

Take It or It Will Leave
Acts 13:44-52
April 28, 2013

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. 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. 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.'" 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 word of the Lord spread through the whole region. 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. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

To get a better focus on today's text, we need to hear a quote from Martin Luther:

Let us remember our former misery, and the darkness in which we dwelt. Germany, I am sure, has never before heard so much of God's word as it is hearing today; certainly we read nothing of it in history. If we let it just slip by without thanks and honor, I fear we shall suffer a still more dreadful darkness and plague. O my beloved Germans, buy while the market is at your door; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and fair weather; make use of God's grace and word while it is there! For you should know that God's word and grace are like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the Turk (Islam). Rome and the Latins also had it; but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it and hold it fast, whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year.

Our text takes place in the city of Antioch Pisidia. It opens with the words: *On the next Sabbath*. That means we have to go back and see what happened the week before this.

Paul and Barnabas had shown up in Antioch less than two weeks ago. On the Sabbath, they were invited to stand up in the Synagogue and speak to the people. They obliged by delivering the Gospel message. Those present at that meeting were so impressed they invited Paul and Barnabas to come back and speak again.

Something miraculous happened between those two Sabbaths. The people, and in particular the Gentiles, were so moved by the Holy Spirit, that they invited other people to hear God's message. In fact, the text says; *almost the whole city gathered to hear the*

Word of the Lord.

We also need to understand the term *almost the whole city*. Antioch was located in southern part of modern day Turkey. There were Jews who lived there but it certainly wasn't a Jewish city. The synagogue at Antioch was probably a somewhat small building. Antioch had a population over 100,000, most of which were unbelievers.

Now let your mind's eye see that picture. Tens of thousands of people gathered at the Jewish synagogue to hear these two newcomers preach the Gospel of Christ. What a revival!

Even more amazing than that, there were no televisions, radios, email, cell phones, or newspapers. Tens of thousands of people in Antioch knew to come and hear God's Word because they were told by others who had already heard. That gives new meaning to the old phrase "Each one bring one."

The people, who flooded the synagogue for this impromptu revival were hungry to hear the Good News. But they weren't the only ones present. Some of those, who were there on that second Sabbath were there to cause trouble.

Our text says: *When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.* Notice they weren't badmouthing Paul. These Jews were putting down the truth of the Gospel. In their jealousy over the attention someone else was getting, they rejected the Son of the God they claimed to worship.

Do we as a congregation, or do you as an individual, have a problem with jealousy? Are we jealous of other congregations or denominations? Do we hide our jealousy by fault finding? Do we explain away our failures? Do we criticize others for their successes?

Christians are not in competition with one another. We need to know what Christ has asked us to do as a congregation and as individuals. He has made it clear. In Christ, there is no jealousy.

I can easily imagine another problem those Jews were having was the inclusion of a large number of Gentiles in the crowd Paul and Barnabas were speaking to. Jews saw Gentiles as outsiders – people of no account. They certainly would never had thought that God could love Gentiles as much as he loved them – his chosen people.

Of course, what those Jews refused to see was that, because of Jesus, all who believe are now God's chosen people. And all believers are equal in God's eyes – none higher, none lower – none better, none worse.

At this point, Paul addresses those who were trying to disrupt the worship of others. Paul tells them that they have condemned themselves. By refusing the message of Christ, they had become their own judges. In short, Paul told them they must either take the message or the message will leave them behind.

When we ignore the Word of God, we condemn ourselves. When we treat the Gospel as something that belongs to us and keep it to ourselves, we show contempt for the Great Commission. When we treat faith and Christianity like a spectator sport and think that our job is to just show up on Sunday, we violate the second Great Commandment to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Listen once again to part of the Luther quote we began with:

God’s word and grace are like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it’s gone it’s gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again when it’s gone it’s gone, and now they have the Turk (Islam). Rome and the Latins also had it; but when it’s gone it’s gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it and hold it fast, whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year.

The contempt the Jews showed for the message of God caused the message to move on. Paul told them that their loss would become the Gentiles gain. Even this word of condemnation did nothing to deter a people full of jealousy and ethnic bigotry. Instead of repenting, we hear the Jews stirred up so much trouble that Paul and Barnabas left town; shaking the dust off their shoes as a sign that they were through with those people.

All of this wasn’t happening in a vacuum. While this scene between Paul, Barnabas, and the Jews was unfolding, the Gentiles were watching and listening. These people, who had been considered outside of God’s plan of redemption, found out that the favor of God depended on faith in Christ not national origin. They heard the Good News, they believed the Good News, and their joy gave them the desire to tell everyone else.

For those believing Gentiles, the shower of God’s grace remained. That fact begs the question, “How are we handling the shower of God’s grace?” How are we doing as a church? How are we doing as individuals?

God’s grace and message can pass from a church or an individual just as it has passed from nations and people groups. No individual or group is so special they can abuse or neglect God and his Word without consequence. We need to keep God first in our lives through worship, prayer, Bible study, service, witnessing, and giving. These things will fill our lives with the joy of the Lord, and that joy is what prompts us to honor and share the Gospel message.

I thank God all of you are here today. I thank God you came to hear the Word of God. That Word tells you that your sins are forgiven. That Word tells you that Christ is your Savior. Now please, take that Word into your own life, and then take that Word to others. Just as the people in the text came back because they had heard the truth of God’s Word the week before – and they brought others with them – I invite you to come back next week. And I pray that you bring someone with you.