

Paul's Missionary Journeys Handout #3

In our last session, we read the sermon Paul delivered to the people at Antioch in Pisidia. According to Barclay, this was a “naturally inflammable city. ... Since Antioch was a road centre it had become a Roman Colony in 6 B.C. In the population there were therefore Greeks, Jews, Romans and not a few native Phrygians who were an emotional and unstable people. It was the kind of population where a spark could cause a conflagration.”

Let's take a look at the results of Paul's sermon. There are both good and troubling results.

Acts 13:42-52

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.

⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶ 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.”

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. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. 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. ⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Before we read more from Barclay on the background to the uprising that occurs, it bears noting that initially the response from the Jews was positive and encouraging to Paul and Barnabas. But that changed.

If you recall from Paul's sermon, he focused on Jesus and how in him God fulfilled prophesy, but in this passage, Paul now explains how the Gospel has been offered also to the Gentiles. In fact, he makes the point that the reason for extending the Gospel to the Gentiles was because it had been rejected by the Jews.

Barclay explains further, “The one thing that infuriated the Jews was that any of God's privileges could be for the uncircumcised Gentiles. So the Jews took steps. At this time the Jewish religion had a special attraction for women. In nothing was the ancient world more soiled and lax than in sexual morality. Family life was rapidly breaking down. The worst sufferers were women. The Jewish religion preached a high austere purity of ethic and cleanness of life. Round the Synagogues there gathered many women,

often women of high social position, who found in this teaching just what they so much longed for. Many of these women became proselytes; still more were God-fearers. The Jews persuaded these women to incite their husbands, who were often magistrates and men in influential positions, to take steps against the Christian preachers. The inevitable result was persecution, and Antioch became unsafe for Paul and Barnabas and they had to go. The Jews were intent on keeping their privileges to themselves.”

Question: What privileges do we have as followers of Christ today that some within the church might not be eager to share with those who are not yet believers in Jesus?

While the some of the Jews were not interested in sharing the blessings of God with the Gentiles, those who were Christians had a different perspective. Barclay continues, “From the beginning the Christians saw that a privilege is granted only to be shared. The Jews were intent on shutting the door. From the beginning the Christians saw that the door must be open wide. As it has been said, ‘The Jews saw the heathen as chaff to be burned; Jesus saw them as a harvest to be reaped for God.’ And His Church must have a like vision of a world for Christ.”

Question: In what ways do you see the church (or our congregation) having this vision? In what ways is it not happening or obvious?

“So Paul and Barnabas went on to Iconium. Iconium was about 90 miles from Antioch. It was an ancient city, so ancient that it claimed to be older than Damascus. In the dim past it had had a king called Nannacus, and the phrase ‘since the days of Nannacus’ was proverbial for ‘from the beginning of time.’ As usual they began in the Synagogue and as usual they had good success; but the jealous Jews stirred up the mob and once again Paul and Barnabas had to move on.”

Acts 14:1-7

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. ² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴ But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. ⁵ When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, ⁶ they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, ⁷ and there they continued to preach the gospel.

“It has to be noted that Paul and Barnabas were more and more taking their lives in their hands. What was proposed in Iconium was nothing other than lynching. The further on Paul and Barnabas went the further they got from civilisation. In the more civilised cities their lives at least were safe because Rome kept order and a lynching would have been speedily punished; but now, out in the wilds, Paul and Barnabas are to be ever under the threat of mob violence from the excitable Phrygian crowds stirred up by the Jews. Whatever else these two were they were brave men. It always takes courage to be a Christian because it always takes courage to take a way that is different from the crowd.”