

## 20. Rejection and reception

December 22, 2013

Ever since I became a born-again Christian, I've been witnessing to unbelievers about Jesus Christ. I lost the count of how many times I've done that. I am most grateful to the Lord because He graciously chose to include me in His master plan so that I can be used by Him to spread His Good News. I had many great results of people receiving Jesus Christ into their hearts as their Savior and Lord. At the same time, I had whole lot more times people flat out rejecting Christ's invitation and they give me that glare.

Of course, I get overjoyed when the person to whom I've just witnessed receives Jesus into one's heart as the angels rejoice in heaven for that person's salvation. However, I feel so sorry for those who reject the Good News of Jesus because I know that their hearts just got harder for next time. But the problem is that some of them may not have next time to hear another salvation message to respond, because he or she does not know how long they are going to live.

The same message, the same Savior, and the same God, but the vast majority of people flat out reject Him. I know what some people would say, "I didn't reject Jesus. I just haven't made up my mind yet." By not making up one's mind to accept Jesus as the Savior and Lord at that time, that person literally is rejecting the Lord.

This morning we are stepping into the area of the modern day Turkey. Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark left the island of Cyprus toward a harbor city Attalia in mainland. From there, they traveled to Perga in Pamphylia. We will start this morning's study from there.

### A. JOHN MARK'S DESERTION

*Acts 13:13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.*

Why did John Mark desert Paul and Barnabas and return to Jerusalem? Your guess is as good as mine. But some theologians would come up with their own speculations of all kinds.

One thing we know from this John Mark's desertion, apostle Paul did not want him to get back on his mission team later. However, John Mark redeemed himself to Paul enough that Paul eventually accepted and approved him according to 2 Timothy 4.

Here's an important observation: all the way through ministry, people leave. In every church there will be individuals who, for whatever reason, move on to other things. This includes those in leadership. It can be very disheartening to experience the departure of someone whom you pour your heart into.

They leave, but the church presses on. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding their departure, the journey continued. For Paul and Barnabas there was neither time nor need for a long, drawn-out farewell. They pressed ahead, keeping their eyes focused on the goal.

It's hard to press on when you feel abandoned. It's easy to give in to discouragement and allow that to siphon your tank dry, but Paul and Barnabas had no such luxury. Emotions in check, they had a job to do. So they moved forward with an even stronger determination.

One of the marks of maturity is the ability to press ahead regardless of who walks off the scene. The alternative isn't an option. Once you've said goodbye, it's time for everyone to move on. That's exactly what Paul and Barnabas did.

*Philippians 3:14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

## **B. PREPARATION THROUGH ISRAEL'S HISTORY**

*Acts 13:14-16 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. 15 And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." 16 Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:*

*Acts 13:22-25 And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.' 23 From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior -- Jesus-- 24 after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.'*

Paul and Barnabas traveled 100 miles north and about 3,600 feet up to get to this important city on the Roman road. As we follow Paul's journeys in Acts, we will notice that he selected strategic cities, planted churches in them, and went on from the churches to evangelize the surrounding areas.

Paul opened his teaching with a quick review of Israel's history much like the one from Stephen before he was stoned to death in Acts chapter 7. Paul was there to give his approval of Stephen's death. I wouldn't be surprised if Paul still vividly remembered what Stephen said with the power of the Holy Spirit.

This survey of Israel's history demonstrates that God has a plan for history, and we need to sense a connection to that plan. Jesus is the goal of history, and as we are in Jesus, we are in the flow of God's great plan of redemption.

## **C. DECLARATION THROUGH THE FACT**

*Acts 13:26-41 Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. 27 For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. 28 And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. 29 Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. 30 But God raised Him from the dead. 31 He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. 32 And we declare to you glad tidings--that promise which was made to the fathers. 33 God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.' 34 And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David.' 35 Therefore He also says in another Psalm: 'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.' 36 "For*

*David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; 37 but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. 38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; 39 and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. 40 Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: 41 "Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you."*

During this time of the year, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, and it is the only right thing to do so. However, as important as the birth of Jesus is, but it would have been pointless if there was no death on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. That is exactly what apostle Paul was doing.

Most of the people in the congregation of this Jewish synagogue had heard the messages of the prophets regarding the birth and the death of the Messiah, but they didn't know how the OT prophecies were going to affect their eternal lives. Because their leaders in Jerusalem, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and High P riests didn't want them to connect the OT prophecies and Jesus of Nazareth.

Since Paul was addressing a synagogue congregation, he used the OT Scriptures to support his argument. In Acts 13:33, Psalm 2:7 is quoted; and note that it refers to the resurrection of Christ, not to the birth of Christ. The " virgin tomb" was like a "womb" that gave birth to Jesus Christ in resurrection glory.

Then he quoted Isaiah 55:3, referring to the covenant that God made with David. God had promised David that from him the Messiah would come in 2 Samuel 7. But if Jesus is the Messiah, and He died and remained dead, this covenant could never be fulfilled. Therefore, Jesus had to be raised from the dead or the covenant would prove false.

In v35 apostle Paul quoted from Psalm 16:10. The Jews considered Psalm 16 to be a messianic psalm, and it was clear that this promise did not apply to David, who was dead, buried, and decayed. It had to apply to Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Now Paul is drawing the net in v38. He told them that through faith in Jesus Christ, they could have two blessings that the OT Law could never provide: the forgiveness of their sins and justification before the Throne of God.

Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Jesus Christ. It has to do with the believer 's standing before the Throne of God. The Jews were taught that God justified the righteous and punished the wicked. But what is the measuring standard of the righteousness in our opinions? You can always find someone who is more righteous than the one whom we thought righteous. If we go by God's righteousness, no one ever can come to His standard.

The Law cannot justify the sinner; it can only show how sinful he is and condemn him. God not only forgives our sins, but He also gives us the very righteousness of Christ and puts it on our account. This was certainly good news delivered by P aul to that searching congregation of Jews and Gentiles who had no peace in their hearts, even though they were religious. This fact still applies to every human being .

For last couple of weeks I've been spending some time with a Jewish young man whose name is Jonathan Nov. He is an U of A Nursing School student and he has stout Jewish parents who think that their son is about to go over the edge spiritually and I am helping him. I met Jonathan at a gun shop in Tucson. Imagine that!

This young man is a seeker of God. Someone already witnessed to him and he did a sinner's prayer, yet there was no follow-up. Consequently the devil has been putting seeds of doubt in his heart about his conversion lately. That is when the Lord directed me to come across this young man's life to intervene. I spent a couple of hours with him to answer all the questions he had regarding the OT prophecies for the Messiah, and even the OT End Time prophecies.

Like these Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, Jonathan heard about the Messiah in the OT previously, but he didn't know how to connect the Messiah to Jesus Christ who was born in human flesh so that He could take our sins unto Himself to die for our sins as the Atoning Sacrifice and resurrected from the death. Through the power of the Word of God, Jonathan's eyes were opened, and so were many of the Jewish and Gentile people's eyes in this synagogue.

#### **D. RECEPTION AND REJECTION**

*Acts 13:42-52 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. 43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. 44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' " 48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*

The same message, the same Savior, but two completely different results – one group of people are receiving Jesus into their hearts while the others rejecting Him.

See how satan stirred up the synagogue leaders' heart with envy? It is easy for all of us to fall into envy against someone's success. It is the Lord's privilege and choice to make one ministry bigger than others. We can not all be big and popular to the same degree, but we can all serve and please God to the same degree in Jesus Christ.

#### **E. APPLICATIONS**

1) Just like the invitation to the salvation in Christ, all of God's commands for us require ONLY two mutually exclusive responses from us – Reception

or Rejection. By choosing one, we set ourselves for the consequence that follows or the reward from the Lord.

2) We can not all be big and popular to the same degree, but we can all serve and please God to the same degree in Jesus Christ.