

Church in the Wild
Pastor's Devotional, July 9, 2017

Read Acts 13:42-52

Pastor Michael's comments:

The Book of Acts begins by announcing that just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he promised his disciples that “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). In the first 12 chapters, we read about the early church's witness in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. The good news of Jesus spread because the disciples were 1) missional where they lived; and 2) missional as they fled from persecution. But in Chapter 13 the church enters a new phase. Without being forced, the church sends its best leaders away to serve as missionaries to far-away places. Antioch in Syria becomes the staging ground for international mission. At a prayer gathering remarkable for its diversity (two Africans participating), church leaders discern that Barnabas and Saul should be sent to share Jesus with far-away people.

They sailed for the island of Cypress, where they “preached the word of God in the Jewish synagogues” (13:5). They went first to the Jews, for Jesus was and is the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Messiah to His covenant people. But after Cornelius and his Gentile family received the Holy Spirit when Peter preached to them, the missionaries assumed that the Gospel message would somehow overflow from the synagogues to the pagan Gentiles. In the events of Chapter 13, this overflow becomes a tidal wave. A dramatic shift is underway, reflected in the change from the Jewish name Saul (1:9) to the Latin name Paul (1:13). Some Christians assume that this name change was due to Saul's conversion. If this were the reason, wouldn't we read of a name change in Chapter 9? Instead, the Saul to Paul name change reflects the reality that a greater portion of Paul's audience were Gentiles. He wasn't abandoning his Jewish heritage. He was doing what missionaries do—eliminating cultural barriers that prevent outsiders from hearing about Jesus.

From Cypress, the missionary team sailed for the region of Pamphylia (southern part of present-day Turkey). After climbing the steep Taurus mountain range, they taught in the synagogues of Pisidian Antioch (Same name; different place). Paul made a point of also addressing “you Gentiles who worship God” (the “God-fearers”) as he explained that the Jewish faith was fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (13:16). Their overwhelming enthusiasm to the Gospel was sign of the Spirit's power, yet the Jewish leaders “were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying” (13:45).

Anticipating this rejection by many of their own people, the apostles declared that “we now turn to the Gentiles, quoting Isaiah 49:6 to demonstrate that it was always God's plan to use the Jewish people as an instrument to reach the Gentiles.

Chapter 13 ends in celebration. The Gentiles “were glad and honored the word of God, “the word of God spread through the whole region,” and “the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (despite being tossed from the city). They are truly on a mission from God!

Most if not all of us are Gentiles who have been grafted into the Jewish family tree by sheer grace. While there are growing numbers of Messianic Jews (such as Kol Mashaich Messianic Synagogue on Lake Washington Road, where Yeshua is proclaimed to be the Messiah), most Jews still don't believe that Jesus is the Christ. Our mission is to bear witness with humility and gentleness, always grateful that by God's grace, we too number among God's covenant people.

Application Questions:

- 1) Have you changed anything about yourself to eliminate a barrier to share Jesus?
- 2) Have you ever spoken to a Jewish person about your faith? If asked, what would you share about Jesus?