

First Missionary Journey: Antioch in Pisidia--Acts 13:14-52

by J.R. Miller

Paul and Barnabas' missionary journey highlights the importance of sharing the gospel with all people, regardless of their background or status, and the consequences of rejecting God's offer of grace.

Scripture: Acts 13:14

Topics: "Leadership in Ministry", "Acceptance of the Gospel"

Description

J.R. Miller discusses the shift in leadership from Barnabas to Paul during their missionary journey in Antioch, emphasizing Barnabas's humility and dedication to Christ's cause over personal ambition. Paul boldly shares the gospel in the synagogue, recounting the story of Jesus and urging the Jews to accept Him as the Messiah, but faces rejection and envy from some. The missionaries then turn to the Gentiles, who joyfully accept the message, highlighting the theme of acceptance and rejection of God's grace. Miller warns that rejecting Christ leads to deeper guilt and loss of blessings, while also reflecting on the nature of human opposition to God. The sermon concludes with a call to examine our own hearts and the effectiveness of our witness for Christ.

Transcript

A change in the relative place of the two missionaries appears about this time. It was Barnabas and Paul when they were sent out--Barnabas, the leader, Paul, the associate. Now it is Paul and Barnabas. The reason for this change no doubt was that Paul, by his superior ability, naturally came to take the lead as the work went on. There is no indication of any feeling of envy on the part of Barnabas when he was thus superseded. Evidently he was so sincere in his devotion to his Master, and in his interest in the work--that he cared not who was first--if only the cause of Christ were advanced. It is not easy, however, for anyone who has been first--to take the second place, keep sweet and cheerful and work as earnestly as ever; but Barnabas seems to have gladly yielded to Paul, the place of leader. Love for Christ constrained him!

Paul and Barnabas attended the Jewish synagogue the first Sabbath after their arrival. After the opening worship, the presence of strangers being noted, and they being visitors from another country, they were invited to speak. Paul promptly availed himself of the invitation and spoke long and earnestly. He was addressing his own people, the Jews, and he told them the story of Jesus of Nazareth, his life, death, and resurrection. He then declared, "We declare unto you good tidings, how that the promise which was made

unto the fathers, God has fulfilled."

The people besought Paul to tell them the story again the next Sabbath. It would seem, too, that many at once accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Paul and Barnabas spoke to these new Christians and urged them to continue faithful. All the week the meeting was talked about and the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the new teaching.

Those who came out on the following Sabbath were not only the Jews--but also the Gentiles. This made the Jews angry. "When the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy." There are some people who never can bear to see others enjoy blessings. If they cannot have the good thing all to themselves, they do not want it at all. One of the first evidences of true conversion, is interest in others and the eager desire to tell others of the Savior and share the blessings of redemption with them.

It could not but grieve the missionaries, to have their own people treat the gospel in this way. But all they could do was to preach to those who would receive them. "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles." One truth taught here is that sinners can get clear of Christ--only by actually thrusting him away. He waits long and pleads earnestly with men. He presses the blessings of heaven upon our souls with loving persistency.

Another truth taught here, is that rejected blessings fly away. Who can tell what these Jewish people lost that day, in thrusting Jesus Christ from them? When they had rejected him, the offer was withdrawn from them and carried to others who would receive it. We must not forget Christ's command to the apostles, to shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony against the cities or towns that would reject them, while they hastened on to other places.

Then, we must never forget that every offer of grace which comes to us, leaves us under deeper guilt if we reject the offer. Let us beware lest through our rejection, our very light make the darkness of the world to come, more terrible for us. A writer says, "You may buy a New Testament for a dollar, yet it may be to you at last, the most costly possession you ever had." It may condemn you, because, having it, you rejected its light.

Paul put the rejection of Christ in an unusual light, when he told his hearers that their refusal to accept him, meant that they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. The way we receive the Word of God when it comes to us--reveals our true character in God's sight. Every lost soul writes its own condemnation! Men perish only because they will not be saved. The very words of divine love, become droppings of divine fire upon the soul that rejects them.

It brought great joy to the Gentiles when the missionaries turned to them with the gospel. "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad." Ofttimes it is not those who seem the most likely to accept the grace of God, who actually receive it. The Jews, who had been looking for the Messiah, rejected the Messiah when he came; while the Gentiles, who had been regarded by the Jews as unworthy of salvation, gladly received Christ and entered the kingdom!

In the first verse of the following chapter, we are told that the missionaries "spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed." How did they speak--as to convince and lead to Christ, such a multitude of people? Was it their eloquent manner, or was it something in what they said, that won people's hearts and drew them to Christ? We all would like to know, for who does not with all his heart,

desire to be a winner of souls? Who does not want to learn the art of speaking in such a way--as to lead men to believe? Many of us go on talking for years, and yet almost none are persuaded by our words to accept Christ. What is the trouble? Is it some defect in our elocution? Would it remedy the defect, if we should take lessons in oratory? Or is the fault in our language, and would a few lessons in English grammar and rhetoric make us more successful? Or may it be that the trouble lies within us, in our own hearts? Is it not worth while when we are at this place in the story--to try to find out just what the trouble is? How did Paul and Barnabas "speak" that the multitude believed?

As another illustration of the perverseness of human nature and its natural opposition to God, we are told that the "the Jews who refused to believe, stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds" against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. There are some people who when they do not like a person or when they have some grudge or prejudice against him, will take every opportunity to influence others against him.

One person, evilly disposed, can poison the minds of a whole community, turning them against the one he dislikes. We need to watch, lest unwittingly and unintentionally we fall into the habit of saying things against others--which we ought not to say of them. We have no right to use our dislikes to injure others.

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