

Thermometer or thermostat?

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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You know, whether we realize it or not, most of the communication, most of the information that you and I receive on a daily, hourly basis is nothing more than just the propagation of the world's system. That's all it is. But over the next few moments, we're going to hear directly from the throne room and the mouth of God and you and I have a very important choice to make, will it be about quantity or quality? Let me define what I mean. No matter how long I preach today, I'll make you a promise that if our hearts are right and our eyes and ears are open, what little time we spend in the word of God can outdo whatever we've heard from the world this week. So right now we have a decision to make, is it going to be about quantity or is it going to be about quality?

Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to this time in our service, Lord, we do pray that you would do it again. Lord, as students of history, we know that you've moved in mighty ways throughout time and, Lord, as students of our own life, we know there have been times in our life where you've moved mightily and maybe there's one here saying, "But I haven't seen it in a while and it's been a long time." God, we're about to commit an exercise that will allow you to move. We're going to open your word, we're going to read your word, we're going to study your word and, Lord, I pray that we would then act out and live your word so that you might do it again. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Acts 13. Now as you're turning to Acts 13, if you're a guest or visitor with us this day, we as a family of faith, we are just very systematically and somewhat slowly walking through the Scriptures a chapter by day, two chapters a day, in a Bible reading plan that eventually over the course of time will take us throughout the entire context of Scripture, but as we're walking through what we know as the book of Acts, this week we found ourselves in a section of Scripture that could be one of the most pivotal sections in all of your New Testament and as we'll see in a moment, it might be one of the most personal sections for here in Acts 13, we see something take place that's incredibly important. You see, at the beginning of the book of Acts, we see the Gospel message, we see the message of Jesus Christ primarily being spoken to, propagated by and addressed to those from a Jewish Judaistic background. By the time you get to the end of the book of Acts, the primary

audience and propagators are of a Gentile background. So you see this transition, you see this shift, so to speak, from the Jewish synagogue to the primarily Gentile church or body of believers and the reason that's important because here in chapter 13, we have the clash of the cultures. We have the clash of that which has been, as we'll see in a moment, the status quo and the clash of that which can be the Spirit of God moving through the people of God, and you and I are going to have a decision to make today and this is an analogy, this is an illustration that I'm sure you've heard in a variety of contexts, we have the opportunity today to decide are we going to be thermometers or are we going to be thermostats?

Now allow me to unpack that for a moment before we go to Acts 13. A thermometer by simple definition merely reads the temperature of the room or the environment and sets their life to match it. A thermostat says it doesn't matter what the environment or the temperature is, there is a standard, there is an objective truth, there is a means of guidance for life and that's what it should be and it stays at that point until the environment changes.

Now you and I have an opportunity, we can walk away today and we can be thermometers, our lives can simply just look and appear to be just like the rest of the environment around us, or we can through the word of God, we can be thermostats and say, "You know, this is what the Lord has ordained and so, therefore, this is what my home is going to look like. This is what my family is going to look like. This is what my marriage is going to look like. This is what my children and my relationship to them is going to look like. This is what my community, my company is going to look like because this is what God has said irrespective of what the temperature of the environment may be."

So in Acts 13, beginning in verse 44, we have the clash of these two cultures. It says,

44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life [notice this next phrase], lo, we turn to the Gentiles. [This is the moment were everything changes.] 47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against

them, and came unto Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

Now for the sake of an illustration today, I want to utilize in context here that those who were contrary to Paul and Barnabas, those who were wanting to create this established system, they're the thermometers of the story and Paul and Barnabas and the early church are the challenge to us to be thermostats much like they were.

So as we walk through this passage today, I want to kind of show the contrast between the two parties we see in Acts 13, so let's begin with the thermometers. Let's begin with these Jewish individuals who have a certain agenda. Now when I say the word "agenda" do not think of that in a negative context. An agenda is simply the means by or the plan by which we have laid out before us. I know oftentimes we say, "Well, they have an agenda," which means it's negative, but you know, in a meeting an agenda can be a positive thing because it's just where we're going to lay things out.

Notice what it says in verse 45, here's their agenda: they saw the multitude, they saw these people which, by the way, back in verse 44 the whole city has showed up, and so what is their agenda? They had envy for them. They had jealousy for them. Now the primary means of illustration today, I'm going to utilize biblical references because I want you to see on this subject matter of thermometers versus thermostats, this is not my opinion or my philosophy, there are a lot of biblical illustrations and scenarios, but I want to begin with a "real life from my home" illustration. When it says that their agenda, or I say their agenda was an envious or a jealous spirit, I see this in my home every single day. You see, my wife and I, and by the way, I have the spiritual gift of sarcasm. We did not think it was enough chaos to have three teenage boys in the house so we've added two dogs to our home. We have a little terrier, she's about 20 pounds, and don't let it fool you, she is the Alpha dog, and then we have 100 pound Rottweiler. That's right, we thought it would be smart to have a dog the same size as our three boys. I mean, that was a brilliant move, wasn't it? But nonetheless, we're minding our own business, if that little terrier gets any attention at all, that big old Rottweiler will make sure that she puts her nose in between and she is going to receive the attention. I nicknamed her Jealous. When we're just doing things and I start petting the little one, here comes Jealous. "Come on, Jealous. Come on over here." Because she has to have – listen to this, this is the agenda of the thermometers – it has to be all about them.

You see, they had envy. What was happening is the crowds that have been gathering for them, the multitudes that they had had the attention of, all of a sudden they're going to hear somebody else. Allow me to state this: the agenda of a thermometer is to make sure that they retain the status quo as its always been. These men, these individuals, had had authority, had power, had influence for so long, now all of a sudden here are these guys opening up the word of God, preaching about Jesus Christ and it's messing up their system.

Allow me to illustrate. Back in Genesis 4, we have the first sibling rivalry in Scripture. We have Cain and Abel and I'm sure you're familiar with the story, that Cain and Abel

came before the Lord and they offered a sacrifice. According to Hebrews 11, Abel's was recognized as being satisfactory, Cain's not so much. The Lord comes to Cain and he says, "Sin lies at the door if you don't get this fixed." So what does Cain do? Well, he goes out and according to Scripture he kills...book of Genesis. When Cain is sent out, he builds an entire community around his ideas, his thoughts and the way he wants things to look. I can only imagine there in Genesis 4 that here comes Cain to his brother Abel and he says, "Abel, I know you're doing what God told us to do but that's just not convenient. That's not easy. I've found a better way that will make everybody happy. Why don't we do it my way?" Abel says, "I have to do it the Lord's way." And Cain kills him in the field.

Fast forward a couple of thousand years, we have a group of people known as the Israelites. Their economy is doing great. Their political system is doing great. Everybody is, for lack of better terms, content and happy, then all of a sudden this one-hit-wonder by the name of Amos shows up. He's got one message, that's it. He shows up and he preaches that even though they're prosperous, even though they appear to be doing well, they're not doing it as God would have them do, they need to repent and change their ways. Well, Amaziah the high priest on behalf of the king, comes to Amos and says, "Um, can you take that message somewhere else? You're messing stuff up here."

You see, we always have a propensity to establish and propagate the status quo that makes our flesh feel good and that's exactly what was happening here. These guys that had a control on everything, these guys had everything the way they wanted it and all of a sudden Paul and Barnabas show up and it messes everything up. So not only do we see that agenda of envy, but notice next their attitude. They contradicted, this is verse 45, they contradicted and they blasphemed.

Let me give you a little insight into "thermometers" as people. When the facts are not on their side, when the information does not propagate their position, they always make it personal. Every time. Notice it says they did not contradict what was being spoken, they did not contradict the words from the prophets, they contradicted them. What they did is in our culture, they got down and dirty and said, "Well, if I can't win by objectiveness, I'm going to make it real subjective real quick."

This is humanity's original game plan. This is our original attitude. I can demonstrate. All the way back in the book of Genesis 2, the Lord made it very clear to Adam and Eve, he said, "When you go into the garden of Eden, you can eat freely of every tree you want except one. Don't eat of that one or you're going to die." They get into the garden and you know the story well, the serpent tempts them, they fall into temptation, they eat of that tree. The Bible says they realized they were naked and they tried to hide themselves from the Lord. They covered themselves up with fig leaves. The Lord shows up and he says, "Adam, where are you?" Now he knows exactly what bush he's hiding behind and what fig leaf he used to cover. That's not the story. The question is, "Where are you in relationship to me? Are you going to acknowledge what's just happened?" I'm going to tell you what Adam does and, gentleman, please, please, please heed this wisdom: don't do what he did. He says, "The woman that you gave me." Notice he didn't say, "B-b-but I

thought what you said was..." He didn't say, "Well, according to what you said, I can see it this way." He said, "Oh no, no, no, her fault. Your fault." All of a sudden when he realized, you see, the status quo had been messed up and when he realized that he was in error, he had no evidence, he had nothing to justify why he did what he did, all of a sudden he made it personal. "The woman that you gave me." That's what thermometers do, that's what these guys do. When the status quo does not continue to their favor, they begin to get personal.

Now let me show you what actions take place. Fast forward to verse 50. It's an interesting section of this passage. The crowds have gathered, they're beginning to listen to what Paul and Barnabas say, we'll talk about that in just a moment. Verse 50 says, "But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts." Let me tell you about thermometers for just a moment. When they realize that based on the facts and based on what is written and based on what is truth, they're not going to get their way, they always stir up a mess. They stirred them up. They got everybody upset. They got everybody all up in arms, everybody is struggling here, and then they started persecuting them. Do you find it interesting that in our culture today, everything seems to be the Christian's fault? Have y'all thought about that for just a moment? If you are a Bible-believing Christian, somehow in our culture today you're to blame for everything that is wrong. Everything. It's the same playbook. These guys, the status quo was being messed up and they said, "Aha, their fault! Blame it on them!"

They stirred everybody up and I'm going to give you some insight, by the way, because I are a preacher I can pick on preachers. Did y'all notice that great grammar there? Just making sure you're awake. When a preacher just spends his life stirring up stuff, it's because he doesn't believe the book and he's not willing to live by it. Beware of those who just stir stuff up to keep the fight going. Paul and Barnabas didn't stir anything up, in fact, a couple of chapters later it says they were stirred by the Holy Spirit. They didn't stir people up, the Holy Spirit stirred them up. Big difference.

It reminds me of Matthew 27. We find ourselves on the front porch of Pilate's, shall we say, place of living during the Passion Week. He's there as he would come in for what we know as the Passover and such, and he's presented with this situation: he's got Jesus of Nazareth on one hand and he's got Barabbas on the other. Now Jesus of Nazareth, it had been rumored, and we know it to be true, that he was born of a virgin; he had no accusations against him, we know that he had lived a sinless, what we would call, perfect life; he had healed the sick, healed the lame; walked on water; multiplied food; and brought people back from the dead. Not a bad resume, right? The other guy, all he had done is inflict hardship, pain and agony on their entire culture, in fact, he had killed people; he had stolen from people; he had taken advantage of people.

So what does Pilate do? He comes to these individuals who, by the way, are the same folks we see in Acts 13. He says, "Who do you all want?" Do you know what it says in Matthew 27? It says these same men stirred the people up, "Give us Barabbas!" Seriously? We want a serial killer over a man who no one dies in his presence? The status

quo had been challenged. Their power and authority was beginning to diminish and three days later when the tomb was found empty, the proverbial death knell in their system would be established.

What did Pilate do? He wiped his hands. He had been warned by his wife who had had a dream. He had pulled Jesus to the side and said, "I find no fault in him." But those folks that day stirred the people up and Pilate and, by the way, this is just as an aside, I believe Pilate could have gone down in history as the greatest believer ever if he had said, "Do you know what? I'm not going where you all are going." Now there would have been four crosses on the hill that day because they would have crucified him too. He had the opportunity but Pilate fell into the trap. Do you know what he did when he washed his hands? He became a thermometer instead of a thermostat. Instead of what was before him, what was true versus what was not, he fell into the temperature of the environment that was around him.

So let's flip the script, let's look at the thermostats for just a moment. Let's see what did Paul and Barnabas do and what is the challenge for you and I today. Look in verse 46, "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you." Let me tell you the agenda of a thermostat: it's not their personal opinion, it's not their education, it's not their upbringing, it's not that's how we always do it. The agenda of a thermostat is what does God say?

"We preached the word of God to you." Now all throughout Acts 13, in fact, you can go all the way back to verse 5, verse 15, all throughout, all throughout the context they preached the word, they read the prophets, they read the Psalms. In other words, when people said, "This Jesus you're talking about, why do you believe this?" Well, the Psalms say it. The prophets say it. Moses prophesied it. They never said, "Well, it's just kind of our idea."

Their agenda, a thermostat's agenda is always to propagate, to promote the word of God, in fact, Jesus Christ himself, think about this, he's in what we know as the wilderness 40 days, 40 nights. Satan comes to him personally and he challenges him on three specific, what we call, temptations. If you look at those temptations, he was tempting him – hear me clearly – to be the greatest thermometer the world has ever seen. "You can have all the power. You can have all the influence. You can have all the accolades. You can have all the earthly attention if you just do it the way I tell you." But Jesus was a thermostat. What did he say? "It is written." In other words, "I'm not going to fix my life to the temperature around me, I'm going to establish what it should be until the environment changes."

So their agenda was the word of God. Then we see their attitude, it says they waxed boldly. Now let me be real clear: to be bold does not mean to be brash. There's a difference. In other words, one of the things I've said to people all the time is I believe the word of God, I'm just not angry about it. Does that make sense? In other words, the attitude, you don't have to be ugly, you don't have to be angry, you don't have to be brash.

It says they waxed bold. We go back to Acts 4 and it says they preached the word of God with boldness. You go over to Acts 17, it says the whole city was turned upside down. [unintelligible] nor sit in the way of the scornful, the way of the sinners. Our lives should be different, it should be sanctified, it should be distinct from the world around us. Basically Psalm 1 in today's context is, "Don't be a thermometer, be a thermostat."

Verse 3, Psalm 1, it says, "And you shall be planted like a tree by the river." Now think about that for just a moment. A tree. We see them every day. We probably don't think much about it, however, what we know as trees, they withstand wind, weather, opposition. For those of you who play what we call the great game of golf, I know that trees are 90% air. Why do we always hit the other 10%? I don't know why but we do. They withstand all types of opposition of all types of elements but what does a tree do? It stands its ground and doesn't budge even if the storms come. Even if it appears to blow somewhat wildly, it never conforms to the storm, it stands its ground. When it says they waxed boldly, it doesn't mean they were ugly about it, it doesn't mean they were mad about it, they didn't use harsh language, they just were not going to budge. "This is what the Lord said. This is how we are to live. This is the standard that we have, we're going to stick with it."

Well, what did the thermometers do? They began to persecute them. They got upset. But notice what the thermostats do in verse 49, it says real clearly that "the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region." You go back to verse 45 and it says the whole city gathered. Let me dismiss today one of the greatest lies that the enemy will propagate in your life. This is one of the greatest ones, that if you live your life according to what Scripture says, if your marriage looks like what a marriage is supposed to look like in the Bible, if you raise your kids the way the Bible says to raise your kids, if you relate to your employer or your employee or to the culture the way the Bible says, the thermometers say, "Oh, you're going to lose all your friends and nobody's going to want you." The whole city showed up. I'm going to tell you something, you know, we live in a day, years ago we had radicals and we had hippies and we had all these folks, hey, you want to be radical today? I've got something for you, you want to be a rebel today? Believe the Bible. You're a rebel. You see, everybody's talking about, "Oh, I'm avant-garde." Nobody out there being different, it's all shades of the same thing.

These guys, they waxed boldly and guess what happened? The word of God was published throughout the whole region. You know that Jesus Christ never had to gather a crowd, they all showed up to hear him, right? These guys, they just showed up. They didn't have to garner a crowd. So the actions of a thermostat is that they keep going in the face of persecution, no matter what the language or the verbiage may be.

Allow me to close with an illustration from my home. As you well know, I have three teenage boys in my house which means that we have an unbelievable grocery bill. I mean, it's incredible. Those guys can eat. By the way, I'm grateful for that. I really am and, by the way, dad can put away some food too. But nonetheless, this is just a typical scenario in our house. My wife Tracy will fix a fabulous meal, she'll take whatever the

recipe is and she'll double it, she'll triple it, and there will still be no leftovers and 30 minutes later they're all eating a bowl of cereal. I mean, that's just the way it rolls.

The most used, or shall I say visited item in our house is the refrigerator. I mean, if that thing had an alarm on it, I mean, we wouldn't hear anything else just, "Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding!" I mean, all the time. I mean, I go to the refrigerator in the morning and it's full, I come home after work, it's empty and I know why because my boys live there. I know what happens. But it just so happens, in fact it happened this week, now it might have been one of them, it might have been me, I know it wasn't Tracy. I learned a lesson from Genesis 3, guys. Thank you. That when that device is open that much, occasionally and it happened this week, some way, somehow, it doesn't get completely shut the way it should. Now it probably appears to be shut and I'll tell you what probably happened and I don't know who, and it might have even been me, I guarantee though in my house, somebody shut the door so hard that it hit and bounced back. That's what happened.

Well, when Tracy woke up the next morning, she's usually the first to get up, she walked in the kitchen and Antarctica had come into our kitchen. She opened up the freezer and there was ice everywhere. It looked like it had snowed in Alabama. I mean, there was all this, you know, steam coming out, smoke coming out, all that stuff that happens, ice everywhere, everything is stuck together frozen. The reason I share that story is the freezer/refrigerator in your home or wherever you live, it does not operate by a thermometer. If it did, then when she woke up it would have been 75 degrees as well and everything would have been spoiled. But a thermostat says, "I don't care what the temperature is out there, I know what it's supposed to be. I don't care that the whole house is 75, I've been set on this temperature and I'm not going to quit until the whole world is this temperature."

That's exactly what they did when they said they published it throughout all of the world. The thermostats, the Paul's, the Barnabas's, the challenge to you and I is in the midst of a whole world that lives their life as a thermometer, we take the word of God and say, "I don't care what they say, I don't care what they preach, I don't care what they teach, this is how I'm supposed to live and I'm not going to stop," and be a thermostat.

Let me ask you a question as you read through the book of Acts and you get to the last chapter: which one do you want to be? Because Paul and Barnabas are changing the world and these guys, they're just another footnote in the history books of the world.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe today is one of those days where you say, "You know, pastor, I've been a thermometer the majority of my life. I spent my whole life trying to look like, be like, sound like everything that I'm hearing out there." But maybe today, maybe today the Lord impressed upon you through his word the need to be a thermostat through the person of Jesus Christ. You see, that's who makes the difference. Jesus Christ, our belief in him, him coming in and changing our lives is the only means by which it takes place. Maybe you're that person today who would desire that. Can I encourage you just to have a conversation with the Lord. The Bible says in Romans 10 whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. You don't

have to have this conversation out loud, in fact, you don't even have to say the same words I might say but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want to confess, I want to confess that I am the problem. I'm the one who is in error. I'm the one who has sinned and I believe that Jesus Christ is the only solution. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he lived a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sin on Mount Calvary. And I believe he loved me so much that three days later he rose from the grave so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the problems of life but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, and I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if that's the conversation you had with the Lord today, we want to celebrate with you. We want to have the opportunity just to have a conversation to hear what the Lord is doing in your life. Or maybe you're like one who in our earlier service, who was already a believer but had never professed publicly through baptism. Maybe that's the place you're in, or maybe you're like many every week who say this is where we want our spiritual roots to be, this is our family of faith. Maybe you just need to pray with someone. Maybe you just need to walk through something. We just want the privilege of having a conversation with you.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time in our service, thank you. Thank you that as we were challenged earlier, you want to do it again; that you desire to move in our lives; you desire not to relegate our lives to the things of the past but the opportunities of the present and the future. God, I pray whatever your Holy Spirit has spoken into our lives through your word, that this would be the day that we would respond. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Any and all decisions, I'll be right here at the front.