

1/28/24 - Acts 13:44-52 "Who Invited You Here?"

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[0 : 0 0] Today we're going to be reading Acts 13, 44 to 52. The next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you, since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.

Behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.

[1 : 1 2] And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. This is God's word. Well, welcome to Steel Valley Church.

My name is Brent. I serve here as the lead pastor. And it's great to be gathered to sing. Singing is phenomenal this morning. You guys are filling the room.

Amazing. Absolutely amazing. So encouraging to hear those voices. And the one theme that I think that it's going to be important to focus on and draw out as we approach a text like this is exclusivity and inclusivity.

Those two things. Exclusivity preserves a distinct group from other people. It develops boundary lines.

Exclusivity creates the distinction between those insiders and outsiders. And so when that boundary line is formed, obviously those who are on the inside are separate from those who they'd probably be unwilling to associate with.

[2 : 3 1] And so this has positive and negative expressions, especially as we look into the Bible. We see some positive expressions of exclusivity to be separate.

See exclusivity of God's people throughout the Old Testament, the nation of Israel, where they had exclusive worship. Remember in the first commandment, you shall have no other God.

Right? In Exodus 23. No gods before me. You also have exclusivity in foods, in drink, in marriage, in sexual relations, and other expressions of religion.

But then exclusivity can sometimes propose a problem. Right? There's a problem that's developed in this passage regarding that.

How do we know when exclusivity is taken too far? How do we know when it's taken too far? In other words, at what point are we setting boundaries that God has not set?

- [3 : 43] Well, here within the text today, we find ourselves in the historical tension between two people groups.
- The Jewish people and those Gentiles. You have the Jewish people being the insiders, and the Gentiles are the outsiders.
- And so if you read, and I just want to pick up this theme. Within this tense dynamic, how do you go?
- From verse 44, where it says, The next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.
- But by verse 50, How do you go from this place full of people to all of a sudden getting kicked out of the city?
- [4 : 58] Well, the main point of the passage today is simple. The message of the gospel is exclusive in reception and inclusive by invitation.
- That is where that line is drawn. That's where the tension is developed in the passage today and the main point. This is going to also check our hearts this morning.
- It's going to actually check our theology in a couple different instances and ways of how God works through His word. But what we can't do today is undermine the exclusive message of the gospel.
- And I just want to hit the gospel real quick right on the front end. Drive it in like a nail, right? We cannot undermine the exclusive message of the gospel that we saw developing in Paul's first sermon in the synagogue from verse 13 to 43.
- That exclusivity of the gospel overturns the exclusivity of this Jewish nation. It's doing something.
- [6 : 16] It's unraveling something. But it seems as if it's unraveling, but it's actually expanding by invitation. It's an inclusive invitation.
- And through the work of Jesus Christ, it is made possible. And it's by the work of Jesus Christ that anyone can be justified. Paul says this in Galatians 2, verse 16.
- Yet, we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. It's an exclusive message through reception of that, but it's inclusive in invitation.
- So don't undermine the exclusivity of the gospel. Don't hear something that I'm not saying today. The gospel's exclusive demand is this, our faith in Jesus Christ.
- That is the exclusive message of the gospel. It's an exclusive demand of us. It's so easy, right? I mean, that's pretty easy. It doesn't get much easier than that.
- [7 : 22] Well, I think the passage as they're getting kicked out of the city makes something sort of stir up within our minds to make us wonder, is it that easy?
- And no, it is not. And so we're going to break up this passage into two sections. The sermon title is, Who Invited You Here? I know.
- And so we're going to break this down into two passages, or two sections. And they will check our heart. They will check our theology, lest we find ourselves wandering from God's plan in our day to day.
- And I'd like to open with a word of prayer this morning. So please join me in prayer. In the words of George Matheson, Divine Spirit, illumine to us the words of the Lord.
- Show us the wealth of glory that lies beneath the old familiar stories. Teach us the depths of meaning hidden in the songs of Zion. Raise us to the heights of aspiration that is reached by the wings of the prophet.
- [8 : 45] Lift us to the summit of faith that is trod by the feet of the apostle. And open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of your law.

And in this we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. So the first section is going to be looking at its rejection. And so it's titled, The Theology of Rejection.

And in verse 44, as which was read this morning, Luke narrates it for us.

The next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

Verse 45. You see, church, this short narrative is setting up with a scene. We talked about narratives and stories last week of the rising action and the tension and then its resolution.

[9 : 59] And this short narrative between 44 and 52, it's set up connecting what happened in the previous verses regarding Paul's sermon, his first sermon in the synagogue.

They were looking for encouragement and got a warning. Not bad for a Sunday morning. And Paul knocked it out of the park in his verses and what he said last week.

The response of the Gentiles and even probably some of the Jews was eagerness to hear more. This carries us into the passage today.

They were flocking to hear more, to receive more encouragement because there was encouragement somehow through that warning. And they repented and turned to the one true living God.

So word spreading. And for those of us in here who know that hunger of wanting more, that a church service can't be nearly long enough for us.

[11 : 08] We just want to keep receiving and receiving. Well, we know what's happening here. God is simply at work through the power of His Holy Spirit through His Word.

These people are gathering to hear the Word of the Lord. This is the whole city. And I think that's kind of a hyperbole. I couldn't imagine the whole city, almost nearly the whole city.

But I think it's to make a point here. Because in verse 45, we see possibly of why that would matter. That type of detail would matter.

Because verse 45, we see that when the Jews saw nearly the whole city gathering. When they saw the popularity.

When they saw the hunger. They got jealous. This jealousy filled them.

[12 : 10] This jealousy was a toxin for these men who rejected the gospel. And they began to contradict the message spoken by Paul. All the history of the nation of Israel responding to God by rejection.

All the biblical citations of that being true. Even in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They rejected. They say, who invited you here?

Get out. You are no longer welcome. I think to illustrate this tension, we need to put a thought in our head. And I've heard it said like this.

If we could imagine a subdivision. Not a neighborhood. But I'm talking like a subdivision. I'm talking like golf course style living.

You know those houses. You know those roads. You know those sidewalks. I don't think anybody in here lives on a golf course. And I'm not trying to shame you for that.

[13 : 17] But I'm trying to help you see something in this passage. Those pristine roads. The subdivision. It's the envy of everyone around.

They wish that they could just live there. It's really costly. They have the best school districts. They have the best everything. They have the best property values. They're the envy of the whole city.

And so imagine you cash in all of your resources. Everything that you have. You say financial accountant, cash in my 401.

Cash in all retirement. Cash in my stock. Sell it all. I'm going to move in there. You buy into this exclusive way of living.

Now sitting on your front porch, you're watching golfers. You go buy. You get the sense of achievement as you sit there. You've made it, right? You've made it.

[14 : 18] It's an achievement. Everyone's envious of you. And looking around at your neighbors, they're just like you. They dress like you. They got real nice cars. And they have all the same values as you.

You have arrived. You have arrived. And things are great. But then, new people begin moving in.

Strange people begin moving in. Foreign people start moving in. They're driving in there with broken cars. Missing bumpers.

And they're moving their stuff. All the stuff is tied to the top of their car. They can't even afford a U-Haul. And they come puttering in.

You got a new neighbor. They have tattoos. Oh. They have piercings. They got holes in their ears.

[15 : 30] Strange people indeed. They look different. They act different. And you wonder, in your heart, sitting there on your front porch, why are they here?

How did they afford something that you cashed in your entire life to buy into? And as more and more outsiders come packing in, you got the Beverly Hillbillies coming in.

Shotguns and all. And you're sitting out there wondering, what's going on here? This isn't right.

So, you get the courage to speak up, to speak out to the least contagious-looking neighbor that's rolling in, right? And you simply ask them, as rude as it is, how did you afford to live here?

How do you afford to live here? And the outsider responds then to the insider. It was free.

[16 : 44] Free. That's how. Enraged at the initial discovery, as you could probably imagine, you got nothing for your future.

Everything you've cashed in for is here. You would be enraged at that discovery. Especially when you find out that that outsider has informed you that there is a wealthy individual, very wealthy, who is buying these homes and actually buying and expanding the subdivision.

And guess what? Giving away houses and property for free in your exclusive subdivision at no work to the residents.

No labor needed. That would enrage even the most peaceful of people, wouldn't it? But why the agitation? Because the exclusive subdivision has now become inclusive by invitation.

Works are no good any longer in this subdivision. This is precisely what is unraveling within this synagogue and in this time period.

[18 : 06] The Lord has overturned the exclusivity of this Jewish nation. And the covenant promise of God to bless this nation forever, found in the Old Testament, finds its greatest fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

And when it finds its greatest fulfillment in Jesus Christ, it finds its greatest expanse as an invitation to outsiders. To Gentiles like you and like me.

And so Paul and Barnabas in verse 46, they spoke out boldly saying, it was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you.

Since you thrust aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life. This goes back to what Paul said the previous week. This is part two of his sermon. You're constantly rejecting.

And as Rick said so wonderfully in his prayer today, it's not to highlight the failures of the nation of Israel. We're not anti-Semitic here.

[19 : 09] It's, they're a type of us. They're a shadow of us and our rebellion. If there's a problem there, we can't point the finger there.

Because we have to point the finger here. It's a hard problem. Not anti-Semitic. So he says, Since you thrust aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. In other words, this once exclusive nation became the providential means of God expanding the invitation to all that says, Come, all who labor and are broken and needy, come, and I will give you rest.

Paul connects Isaiah 49 here. This reference of what's going on. The Jews are lifting their fists and Paul simply lifting the Bible.

He's saying, That which brought hope to the Jews living in an exile, according to Isaiah 49, verse 6.

[20 : 37] The one mention of the prophet Isaiah given to them as a source of hope and exile, of their role being a light to the nations, is unfolding.

But unbeknownst to them, they are indeed the very problem that is existing. Unbeknownst to them, their resistance of Jesus Christ, their resistance to the gospel would be the means of its very spread, of its very expanse.

Getting kicked out of a city is spreading the gospel to the next. This is not anti-Semitic notion, but it's a biblical one. Anyone who rejects the gospel, you could be a Gentile and reject the gospel just as a Jew or a white guy like me, right?

Anyone who rejects the gospel cut themselves off from God, from the people of God. They're dead branches. And do you want to theological shaking reality this morning?

The invitation to the Gentiles was what God had in mind when He made His covenant with Abraham. That extends all the way back into Genesis.

[21 : 58] It's a scandalous message to this Jewish nation, the insiders. But it is ever so true. But why would anyone reject God's grace?

It's something that seems so simple, doesn't it? Why would anyone reject it? Well, it's because it takes guilty hands to receive it.

Needy hands. Hands that know they're driving a broken car. this is a theological reality that's unraveling in this passage today.

For the insiders who did all the work to get there and find out that their labor is no longer good. This is good news to us, church. We toil.

We struggle in life. We try. We run our lives on achievements. We try so hard to do the best that we can in life.

[23 : 15] And what we find is that at the foot of the cross, Jesus Christ simply says, stop laboring. Stop toiling. And believe in me. Man.

It's an exclusive demand of the gospel to be received. But boy, praise God that it has an inclusive invitation available to you and me today.

We see also its reception in verse 48 all the way to 52. When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing, glorifying the word of the Lord and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. Verse 48, the Gentiles didn't revile.

They rejoiced. Just as we rejoice, we say amen to the free gospel of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 28] The one gospel of Jesus Christ. And it spread. People were glorifying. But what was the word that spread?

What was that? Salvation to all. That scandalous salvation. The message of God's equitable grace and invitation that says anyone who believes in Him, come.

Not by works, but by faith. All who believe. And the response of these recipients captures the glory of conversion, doesn't it? It's a predestined plan of God.

As many as were appointed to eternal life to believe. as many as were willing to see and accept their guilt. God did the work.

You see, the ones who did the work rejected God. The ones who knew they didn't do the work, knew they got this hillbilly car coming into this subdivision.

[25 : 38] They knew they needed God. And they received the Word of God. Now, regardless of where you land on the theological spectrum of God's sovereign initiative in salvation and how that works its way out, we find agreement in this church.

We unify in this agreement. If we work for God's glory, if there's an expression of worship in our lives, it is a consequence of God's work first in us.

It's a consequence of God's initiative in us. It's an initiative. It's a consequence of God's election. None of us came forth from the womb of our own will or our own initiative.

Nor has a single spiritual life been revived by their own will or initiative at their second birth. Which brings that illustration of being born again, according to John 3, comes to life in that.

Why conversion is best illustrated that way. God who does the work, not us. It's comforting to know that if I didn't do the work, that's good news.

[27 : 04] I would find a way to screw that up. Just like I find a way to screw up every song lyric there is known to man, and just botch everything.

I would do that if it were up to me. And here we find our greatest assurance then. If it's not us who do that work, if it's God, we find great assurance in God's initiative in salvation.

Because if God calls, He will keep. If God saves, He will sustain. It's all God.

What good news that is. Maybe you're here and realizing that you do need a Savior. And as we saw in Paul's sermon last week, history proves that humanity does need a Savior.

It's calling out the needy. It's calling out the guilty. It's calling out the ones that know that they don't have it all together. And you can put whatever ism at the end of that, whatever you want to call it, but you can't reject the way of salvation all your life and claim that at the end of your life, you just didn't know.

[28 : 16] I'm telling you here today, you cannot earn your salvation. And if you are laboring and toiling in your life today as a non-Christian, as an unbeliever, it's an invitation for you to come.

How? Faith. Come, believe the message of Jesus Christ. Lay down your life today and surrender yourself to the one true God.

The passage makes it clear that if you're going to leave this church today in any certain way, there's only one or two ways that you can leave here. It's either in rejection or reception.

There's only two ways that you can leave here today. there's no fine line. So joyfully receive the gospel this morning. And as we reach verse 50, we have a warning, we have a reminder that those in rebellion against the gospel should be warned.

But those who are redeemed by the gospel should be reminded. Verse 50 it says, but the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their districts.

[29 : 41] Church, one thing we need to realize in our world today is that the world's hostility against the gospel only reinforces its truth.

it's the clearest indication of pride, but it's also the clearest indication of humility.

Those whose hearts in this passage were hardened to the message, clearly, obviously, if you want to talk about election, obviously, they're not elect. God has not done the initiative inside of them, and so they're pushing back on the gospel.

Well, they did everything in their power to turn the entire world against these two men. Who invited them here? Get them out.

Not in our subdivision. Jesus said that this would happen. He said in John 15, verse 18, that the world hates you.

[30 : 45] Know that they first hated Jesus Christ. In other words, we don't have to take this persecution personal. The world is after Jesus Christ, not us.

And their hostility towards us only reinforces that truth. And so Jesus was also given, Jesus also gave directions to the disciples as well in verse 51 of how to handle rejection.

What a good reminder. verse 51, they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconia. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

And so the believers of this passage shook the dust off their feet, just like Carmen shook the dust from the broom on a nice floor that I mopped and departed.

I didn't take it personal because Jesus told me not to take it personal. Persecution. Church discipline.

[32 : 00] The believers shook the dust off their feet. This symbolizes that they're leaving defilement behind. They're leaving the garbage behind. They're walking away from it. We got the saying in our day-to-day, we're washing our hands of the situation.

It's up to them. We're separating, we're drawing that borderline. It's their problem, not mine. Jesus told to handle it that way. And as providentially stated all the way back into verse 46, look with me in the text, verse 46, by way of the Jews thrusting them aside, get out of our city, was indeed how the message would continue to spread.

This is how it works, church. The church marches on. The church plants seeds. Plants seeds on hard ground, wet ground, good ground, bad ground, no ground.

We plant seeds. We scatter them everywhere we go, and we leave the growth to God alone. The message of the gospel is exclusive by reception and inclusive by invitation.

the subdivision is expanding. Still exclusive, still an exclusive subdivision, but it is expanding, but all upon basis of God's grace through faith.

[33 : 26] Church, welcome to history. You think that the gospel would be most propelled in its great reception. All these people are flocking and everything towards it.

would never imagine that the gospel actually is most propelled through its rejection. Third world countries where the gospel is actually a punishable offense to death, they know that that is certainly true.

So, how might this be encouraging to you? Maybe you work in a tense workplace or attend a liberal college campus that's just trying to discard of any sense of morality or sense of anything really.

Right? How might this be encouraging to you when you have your friend groups that are rejecting the gospel but you're still preserving those friendships but obviously since you became a Christian your friend list has kind of decreased quite a bit.

People just don't want to hear it, right? Or maybe for an unbelieving spouse. You got married as unbelievers and your spouse is still rejecting and pushing back on the gospel.

[34 : 42] How might this encourage you? Because this doesn't sound too encouraging, does it? How can we be okay with all of this like the disciples?

How can we be okay? Well, when we labor so hard for the gospel and the world labors so obstinately against the gospel, we find a strange peace knowing it's not up to us to produce any results, nor can we take any responsibility to save.

Salvation belongs to the Lord, amen? We're glorified mail carriers, mail people, delivering mail, right?

Nothing more, nothing less. And in this we have peace. In this we have assurance. In this we welcome those who are welcomed by Jesus Christ into our subdivision.

Tattoos and holes in the ears and all. And in this, most of all, we remain steadfastly fixed in our eyes upon the Lord of our salvation.

[35 : 57] Friends, salvation is free, but it certainly does come at a cost. Right? There's fine print to it. You're always skeptical when things say free, aren't you?

What's the catch? Oh, there's a catch. Because on the back of a bloodstained cross is the fine print that so many people are unwilling to realize.

On the back of the bloodstained cross it says you will be reviled. You will be rejected. persecuted. You will be persecuted.

You will be like me, Jesus says. But as Jesus rose, so we all will rise.

In that, we find peace. In that tension. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.