

**Acts 13: 42-48; “When the Holy Spirit is Working”, Sermon #57 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on January 26th, 2020, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In my last message to you, I showed you just how prominent the truth of Christ’s resurrection from the dead was, in the preaching of the apostle Paul that day. Today I want to show you just how powerfully the Holy Spirit was working through Paul’s preaching, and what the reactions of his listeners were, when his message ended, and the meeting at the synagogue broke up. The reactions were mixed; the Gentiles wanting to hear more, and many of the Jews and the devout proselytes were saved that day. But, as we shall see, there were other Jews who did not like the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ was being preached. At this hour, I want to impress upon you the fact that when the Holy Spirit is at work in the preaching of the word, that there will be certain and definite results; both positively and negatively.

I would like to make this proposition into 3 points. 1st – When the Holy Spirit is working, people will be persuaded to continue in the grace of God. 2nd – When the Holy Spirit is working, many will be drawn to hear the word of God, but there will also be those who oppose it. And 3rd – When the Holy Spirit is working, those who have been appointed to eternal life will believe. Oh, the glory of the Holy Spirit’s working. Let us pray as we hear this message that He would come in power to our hearts, and that we might see Him working powerfully in our midst today, and in the days to come.

1st – When the Holy Spirit is working, people will be persuaded to continue in the grace of God. (verses 42 and 43)

“So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.” “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.” Now, we need to understand that when a man is preaching the gospel or any other portion of the word of God, that the Holy Spirit does attend that preaching with His working and His power in relation to the purposes of God. God the Holy Spirit is the One who opens the heart to receive the things that are spoken, as it says in Acts 16: 14 concerning Lydia’s conversion to Christ. She was a devout woman. She was worshiper of God in a general sense, because she came to a prayer meeting. But then it says – “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken to her by Paul.”

I want you to observe that it does not say that on that occasion that the Holy Spirit opened all of the hearts of all of the people who attended that prayer meeting. But He did open hers. It was the same message of the gospel, and Paul preached it to everyone there. But the Holy Spirit was selective in regard to His saving work. This was because He as God had a purpose to save, already in mind, along with the Father and the Son, and so He gave her the power to believe in Christ’s name; He gave her the grace to heed the things that were spoken to her by Paul. The encouraging truth which we should take notice of, is this: that the Holy Spirit is the One who opens the eyes of a person’s understanding to see spiritual things, and it is He who works in their heart in such a way that they are persuaded to receive the truth about their being a sinner. They know that they must believe in the only Savior of sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But let us also realize that when the Lord the Spirit is working, that He uses means. He uses the means of a Christian man preaching, to attempt to show them the truth. The man himself may seem very unimpressive. And his preaching may seem to be a very weak means to see a sinner’s heart changed; it may seem a very foolish means to use to accomplish the mighty spiritual work in a sinner’s heart. But let us remember that it is God’s means. He wants people

to see, that even though the means might seem weak in themselves, that really, it is not, because it is accompanied by the power of God.

Sometimes even Christian people falsely think that salvation should come to sinful unbelieving persons by their appealing to their intellect; as though they can simply convince them of the truth using human logic with them. They wrongly think that they should be able to intellectually reason with those folks, appealing to their higher instincts and the noble principles of their self-interest, to see them come to Christ. They perceive that many people have an innate finely tuned intellect and so they hope that they will be able to conceive of things correctly if it is presented to them in propositional form. They think that surely that they will approve of what God has done through Christ for sinners; as though the gospel can somehow be believed by them without any supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit moving upon their mind or heart to cause them to be humbled in their intellect, so that they might receive the Christ of the gospel.

Many do not understand that the depravity of man extends to their intellect, just as much as it does to their feelings and their will. But let me tell you; the intellectual person without grace is just as corrupt as the more ignorant person is, without grace. In some ways they may be more corrupt because they can use their intellect to more cleverly engage in their sin. A very intelligent thief can pull off a bigger bank heist than the thief who can't think things through well enough as to see how they can succeed in their robbery. It is true that a good intellect is a gift of God, but it is a natural gift, and as such it is a part of common grace. There is no special grace in being smart. Being marred by sin as natural mind is, without any saving grace, an intellectual man will not seek for God to know His ways, but he will be very concerned to reveal his own mind to you, and his own thoughts to you, on a multitude of subjects related to God, which in his mind disqualify God's word and possibly even His existence. An unsaved intellectual man is given to making himself out to be a judge of God Himself. Such is the case of all atheists. The only answer for them is the preaching of the cross.

But turn over with me to 1st Corinthians chapter 1, verses 18-25. "For the message (the preaching) of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." "For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'" "Where is the wise (man)?" "Where is the scribe?" "Where is the disputer of this age?" "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" "Since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." "For the Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Now, you can see here can't you that it takes much more than your own reasoning powers to come to know God. Where is the wise man who says – I found God on my own; I reasoned my way into it. No, if he knows his Bible, he knows that the carnal mind is enmity to God. His own mind is opposed to being ruled by God, submitting to God in any way except upon his own terms. The carnal mind says – I will analyze God and all that His Bible says, but I will not believe it, if the truth which is declared to me in it, does not fall in line with my own reasoning and my own understanding. But the Bible says – "Lean not to your own understanding." "In all of your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." (Proverbs 3: 6) And so there is a need for repentance as well as faith in coming to know God. The foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

It says here - Where is the scribe? A scribe was one who copied and explained the law of God. I am told in Cruden's Concordance, that in Old Testament times this work was done by the Levites, but later it was gradually put into the hands of a specially trained body of laymen. Not

only did they copy the written law, but they formulated and wrote down the detailed rules made by the later authorities (the rabbis and teachers of the law), which made up what was called the oral law, or the traditions of the elders. Thus there was much opportunity for the exercise of hypocrisy for which our Lord denounced them *as being* in company with the Pharisees. In other words, what is being said here is that the scribes wrote down all of the additions to God's holy law which the rabbis and Pharisees told them to, and thus they violated that holy principle which is found in Deuteronomy 4: 2 – "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." But since they added to it so many things to it that God had not commanded, they were no closer to knowing God than the atheist who says in his heart that there is no God. In both additions and subtractions, those men who do so, think that they are wiser than God Himself.

And what about the supposed wise man of that day, in Corinth? Where was the disputer of that age? Where was the philosopher of that day who could come to know the Lord by his own innate wisdom? No, the word here says that even though he could really dispute well with other men and show forth his great knowledge of many natural earthly and heavenly (in his own thinking) principles, he really knew nothing of true heavenly principles of the Scriptures, or the wisdom which is from above, which comes by revelation of the truth by God the Holy Spirit.

So in what sense was he considered wise then? He was supposedly wise in the his own reasoning ability even as the Greek philosophers of that day were considered to be wise. They had great minds, and many of them were great orators, and they were very persuasive speakers in convincing others of their particular position on any subject. They used persuasive words of men's wisdom. The worldly wise Jews were looking for a sign and the worldly wise Greeks wisdom, but Paul and those with him preached Christ and him crucified. There was, with them, the foolishness of preaching as their method of communication, and the foolishness of the message itself; a message of Christ having to humble Himself, and die on a cross for sinners such as they were; men of great minds who could not see the truth of their need of His costly sacrifice.

This was the case of those Jews who left the synagogue in a huff after Paul preached to them. It angered them that Paul would preach in such a way of such a despised person as Jesus was to them. They were always resisting the Holy Spirit. But there were others who the Holy Spirit strove with effectually to their salvation, it says in verse 43 that many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas. And Paul and Barnabas were conversing with them, and they were able to persuade them, it says there, to continue in the grace of God. What does that statement mean? It means that Paul and Barnabas were convinced that those who were following after them after the meeting, wanting to know more and to hear Paul preach again. And so they urged them, and they were persuading them to continue to trust in Christ for all the grace that they would need to persevere in their new-found faith in Christ.

They were telling them that they should not let anyone or anything turn them away from following Christ, and that they should continue to hold fast to the truth about the fact that they stood complete in Christ because of His grace, and that they could persevere in their faith if they would continue to seek grace to be faithful to Christ. This leads me to ask if this is true of you? Do you continue in the grace of God? Do you see your dependence upon Christ for the strength to be faithful to Him; to hold fast the truth; that He has fulfilled the law on your behalf and that He has died for your sins on the cross so that you can make progress in holiness and righteousness? This is what Paul and Barnabas were exhorting these young believers to.

2nd – When the Holy Spirit is working, many will be drawn to hear the word of God, but there will also be those who oppose it. (verses 44-47)

"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God." "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul." "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.' 'For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you as alight to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' What amazing power is evidently put forth by the Holy Spirit in creating interest in the minds of the townspeople in hearing the word of God. Almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God on the next Sabbath day. It is certain that those who were saved and wrought upon by the Holy Spirit that first Sabbath, as they sat under Paul's preaching, went home and told their relatives and their neighbors and their friends that they had felt the power of the Spirit convincing them of the truth, and working in their mind so that they knew that they needed to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved!

The apostles themselves, no doubt, had occasion to go from house to house reinforcing the truth of the gospel to many during that week, and so great was the expectation that most of the city turned out to hear Paul preach. I am saying that this was not only a work of the apostles; it was the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to awaken people, and arrest them with the truth; stop them in their tracts from thinking that they can continue to live their lives without God, without Christ, and without grace. The Holy Spirit can work upon many people at the same time, as it was here, to consider their own soul's salvation and be drawn hear the preaching of the word.

There is nothing the Devil likes less, than this kind of working of the Spirit, because he knows that his own kingdom of darkness is being assailed. The Sword of the Spirit, the word of God, through the foolishness of the message preached, is being wielded against the falsehoods of darkness! The warriors of light, preaching the gospel of Christ have come to take his kingdom by storm! This stirs him up. This makes him angry! Something must be done, he thinks, when so many people are awakened at once. But not only the Devil was wakened up to oppose the apostles when they were so successful in their preached, but also minds of the self-righteous Jews were immediately disturbed and moved to envy, when they saw the crowds coming to hear Paul and not them.

And so you find here that immediately they began contradicting and blaspheming. They strenuously opposed the things spoken by Paul. They probably denounced them as heretics! Why such strenuous opposition? Why were their feelings so strong that they blasphemed the name of Christ? It was because the preaching of Christ and His salvation, Christ and His kingdom's advance, when it brings results like this, because of the Holy Spirit's powerful working, is an intolerable thing to people who believe in a salvation by their own works. They had to contradict what Paul was saying with everything that was within them! It was because they were being convicted of their sin of rejecting Christ! Do you remember what the Lord Jesus said in John chapter 16, verse 8 about the ministry of the Holy Spirit? "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father and you see Me no more; of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged."

So, let us understand that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convince and convict men of sin because they do not believe in Jesus by nature. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convict men of Christ's righteousness and to point out to them that their own righteousness is insufficient to save them. This often brings unrest to the heart and anger to the mind of self-righteous, self-sufficient people. They think to themselves – I am not good enough the way that I am? I try hard to live a righteous life. I go to synagogue or church, and I try hard to keep the commandments of God, and you tell me that I must have Christ's righteousness in order to be saved?

Yes, this is the blessed work of the Holy Spirit to convict of this unbelief, of this disbelief that people must have Christ to be saved and enter the kingdom of God and the kingdom of

heaven. The Holy Spirit's work of conviction is opposed by the most religiously moral people as well as those who are gross sinners, but unsaved. It shows them that their greatest guilt is not accepting God's plan of salvation; of thinking that their own evaluation of themselves is right and enough. But the Holy Spirit when He is doing a saving work shows that person that their own work falls far short of the glory of God and what He expects. The Spirit also convicts men of judgment; that is, He convinces them that Christ is the final judge of all men, and that He would deal decisively with the Devil at the cross and judge him there; that He would destroy his power to hold men in bondage all of their lives. Christ would take away the Devil's supposed rulership of the kingdoms of this world and his supposed right to rule in any believing person's heart. You would think that the Jews would have wanted to learn these good things but their hearts held these sinful prejudices against Christ and anyone who would preach Him.

And so, the apostles grew bold, it says in verse 46, and they said – "It is as 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." O what a terrible thing it is to reject the preaching of Christ; to reject the gospel so freely offered to you. Why, in doing so you judge yourself to be unworthy of everlasting life! You despise the gospel offer and you despise God Himself. You speak evil of the One who in love gave His only-begotten Son for you the sinner, but you despise the offer! But this statement by Paul and Barnabas was not spoken to individual ones of the Jews; it was spoken to the whole group of these Jews who were rejecting Christ there that day. Paul and Barnabas knew that it was the command of the Lord that the gospel be preached to the Jews first. And they had done it. But since their word, which was God's word, was rejected, they knew that they would turn to the Gentiles and preach it freely to them.

And so they quoted the Scripture from Isaiah 49, verse 6. Let me read to you the whole of the verse. "Indeed He says, (that is the Father is speaking prophetically to the Son) 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'" You see, this is the point of much of what I am trying to convince you of today. God has great purposes in salvation; both for the Jews and for the Gentiles. But here the Jews were opposing the gospel of Christ their Savior. And so they would lose everything. This confrontation here was a sign to them of that; of their greater rejection as a people for many generations. But read Romans 11: 7-33 and you will see that their rejection is not final. Their branches were broken off that we the Gentiles might be grafted in, but someday they shall be grafted back in to their own olive tree. This too will come by the mighty working of the Holy Spirit.

3rd – When the Holy Spirit is working, those who have been appointed to eternal life will believe.

Verse 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." Now this verse is the icing on the cake in regard to all that I have been trying to teach you about the Holy Spirit's working. They knew, from the preaching of Paul and Barnabas, that they would be brought into the same Universal Church of Jesus Christ as the believing Jews were. They were glad because they would receive the same blessings of salvation and they would be fellow heirs with the Jewish saints. This truly was good news and it made them glad and they glorified the word of Lord! They received it and believed it and praised God who has sent these men to them to preach to them the unsearchable riches of Christ!

But something more is being taught here than the appointment of the Gentiles to receive the same blessings and privileges of salvation along with believing Jews. What is being taught here is the truth of these particular believing Gentiles being predestined to eternal life. As many as were appointed to eternal life it clearly says. This simple straightforward wording tells us these

Gentiles were appointed to these blessings according to God's choice of them, His foreknowledge of what He would do for them in particular, to save them. That is, He had chosen them before the foundation of the world, and they were thus appointed to eternal life. God had appointed it before time began, and He brought it pass at this particular time by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit; that these who sat under the means of grace, of Paul and Barnabas preaching to them the gospel, they would believe it, and have eternal life. Let us glory in the fact that the Bible speaks this clearly, this forthrightly, and this straightforwardly, about His own predestinating work, but let each of us also remember that God uses means, the means of foolishness of preaching, to save those who believe.