

November 25
Acts 13-15

One thing we need to note about that Antiochan church is they did not run ahead of the Lord. They were praying and fasting – worshipping the Lord – and out of that prayer and fasting God said to them, “Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” With the regular practice of the discipline of prayer and fasting, the church in Antioch had a depth of spiritual perception that enabled them to get very specific direction from the Lord.

Another thing about the church in Antioch - they were not afraid to send the best they had. There were other strong leaders in the church in Antioch, but it is clear that when God said, “Send Barnabas and Saul,” He was saying, “give Me your best.”

The remainder of this chapter is very important to us because it gives to us a very good idea of what the preaching of the Apostle Paul was like in the synagogues of Asia Minor.

Paul's presentation of the gospel in the familiar setting of a first century synagogue relied heavily upon the Old Testament, building a case for seeing Jesus as the Messiah, who fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecy. The death and resurrection of Jesus are right at the center of the message and Paul is at great pains to establish that the resurrection not only occurred, but was prophesied long before in the Old Testament prophecies. The heart of the Gospel is that *“through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses.”*

The last thing to which I would call your attention relates to Paul and Barnabas' response to opposition. When the leading men of the city stirred up opposition to the apostolic team and drove them from the region, it says they shook the dust from their feet. They realized the limitations that existed upon their time and energies, so they determined to invest themselves only in receptive people. Wherever the message was received, they stayed to plant a church. Wherever it was rejected, they shook off the dust and moved on to find the ones who would be receptive.

One thing that I want for us to notice is that the same dynamic that we saw operating throughout the ministry of Jesus is now evident in the ministry of His followers as well. Wherever they go, people divide themselves into two camps - some accept the Gospel with joy and others become virulently, sometimes violently, opposed to the message, and do all they can to undermine and defeat it. The opposition to Paul and Barnabas usually began among the Jews who rejected the notion that Jesus Christ was the prophesied Messiah. Their program would be to attempt to shout down this new teaching that seemed so heretical to them. The next stage would be to arouse a mob to create a civil disturbance - a riot - and then to accuse Paul and his companions of being the cause of all the problems. If they could force Paul's party to leave town, then they might be able to intimidate or browbeat any converts he left behind.

Please note that Paul and Barnabas are absolutely adamant that they are only messengers, and the credit and glory for all that they do must belong to God and God alone. The superstitious Lyconians, after seeing another of those apostolic miracles, mistook Paul and Barnabas for Hermes and Zeus and were about to offer sacrifices to them. The horror of the apostles at this mistake would be hard to overstate. The glory goes to God.

The next thing I want you to see is that in Paul's return visit to each of these fledgling churches the message being proclaimed to strengthen the new believers was, 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.' We are the sons and daughters of the King - but His Kingdom is not of this world, and the riches He wants to bestow upon us have very little to do with fancy cars and fat bank accounts. I encourage you to read your Bibles carefully so you will be knowledgeable in the truth.