel throughout the whole region," which it did. We've never thought about this doctrine of election.

But it's here, because he puts it here. He wants us to know the reason for their faith, the reason for the life that they have received, and he makes the point because it is the very heart of the gospel, which is what this account is about. The gospel is all of grace. As Warfield said, "The whole gospel turns as upon its hinge on this fact that salvation is of pure grace." It has nothing to do with us. That is, it has nothing to do with our abilities, our merit, our striving. We do strive, hopefully; we do seek. But all of that is because of grace. It has everything to do with that. The gospel has everything to do with God and it is necessary for us to know that, for a number of reasons.

Luke doesn't list any of the reasons, but I can't help but believe they had a number of reasons in his mind and that's why he makes this point. He wants us to reflect upon the fact that this great work that occurred in Antioch occurred because of God's grace, because of electing grace, and to meditate on that fact. And when we do, we do see a number of practical benefits.

First of all, it puts all the glory where it should be - with God. For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things to Him be glory forever, amen.

And so secondly it is the ground of our humility. Election eliminates boasting. People sometimes think. "Well, if you believe you're in election, then you're an arrogant person, because you think you're better than everybody else. No, if anybody thinks that, if anyone is arrogant because of the doctrine of election, they show they don't understand election at all. It has nothing to do with being worthy. It has everything to do with being unworthy and God choosing those who don't deserve. It's a gift, a gift to the undeserving, and nobody boasts in a gift and nobody boasts in a gift that is undeserved.

And God's plan is designed to prevent boasting. Ephesians 2:8, 9, in verse 9 He says that "no one may boast."

But if faith is self-originating and salvation is based on our choice of God, then the final determining factor would be what we do, and then we would boast. We would have every reason to boast. After all, all of God's work, the sacrifice of Christ, everything would have come to nothing, absolutely nothing, if we have not chosen Him. And so we could rightly take credit for blessing God, giving success to His plan of salvation. If it were all dependent upon us and we had not believed, there'd be no salvation. It would come to absolutely nothing.

But Luke is saying that there's no ground for any of that. He's saying here that faith is not our doing; salvation is not our doing. It finds its source in the fountain of election, not ourselves. We have no ground for boasting.

Thirdly, election is the basis of our assurance and comfort. It's the proof that we are absolutely secure. We would not be secure if everything was dependent upon us, because if you can elect yourself in, you can elect yourself out. And if it were left to us, we would certainly do that. I know that I would elect myself out if it were just left to me. But if everything is based on God's choice of us, on God's work for us, on God's preservation of us, then we can rest in that.

And when we rest in Christ and in an understanding of grace, we then become active for Christ as His witnesses. And that's the fourth blessing of election. It promotes evangelism. We see that in the next verse, in verse 49 where we read that the gospel spread throughout the whole region. Now Luke certainly didn't see a conflict between election and evangelism. He mentions election and then in the next breath he speaks about evangelism. He doesn't put the two together for us, but he didn't see a contradiction there. He tells us how these elect Antiochians went out preaching the gospel. There's not conflict between the two. In fact, it is a true statement that virtually all the famous missionary pioneers were believers in election - William Carey, David Livingstone, many, many others. It was a motivation for

going out. They knew God's people were out there. There were many sheep and they went out to call them.

Election is no deterrent to evangelism. It is a real motivation to giving the gospel when we realize that God works through what we do when we act in obedience to Him and He gives success. Success is not dependent upon us. We are responsible to respond. We are responsible to give the gospel. We are responsible to be lights. We certainly are. But it doesn't in the end depend upon our ability to explain and convince and bring people in.

If we believe that, if we believe that success or failure in God's work depended or rested upon us, well, that would be a disincentive to service in evangelism. I mean, who could bear under that burden to know that the souls of men and women depended upon me or you and what we do and how convincing we are and how much we know. That's a disincentive. It doesn't rest upon us. Salvation is God's work. If you don't go out and preach the gospel, God will raise up someone else to do it and He will bless them.

Salvation is God's work and He will accomplish His good purpose. He is sovereign in the matter of salvation. He has chosen a people for Himself. It is not a small company of the elect. It's a vast number of people, greater than the stars of the heaven, more innumerable than the sand of the seashore and the dust of the earth - vast number of people and He will not lose anyone of them. We get a sense of that here. It's not possible for any of the elect to perish. Luke doesn't say that a few of the elect believe, but as many as were chosen, or as many as were appointed, believed. All of them.

That reminds us again of our security due to divine election. All of the elect will be saved. So why evangelize? That's the question that often comes up, sometimes as an objection against unconditional election. But it also comes up in our own minds. If we believe in this doctrine, we sometimes ask our self, well, what is the point? If God's going to save them, then He will save them, won't he? Yes, he will.

But He does that through the preaching of the gospel. That's the means of salvation.

I said a few weeks ago when we were discussing prayer in regard to sovereignty, and the question that comes up, "Why pray if God's sovereign? God controls everything. If He's ordained what's going to happen, why pray? If God knows everything, why pray? After all, He knows my needs far better than I do? What does my request offer Him? He knows what to give me before I ever ask. So why pray?"

Well, the reason we pray is, one, because we're commanded to do it, but also because the God who has ordained the end has ordained the means to the end and the way that we obtain the blessings that God has for us, the abundant blessings that He has for His people is through praying, asking. He tells us to do that. Paul says, "Pray without ceasing." James tells us that if we lack wisdom, we're to pray for it.

The God who has ordained the end has ordained the means to obtaining the end. And in the work of salvation, the means that God has appointed for awakening faith in the lost is our witness. It's evangelism. That's what He blesses. He does it according to His will, His sovereign will, but He promises to bless the gospel when we proclaim it. And so we can go out with the confidence that He will do that. It's what gave Paul confidence to enter a synagogue and tell these people the truth that he told them about Christ and salvation that's in Him. It's what gave him the boldness to stand on Mars Hill and teach these philosophers, these men of great learning about Christ and the resurrection.

The fact that God's in control - and as I pointed out, people of Antioch did that. They became active in evangelism. They didn't come to faith, come to salvation, and they didn't then sit back and just watch what was going to happen. They became very active. Verse 49, "And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region."



When people understand the grace of God, they want to share it. And this was good news for the Gentiles. Christ had died for them too. And they could be justified from all things, from all their sins, from all their guilt, and its penalty would be removed from them through faith in Jesus Christ. So they went out and they told others.

Paul and Barnabas had been shut out of the synagogue, like Whitfield and the Wesleys were shut out of the churches in England, but that did not stop the gospel. Nothing can. Still, men try and opposition only mounted with greater success came greater hostility. Luke writes in verse 50, "But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigate a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district."

Generally throughout the book of Acts it's the Jewish authorities, not the civil authorities that stir up hostility against the gospel, and that's because that's where the gospel starts, would be among them, among the men of the synagogue. But that's typical of the way things are, not just among the Jewish, not just with Jewish resistance, but it is the men of religion. It's the men of the churches that oppose the gospel most strongly so often. And those who oppose the truth are those who supposedly represent the truth. In this case, it's the leaders of the synagogue and they did so by using their influence with the women of the congregation.

Many wealthy Gentile women in the cities of the Roman world were attracted to the synagogue and became followers of Judaism. We see that later in chapter 16 with the Philippi and Lydia and the women who gathered there at the river. And in southern Asia Minor, wealthy women exercised more influence than in other parts of the empire. So the leaders of the synagogue pressured the prominent women of the congregation to prejudice their husbands against Paul and Barnabas and expel them from the district.

They did and they may have done so with some violence, because in 2 Timothy 3:11, Paul speaks of persecutions and sufferings that happened to him at Antioch, so very likely they rejected them

from the city with some force, some violence. And it reminds us again that the gospel offends. The word of God offends. It's like the smell of death to many and they oppose it, so we shouldn't be surprised if we tell others of Christ and we witness to the gospel and we are rejected as well. We're in good company. They rejected the apostles.

And so they left, but not without protest. They shook the dust off their feet against them. It was a Jewish gesture of abandonment. The good news of salvation had been removed from them, they were saying. From there they went to Iconium, which is southeast some 80 miles away. They left Antioch a very different place from the city they had entered some weeks before. They left with a church established there. And though they were gone, the disciples that they left behind were not alone and the disciples they left behind were not discouraged.

Luke concludes that they were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God was with them. He's with every believer, which means that Christ is with us. We have the mind of Christ, the life of Christ, the person of Christ within us through the Holy Spirit. We are never alone. The Lord is always with us. He promises to always be with us, to end of the age, to never leave us nor forsake us. And it was evident that He was with them, evident from their joy.

Paul would soon write to them in the book of Galatians of the fruit of the Spirit. It is love and joy and peace and a whole number of virtues. That is the sign of salvation. It is an evidence of election. We noted earlier that faith is the proof of election, but joy is also an evidence of it. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is in the heart of every believer in Jesus Christ. And the evidence that He's there is the fruit of the Spirit. It's joy. And that should be characteristic of the life of every believer in Jesus Christ. That should be characteristic of your life.

Joyful should be what you are, not gloomy. We have every reason for joy. God loves us. He has loved us from all eternity and He

will never stop loving us. His love is unconditional. You will prove unfaithful along the way. You will fail Him. Before the sun sets today, you will fail Him, but He will never fail You. We have every reason for joy. He loved us so much that He sent His own Son to die for us and to pay for our sins so that at the moment of faith we would be forgiven, we would be justified, we would be righteous in His sight, and that is forever.

We have eternal life. The Lord will never cast us off. We will be with the Lord for all eternity, heirs of a glorious kingdom. That's reason for joy and that is true of every believer in Jesus Christ. So have you believed in Him? Do you know that you are a sinner deserving of judgment and have you looked to Christ as the one who took that judgment in your place on the cross? If you haven't, then look to Him; trust in Him.

You say, well, after what you've said though, I'm not sure I can do that. After all, in order to believe, I've got to be elect. I don't know if I'm elect. But remember, the elect believe. Election doesn't exclude people. It includes people. It makes faith possible, and so if you desire salvation, if you want to be saved by Christ, then believe in Him. And once you believe in Him, then you will discover that you were elected by God from the foundation of the world and you can rejoice in that.

May God help you to do that. May God help all of us to rejoice in what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have much more than you can comprehend. May God help us to rejoice in that and go forth from this place to serve Him faithfully. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace. It is sovereign. It's nothing that we can produce. It's certainly nothing we deserve. It's all of you. From beginning to end, salvation is of the Lord and we have that great promise from Philippians 1:6 that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." You will lose not one of your people. You will bring us all to completion.

And so we can know that whatever we're going through today in this very hour, however hard it may be, it's for our good. It's only to refine us and to make us fit for eternity. Everything that comes into our life comes into it for a purpose, a good purpose, and we thank You for that. We thank You for Your work of grace. We thank You for the salvation that's ours in Your Son, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.