

In order to prepare ourselves for our passage this morning... I would like for you to imagine that you're out for a hike on a beautiful spring day... and you come to a creek. ... But there's something wrong with this picture. ... You notice that someone has dumped trash into the stream — an ugly sight. Judging by some of the empty soda cans... the trash has been there awhile. ... In fact... there is even an ugly film on top of the water. ... You can't just leave the scene as you found it... because it would bother your conscience. ... So you stoop down and begin gathering the trash.

It actually takes several hours before you can begin to see a difference... it is simply amazing how much junk has been discarded there. ... You sit back... rest for a moment... and realize you'll have to keep returning each day until the site is truly clean. ... But when you come back the next day... it's as if your work has been undone.

In fact there's more trash than before. ... Somehow the garbage bred overnight. ... You think about the unlikelihood of someone coming to this very spot to dump their garbage in the few hours while you were away... and you realize that something smells fishy — so to speak. ... So you begin to follow the creek upstream.

Sure enough... you come to a garbage dump that has been there for years. ... It's emptying into the passing creek. ... Your cleaning job only opened up a gap for more stuff to settle. ... You could go and clean every day .... However... if you want your creek to be clean... that means going directly to the source ... and dealing with what's there.

Unfortunately... the church in America... spends great amounts of time... money... and energy... doing trash removal "downstream." ... The society that we live in is tremendously polluted with strewn filth everywhere. Calls are made every day that we need revival. ... Who among us has not felt compelled to pray for revival in America...?

But I need to be very blunt this morning. ... I don't think that the majority of us knows what we are praying for... and if we did know... I wonder if we would still pray for it.

Today's message is titled – "Some Hard Truth about Revival."

In order for real revival to come... we will uncover some evidence in our passage today... which I believe are the conditions that are necessary for it to arrive. I believe it... because the Apostle Paul... an original revival evangelist... brings them up in his sermon... that he preaches.

In Acts chapter 13... Paul and Barnabas have just begun their first missionary journey... having been sent by the church in Antioch (of Syria.) ... They have just finished their Cyprus campaign... which met with the success of seeing the Roman Proconsul give his life to Jesus. Today these two evangelists will carry on their campaign to influence entire societies... and Dr. Luke slows down his narrative for us in Acts... so that we can get a closer look at their campaign. ... When they were on the island of Cyprus... we were only given quick summaries... but now we will see how Paul makes his appeals... and we will get greater detail of their mission. ... We will even have the chance to look over the very first recorded sermon of the Apostle Paul.

Paul and Barnabas brought the Gospel truth to those who had a limited understanding of God... (They went to the Jewish synagogue)... Their audience had some understanding of God and the Bible... But this audience had not yet heard the good news of the Gospel. ... Our task today is not much different. Our audience today (by and large)... has (at best) a very limited understanding of God and the Bible.

We are asked to pray for “revival” ... but in the words of evangelist, Ken Poure... “Something has to first be “vived” before it can be “revived.” ... In this post-Christian era of our world... we should no longer be talking “REvival”... but instead we are back to the initial stage of living a post-Christian... post-modern... Biblically illiterate society... that has little (or no) acquaintance with it. ... So let’s look closely at Paul and Barnabas... as they seek an initial “vive” to the Galatian culture in our passage today.

As I have already tried to give warning – this will be some hard truth about revival. We must be cleaning the creek upstream – at the **true** source... if we really want revival to come. ... What I mean by “*Upstream*” and the “*true source*” is our **own hearts**. ... Yes... pray... and work for “vival” in our land! But know this: real societal transformation begins when we travel upstream to the source of our heart. ... The real battle takes place deep within ourselves... and it begins with several prayers of conviction.

### **Acts 13:13**

What happened to Paul and his companions... just before arriving in the region of Galatia... certainly must have had tremendous impact on their ministry... once they arrived. ... Here in verse 13... we are given some

important details that might be easy to dismiss... as not very important... if it wasn't for other passages of Scripture. ... The missionary team is no longer on the Island of Cyprus... but has landed at a port city below the region of Galatia. They are in Perga. ... Antioch of Pisidia will be the first city they visit in Galatia... It is 3,600 straight up from where they are. And when they arrived at this port city... I don't think that it was their original intent to go Galatia. ... We are not told what their original plans were... but we are told by what Paul would later write to the Galatians... that his first visit with them was an unplanned visit.

**Galatians 4:13-15 (ESV)**

*You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.*

The ailment which Paul had is not identified... but let me tell you a few things that are known about Perga during the time that Paul and Barnabas would have been there. ... According to historical writings... the lowlands of Perga... in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century... was known to be experiencing prevalent cases of a form of malaria. One written description of this virulent type said that it was like “driving a white hot poker directly through the eye sockets and into the cranium.” (No wonder Paul said that he was a trial to the Galatians.)

Galatia was a region that was noted for its healing properties. Air was thinner because of its 36 hundred foot altitude... and the sea breeze that blew fresh off the Mediterranean. A lot of people went to these high ocean

plains in order to convalesce with their diseases. This would explain why Paul would say to the Galatians... that it was because of an ailment that he first came to them. Also it may explain Paul's reference to their willingness to pluck out their own eyes for him. (That comment no longer seems so random.) Paul may have had extreme eye pain... if he had caught the prevalent form of malaria that was going around Perga.

So... condition number one of the missionary team... here in Acts 13:13... is more than likely a very painful physical problem. ... There was however a second one that is mentioned. It was a relational difficulty. ... John Mark bailed on them. ... The young man defected from the missionary team and went home.

This action caused such tension between Paul and Barnabas... that eventually it led to Paul and Barnabas parting company with each other... and going their separate ways. (We will see this when we get to Acts chapter 15.) Although not much is said here... what we see in Acts 13:13... is the very reason for their future split... and it had probably been brewing under the surface... until it finally led to the physical divide between Paul and Barnabas... that we will come to... later in Acts.

The team experienced an excruciating physical condition... and horrible relational problems. ... Christians today will abandon their pursuit of revival... for reasons that are much more trivial. ... *“Revival !...? Sure! As long as it won't inconvenience me too much...”*

Being as sick as he probably was... Paul might have gone home (like John Mark)... and waited until he felt better. Who would have faulted him... if he did...? ... But instead... Paul and Barnabas pressed on... through much

difficulty. ... And to get to Galatia... their route was a hard climb... through a treacherous area... It was known as a sure place to be robbed and perhaps killed. The Roman army was unable to make these road safe for travel... because the robbers would safely hide from them in its many caves.

So... here is the first hard truth about revival. If revival is going to come... it will come when we are willing to take up our own cross. John Mark probably left... because at that time he was not ready to take up his cross and endure the certain hardship of this effort. ... It was too much. ... Before revival comes... we must be willing to endure hardship.

A church that holds prayer meetings calling for revival... is like a mortician who offers a sale on his caskets. I can't imagine that he could create much of a rush of people clamoring to purchase their own casket – bargain or no bargain! Maybe that is why we don't see them advertise – “*Best price around! Come in today for the best selection. We will even throw in a free satin pillow for your head!*”

(I know that I sound ridiculous – and morbid)... But when we pray for revival in our land – we are praying for ourselves... and our fellow believers... to be dead to ourselves... (to not be consumed with our personal convenience and ease.) We might even be praying for tremendous hardship for ourselves. And this too is a “hard sell”!

Only those who love God enough that they are willing to suffer personal pain... disappointment... and hardship... in order to see God's Kingdom advance... should ever pray for revival. Don't pray for revival... if your motive is simply to have better days of less crime and fear. Don't pray for revival... if it is only for your own safety and peace of mind about the future.

Pray for revival because you love God. Pray for revival because you want others to be in right relation with Him. ... .. If you can't pray for revival... because you now know how costly it might be... then I beg you to pray that God will change your heart... (that He will bring you to such a condition of willingness.) ... .. You see... I'm not sure that our land is ready for revival... until more of us have such willingness. ... I have changed my prayer from... "*God... please bring revival to America!*" ... to "*Lord... please make my own heart ready for the revival that we need...*"

Well... Paul and Barnabas apparently were ready... so they pushed through incredible hardship... as they tried to vive Galatia. ... We are about to see more specific areas of heart change... that we need to pray with conviction for ourselves... if we are asking God to revive our land.

### **Acts 13:14-15**

*"If you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it..."* That must have been like waving a red flag in from of a bull... to the Apostle Paul.

**C H A R G E !!!**... Wow! What an opportunity!

A Sabbath service in the synagogue would consist of the reading of a portion of the Law... as well as a reading from a section of the Prophets. This would be followed by comments from a designated speaker. The rulers of the synagogue would select the readers... and another person to make the comments. ... If ever there were distinguished guests present (and you would know them by their clothing – rabbis had distinctive apparel) these would be asked to speak. None of the rulers of the synagogue probably knew Paul or Barnabas... but they would be able to tell that Paul was a highly educated rabbi.

Have you ever been in a situation... where conversation... or perhaps a direct question that was pointed at you... opened a door so wide that it was obvious God wanted you to share your faith...? ... Have you ever choked in a situation like that...? ... I think we all have! ... And tragically... we sometimes get very good at convincing ourselves... “*Well... this just isn't the right time...*”

(LISTEN!) If you would like to pray that God would bring revival to our land... make sure that you pray for the boldness to not miss any more of the opportunities that God gives you. Then be ready and watch for the opportunities... like the one that God gave to Paul... here.

### **Acts 13:16-20a**

Paul began his sermon like Stephen began his last sermon... back in Acts chapter 7. ... They both gave a review of the history of the Jewish nation. But Stephen emphasized the continual rejection of God's plan... by the Jewish people. ... Paul will emphasize God's grace in providing the undeserving Jewish people with His sovereign plan.

In this opening segment of his sermon... Paul wanted his listeners to grasp three things. First is that God is sovereign. God's mighty hand delivered the Jews from the world's greatest power (Egypt.) ... Then He delivered them from their own disobedient ways (after 40 years of wilderness wandering)... and brought them (quite impossibly) into a land that was occupied by 7 well-established nations... and gave the land to the Jews.

God can do anything! But the second thing these verses emphasize is that He does it in spite of our failures. It is because of His grace. ... And the third thing to notice is that it is done according to God's timing. God has His Own time-table. All of this did not happen all at once... the moment He promised the land to Abraham. No... it took 450 years!

When we look at the circumstances of our world right now... (the sad and growing conditions of ungodliness)... it is easy... especially as we watch the news to get very depressed... as if there is no hope! ... Disgust can easily take over. There is scandal and corruption everywhere we look!

But there is nothing that I am seeing on my TV... that is too big for God to handle. (We have to keep reminding ourselves of this...) ... And I am not asking God to show His mighty hand on the basis that somehow we deserve revival. ... Our disobedience marks us... just as it did Israel. ... I am asking God to heal our land... on the basis of His grace. ... Third... because God has His Own time-table... I am not demanding that He submit to mine. I am not praying... "*God... You need to do something right now!!!*"

### **Acts 13:20b-25**

The Israelites had aspirations to be like all the other nations that surrounded them. "*God... We don't want Your system of Judges... we want a king...*" - And God gave them a King who met all of the qualifications they saw a king should have. But King Saul was a huge disaster. So God showed them the difference by bringing them David (who was found to be a man after God's Own heart.) David... not the man the man that the people's aspirations first led them to... would bring the future Messiah. God would not let the Israelites aspirations prevail. ... Even when it came

to John the Baptist. The aspirations of the people thought that he would be their Messiah. But John proclaimed that he was not even worthy to untie the sandals of the real Messiah.

We always seem to have our own ideas and aspirations... for the way we want God's plan to go... don't we...? This brings me back to a question that I hinted at before... Is the reason that you want revival in our land motivated MORE by your personal aspirations... (your selfish desires for the personal blessings it would bring)...?

Oh how we need to pray for a willingness to submit our own aspirations before God and His rightful glory!

### **Acts 13:26-37**

It was all right there in the Jewish Scriptures! How could the Jewish leaders miss it...? Why would they ignore such clear evidence of Who Jesus the Messiah was... and reject Him...? ... They did... because they were doing what we have all been guilty of doing from time to time.

We sometimes read the Scripture Eisogetically. ... That means we take our own aspirations... our own values... and pre-understandings... and we foist them onto the Scripture passages that we read. We make the verses say what we want them to mean... and we don't even see what they say... if it contradicts our aspirations... values... and pre-understandings.

Any Christian who is unwilling to recognize this sinful tendency of our human nature... is setting themselves up for major distortions of God's Word. It is the same mistake that the Jewish leaders of the first century made. They did not want to see the New Wine... (the new system that

Messiah came to establish.) They were too comfortable with the power they had and didn't want to give it up.

Because of our own comfort... we will not see the change that Scripture calls for in us... either... because of our eisogetical reading of Scripture. ... Our only safeguard... is to recognize our own sinful human nature... which has this tendency... and to pray every time we open Scripture... asking God to keep us humble enough to allow whatever His Word says... to pass through all of our pre-understandings... prideful aspirations... and cultural values.

The next thing we need to pray for... is a continuous willingness to submit all of our pre-understandings... desires... and values... before the Lord... as we study His Scripture.

### **Acts 13:38-39**

All the Jewish Law could do is point out that they missed God's standards. It shows you that you have blown it. ... But the message of the Gospel is that you now have the power to **stop** blowing it! As a believer you are free *not* to sin. An unbeliever does not have this freedom. ... But Christian... no matter how strong the temptation is – you have the power to be free from it. ... Satan wants us to think that we are still bound... that we can't overcome... so just give in. That is not true!

### **Acts 13:40-41**

Paul quotes Habakkuk 1:5 as a serious warning. In the days of Habakkuk... no one believed the prophet when he told them that God was sending the Chaldeans to punish the nation. Habakkuk said: God would

use Gentiles to punish the Jews. ... Paul turned it around... and says “You are not going to believe this either... and because you scoff... now God will use the Jews to bless the Gentiles. They will get to be part of God’s Kingdom.

### **Acts 13:42-47**

The opposition of the Jews to the Gospel resulted in their losing the privilege to hear Gospel message. ...The principle here... which is true in every age... is — spiritual privilege must be respected or you will lose it — so if you refuse the Gospel message... God just may take it away from you... and you will lose your opportunity to be saved.

### **Acts 13:48**

What an INCREDIBLE verse!!! “...*As many as were appointed to eternal life believed...*” ... Only those who were previously selected... believed this Gospel message they heard.

We need to recall that salvation involves two agents: God and the person or persons who believe the gospel. ... There is no salvation without God's appointing... and no salvation without a person’s believing.

I’ve said this many times... that I don’t know how it works... but clearly BOTH are true! ... And here we see them both in the same verse.

Charles Spurgeon once put it in terms of the door into the kingdom of God which carries a text above it: 'Whosoever will, may come'. ... We respond to the invitation... we believe in Christ and pass through the door into the kingdom. ... However... once inside... we look back and discover another

text above the door on the inside which reads: 'Chosen from before the foundation of the world.' How these relate is a mystery for our present capacities. But both are true! How dangerous it is to deny the truth of predestination or the truth of man's free will to chose God.

Please don't think that it takes a lot of arrogance to believe that you have been chosen by God... Just the opposite is true... It takes profound humility... when it is understood. We choose... only because we were chosen... and given the gift of faith. ... A lack of humility says... "*I chose because I was clever enough to understand... therefore I decided...*" Rather... as verse 48 indicates... we reach out to grasp the free gift of eternal life... because the Lord already had a firm grasp on us!

This truth means that - we are loved and forgiven... not for what we have done... or will do! God already has us. (He has appointed you... if you are a believer. His grace is not conditioned by your performance.)

The Gospel of Christ brings unbelievable freedom!

Christian... Do you live as though you have been acquitted... forgiven... reconciled once and for all...? ... Has this released you from all effort of trying to make yourself favorable to God...? Are you liberated from having to win His approval... and the acceptance of others...?

(LISTEN, Believer!) You don't need to try to court favor with God... by praying for revival... or by praying for all the right things that bring revival.

Pray for revival... because you have this freedom. A love for Christ that is deep enough to pray for revival... while knowing what it entails... comes

from a consistent rediscovery of our secure forgiveness... that we are loved unconditionally... and that there is no need for us to try and earn it.

And the reactions of people – acceptance or rejection of our message – will never be the basis of our joy. ... Look how rejection did not effect the missionary team's joy...

### **Acts 13:49-52**

America needs revival...! Amen...?

If we are going to pray for it... we should perhaps pray like Sir Francis Drake... explorer and naval pioneer during the Elizabethan era.

*"Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.*

*Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new Earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.*

*Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."*