

Sermon Title: When The Light Shines
Scripture Text: Acts 13:44-52 (Acts #32)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 12-10-23

Please join me as we go to the Book of Acts, Chapter 13, where today, Lord willing, we are going to finish the chapter—Verses 44 through 52. Get it in context in your understanding here: The world-changing first missionary trip of the Apostle Paul and his dear friend and right-hand man Barnabas—that trip spanned roughly a year and a half, from A.D. 48 to 49. We don't have a date stamp on exactly when these things happened, but we know that the summary and the highlights of this so-called "First Missionary Journey"—because Paul took three such journeys, and then a bonus trip to Rome at government expense; we will get to all of that later in the Book of Acts—but the highlights and the summary of this trip are in Acts Chapters 13 and 14.

At the beginning of Chapter 13, we saw them commissioned and sent out by the church in the city called Antioch of Syria. From there, they went down to Seleucia—that is the nearest seaport—and they sailed from there to Salamis, a city on the eastern end of the island of Cyprus; and then they worked their way all the way from east to west across Cyprus, launching Gospel ministries wherever they could find synagogues from which to begin. The last stop on Cyprus was the capital city of Paphos; that's where the Roman "proconsul"—the local Roman governor—named "Sergius Paulus" came to faith in Christ, despite the opposition of a Jewish false teacher named "Bar-Jesus." That doesn't mean he was trying to "bar" people from coming to Jesus, [although] he was doing that; it means "Son of Salvation," but he was actually on the other side.

Next, they sailed from Paphos north and a little bit west to the port of Attalia, in the region known as Pamphylia; and when they arrived there, they came to the city of Perga, just a little bit inland. That was where John Mark abandoned the team and turned back to Jerusalem; we will see more about him later in the Book of Acts—and the good news is that there is a wonderful end to that story.

From the city of Perga, they made a very difficult and dangerous leg of the trip through the Taurus Mountains, through the region known as Pamphyila, to a different city called "Antioch"—this one: "Antioch" in the region of "Pisidia." Antioch of Pisidia is where, in the synagogue, the Apostle Paul preached the first of his sermons to be recorded in the Bible. He had been preaching ever since he came to Christ, but this one is the first one we have recorded. And it is a *masterful* exposition of several Old Testament passages, and it was delivered there in the synagogue. The summary of that sermon was our venue for last Lord's Day. By the time we finish today, Paul and Barnabas will have moved on into the region called "Galatia"—famously known for being the area to which Paul later addressed the letter that we know as the Book of Galatians. What we are going to see today puts them at about the halfway point of this journey—like I say, about a year and a half. So it lasted a lot longer than it takes us to read Acts 13 and 14.

We concluded last time after that synagogue gathering where Paul preached that *phenomenal* sermon, and we saw some very encouraging results. Remember Chapter 13, Verse 43, where we left off: "Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

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That is worded in such a way that we know that countless conversations went on in the week after that meeting of the synagogue and that spectacular sermon delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit. That leads us to our passage for today. And in our section for today, we are going to see, in practical application, the crucial elements of the strategy that Paul constantly employed through his ministry: He went to Jews first, wherever he could find them (see Rom. 1:16; cf. Acts 3:26; 5:31); he preached the Gospel, and then they turned to the Gentiles (Jn. 10:16; Acts 1:8). And often—as a matter of fact, in *most* cases—that was a bumpy transition. It wasn't like, "Okay, Jews, thank you for your hospitality. We've really enjoyed this. I'm so glad many of you believed. Now, we are going on to the Gentiles," and the Jews said, "Oh, go in peace." No; there was almost always some growling involved when that happened.

So, we are going to look at Verses 44 through 52, and we are going to see:

1. A Great Response (vs. 44), followed by:
2. Great Resistance (vs. 45), followed by:
3. Great Rhetoric (vss. 46-47), followed by:
4. *Another* Great Response (vss. 48-49),
5. *More* Great Resistance (vs. 50),
and it ends with:
6. A Great Reality (vss. 51-52)

Well, first, let's look at the Great Response.

That Sabbath message in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia *rocked* the Jewish community there! Verse 44—"The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord." It appears that *not only* was the place filled with the *regular* attenders of the synagogue, "nearly the whole city" came "to hear the word of the Lord." How did *that* happen? Well, it was a big splash. And Jews *and* God-fearing Gentiles—those that had turned from their paganism to hang out with the Jews; and they believed in Yahweh, the true God of the Bible, having abandoned their idolatrous practices—word was spreading all through the week. As I said, the way it is worded in the imperfect tense, *lots* of conversations were taking place.

As we will see soon, the excitement was rather quickly dampened by some of the people there. Verse 45—"But when the Jews saw the crowds..." What would you hope the next phrase is? "They *rejoiced* at the glorious grace of God, that their Savior—their Messiah—has come!" Nah. "But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming."

Now remember: Often "the Jews"—that phrase is shorthand for the *leaders* of the Jews, who led the opposition to Christ (Matt. 16:1; 23:2; 26:3, 57; Jn. 18:13); that's the case in this verse (cf. Matt. 27:18; Jn. 7:48; 11:47-48). And we get the idea from the previous section that some from the synagogue had followed Paul and Barnabas out and kept talking to them; there were ongoing questions. It is hard to believe that every single Jewish person in Antioch of Pisidia turned against Paul and Barnabas; I think many of them *did* believe, but that was not the prevailing opinion.

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What was going on in that city was just like something else that we see in the Bible. Remember, the author of one of the smaller books of the Old Testament—"Jonah"? Jonah had the same lamentable attitude. God told him to go to Nineveh—massive city of the Assyrians, a horribly wicked place; he heads the opposite direction; God steers him back and finally gets him to Nineveh, and he reluctantly preached there. It was kind of like, [dejectedly] "I don't *really* want to be here, but God said, "Repent, or judgment is coming.'" And there was this *largest revival in history*—hundreds of thousands believed!

And look what it says of Jonah right after: Jonah Chapter 4, Verses 1 through 3—"But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, 'Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.'" He was saying, "God, *now* You see why I did not want to go there—the *Gentiles got saved!* I *hate* that!" You do not want to be in that kind of an attitude toward God (see Deut. 32:43a; Is. 19:24-25; 56:3-7). And [Jonah] concludes: "Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

I commend you to go listen to our sermons on Jonah, especially Chapter 4. I *do* think Jonah eventually came around. But understand: That ugly spirit of Jonah lives on. The thought of Gentiles getting in on the blessings of God was *unthinkable* to many of the Jews, *especially* in their leadership.

It says the ones in Antioch "were filled with jealousy." Remember, "filled" means "controlled by," "dominated by" (e.g., Est. 3:5; 5:9; Dan. 3:19; Lk. 1:67; 4:28; 6:11; Acts 2:4; 5:17; 19:28; Eph. 5:18). *Reason* did not matter. *Scripture* did not matter. *Eternal truth* did not matter. It was all overruled by "jealousy": "We want what *we want*, and we don't want *anyone but us* to have it!" That was the attitude; it was unadulterated prejudice. It was just as vicious as any modern expression of racism. Nothing could infuriate them more than the thought of those *hated* Gentiles receiving the blessings that *they* thought belonged to them alone. Of course, they were *missing* the blessing because of their belief system.

And that attitude spilled over into their words and their actions. The word "contradicting" is in the imperfect tense again, meaning they were continually, relentlessly speaking against what Paul was saying. And since his message was *directly* from Scripture, they were putting *themselves in opposition to God* (see 1 Thess. 4:8). Why, they were "blaspheming," it says there.

Some translations—I think, unfortunately—water down what our verse actually says, in Verse 45. The NIV—the "New International Version"—says, at the end of that verse, that they "heaped abuse on him." The ESV—the "English Standard Version," which is usually much better than the NIV—does the same thing, saying they were "reviling him." Both of those translations made the decision to take the liberty to *add* a word that is not in the Greek. *It does not say* they were "blaspheming *him*." What does "blaspheme" mean? "Insult, demean, stand against." But *it does not say* that they were insulting Paul and Barnabas. Now, I think they *were*; they were certainly tearing them down, trying to

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discredit them. And they *did*, after all, wind up driving them out of the region. But there is a much *stronger* point—that, to hear the great news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and *reject* it, and argue against it, and attack those who spread it—that is to *blaspheme God Himself!* (see 1 Tim. 1:13)

These people in Antioch of Pisidia—the leaders of the synagogue there—were committing the very sin that Jesus describes in Matthew 12:31-32: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. That is when someone hears the Gospel—and it applies *especially* when, in the days of Christ and the Apostles, one could see the miracles confirming the messengers of the Gospel (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4)—you hear all that, you see all that, and you announce the conclusion: "That is the message of Satan," or, "That is just absolutely to be rejected!" That is nothing less than "blasphemy" (see Heb. 10:26-27).

Take a look at how Paul and Barnabas ended the verbal battle for souls there. Look at their Great Rhetoric—very simple, very direct—Verses 46 and 47. Start with Verse 46—"Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly"—that means that they spoke clearly and they spoke forcefully; they did not leave any doubt (e.g., Eph. 6:20b)—they "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.' "

When people hear you proclaim the Gospel, and you invite them to believe and receive "the free gift" of "eternal life" (Rom. 6:23), and their response is to "blaspheme" you and the message, and God Himself—that is *not* the time to be gentle and meek! That is when they "spoke out boldly"! When someone is rejecting the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that is *not* the time to say, "Well, you have your opinion and I have my opinion, and we just simply need to agree to disagree." No, we are not talking about Ford versus Chevy, or chocolate or vanilla, or pumpkin or pecan pie, or hardwood or carpet. This is *Heaven or Hell!* This is *eternity* at stake! This is the time to warn people, and you might want to use these words: "Do not 'judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life!'"

They brought the verdict on themselves! When they chose to *repudiate* the Gospel and the Gospel messengers, they "judged themselves unworthy of eternal life." What a *horrible price to pay* for nationalistic pride, racism, the love of self-righteousness! What a horrible mistake (see Prov. 1:29-31; 2 Thess. 1:8-9; 2:12).

When we read it this way, we typically stop reading at John 3:16. Hey, pretty good chapter—you might want to go on reading more of it; then you get down to Verse 18—"He who believes in Him"—Jesus—"is not judged; he who does not believe *has been judged already*, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

You see, God *will judge you* according to all of your deeds (Ecc. 12:14), all of your words (Matt. 12:36), all of your thoughts (Rom. 2:16)—and He will do it with perfect fairness (Is. 3:11; Acts 17:31), which means: You are going to Hell (Jn. 5:29; Rom. 2:5-6, 8-9; Rev. 20:10, 12-14).

But He offered *grace!* (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Titus 2:11) He offered a *Savior* that would take all of that penalty on Himself (Is. 53:5-8, 10; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

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But Paul and Barnabas said, "Since you...judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles," and they quoted from Isaiah Chapter 49, Verse 6; it's Chapter 13, Verse 17 in Acts: "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.' "

That idea that eternal salvation was meant to be the *exclusive* possession of the Jews is *absolutely foreign* to the *Jewish Scriptures*! You can go back to Isaiah—famous section—Chapter 42. Let me read you Verse 1 and Verse 6 of Isaiah 42. This is Yahweh, this is God speaking: "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations"—the *ethnē*: *all* the nations.

Skip down to Verse 6—"I am the Lord"—"I am Yahweh"—"I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations..." Israel was meant to be the "light" to *all* "the nations"! (cf. Deut. 32:43a; Rom. 15:10) But instead of being the conduct, they installed a plug! "We are going to *stop* all of this from flowing *through* us, and hold onto it."

Go all the way back to the covenant with Abraham: Genesis Chapter 12, Verse 3. [And in Genesis 22:18], He told Abraham: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (cf. Gal. 3:8). We are "light" to "*all* the "nations" (Matt. 28:19).

There was, in Antioch of Pisidia, a Great Response. That led to Great Resistance. But there was *also* Another Great Response, and there was Another Great Resistance.

For Another Great Response, look at Verse 48—"When the Gentiles heard this"—"heard" that "we didn't have to come to the synagogue anymore to hear this; it is going to spread now"—"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." They are going to "turn to the Gentiles"—but already, God is bringing Gentiles to the faith.

"Appointed" is from the word *tassō*. It connotes the idea of "enrolling" in something. The list in which the appointed ones—the Elect, Christians—the list in which we are enrolled is what the Bible calls "the Book of Life" (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8, 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; cf. Dan. 12:1; Lk. 10:20; Jn. 6:37; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). If your name is in "the Book of Life," you *will be* with the living God forever (Jn. 6:39).

Now, my friends, there is nowhere in the Bible where there is a more clear juxtaposition of *God's sovereignty* in salvation and *man's responsibility* to believe—no better side-by-side presentation of that than right in this passage.

Compare back to Verse 46—"since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life"—that's man's response (cf. Jn. 1:11; 3:19; 5:40; 8:45; 2 Thess. 2:10, 12). "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jon. 2:9; cf. Jn. 3:3, 5; 6:44, 65; Rom. 9:15-16; Titus 3:5); damnation is the responsibility of man (Ps. 9:16b; Prov. 1:31-32; 9:12b; 11:5b; 14:32a; Is. 3:9, 11; Rom. 2:2).

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There are people who hear of the Doctrine of Election, and they *run away*. One thing people say is: "Election *is not fair!*" (e.g., Ezek. 18:25; NKJV) That shows ignorance of the fact. I want to submit to you: God is *never* unfair! Read Romans 9—Paul kind of agreed with me on that (cf. Rom. 3:5b); *the whole Bible* agrees with that (e.g., Ps. 7:11; 9:8; 75:2, 8; 145:17a; Is. 5:16; Dan. 9:7a; Rom. 2:5-6; 2 Tim. 4:8). God is *not* unfair! He is *perfectly holy!* (Ps. 18:30; 99:5b; Ezek. 36:23) If He did anything unfair, He would not be holy! He is *perfectly* righteous! (Ps. 11:7; 33:5a; 97:2) If He did anything unfair, He would not be righteous! He is *perfectly* "just" (Dan. 4:37; Zeph. 3:5; Rev. 15:3).

So, "fair" is: "I will be fair with everyone." The standard is: "Obey Me, and you will have eternal life"—*perfect* obedience all of the time (Deut. 18:13; Matt. 5:48; Lk. 10:27-28). And as James Chapter 2, Verse 10, says: If you break the Law "in *one point*," you are "guilty" of breaking the *whole* Law (see also Gal. 3:10; cf. Ecc. 7:20).

One of the illustrations of that I like: Take one of our big windows over here. If you took your little ball-peen hammer and whacked it down in the corner somewhere, the window would be ruined; the seal would be broken. You could probably still see through it, but you would be guilty of being a window-breaker!

Every single time—*anytime, anywhere*—that in deed or thought or intention or attitude, you have fallen short of perfection, then you are guilty of being a breaker of the Law of God. And He is *totally fair!* He would *never* violate His standard (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 92:15). So, "fair" is: You and I get "the Lake of Fire"! (Rev. 20:12-14; cf. Nah. 1:3).

The other extreme is: "gracious." "Gracious" is: God, *knowing* our sinfulness, sending His Son to die for our sins! "While we were" *still* "enemies," His Son died for our sins (Rom. 5:10; cf. 1 Jn. 4:10).

The reality is: Left to themselves, *no one* would believe (Jn. 3:3, 5, 6:44; 1 Cor. 2:14). Go back to Romans Chapter 3. You might want to look at all of Verses 10 through 23, but let me just read to you Romans 3:10 and 11. Paul says: "As it is written"—what he is referring to is Psalm 14:1-3—"There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God." That is Isaiah 55, Verses 1 through 3.

So, for God to "appoint" *anyone* "to eternal life" is an act of *completely* unmerited favor and compassion—and it is *all* for His "glory" (Rom. 9:23; 2 Cor. 4:15; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). The Bible teaches clearly that those who end up in Hell get there because they "judged" *themselves* "unworthy of eternal life." Because "the free gift of God *is* eternal life *in* Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:23; cf. Rom. 3:24), "Come, take it," He says. "Drink the water" of eternal life (see Is. 55:1; Jn. 4:10; 7:37; Rev. 21:6; 22:17).

Side by side with that, the Bible teaches that the Elect are saved because God "appointed" them for "eternal life" (see Rom. 8:30; 9:15-16; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). Because on their own, they would not "seek God" (Rom. 3:11; cf. Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14). When you see someone seeking God, really asking you those questions—that is the evidence of the Spirit at work in that person's life (Jn. 3:3, 5; cf. Ezek. 36:35-37; 1 Cor. 12:3b; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:2). That is a *wonderful* opportunity!

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As you weigh the sovereignty of God in salvation, and human responsibility to make the decision, they are both true *all the time*, simultaneously; neither one ever overwhelms the other. I like how John MacArthur put it. He said: "Those truths form a narrow causeway between two deep chasms. To emphasize *either* truth at the expense of the other is to plunge oneself into the abyss of doctrinal error. They are *both* true." (see Deut. 5:32)

And we are told [about] those "appointed to eternal life." Certainly, that included both "Jews" and "Gentiles" in Pisidia; that is always the case (Rom. 9:23-24). When we get to the end of the whole story, we are going to see that there are people around the throne of God "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" in the world (Rev. 5:9), because they "received" the "free gift"—which is the gracious sovereign work of God (Jn. 1:12-13).

There is a must-read book for anyone who wants to plumb the depths of sound doctrine. It's this big one [referring to the Bible]—but an ancillary one to that is a book entitled "Evangelism And The Sovereignty Of God" by J. I. Packer. J. I. Packer got his promotion a while back; he is with the Lord now. There are just a *couple* little wrinkles of his theology that got tweaked when he arrived to be with the Lord; but on the Doctrine of Salvation, he was a stalwart.

I want you to listen carefully to a passage from that book. Again: Evangelism And The Sovereignty Of God. I have paraphrased this countless times; I don't think I have ever read it to you. I said, "God is sovereign in salvation." That is true; that is *always* true (see Matt. 11:27; Jn. 6:65). I said, "Humans are responsible for the decisions they make in response to the Gospel." That is true; that is *always* true (see Jn. 3:36; 2 Thess. 1:8). Neither one of those ever changes. How can you have *this* law here, and *this* law here, and *you cannot see* how they reconcile? Well, that is called—here is your fancy word for the day—"antinomy": "anti" = "against"; "*nomos*" = "law." So, this law against this law—*but they are both true!* So we call it an "antinomy"; some call it a "paradox"; some call it a contradiction. Some call it stupid, and they run away.

Here is what Dr. Packer so brilliantly said: "The particular antinomy which concerns us here is the apparent opposition between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, or (putting it more biblically) between what God does as King and what He does as Judge. Scripture teaches that, as King, He orders and controls all things, human actions among them, in accordance with His own eternal purpose. Scripture also teaches that, as Judge, He holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the courses of action he pursues. Thus, hearers of the gospel are responsible for their reaction; if they reject the good news, they are guilty of unbelief.

"Man without Christ is a guilty sinner, answerable to God for breaking His law. That is why he needs the gospel. When he hears the gospel, he is responsible for the decision that he makes about it. It sets before him a choice between life and death, the most momentous choice that any man can ever face...When we preach the promises and invitations of the gospel, and offer Christ to sinful men and women, it is part of our task to emphasize and re-emphasize that they are responsible to God for the way in which they react to the good news of His grace." (Evangelism And The Sovereignty Of God [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1978], 22, 25–26)

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Now, if that doesn't cause your brain to overheat a little bit, you weren't paying attention. Go ahead and read it again on your own, later. But that's the case! (see 2 Tim. 2:10, 25).

We do not know how many Jews from Antioch of Pisidia came to believe in Christ. We *do* know that when their leaders there "repudiated it," many Gentiles accepted with "rejoicing," and they were "glorifying" God. *And* guess what? One Sunday, one sermon; and the next week, the whole city shows up and a bunch of people believe—they didn't shut up! They kept talking! And look what happened, in Verse 49—"And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region." One by one!

So, we have seen A Great Response; Great Resistance; Great Rhetoric; Another Great Response; and now: More Great Resistance.

The belief of the Gentiles—their *joy* in Christ—further enraged the leaders of the Jews there. Look at Verse 50—"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."

They knew which "women" to go to in order to start trouble (insert snarky joke here); but also, "the leading *men* of the city"! They knew how to stir up trouble, and they very cleverly—in an evil sort of a way—used the most influential Jewish women *and* the city leaders, and convinced them that Paul and Barnabas really were a *threat*.

We are not told any details about how they instigated this persecution against Paul and Barnabas. We are not told *exactly* how they "drove them out of" the city, but they did it. Somehow, they had to have persuaded the local authorities that these two guys just *have* to be run out of town.

By the way: This left a big impression on Paul—*so big* that he mentions it in his final canonical letter years later, writing to his dear protégé Timothy: Second Timothy 3:10-11. He is encouraging this younger pastor, and he says: "Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra"—that's where we are going next—"what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!" There will *always* be resistance to the Gospel (Prov. 19:3; Jn. 3:19-20; Rom. 3:27; 2 Thess. 2:12).

Why, as we have seen, with a Great Response came Great Resistance; and then Great Rhetoric to stand for the truth; and then Another Great Response and Great Resistance; and it closes with: A Great Reality.

You have probably heard this or read it in your Bible, if you have been around for very long. We have just recently seen it in our daily e-mail studies in the Book of Mark—how the Jews of the first century were very legalistic about *never* wanting to bring Gentile dust back into Israel when they returned from Gentile territory.

So, look what Paul and Barnabas did: Verse 51—"But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium."

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Now, do you accomplish *anything* spiritual by walking out of Boise and into Meridian, and you shake the dust off your feet? *Of course not!* It was just a symbolic way of saying that those Jews in Antioch were considered by Paul and Barnabas as no better than *pagans*, because they rejected the Savior (cf. Matt. 18:17b). It was their peaceful protest to show the condemnation that those people had brought upon themselves (cf. Lk. 13:28; Rev. 2:9b). Those Jews were left in their obstinate disobedience (cf. Matt. 15:12-14). We saw it in Mark, when Jesus sent out the Twelve, two by two. He said, "Any place that does not receive you...shake the dust off the soles of your feet" (Mk. 6:11)—You are saying, "You are acting as evilly as pagans." (cf. Acts 18:6)

Now, lest we be left to think that this ministry was *nothing but* opposition and conflict, our chapter ends with the wonderful reality that the Gospel *truly* changes lives! It brings *endless* joy! It leaves people serving God in the power of the Holy Spirit. If you look at Verse 52—"And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

Paul and Barnabas are going to press on with the ministry of spreading the Gospel. The next step is "Iconium"; it is less than a day's journey from Antioch of Pisidia.

But do you see how this passage portrays the sharp contrast between the options available to every person? Each person either *trusts* in Jesus and is saved; or *rejects* Him and is condemned to "eternal" torment (Matt. 25:46; cf. Dan. 12:2).

Do not forget the words that Jesus said, just before He spoke of that awful sin of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Just before that, He says this in Matthew 12:30—"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters."

It is "saved" (Jn. 3:17) or "lost" (Matt. 18:11). It is "Heaven" (Phil. 3:20; 2 Tim. 4:18) or "Hell" (Matt. 10:28). It is *right* or *wrong* (Prov. 14:12; Matt. 7:13-14). There are *only* two choices (Deut. 30:19; Jer. 21:8; Lk. 13:3, 5; Jn. 8:24; 10:7-10; Rev. 21:6-8).

I think it is safe to say that that town of Antioch in the region of Pisidia was left changed forever. Oh, yeah, they got rid of Paul and Barnabas. But they left behind two groups there, *totally* different! Surely, some of the Jews had turned to Christ; but for the most part, the remaining Jews were *cemented* in their rejection and their prejudice and their *hatred* of those Gentiles.

But there was *also* this *joyous* group of Spirit-filled believers in Christ who were *quickly* coming to understand the joy of *true* spiritual fellowship with "*all*" people of "*all*" backgrounds, Jew and Gentile alike (Ps. 119:63; cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). They were beginning to understand what Paul had not gotten around to writing yet, about "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). They celebrated *breaking down* the walls that separated people (see Eph. 2:14). And I am sure they kept preaching to the ones who had driven Paul and Barnabas out of town. Why, those new believers, who "were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit"—they began being able to greet each other with some other words that Paul had not gotten around to writing yet. They could say, as they left any gathering: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14).

Sermon Title: When The Light Shines
Scripture Text: Acts 13:44-52 (Acts #32)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 12-10-23

Where are you? There are *only two* eternal destinies—*only two*! There is only *one* way to Heaven (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12), and the *default setting* is to miss the boat! (see Jn. 3:3, 5) You don't need to do *anything* in order to go to Hell (see Eph. 2:1-3). You don't have to persecute a missionary. You don't have to murder anyone. You are already *perfectly* suited for "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46).

But there is *one way out*: "through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:21; cf. 6:23). That is why they said God sent you "as a light to the nations" (Is. 42:6); in the dark, dark "world," the "light" is Christ (Jn. 8:12).

If you haven't been here, you will find out; but you who have been: Remember how we celebrate at our Christmas Eve service? The Parable of Light—the light spreading through the world, wherever it goes (Matt. 5:14-15; cf. Phil. 2:15; Col. 1:5-6; 2 Cor. 2:14-16).

Let's pray:

Father, thank You for the Light shining. Thank You for sending that Light, who is Your Son. Thank You for telling us that through us, Your Light can shine, and we can let our light shine and people can see our good works and be drawn to the Savior and bring You glory. Oh, that is what we want! And Father, in this time of year there are many around us who will even let the name of Jesus cross their lips, who will even speak of a Savior, who will speak of a coming King—and not have any idea what they really mean by that. So, help us to be faithful stewards of these opportunities that are before us. And above all, thank You for life in Christ. I pray no one would leave here in any other condition, other than to be standing in the Light, to be standing in Your grace, for Your glory. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.