



23 | ACTS 13:13-52

THE MESSAGE OF MISSIONS

The gospel is so powerful that it is unstoppable. We just have to preach it and God will give his supernatural increase in the hearts of our hearers.

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Call to Worship

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.
¹⁹ Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen! —Psalm 72:18-19

Songs

Behold Our God
And Can it Be
Moment by Moment
Only a Holy God
Amazing Grace

Announcements

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

GIVING: You can give over Zelle through your bank with no fees (use secretary@livinghopechurch.net). We also have a collection box on the Welcome Center. Malachi 3, “Test me in this” Proverbs: “**Give of your firstfruits.**” We believe blessing comes by putting God first.

Introduction

When I was just a toddler, my brother David, 12 years older than me, found a maple tree seed—what we call helicopters or whirly birds. David decided to plant one of those half-grown silver maples growing from that whirly bird. My dad did his best to mow it over, but he only mowed once a week, and that little tree grew even when my dad was sleeping. Eventually autumn would come, and that little tree won. Today you can see that tree from the Satellite photos it’s so big! My dad saw just a tiny seed, but my brother saw a mighty maple. The gospel is a lot like that seed my brother planted. Some plant the gospel message, and some water, but God makes it grow. He gives the increase in the human heart.

In our text, we learned how the proconsul Sergius Paulus came to know Christ. After this great Roman governor became a Christian, Saul took the name Paul, and this event increased the number of conversions in Cyprus. Even many years later, while the vast majority of Jews living on the island were hostile to the Christians, the Gentiles were filling the churches.¹

Their activity seriously disturbed the Jewish community. Initially, the apostles taught the Jews only, but when they rejected them, they began to preach the good news to the Gentiles. The tradition of Cyprus maintains that under the pressure of outraged Jewish community, Paul was captured in Paphos and, after being tied to the whipping post, punished with 39 strokes of the whip.² While in Cyprus, according to tradition, many others, mainly Gentiles, were converted, including Herakleidios, who became one of the first pastors there in Cyprus scattered in various cities throughout the island.³

Key Thought: The gospel is so powerful that it is unstoppable. We just have to preach it and God will give his supernatural increase in the hearts of our hearers.

1. THE PATHWAY FOR THE GOSPEL (13:13)

Though it was such a fruitful time, it was intense, and at points likely vicious, so John Mark deserts his friends and makes his way back to Jerusalem while “Paul and his companions” continued to plant the first churches in Asia.

¹ Mariusz Misztal, *Historia Cypru* (Kraków, Poland: Issue 628 of Praca Monograficzne, Commission of National Education in Kraków, 2013), 86.

² Ibid., 85.

³ F. Halkin, *Les actes apocryphes de Saint Héraclide de Chypre, disciple de l’apôtre Barnabé*, (Analecta Bollandiana, vol. 82, 1964), 133–169.

A PROMISING PATHWAY

Paul, Barnabas, and others set sail to evangelize a whole new part of the world: Asia, what is modern-day Turkey. They felt the direction of **the Holy Spirit leading them to stay in the east** and evangelize.

Acts 13:13a | Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia.

There were many Roman colonies in Asia, and Paul knew this was the way the gospel could get to the whole world. These were the world's crossroads at the time. If God had led them to Cyprus in order to save Sergius Paulus, the governor there, then what else did he have in mind for Asia?

When we look out at the harvest fields, it's **easy to become jaded and critical**, but how vital it is to remember the Lord's promises to save our loved ones and to see God's heaven full. We must always have an attitude as wide as God's love and power. He can and will save multitudes for his kingdom. He has promised to do so. Go into the highways and hedges and compel them to come (*cf* Lk 14:23)! Of all people the Lord's saints should be the most hopeful on the planet. God saved you, didn't he? He can save anyone.

A TREACHEROUS PATHWAY

Sadly, not everyone seemed to have that hope. John Mark seems to have been discouraged if not intimidated by the journey.

Acts 13:13b | And John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

John Mark knew that to plant churches in Asia, you had to go through the Taurus mountain range, and that would be treacherous. It extends across the coast and inland of what is today the country of Turkey. **Paul had grown up in the highlands of the Taurus mountain range.** Paul's first missionary journey would carry them all around the Taurus mountain range, which was incredibly treacherous, but Paul knew this territory.

This may have been too hard a task for John Mark, so he departed back home to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas on the other hand, plowed forward. Nothing it seemed could stop them from spreading the good news to the cities of Asia.

John Mark may also have retreated because there was an obvious **management change**, from Barnabas to Paul. Barnabas was very familiar with Cyprus, and there had been an amazing response. But here in Acts, it is very clear, if we look at the text closely, this from this moment on Paul is the one in charge of the missionary journey, not Barnabas. Paul is the one so familiar with Asia Minor, not Barnabas. Paul is clearly leading the way. It may be that John Mark did not appreciate that Paul had been given the leadership position over his Uncle Barnabas. We hear no complaint from Barnabas about his loss in status, but obviously there was a complaint from John Mark.⁴

A FAMILIAR PATHWAY

From Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas and other companions head to evangelize Asia. They landed in Perga, a small port city on the coast of the Mediterranean, just north of Cyprus. This is **Paul's stomping grounds**. He's from Tarsus.

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *Acts*, St. Andrew's Expositional Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 229.

Acts 21:39 | Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city.”

Perga is not that far from Tarsus. Paul had arrived in a neighborhood familiar to him since **boyhood days**. His birthplace was in these parts.⁵ **Paul would have already travelled these pathways before.** Paul knew the treacherous pathways throughout the Taurus Mountains. He knew how to get through these roads safely. He would have had contacts that would assist them in their travels. As familiar as they were, they were treacherous, that along with the intense persecution, John Mark headed back home to Jerusalem. Barnabas and Paul continued on to Perga and on to Antioch beyond the Taurus Mountains, into the land of Galatia.

<<Lycian Way>>

<<St. Paul Trail>>

You can travel through the Lycian Way and the “St. Paul” trail and experience the treacherousness of the journey even today.

It is during this trip to Asia, we learn later, in Lystra and Derbe that a young man named Timothy hears the gospel and is converted to Christ. He’s from a very faithful family with a Jewish mom, and grandmother, but an unbelieving Greek father.

2. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL (13:14-41)

Acts 13:14 | But they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

The first stop in preaching the gospel in Asia is in Antioch of Pisidia, also known as Caesarea Antioch. It’s a **treacherous journey to get there, being 3,600 feet above sea level**. This is to be the location of the first church plant in Galatia. This is the launching point for the churches of Galatia, to which Paul later writes his **letter**. **The four Galatian churches are Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.**

Paul’s master plan for Gentile evangelism almost always included a witness for Christ in the local synagogue. Because he was a trained rabbi, a graduate of the famous school of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, he could be sure of an initial hearing in any synagogue. If he could reap a quick harvest for Christ in the local synagogue, he would have a nucleus for organizing a church.⁶ They go to the Jews in the synagogue on the Sabbath day and Paul is invited, as a guest rabbi, to teach the people there.

A PROMISING INVITATION

Acts 13:15-16 | After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”¹⁶ So Paul stood up,

⁵ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 13:13a.

⁶ Phillips, *Acts*, Ac 13:14a.

and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

The order of service proceeded with the usual prayers and Scripture readings, Paul and Barnabas making the responses as ordinary members of the congregation. When Paul and Barnabas had first come in, the presiding elders of the synagogue no doubt met them. It would not take them long to recognize that these men had recently been in Jerusalem, were well-traveled, well-informed, and well-taught. What would be more natural than to turn the podium over to them? In a place like Pisidian Antioch, somewhat off the beaten track and certainly remote and isolated from Jerusalem, visitors of their caliber must have been rare. There would be a natural curiosity about the men as well as a hunger for news from Jerusalem.

Paul’s procedure was to wait until opportunity came and then to seize it firmly with both hands. He had not gone to the synagogue that Sabbath hoping someone would invite him home for a meal, or to expound the theories of Hillel, or to relate news from here and there. He had gone there looking for an opportunity to preach Christ, and now it had come. Decisions as to his movements had been right. The platform was now his.⁷

Don’t be worried about how God will open up the door for you to preach the gospel. Paul and Barnabas had no idea what God was going to do in this strategic city, but they were led by the Spirit. They went not knowing if they would be able to share Jesus with these people. But God opened the door and gave the words.

A PROMISED PEOPLE

The text before us now contains the first recorded sermon of the Apostle Paul. The content seems to be taken both from **Stephen’s sermon and the Apostle Peter’s at Pentecost**. He uses the same outline as Stephen and the same texts as Peter. It’s astounding that the prayer of Stephen to save his hearers was answered in the life and message of the great Apostle Paul.

Out of Egypt

God calls a people out of Egypt. Helpless people are the only kind that God calls. He resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

Acts 13:17 | The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it.

We find that Paul reminds his hearers of the helplessness of all who do not know Christ. Israel was like that. They were in slavery, and it was truly an impossible situation. “With uplifted arm” he brought them out of the land of Egypt. Remember Egypt was called “the iron furnace” (Deut 4:20). It was a place where they were told what to do by their taskmasters. Isn’t that what our old life was like? We were all in our own Egypt. We had the taskmasters of the idols of our heart. We were blinded by our sin and in a completely impossible situation. We were all dead in our sin and headed to a sinner’s hell. But God led us out of Egypt!

⁷ Phillips, *Acts*, Ac 13:14b–15.

Out of the Wilderness

Paul then told them of how God calls his people out of the wilderness. He provides for us there. Shoes don't wear out there. Manna rains from heaven. We see the goodness of God in the wilderness.

Acts 13:18 | And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness.

It is interesting Paul says that God "put up with them." Glory to God he sometimes puts up with us and our sin. He loves us. He will never leave us or forsake us. He wants us to come out of the wilderness and into his Canaan land.

Into Canaan

Acts 13:19 | And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance.

Then he continues the history of Israel about the conquests of Canaan, even seven nations under the command of General Joshua. In one day, God made the sun stand still so that Israel could keep conquering the nations. They had such a victory they couldn't do it all in one day (*cf* Josh 10-11; Deut 7:1). Dear saints, we have our own General Joshua. His name is Yeshua, and he will make the sun stand still for you as well. He will conquer all your enemies.

On to the Kingdom

Now Paul turns to an exciting time where God brings Israel to a kingdom under David.

Acts 13:20-22 | All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²² And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.'

How promising the history of Israel is to bring Israel to a king, yet this king is terribly imperfect. As great as any of the kings were, each was marred by sin and selfishness. They did not completely fulfill God's promises to his people.

A PROMISED SAVIOR

All the kings of Israel left God's people disappointed. They kept waiting for the true king, the Messiah. And finally, he came! The prophecies are fulfilled. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal 4:4-5). Paul announces that the Messiah has come to save their souls.

Acts 13:23 | Of this man's [*David's*] offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.

Hallelujah, Paul gets to the heart of the message. The blazing center of the Bible's message is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. He's our promised prophet, priest, and king.

Paul's message was about Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises. Jesus is *the* Messiah, the *only* Messiah, and the *Jewish* Messiah. Jesus came from the seed "as he promised" (13:23). Paul was establishing an important **principle in the interpretation** of the Old Testament **Scriptures: they pointed to and culminated in Jesus Christ.**⁸ When the resurrected Christ taught the Scriptures, he did the same thing.

Luke 24:27 | Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

A PROMISED SALVATION

Now Paul recounts how Christ came into history, announced by John the Baptist, who may have been more famous than Jesus at this time. They had surely heard of John, but had they considered John's message about the coming Messiah?

Acts 13:24-26 | Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' ²⁶"Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation.

The message of salvation through Jesus came first through John the Baptist. Remember he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29)? Now Paul was telling those in the synagogue at Caesarea Antioch in the rugged Taurus mountains that Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins. **He's the Messiah for all nations.** He speaks not only to the Jews—"sons of the family of Abraham," but also to those "who fear God," that is Gentiles that had become proselytes of Judaism. Paul is announcing that the salvation through Messiah promised by the prophets had finally come.

A PROMISED FULFILLMENT

Not only had the Messiah come, but specific prophecies have been fulfilled. Paul goes through several prophecies here.

Acts 13:27-31 | For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. ²⁸And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰But God raised him from the dead, ³¹and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.

All that "was written of him" was fulfilled through the rulers of Israel. He was put to death, executed by Pontius Pilate. Paul's about to tell them that his death was a

⁸ Thomas, *Acts*, 369.

substitutionary death, that through his death they could be justified, their sins forgiven. But right now, Paul is going through the historic fulfillment of the prophecies. Just as the prophets wrote of Jesus, he not only died, but he was buried, and then he **rose again on the third day**. The prophet Hosea had promised that Messiah would rise on the third day (Hos 6:2). Then Paul, as he often does, calls eyewitnesses to account. He tells them there is evidence that can be submitted for the resurrection: you can talk to those who witnessed it. We know there were over 500 who were scattered from Galilee to Jerusalem, and likely throughout Asia and Europe by this time. They went forth from Pentecost to every nation under heaven. Perhaps some in this synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia had already heard one of the witnesses testify of Jesus.

A PROMISED RESURRECTION

Now Paul is going to start quoting Scripture and calling God as his witness, that the Messiah would die and rise again, since this might have been a very strange teaching at first. To establish that Messiah would need to rise from the dead, Paul quotes three passages: Psalm 2, Isaiah 55:3, and Psalm 16.

A Prophecy from Psalm 2

Paul begins in Psalm 2, which is the main coronation Psalm for the kings of Israel.

Acts 13:32-33 | And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, ³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’”

When Paul made this appeal to Psalm 2, he was not talking about a moment when Jesus was begotten, since Jesus is eternal. On an earthly level, the kings of Israel were said to have been “begotten” on the day of their coronation.⁹ **Jesus’ coronation** as King of kings, when he was “highly exalted” **was on the day of his resurrection** (cf Phil 2:9). He is begotten, coronated, so that “every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord” and king (Phil 2:10; cf Isa 45:23). Jesus is not only the son of David, his offspring, God’s “Savior” of Israel, he is God’s Son who is coronated at his resurrection.¹⁰

A Prophecy from Isaiah 55

Now Paul moves to Isaiah the prophet. He quotes Isaiah 55:3, which promises that God will not forget his covenant to David to bring an eternal king from his loins. The underlying text is the promise to David that he would always have a descendant on the throne (cf 2 Sam 7:12–13).¹¹

Acts 13:34 | And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’”

⁹ R. C. Sproul, *Acts*, St. Andrew’s Expositional Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 239.

¹⁰ James M. Hamilton Jr. and Brian J. Vickers, *John–Acts*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. IX, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 463.

¹¹ James M. Hamilton Jr. and Brian J. Vickers, *John–Acts*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. IX, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 463.

The point is that God raised Jesus from the dead, because he promised in Isaiah 55 the sure blessings of **an eternal covenant** with David, and there has to be **an eternal inhabitant on the throne**.

Indeed, God fulfills this in the human birth of the eternal Son of God, but according to prophecy, Messiah is put to death. How does this coincide with prophecy? There must be a resurrection. Paul gives a final Scripture, proving the resurrection from Psalm 16.

A Prophecy from Psalm 16

Acts 13:35-37 | Therefore he says also in another psalm, “‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’”³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption,³⁷ but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.

King David could never fulfill God’s eternal covenant, Paul says, because he died, and his body is still in the tomb. Of course, Messiah would also die, but according to Psalm 16:10, his body would not see corruption, and he would rise again from the dead. The one who would die, but not see corruption is God’s Holy One, the eternal Son of God.

Christ’s body must escape not merely from corruption and decay but from **death** itself. And so it did. He not only saw no corruption. Hallelujah, he conquered death itself!¹²

A PROMISED JUSTIFICATION

Now Paul begins to apply the gospel. This is important. Why did Messiah have to come and die and be buried and rise again. Paul gives us the answer. Jesus’ death is substitutionary. It’s for the forgiveness of sins. From Jesus’ work on the cross comes our justification before God.

Acts 13:38-39 | Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,³⁹ and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Forgiveness can be granted to anyone who believes. When belief is exercised on Christ, the person is “freed” or literally, “justified.” Paul employed the important term “to justify” (*dikaioo*, twice) in verse 39, where the ESV translates it “freed”¹³ Paul was teaching, in his first recorded sermon, the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He repeats this theme over and over again.

Galatians 2:16 | By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Romans 5:1 | Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹² John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 13:37.

¹³ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Dorani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 371.

Philippians 3:9 | And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Indeed, at the cross, there is a glorious exchange, my rags of sin for Jesus' robe of righteousness. Because of this, the moment we believe, we are positionally perfect and righteous in the sight of God. We are as holy and perfect as Jesus is, because God sees us through the righteousness of Christ. What amazing news.

A POWERFUL WARNING

Paul ends on a warning. He says to beware of the gospel. If you accept it, your heart is softened, but if you reject it your heart will get hard. God's doing a great work, so don't reject him. Paul quotes the warning from Habakkuk 1:5.

Acts 13:40-41 | Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: ⁴¹“Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.”

The choice with which Paul left his audience is the choice every person faces. Accepting the salvation offered in Jesus Christ brings forgiveness of sin and eternal bliss. Rejecting it brings judgment and eternal damnation. God's grace and love do not cancel His justice and holy hatred of sin.¹⁴

From the patriarchs all the way to the prophets, the Old Testament Scriptures have spoken about God's revealed intention to rescue and redeem humanity. The unfolding story of the Old Testament reached its climax in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul gave them a way of understanding their own Scriptures. In effect, he was saying to them that unless they acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, they had utterly failed to understand the Scriptures.¹⁵

3. THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL (13:42-52)

What were the results of Paul's preaching? It was a powerful result. God's word always does its work.

Isaiah 55:11 | My word ... shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please.

Romans 1:16 | I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

THE GOSPEL DRAWS PEOPLE

Look how God's word does the work! The word had such an effect that people were begging to hear more.

¹⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 27.

¹⁵ Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 370.

Acts 13:42-43 | As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.⁴³ And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

We see what happened in Antioch of Pisidia. The word was preached, and the people begged to hear more. Theologically, we learn that God is drawing people to salvation. God has to do the drawing. He has to open the sinner's eyes and give him a new heart.

John 6:37, 44 | All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

We see what happened in Antioch of Pisidia. The word was preached, and the people begged to hear more. Theologically, we learn that God is drawing people to salvation. God has to do the drawing. He has to open the sinner's eyes and give him a new heart.

We are drawn in love and drawn in grace, but it is an irresistible drawing. The word can actually be translated "dragged" (21:30, where people are dragged before magistrates). The idea is that God is sovereignly working in the heart of man to bring him to salvation. Without that drawing no one would come to Christ. The gospel is drawing people.

What can you do? We must understand the means of grace. God uses your **prayers**, your **fasting**, your **evangelism** in powerful ways to open up the eyes of the blind. We cannot neglect that people will never hear without a preacher. You have to pray and fast and tell others if they are going to be added to the kingdom.

THE GOSPEL OFFENDS PEOPLE

A week later the synagogue is filled to capacity. Thousands are gathered, both Jews and Gentiles to hear Paul teach the Bible.

Acts 13:44 | The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

The Apostle Paul had a deep desire that his own kinsmen should be saved. He said in Romans 9 that he was willing to be damned if that would bring them to Christ. Yet the Jews here rejected the gospel.

Acts 13:45 | But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

A door was slammed in Paul's face. He had hoped to be able to evangelize his own people. This was always his burning desire (Rom 9:1-3; 10:1). We don't know what he said that second Sabbath in Antioch of Pisidian, but the Jews were jealous and didn't want to hear it.

The Spirit of God must have brought such conviction on people that instead of rejoicing, they were angry that their own teaching didn't bring such joy and conviction. It was so powerful that the place was standing room only. People must have kept inviting more people. This kind of jealousy moved the leaders of Israel to crucify the Lord. Jesus told us that if they hated him, they will hate his followers as well. So Paul came unto his

own, the Jews, and his own received him not, just as they did not receive the Lord. What does the Lord's servant do when confronted with the obvious fact of a closed door? He looks for one that is open.¹⁶

Acts 13:46-47 | And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

Paul quotes Isaiah 49, a prophecy of Christ being a light to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas now take a decided turn away from the Jews and the synagogues and begin intentionally seeking the Gentiles for salvation.

THE GOSPEL SAVES PEOPLE

Even in the midst of the Jews being offended, the Gentiles were being brought into the kingdom. Whenever there is opposition, that means you are preaching the gospel rightly. The gospel normally produces rejoicing or rioting. If it is heard rightly, people will have a fierce response to it, either positive or negative. So after the negative response, we see a resounding positive response, where there is great joy and celebration for the Gentiles gladly receive the truth of Christ.

Acts 13:48 | And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Those appointed to eternal life will believe. You would think it would be the other way around, that those who believe will be appointed, but it is the opposite. This points to the glorious doctrine of election and predestination: that God has already written our names in the book of life and appointed us. When the word comes to us, our eyes are opened, and the word transforms our heart from stone to flesh. We believe and are granted the eternal life we were appointed for. So we see two vital truths in understanding the gospel: the sovereignty of God in opening the eyes of dead sinners, and the responsibility of man to choose Christ. Both are truth. Both must be taught. One does not cancel out the other.

Then we hear this wonderful verse of how the word was doing the work not only in the hearts of the Gentiles in southern Galatia in Antioch of Pisidian, but "throughout the whole region."

Acts 13:49 | And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

I love this quote from Martin Luther that explains how thousands of churches were planted throughout Europe during his day. People were starting to call Christians "Lutherans" in Germany, and Luther was horrified. He wanted to give proper honor to the word of God that does the work.

¹⁶ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 13:45.

What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone ... How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name? [i.e., “*Lutherans*”] ... I simply taught, preached, wrote God’s word; otherwise, I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the word did everything.¹⁷

THE GOSPEL BRINGS PERSECUTION

Now we find out that after seeing such a fantastic reaction from the Gentiles, they Jews have the opposite reaction.

Acts 13:50 | But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

Paul and Barnabas were forced to leave the city when a riot was stirred up against them, but **the Holy Spirit could not be driven out**. He remained with the converts as the source of their new life, power and joy.¹⁸ Being driven out from one place means an open door for another.

Acts 13:51 | But they shook off the dust from their feet against them.

Like Jesus taught the 70 when they went out, Paul and his missionary team “shook off the dust from their feet against them.” The Jews of Paul’s day were scrupulous not to bring Gentile dust back into Israel. By their act, Paul and Barnabas were saying in effect that they considered the Jews at Antioch no better than pagans. There could be no stronger condemnation. Those Jews were left in their obstinate unbelief.¹⁹

THE GOSPEL BRINGS JOY

There was no room for doom and gloom or disappointment. Paul, Barnabas, and their friends went to the next open door.

Acts 13:52 | And went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Joy? I thought they had just suffered rejection at this place where they labored. The Christian’s joy is not based on our circumstances. They were **filled with joy for several reasons**: first, God did a great work in Antioch of Pisidia among the Gentiles—the first church in Asia is planted. Moreover, they leave behind them freshly converted disciples who, like all new Christians, are *filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit* (13:52; cf 2:44–47; 8:8, 39b).²⁰ Second, they also believed God would do a great work in the next cities, beginning with Iconium. Third, God is in charge of granting eternal life. He appoints those who believe. The burden is not for us to convert, but merely to preach God’s word and his gospel faithfully.

¹⁷ Martin Luther in Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 54.

¹⁸ F. F. Bruce, *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* (Nashville, TN; Bath, England: Kingsley Books, 2017), Ac 13:42–52.

¹⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 40.

²⁰ Chalmer Ernest Faw, *Acts*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 155.

Are you filled with joy this morning? You should be! You have Christ. Is Jesus the center of your life? Or are you down in the dumps because your eyes are on this broken world? Get your eyes off yourself. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Conclusion

God can do the impossible. He can change the heart of the most stubborn sinner and make him humble. The average cost of a **physical heart transplant** including the immunosuppressant drugs after the surgery is close to **a million dollars**. Yet, the best heart transplant a man can receive is a **spiritual heart transplant**. It costs him nothing and the new heart will never fail. We can't give that spiritual heart transplant, but God can and will.

We are called to plant the seeds of the gospel wherever we go. We cannot make it grow. God has to do that. **We plant, and we water, but God gives the increase.**