



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 13:42–52

“Enrolled for Life and Testimony”

TRANSCRIPT

Let's turn to Acts chapter 13, and we're going to begin the Scripture reading at verse 42 through the end of the chapter in verse 52, and this is Luke's account of the remainder of Paul's ministry in Antioch in Pisidia. A couple of weeks ago, or so, we looked at the first of Paul's preaching; and saw how he unfolded the review of God's dealings with the nation Israel and then we looked in the last of the messages that I gave on the book of Acts at Paul's treatment of divine grace and the history of Israel's Messiah. And so, now we read beginning at verse 42, of the things that happened after that historic sermon in the synagogue in Antioch. And verse 42 begins:

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

I would gather from this that the Jews and the religious proselytes, who are said here to be in the grace of God, and Paul encouraged them to continue in it, must have been what we would call “believers” as a result of the teaching of the Old Testament and had grown up, had come to the

knowledge of the grace of God in the promised Messiah. And, Paul now persuades them to continue in that grace.

And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the Word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

That’s a very interesting quotation from the Old Testament, and we don’t have time to look at it in detail, but I would like to point out this: in the context of Isaiah chapter 49, the prophet writes of the “suffering servant of Jehovah.” And, later, history makes it very plain that the “suffering servant of Jehovah” is the Lord Jesus Christ. In that context, the term Israel is used both of the nation Israel and then of this “suffering servant of Jehovah,” in whom Israel’s history reaches its climax and fulfillment; that is, the Lord Jesus Himself.

And, Israel has a ministry to them from the “suffering servant of Jehovah.” And Paul, in citing this, I think, makes it very plain that not only is the Lord Jesus the one who is the “suffering servant of Jehovah,” and will have a ministry to Israel; but He will also have a ministry to the Gentiles. And, in the ministry of Paul and Barnabas and others, the Apostle—evidently in Luke’s eyes—is seen as fulfilling the ministry of the Lord Jesus as well. “For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

And so, Paul conceives of himself as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, an instrumentality in the fulfillment of the promises that God gave to the “suffering servant” to the nation Israel. And he continues—Luke does—giving the words of Paul:

For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles...And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

That’s a very interesting statement, because it was the custom for Jewish men, when they left Gentile lands and came into the land of Palestine, to shake off the dust of the Gentile’s lands in a symbolic gesture, which was designed to indicate that they were leaving heathen and pagan territory, and coming to the land of the promises. So, the Apostle, in effect, turns the tables on the Jewish men of the synagogue; and they shake off the dust of their feet against them, in token of the fact that they were recognizing the men of the synagogue who had not responded to his message as being, essentially, pagan men. You remember that Paul, in Romans 11, says, “Not all who are of Israel are Israel.” In other words, there is an election within the nation Israel; not all of Israel is Israel. There is an ethnic elected element that is the subject of the promises. “In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” Paul says.

So, here, the Apostle in effect says that those who reject the message, though they be Jewish men, are really like pagans when they reject the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, Luke concludes the chapter with:

And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

May the Lord bless this reading of His inspired Word. Let's look to the Lord now in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the Scriptures and for all that they tell us, concerning the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for this great privilege, of reading the Word of God and pondering its meaning. And, O Lord, we pray that we may not do this without serious consideration of the claims of the Triune God. Deliver us from the cursory reading of the Word of God. Deliver us from the attitude of indifference. Deliver us from the imperviousness that also often characterizes so many of us as we handle the inspired Word of God.

We pray, Lord, that we may be submissive to the teaching of Scripture, and if our hearts are hard and if we are disinterested in the things of God, O God, change us. May the things of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ become the things of first importance for us. We thank Thee for this assembly of individuals, members of the Chapel, visitors and friends; and we pray Lord Thy blessing upon them. And may our gathering and the ministry of the Word and the singing of the hymns be pleasing to Thee. May there be a serious interest on the part of all of us to know Thee better, as a result of our meeting together.

We pray for those whose names are listed in our Calendar of Concern, and we ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon them. We give Thee thanks for the answered prayer just mentioned, and others, we know Thou art hearing our petitions and Thou art answering them in Thine own way. We give Thee thanks, Lord. Thou art surely a great God. We pray for the whole church of Christ, as well as our elders and deacons and members. May today, Lord, be a day of advance in spiritual knowledge, for all of us. And we especially remember any who may be here, who do not have the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins. May, O God, today be the day in which they respond. We pray, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for this morning, in the continued exposition of the book of the Acts, is “Enrolled for Life and Testimony.” Paul has just finished in Antioch the only sermon of his that the media—in this case, Luke—has fully reported. And it’s a review of divine grace in the history of Israel, in the earlier part of his message, and a review of divine grace in the history of Israel’s Messiah, in the latter part. And Paul as was his custom, being a fearless man, concluded with a ringing appeal and admonition.

“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”

It’s obvious that Paul was no consensus man; no lover of the Golden Mean; no balanced man, as the world would like to have a balanced man. He didn’t dwell among the temperate zone of timeless or tasteless spiritual tepidity but in the *tierra del fuego* of flaming evangelicalism. The Apostle didn’t mind saying to those who were his listeners in the synagogue, “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish...”

There are two kinds of Christians; there are those who would like to change the world through the preaching of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, and then there are those who would like to change Christianity, just a little bit, to make it more acceptable to the World. And the Apostle was one of the former kind—the kind that we all, I think, ought to want to be.

If you look over Paul’s sermon that he preached in Antioch in Pisidia, you’ll notice that he laid stress upon the fact that salvation begins in the heart of God. In the 17th verse, the Apostle said, “The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt...” And that fundamental choice, of Abraham, is the fundamental

choice of the Old Testament. And, of course, it finds its complement in the New Testament, when the Apostle speaking to the Ephesian church says, “That God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, because He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”

Salvation begins the heart of God. The results are a forecast of Paul’s experiences everywhere. Wherever the Apostle went, it seemed to be that this was what happened. He preached the Word; then he was rejected. He made appeal to the Gentiles, there was a reception by some of them—a little nucleus of believers was formed and a local church established—disturbances were fomented by the Jews, as a rule, and the result was that the Apostles and those that were with them were expelled from the city and they went on to carry the Word of God elsewhere.

Now, we know from the Word of God that this was something that was prophesied in the Old Testament; that the Word of God would ultimately go out to the Gentiles. But, Israel also has a glorious future and the way in which the movement of the nation and the nations goes down through the centuries is, of course, a reflection of the great program of God.

Well, after Paul has warned them that they are despisers and wonder and shall perish, God is working a work in their midst, which “you would in no wise believe though a man declare it unto you,” the synagogue service came to an end. And, when the Jews had left the synagogue, the Gentiles came to Paul afterwards and urged that these same things should be preached to them the next Sabbath day.

Now, this was not the usual way in which a meeting ends. And, it certainly was not the usual way in which church meetings end. Addison Leach, a well-known Christian of the last generation, once said, “Have you ever experienced this?” Speaking to preachers, “You preach and stand at the door. The first person says, ‘That was a fine sermon.’ And you say, ‘Thank you very much.’ Someone then comes along and says, ‘A fine message.’ And you say, ‘Thank you very much.’ And then, someone says, ‘That was a good word.’ And you say, ‘Thank you very much.’ And then a person comes along and says, ‘How are you this morning?’ And you say, ‘Thank you very much.’” [Laughter]

So, we tend as a result of preaching to consider this to be just the kind of thing that we rarely enter into really feelingly or existentially.

Alfred [name indistinct] who has a little book on the book of Acts, speaks about this same thing and he says, “We know all too well, the dismal anticlimax, which often follows when the synagogue breaks up. The congregation goes home to dinner, or there is a kindly, ‘That was a fine sermon, Doctor,’ which forms,” Mr. [name indistinct] says, “A cheery requiem over an already buried truth. Perhaps later on the service comes to mind fleetingly in a lament, that the soprano flats her high notes so often.”

I think of a 91 year old preacher who said a word to his deacons; and I think I can enter into the spirit in which he said this—not about our deacons, entirely, but I can understand. He had preached for many, many years and he said to them, “When I die, please shed no tears. For I’ll be no deader then than you’ve been for years.” [Roaring laughter]

So, it’s a sad thing, but it is true—as a true commentary on human nature—that you can preach the Word of God to a congregation for years, and the congregation is full of spiritually dead people. It’s one of the saddest things, I think, as a preacher of the Word of God that one has to experience. But, it’s nevertheless very true.

How important it is that you—not only you older people, but you younger people—be sure that these spiritual truths are truths that you know, first hand, from your own experience. May God help you not to simply listen and endure; but to listen and enter into the experience of the things of which Holy Scripture speaks.

Well, they came and they sought to persuade Paul to preach these things again the next Sunday. What a magnificent response. They urged him to stay. And so, Paul did and we read, on the next Sabbath day, in verse 44, almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God. One can imagine something of the picture, as it comes before your mind, in the synagogue. There was Barnabas who, in the next chapter, is likened to Jupiter by the people at Lystra. A man who was

grave, majestic, venerable, full of the Holy Spirit in grace. And, Paul, who is likened to Mercury, agile, mobile, swift of speech.

And then, on the other hand, there were the leading Jews of the synagogue, scowling, drawing up their robes to avoid contamination with the Gentiles. And this is the gathering that came together to hear the Apostle preach. And we read that almost the whole city came together. Why? What issues would they discuss? Would they discuss politics and Claudius and the future that lay before them in their relation to the Roman Empire? Or, were they to discuss social reform? And, after all, they had plenty of reason to because slavery was one of the great institutions of the Roman Empire.

Or, was it philosophy? To discuss the stoics and stoicism? And others? Zeno and Posidonius, and Plato and Aristotle and others? No, the central facts of life were discussed. The facts of God, the facts about sin, the facts about salvation; what they came together to discuss—and the thing in which they were truly interested was the Word of God. Isn't that a sad thing? That we really can come together and the Word of God assumes a secondary place?

Too often, in our church meetings today, the Word of God—a secondary place. I was, last week as you know, in Charleston. Heard a very interesting sermon in one way; it was actually an excellent idea that the minister had, but as the sermon progressed it was quite obvious he would never come to the point of the gospel. And then, when the benediction was pronounced, there was no way in which a person could have come to a clear understanding of the gospel message. No denial of the facts of the faith; just omission of them. We come, we listen, we have the aura of religion and spirituality; but nothing about sin, nothing about the cross, nothing about the terms of salvation, no way in which an individual could come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and feel the burden of his sin and its guilt and condemnation leave him through faith in Jesus Christ.

Well, the Jews were there, too, and Satan hates progress in sound doctrine. And Paul was a man who preached sound doctrine. There was a whole lot of jealousy. They were filled with envy. I'm sure that they accused the Apostle of stealing their sheep. This led to debate and blasphemy. So,

Luke says. And, finally, the Apostle and Barnabas becoming very bold said it was necessary that the Word of God should first have been “spoken to you.” That’s a very interesting statement because it reveals that in the Apostle’s mind, it was proper to preach the gospel to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. Lots of people have thought—and have given all sorts of reasons for this—but it seems to me quite plain that the reason that the Apostle preached to the Jews first and then to the Greeks is because the great promises of the Old Testament were promises that were given to Abraham and to his seed. And those promises found their way down through the ages in the promised seed. And we have Abraham, and then Isaac, and the statement of Scripture, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And then, Jacob, whose name is changed to Israel, and then the men of faith of the Old Testament—a body within ethnic Israel of ethnic individuals who are the chosen seed of Abraham.

So, since the promises were given to Abraham and since through Abraham and his seed the whole world is to be blessed; well, you can understand why the Gospel went first to them. The Lord Jesus is responsible for this as well, because in the 10th chapter in the 5th and 6th verses of the Gospel of Matthew, He gave instructions to the Twelve, along these lines. He said, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” The promises were given to them. And then, through them, they were to go, ultimately, to the Gentiles.

So, Paul says, “The Word of God should first have been spoken to you.” The Apostles were in agreement upon this point. If you take your New Testament and turn back to the 3rd chapter of the book of Acts, Luke records Peter’s sermon, following the healing of the lame man, and in its climax, in verse 25 and in verse 26, the Apostle says, “Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindred of the earth be blessed. Unto you first,” again this word, “unto you first, God having raised up His Son Jesus sent Him to bless you in turning away everyone of you from his iniquities.”

So, Paul in the synagogue in Antioch says, “It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you, but you have not responded,” and as he will say later, in the Epistle to

the Romans, “The natural branches of Israel are broken off from the olive tree.” Not all of them, but the vast majority of them; and now grafted in among them are the Gentile believers.

So, he says, “first should be spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

Now, one can see here several very interesting contrasts. The first is the contrast between the word “ordained unto eternal life” and the words “judged unworthy.” In verse 46, the Apostle says, “Seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.” Now, that’s a very strange thing because actually everybody is unworthy of everlasting life. What does he mean when he says “judged yourselves unworthy of everlasting life”? Well, in the first place, the term “judged unworthy”—unworthy may be understood in two senses. A person may be unworthy, not because he’s—he may be unworthy because he doesn’t deserve something. Or, he may be unworthy in another sense; or to turn it around and speak of someone who is worthy—he may be worthy of an office—because he is fit for the office. Or, he may be worthy of the office because he deserves the office. The term worthy has the two senses in English; it has the two senses in Greek, as well.

So, an individual may be worthy in the sense of qualified; or, worthy in the sense of deserving. We may say of an individual, who is—we are discussing with reference to a political office—we may say, “He is worthy to hold the office.” We mean he is qualified; he has all of the necessary political qualifications. But, we may have deep reservations and say, “He doesn’t deserve to have that office though he is qualified to hold that office.”

Now, in the sense of being deserving, nobody is deserving of eternal life. But, in the sense of qualified for eternal life, that takes place when an individual has responded by the grace of God to the Gospel in personal faith in our Lord and His saving work. In that sense, we are qualified to possess eternal life.

Now, that’s the sense in which Paul uses the term here. You judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life. He’s simply saying, “You have disqualified yourselves from the possession of eternal

life because you’re not believing.” Everyone will say, “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.” We are all undeserving, in that sense.

But now, we’re talking about this contrast between “ordained” and “judged unworthy.” It’s striking to me that people have sought to avoid what is the plain teaching, it seems to me, of verse 48. We read here: “And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” Now, you will find, for example, in the Living Bible words something like this. The Living Bible is really a sickly Bible on the way to death in a number of its translations, but in this particular case you will find “as many as want eternal life.” Or, in a note, I think, as I remember, “As many as are disposed to...”

Now, what that is is just a blatant attempt to avoid what is, I think, the clear teaching of the Word of God, and that is that faith is not the reason for our election; but faith is the product of our election. We are not elected because we believe, but we believe because we are elected. And so, he says, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” But Today’s English Version has, “As many as were chosen for eternal life believed.”

Phillips says, “As many as were destined for eternal life believed.”

The New English Bible has, “As many as were marked out for eternal life believed.”

This is a term that was used of the signing of a decree. In fact, that’s where Phillips gets the rendering “destined for”; decreed for. But, it also was used of enrollment, and that’s the sense in which we are using it in our title of the sermon, “Enrolled for Life and Testimony.”

So, “As many as were enrolled for eternal life...”—enrolled in the book of life for eternal life. Believed.

Now, that makes very plain, it seems to me, three important truths. First of all, human inability. Jesus said, “Do I have to go over these old truths over and over again?” Don’t answer. Yes, is the correct answer.

“No man can come to me,” Jesus said, “except the Father which hath sent me drawn him.”

“No man can come to me...” The inability does not lie in physical or mental defect; it lies in our human nature, the obstinacy of our will. The Lord Jesus said, “You will not come unto me, that

you may have life.” The darkness of our understanding; we are alienated from the knowledge of God. The natural man does not welcome the things of the Spirit of God. And, the depravity of our affections—only unconquerable grace can help those who cannot of themselves come. That’s plain.

The second truth that is plain is the truth of divine election. This truth is plainly taught here when he says, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” Faith depends upon election. Now, why is it this way? Because if this is the way God deals with us it becomes very evident that there is no room left for human merit. And our salvation is the work of God, and we praise God for that. We also rejoice in the fact that none of God’s people shall perish. As many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And, listen, it is not few; it is many.

Paul says, or the Gentiles, Luke says here, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” All of the Lord’s people shall ultimately come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. I like those wonderful old words of the great Puritan, John Arrowsmith, who says with reference to Romans 8:29 and 30. You remember the text that says: We were foreknown. We are foreordained. We are called. We are justified. And we are glorified. He says, “This is a golden chain, which God lets down from heaven, that by it He may draw up his elect thither. And it has five golden links, foreknown, foreordained, called, justified, glorified. One unbreakable chain.” And then he went on to say, “Election having once pitched upon a man will find him out and call him home wherever he be.”

Zacchaeus out of cursed Jericho, Abraham out of idolatrous Ur of the Chaldeans. Nicodemus and Paul out of the college of the Pharisees, Christ’s sworn enemies. Dionysius and Damorous out of superstitious Athens. And S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. out of idolatrous Charleston, South Carolina and Alabama.

Wherever you may be, God’s divine work of salvation—if you are the object of it—it will call you out from that. And, Mr. Arrowsmith goes on to say, “Whatever dunghill God’s jewels be hid, election will both find them out there and fetch them out from thence.”

Do you know that we are supposed to rejoice in this? I look out over my audience, and there are some of you that are smiling; but the rest of you are looking... This is a truth in which the saints

of God are to rejoice. Listen! We have authority for this from the Word of God. Jesus said, “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” Rejoice! Be happy over the fact that God has set His love upon you.

And then, Mr. Arrowsmith goes on to say, “Remember, this rejoicing—because your names are written in heaven—is a reference to the book of love, the writing of our names in which is the firstborn of all God’s favors.”

He has set His hand upon His people and He will bring them all home. That’s enough to make any, even Presbyterian, rejoice and smile in the Sunday morning services.

Well, the third truth is human responsibility. We are responsible. Listen! Paul said, “You judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.” I know an individual will say, immediately, when you talk about something like this. They will say something like, “But suppose I’m not one of the elect?” Now, why don’t you just suppose that you are one of the elect? Why don’t you just suppose that you are one of the elect and, therefore, come to Christ? Why don’t you, as Mr. Spurgeon says, “Why don’t you suppose,” well, as he puts it, “Why don’t you...” he says, “suppose you leave off all supposing and just come to Christ?” And you can enter into the possession of eternal life by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and that settles the question of your divine election. But, if you sit back and say, “I don’t want to come,” then, of course, you don’t have any excuse because you’re getting exactly what you want by your own profession.

So, come to Christ! Believe in Him! Settle the question of your divine election by coming to faith through the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for sinners. And if God has revealed to you that you’re a sinner, this salvation is for you. Come to Christ! Believe in Him! And rejoice in the salvation that has come through God’s divine election made in ages past.

Now, some people will say, “Why, if you believe in the doctrine of election, you just sit back and do nothing. How foolish! How nonsensical can anyone be! The greatest motive power in the whole of this universe is love to God because of what He has done for us in Christ.”

Listen, I was in Charleston as you know, and Charleston is an interesting place because among one of the things that it's interesting for is the fact that it has the only—I think the only Huguenot church in the United States is there. And I had some—a reference here—from Preserved Smith, who wrote a very important book on the nature of the Reformation and where it is, I don't know. I put it here [Laughter] somewhere and I think I have found it. And, Preserved Smith, who wrote about the Reformation has these things to say about the Huguenots. And, as you may know from your history, the Huguenots were Calvinists; and they were Calvinists who were run out of France in the massacre of Saint Bartholomew. And this is what he says about them. And, mind you, he was not one of them. He said, “And if we judge the tree by its fruits, at its best it brought forth a strong and good race. The noblest examples are not the theologians, Calvin and Knox, not only drunk with God but drugged with him, much less politicians like Henry of Navarre and William of Orange. But the Puritans, the Huguenots from France and the Puritans of England, the choice and sifted seed where with God sowed the wilderness of America. These men bore themselves with I know not what of lofty seriousness and with a matchless disdain of all mortal peril and all earthly grandeur; believing themselves chosen vessels and elect instruments of grace. They could neither be seduced by carnal pleasures, nor awed by human might. Taught that they were kings by the election of God and priests by the imposition of His hands, they despised the puny and vicious monarchs of this earth. They remained, in fact, what they always felt themselves to be, an elite, the chosen fruit—the chosen few.”

And, I love this statement, made by Professor Smith, “If we judge the tree by its fruits, at its best it brought forth a strong and good race.” Those who understand the divine election of God and the sovereignty of God and divine grace are going to be individuals whose lives reflect the God that they worship.

Now, I want you to notice what happens, when these people come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. We read in verse 49—now, people tell us, “If you believe in divine election, you will sit

back and do nothing.” Listen! Do you read the Bible? Do you study Scripture at all? Do you pay attention to what the Word of God says? Look at the very next verse.

“And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.” It is the doctrine of divine sovereignty in divine grace that is responsible for the evangelization of that part of the land. And the Apostle, the preacher of divine sovereign grace, is at the head of this movement. It’s not surprising that the end of the chapter ends with, “And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit.”

As Arrowsmith said, “His love to God will be without end, who knows God’s love to him, was without any beginning.”

You may fling out the messengers of the grace of God, but you cannot extinguish their work. And they may expel Paul and Barnabas from their cities, but the work of God will go on.

May I close by a few references to some of the things that stand out here. You’ll notice that the message of the apostles was simply the Word of God. He didn’t talk about psychology. He didn’t talk about the practical things of love, sex and marriage, which so many preachers seem to be emphasizing today. He talked about the great truths of sin, grace, the cross, God, salvation. These are the things that we need. Those other things will take care of themselves for those who will, having received the grace of God, will begin to study Holy Scripture.

Listen to what is stated here about their preaching. Verse 42: “And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.” Things about the word of God.

Notice verse 46: “then Paul and Barnabas waxed boldy, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you...”

Verse 48: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord...”

And, verse 49: “And the word of the Lord...”

So, they preached the Word of God. They preached the word of the Lord. The perennial effect of the Word of God is to divide. That’s why people don’t like to preach it. It divides people; and particularly, if you preach divine sovereign grace. That’s a pretty good way to have your congregation depart and drift away, if you talk about divine sovereign grace. Preachers, if you knew preachers as I know preachers, they will tell you that that’s why they don’t preach these things. They don’t preach them because they say they are divisive.

Now, I’d just like to say, if it’s in the Word of God, should it not be preached? I think it should be preached. I don’t think there is any good reason why we should say that we should cover up what God has revealed to us in Holy Scripture. For what are we saying, we are actually attacking the Holy Spirit for revealing things that are divisive. The Lord Jesus said He didn’t come to be a balanced believer, who would bring everybody together in perfect harmony. He said He came to bring a sword and a fire; because sometimes that’s necessary for saints to awaken and come to Christ. I say, saints-to-be.

Now, in verse—in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, listen to what Paul says about his own preaching. “Now thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place.”

Now, 2 Corinthians 2:15, “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” To the one, we are the savor of death; unto death. To the other, the savor of death of life unto life. And Paul, reflecting upon the fact that the Gospel message is a divisive thing says, “And who is sufficient for these things?” he answers his question later by saying, “Our sufficiency is of God. Our responsibility is to preach the Word of God. If it is divisive, so be it. It is divisive.” The responsibility lies with God.

And so, today, when we preach the sovereign grace of God, I know that some of you will walk out and say, “I don’t ever want to come back to Believers Chapel again.” I’m sorry. I wish you would come. I wish your heart would open up to the sovereign grace of God. I wish that the rejoicing that our Lord Jesus speaks about would be your experience. I wish that you would so

rejoice in it that you'd go out and tell some of your neighbors about it. That you would be an instrumentality for the publication of the Word of God in Dallas. But, in the final analysis, it is the sovereign God who saves and it's the sovereign God who accomplishes His purposes. We are instruments but we must preach the Word of God as we see it in the Word of God.

Unfailing results! The Apostle goes out. He shakes the dust off of his feet because he's been repudiated by the religious leaders in the city of Antioch in Pisidia; but he's left some people there who have the experience of eternal life. And what a wonderful thing it is to have eternal life and the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Archibald Alexander was one of the great Presbyterian preachers, one of the founders—founding fathers of Princeton Theological Seminary—and he speaks about how for a long time he did not know the grace of God. At seventeen years of age, in the city of Lexington, Virginia, he was very concerned. He went out. He said he went out of the city. He found a big rock. He sat down on the rock with his Bible and he was reading the Bible. And he said, “I was concerned about spiritual things,” but he said, “The more concerned I was, the less response I seemed to get.” And, finally, he said, “in a despair, I just turned to the Lord and I said, ‘O God,’ and he just let out a cry.”

He doesn't say exactly what he said, but he said, “He just let out a cry of despair to the Lord God.” And then he describes what happened. “In a moment, I had such a view of the crucified Savior, as without parallel in my experience. The whole plan of grace appeared as plain as day. I was persuaded that God was willing to accept me just as I was, and convinced that I had never before understood the freeness of salvation, but had always been striving to bring some price in my hand or to prepare myself for receiving Christ. Now I discovered that I could receive Him in all His offices, at that very moment, which I was sure at that time I did. I felt truly a joy that was unspeakable and full of glory.”

Do you have that joy? Do you know that joy? Do you know the joy of sovereign grace? Is that your experience? Is it something that's deep down within you and affects you in your life?

I love that account of the last words, near the end of the *Divine Comedy*, and Dante is asked by Saint Peter whether he has faith. Peter says to him, “Good Christian, speak and manifest thyself. What thing is faith?”

Dante answers, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the argument of things which are not seen. And this I take to be its essence.” And Peter, likening faith to a coin that rings absolutely true, says, “Right well now hath been this coin’s alloying weight, but tell me if thou hast it in thy purse?”

And then, Dante replies, “Whereupon I said, ye, so bright and round I have it that for me there is no perhaps in its impression.”

So, do you have faith? Has God given you faith in Jesus Christ? Do you have it so certainly that there is no perhaps in that possession? You may have it through the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

If you’re a sinner, recognize your lost state. Come to Christ! Believe in the one who suffered for sinners! Shedding His blood that sinners might have life. If you come to Him, receive what He has done for you as a gift God works, in the gift of life, the transformation of your life gives you the joy of God the Holy Spirit in the possession of a salvation that God had determined in ages past should come to pass at this time.

May God help you to come to Christ! Don’t leave this auditorium without the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. Join the great company of the saints, down through the years, who have trusted in a crucified Savior.

May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, how glorious it is to be able to read and ponder and enter into in measure the experiences of the Apostle and Barnabas and others as they sought faithfully in difficult and trying circumstances for them Jewish men, to proclaim the Word of God among other Jewish men. We know, Lord, something of the sense that they must have felt. The Apostle speaks in

other places of that great and unceasing pain in his heart that his own people were turning away from the message that Thou didst give to Abraham and expand down through the Old Testament. We thank Thee for the ministry of the Lord Jesus and for the fulfillment of the promises.

We thank Thee for the way in which the Gospel has gone out to the Gentiles, but, Lord, as we look around, we notice the same thing happening among the Gentiles that happened among the Israelites. The coldness, the hard-heartedness, the lack of interest in the Word of God, O God, deliver us from these things and give us, by Thy grace, men and women who ordained to eternal life believe and come into the possession of the joy of salvation through Jesus Christ. If there should be someone in this audience, Lord, who has not yet come; may at this very moment they lift their hearts to Thee and say, I know I'm a sinner. I know I'm lost. I see Christ died for sinners. I come. I receive the free gift of eternal life. I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast saved me. This we pray, Lord, for Jesus' sake. Amen.