Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the Word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

There is so much going on in this section of God’s Word and we will indeed try to touch on all of it. Not really any theme and parts today, just working to get you the whole picture of what is going on. Let’s give you some background first.

Last week, we heard that first sermon of the Apostle Paul given at Pisidian Antioch. Believe it or not, we are still in Pisidian Antioch only it is a week later. A huge crowd has gathered. That crowd has gathered for only one reason. The message that Paul and Barnabas had delivered. A message about a Savior. A message about the grace of God and the wonder of what God has done and prepared for us, and by us I mean the whole human race on this planet. People were excited about the message of Jesus. People grasped that this message was unique and, well, the best news they had ever heard. So yep, people gathered, almost the whole city gathered to hear more of this message of Jesus.

Of course, as you can see by the text, a problem arose. Verse 45 lays out the problem. **“When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.”** The leaders of the Jewish synagogue didn’t like this stuff. They didn’t like it that their people and others were in the crowd. I can just hear some of what they were saying, “Hey, why are you listening to them? Do you think what they are offering is any better than what we have? We have God’s law and it tells us everything we need to do in order to get to heaven. These guys are telling you lies and falsehoods….why if God had meant that things be easy and free we would have told you that!”

As they are griping and “blaspheming” (that’s the actual Greek word used and it really means that these men were speaking against God) I can imagine that quite a few of the people there, saw and heard their leaders and then left or turned away from this gathering. When Paul and Barnabas saw this and grasped what was going on, note what they say. What they say is important not only for then but for today. **“Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 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. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”**

Wow! Notice a few things here. Paul and Barnabas do not change their message. They do not simply say, “Hey, you have your God and we have ours and since your tradition of God is just as good as ours and since we must all surely worship God but in different forms and ways, why the Lord bless you all!” They do not change their message because they know, without a doubt that what they are telling people is the message of the Lord God, the only true God there is. So what do they say? They speak the truth, in love. **“Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.”**

By the way, by using the word reject there is no doubt that they mean to say, “You reject God and his truth.” Why? Because the Jewish faith really was a faith that was from God but over the centuries the Jewish people got wrapped up in the ritual and forgot what the faith was really about. Their faith was about a Savior to come. Their faith was about sin and the need to have sin atoned for. God had said He would do that through His Messiah. God said you would know who that Messiah was by a number of different ways. The Messiah would be born of a virgin. The Messiah would do miracles such as had never been seen before, in numbers never seen before. The Messiah was going to die and then this Messiah was going to come back to life. Look for those things and you will know who the Messiah is. Clearly the Jews rejected that Jesus fulfilled exactly what God’s Word declared.

Their rejection of Jesus and this wonderful gift of God means what? We are told: **“You do not consider yourself worthy of eternal life.”** I can’t tell you how deeply that truth saddens me. This is the Lord God who has made eternal life and salvation easy. He sent His Son to atone for our sins, that is, He sent Jesus to pay for our sins, the sins of the whole world. He then raised Jesus from the dead that there would be no doubt that Jesus was the Savior, who now makes eternal life possible for all. All that is necessary is faith. To hear the message of Jesus, the message of God forgiving sins and believe that such is the way it is. We have eternal life simply because of Jesus.

The other day as I was conducting a Catechism class I was once again reminded of my two absolutely favorite questions and answers in our Catechism. Question 201. *Of what does Christ’s resurrection assure us?* Answer: *Christ resurrection assures us that He is God’s Son….He is our Redeemer…that He will raise us from the dead.”* There it is, the heart and core of what the Christian faith is about. Then comes question 212. *Why am I sure that I will be with Christ in heaven?* Answer: *I am sure that I will be with Christ in heaven because He has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.*

Isn’t that awesome? Those two questions clearly lay out the wonder and truth of what Jesus is about. Jesus paid for our sins and won everything for us as is attested to by his resurrection. And all of this is true and factual because Jesus was raised from the dead. It is all about Jesus. This gracious gift of God given that we might be the Lord’s and have eternal life.

By the way, here is the perfect place where God could have testified to the importance of the Law. The Apostles could have said, “Yep, you Jews have the law and if you work hard and keep that law, work hard to bring honor to God and show how much you love Him and can do for Him, why, yes, you can earn your way to heaven by your works and obedience.” The Apostles don’t say that because we can’t obey, we can’t keep the law. We, all of us, sin horribly every day. We daily trash our Lord and His gracious gift of life. The difference is that we cling to this message of Jesus and those who think it is going to be works reject this message of Jesus. And it doesn’t matter if you declare that works are going to save you in the name of Jesus or any other god, I have news for you, “You cannot get to heaven by works! You cannot be good enough, do enough works, please God enough. On our own we don’t stand a chance of earning eternal life.” That is why God sent Jesus. What we could not do, God did for us in Jesus.

Does that mean we can do whatever we want and God will just have to accept it? Listen to the reaction of the Gentiles who did believe: **“they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”** Because of God’s Word, because of the message of Jesus as the Savior these people believed. Notice the importance of God’s Word? It was the Gospel of Jesus that gave them faith, the gospel of Jesus through whom the Holy Spirit worked to give faith and with that faith eternal life. This salvation did not depend on dynamic preachers, flashing lights, your kind of music, evangelism plans or any other endeavor of man. It depended on the message of Jesus and it depended on the power of God who appointed those who would believe.

Not long ago in our weekly Bible class we heard some awesome truths of God. Ephesians tells us: **“For he chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”** Before even a particle of matter was created God knew you and chose you to be one of His children for eternal life. Later on we heard this, **“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”** We are believers because of the grace of God. We are believers because of, in and through the power of Jesus. I cannot believe apart from Jesus and in truth, I cannot believe apart from God’s Holy Word which testifies to and reveals Jesus. That’s why John’s Gospel opening says that Jesus is the eternal Word that makes all the difference. You cannot separate the two. To believe in Jesus is to believe in God’s Word, or as our text states, **“they honored the word of the Lord.”** Genuine faith is always based on the Word of God.

The sad part is what happens next. Please note that this is pretty much indicative of what we as God’s children can expect from the world. **“But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.”** Did you pay attention to those words? What is said is revealing a horrid truth. There were women, who at one time were “God-fearing”. They belonged to the Synagogue, were involved in the worship and they were devout in their lives. But now, with prodding from the Jewish leaders, these women and the rich men of the town, turn against the Apostles, turn against the message of Jesus and the result is that the town expels the Apostles from their region. The “God-fearing” are made godless. Isn’t that sad!

Just as sad, the Apostles **“shook the dust from their feet in protest against them.”** Sometimes that’s what God’s Word calls for. We turn away from those who have become godless. Shaking off the dust was a symbolic way of saying, “You can do that if you want and we are now going to leave you to your sin.” Lots of situations like that today. Situations where it is just best for the Christian to walk away and withhold the message of Jesus. To my knowledge, this region is going to remain godless for many centuries to come.

The last verse is important. **“And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.”** The disciples went on their way still filled with joy, still filled with the Holy Spirit. Just because God’s work was cut off here does not dampen their joy in Christ. I would simply tell you that they see the hand of God at work here. Those who were supposed to believe did, and though many didn’t believe, the joy and wonder of Christ is not lost to the disciples. God will work his wonders and ways. God will send His Word to accomplish his purposes. God’s will is always done just as God desires.

May we hold on to the Word of Jesus. May we grasp this wonder of Jesus, the salvation that is ours in Him. May we proclaim that Word and let God’s will be done. Lord fill us with the joy of faith. Amen.