

Acts 13:44–52, “Salvation to the Ends of the Earth”

5/15/22, Fifth Sunday of Easter

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Acts 13:44–52 (NKJV)

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.

Things were looking up. Paul’s preaching had been so well received the week before that he had been invited back to the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia for the next Sabbath gathering. Since we were together last, a week has passed, and this has also happened in the text in Acts 13. It’s now a week later and word has gotten out that Paul is preaching again and everyone wants to hear him.

Today’s text comes in two acts, each with three scenes. Act 1, scene 1: the build up. There’s a buzz of excitement all around town. Acts 13:44 says, “almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.” Just a week before, people had heard Paul proclaim Christ crucified for their salvation, and many believed. He had preached God’s family promises, that all who believe are fully forgiven of their sins, fully adopted into God the Father’s family, and fully integrated into the fellowship of their new brothers and sisters in the local congregation.

Those who heard and believed wanted to hear God’s Word again, and they wanted to share this salvation with others, so they brought their friends. I’ve seen this happen in our own congregation: people grateful to hear the Word of God, so they invite their friends. I haven’t seen almost the whole town gather like what happened in Acts 13, but sometimes all it takes for your friend or neighbor to come, or to at least think about it, is for you to invite them.

Act 1, scene 2: the let down. All it took to let all the air out of the excitement balloon was one verse. Acts 13:45 says, “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy;

and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.” The whole town was ready to hear God’s Word, but they were disappointed. Paul had been invited back, but he didn’t get to preach there again, or if he tried he was getting heckled.

Paul was being opposed by people who were just like what he used to be—enemies of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It says they were filled with envy, and the way they opposed Paul’s preaching of God’s Word was by contradicting and blaspheming. That’s a bummer! It’s a bummer of a let down for the people who wanted to hear Paul preach Christ from the Scriptures again, but it’s an even bigger bummer that these leaders are rejecting salvation.

Act 1, scene 3: the resolution. When life goes from exciting to being a big let down, what do you have left? God’s Word and His promises. Notice how Paul and Barnabas respond to the opposition not by claiming their right to speak since they had been invited back, but instead by standing on God’s Word. Acts 13:46 says, “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.”* ’ ’ ”

Why are Paul and Barnabas bold? They’re being opposed and insulted by powerful people. Why aren’t they afraid? Because they know the Lord, and they are standing on His Word. On what Word of Christ do they stand? Verse 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.’” Who is greater? The ones opposing Paul and Barnabas, or the One who sent Paul and Barnabas? God sent them! He is greater than all! It is as 1 John 4:4 says, “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

They’re not afraid because they’re not standing on their own strength—they’re relying on God. Jesus had sent them to be a light to the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth, so they would. Every time Paul entered a city he first found the Jews gathered at the synagogue and preached to them. God had brought the Savior of the world into the world through the Jews, and so the Gospel came to them first.

In Acts 13 many Jews believed, but the leaders rejected the Gospel and would not tolerate Paul and Barnabas preaching Jesus as the Christ. But the Gospel would not be silenced. In the three scenes of act 1 we’ve seen the build up, the let down, and the resolution. When life goes from exciting to being a big let down, what do you have left? How will it all resolve? What you have left is God’s Word. How it will all resolve is according to God’s promises.

He doesn’t promise that life will be easy or fair or long or comfortable, but He promises to be with you and to give you everlasting life and salvation in His name. Jesus was not only the savior of the Jews, but of the Gentiles also. He was not only the savior for those in Antioch of Pisidia, but also for you. That Jesus sent Paul and Barnabas to bring salvation to the ends of the earth includes their preaching in Acts 13 being brought to you right now.

Act 2 is exactly like Act 1 in its structure: there’s a build up; there’s a let down; there’s a resolution. So Act 2, scene 1: another build up. Upon hearing Paul and Barnabas boldly proclaim that God’s salvation through His Son Jesus Christ was for the whole earth and that they would

now be focusing their efforts on reaching the Gentiles, we get a build up and explosion of joy from the Gentiles. Acts 13:48 says, “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.” Again there is a buzz of excitement: the Gentiles were glad; they glorified the Word of the Lord; they believed; and they spread it all around.

That’s what I hope you take from today’s sermon. Upon hearing that God loves you and that Jesus is the promised Christ who died for your sins and rose to give you eternal life, I hope it makes you glad. I hope that Gospel message makes your soul glorify the Word of the Lord. I hope above all that you simply believe. And as the Lord gives you opportunity and prompts your heart to do so, I hope you spread it all around.

Act 2, scene 2: another let down. The second excitement balloon is about to pop. Now instead of just opposing Paul and blaspheming Christ, the envious and hard-hearted leaders stirred up reinforcements. Acts 13:50 says, “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.” Another bummer. Instead of being invited back to preach a third time, they got the boot.

Act 2, scene 3: another resolution. How does it all resolve? How did Paul and Barnabas take this rejection? There was so much potential for further ministry in Antioch of Pisidia, but now that door was shut. Rather than hang their head and talk longingly of the good old days of a week ago when they had received the invitation to speak again, they recognized that the Lord had given them a certain ministry in a certain place for a specific season of time, and that season was over, and that was okay.

Acts 13:51 says that Paul and Barnabas, “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.” They weren’t filled with disappointment, they were filled with joy. They weren’t filled with what ifs and shoulda-coulda-wouldas, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

God’s Word through them had been rejected, so they moved on and obeyed Christ’s direction from Matthew 10:14, “if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.” ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.” They knew their job was to be faithful to God’s call on them to share the Gospel. Whether or not people believed or disbelieved was out of their hands, so they were content to leave it in God’s hands.

Dear friends, you are in God’s hands. He made you. But He also redeemed you, buying you back from sin, death, and the devil through His Son Jesus Christ. His salvation was for the Jews, for the Gentiles, to the ends of the earth, and that means it’s for you. So be glad, glorify the Word of the Lord, believe; and spread it all around. And may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.