

UNSTOPPABLE

GOD'S WORK
IN THE WORLD

VILLAGE BIBLE
CHURCH

WHAT KIND OF A LIGHT ARE YOU?

Lesson 3

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DEVOTIONAL

"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.'"

Previously in verse 46, the Jews were pretty clear they weren't interested in what Paul and Barnabas had to say. So Paul and Barnabas took their message of salvation to the Gentiles by saying to the Jews, "Fine if you don't consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we'll tell the Gentiles instead." The Lord had made Paul and Barnabas a "light for the Gentiles." What is the purpose of a light? A light illuminates darkness, just as a spotlight turns a theater stage into daytime or a lighthouse beacon warns a ship of impending danger. The children's song goes: "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine; Let it shine; Let it shine; Let it shine; All the time." Paul and Barnabas were not just letting their light shine; in fact, they had themselves become the light.

Yesterday, I started this devotional message while I was at the airport in Portland. My trip had already been delayed by two hours (due to "mechanical problems"), when the airline's agent announced a gate change for another flight waiting near us. I noticed an elderly woman sitting nearby who looked concerned, so I asked her if she was on the flight affected by the change. She said, "Yes." I asked her if she knew where the new gate was located, and although her response was, "No," she was reluctant to accept my offered help. I insisted it was no problem whatsoever, and as I helped her up I also asked if I could carry her bags. She readily agreed. As we walked and talked, she shared with me that she was returning home from a visit with her two sons and their families in Portland. She also told me that although she walked two miles every day, she really had difficulty seeing, and finding this gate might have been a big problem.

I wasn't completely myself at that particular moment. I wasn't in a hurry, self-important, or irritated with my own delayed flight and postponed plans. Instead, I allowed Jesus to express Himself through me in a random act of kindness. I became a light to the world — to this particular woman. How or why I am not sure. What I do know is that I had been in the Word. The Word was in me and my light shined brightly for a moment in that act — in this dark world

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

What kind of a light have you become? What kind of light emanates from you when you walk into your place of work? Is it different from any other? What about when you are in line at the grocery store? Have you allowed the Lord's Word to reside in you?

There were many needs in the Portland airport that day. However, the one the Lord showed me was an older woman who needed assistance finding her way to another gate. Was I an answer to her prayer? I don't know, but I might have been the answer to her granddaughter's prayer when she asked the Lord to help her grandmother get home safely. What about you? Will you respond the next time the Lord nudges you with someone's need? Will you be an answer to prayer?¹

OPEN IT

1. Luke describes a scene in our text where “almost the whole city gathered.” Describe a time when your community rallied around a common cause, whether in triumph or in tragedy?

READ IT

Acts 13:42-52

EXPLORE IT

2. How did the people respond upon hearing the gospel message from Paul?
3. How did some of the Jews respond to the growing following of Paul and Barnabas?
4. As a result of the response by the Jews in the city, what action did Paul and Barnabas take?
5. Who did the Jews incite to stir up trouble?
6. To what group of people does Paul and Barnabas direct their evangelistic efforts?

¹ Devotional by Mike Brooks for The Pocket Testament League found @ <https://www.ptl.org/code/devotionals.php?day=183>

APPLY IT

A MIXED BAG

In our text this week we are reminded of one indispensable truth: No matter how faithful we are in preaching the gospel we are never guaranteed conversions. In fact, we see that Paul and Barnabas, who were gifted preachers, receive a mixed response that spans a spectrum of feelings and emotions. It is in this text that there are only a handful of possible responses to the gospel. These responses are clearly seen in Acts 13:42–52. Luke shows us that people will respond with either **indifference, interest, or indignation** when they come face to face with the gospel. In our study, we will look at these with the goal of being equipped to respond to each of these reactions.

7. **What things cause people to respond with indifference, interest, or indignation when the gospel is preached to them?**

8. **Not knowing how someone might respond to your evangelism can be daunting. What truths about God and His Word give us greater confidence and boldness to share our faith even when we don't know how the listener will respond?**

Truth Divides! It does not bring all parties together in some type of spirit of tolerance. Revelation demands a response. A person cannot remain neutral. He is impacted with the Savior of life unto life or death unto death. He is never the same person as before his exposure to the gospel message. As ambassadors for Jesus Christ and those called to fulfill the Great Commission, we must be bold to bring the same message to people who will have very different types of responses. **It takes faith and courage to please the Lord rather than be a man-pleaser and be concerned about our own popularity and positive reception.**²

9. **How can seeking to please men instead of pleasing God affect the gospel that we preach?**

² Commentary on Acts by Paul Apple found @ <http://bibleoutlines.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/acts.pdf>

INDIFFERENCE (vs. 42)

The King James Bible and New King James Bible translated verse 42 differently than most other translations. Their translation adds a nuance to the varied response of the audience that day. It separates Jews who left unimpressed and disinterested in Paul's message in contrast to the Gentiles who were excited to hear more.

Acts 13:42 NKJV

So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.

10. What should our response be when people seem totally disinterested when we speak about spiritual things? In what ways can we spark the interest of these people?

11. Imagine you are Paul and Barnabas and you have just preached your heart out about Christ. Once the service is done, some in your audience leave completely unmoved and disinterested in all that you have just shared. How do you keep from blaming yourself for the indifferent responses of people?

What encouragement can we take from our text when our message falls on deaf ears?

INTERESTED (vs.43)

At the conclusion of the sermon, Paul and Barnabas began to leave the synagogue, but not before a request was passed on to them that they would say more about the subject on the next sabbath. Many of the congregation, however, were not prepared to wait a whole week before hearing more. Once the synagogue meeting had been concluded, many of the Jews and proselytes who had been present joined Paul and Barnabas, and were encouraged by them to remain faithful to the grace of God. This phraseology (cf. 11:23) suggests that these people already trusted in the grace of God, as they had come to know of it through the Old Testament, and were now being urged to continue in that basic attitude by believing in Jesus as the one through whom God's promises were being brought to fulfillment.³

³ Marshall, I. Howard. Acts: 5 (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (p. 243). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

12. The people “begged” to hear more about the mission and ministry of Christ. What causes people to be so hungry to hear more about Christ?
13. The response of these people was one that seemingly indicated that they were dying to hear more about the Word of God, which is a stark contrast to many Christ followers today, who seem to be bored by such things. How excited are you to hear from God’s word?

What things can help to grow your appetite for the things of God?

Continuing in grace is as important as beginning in grace; we must never leave it as the basic principle of our relationship with God. Far too many only think of grace as the introduction to the Christian life, but God wants grace to remain as the foundation for our life with Him. Profession of faith comes easily...but genuine faith is proven out over time by our abiding in God’s grace; remaining in the pathway of faith and discipleship.⁴

Continue: To remain in a place or condition

Grace: God’s unmerited favor

14. Based on the two definitions above what does it mean to continue in grace? What does this look like when it comes to everyday life?

⁴ Commentary on Acts by David Guzik found @ <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-13/>

15. What can happen to both the believer and a watching world when we cease to “continue in God’s grace?”

Paul’s words made a deep impression on many of his hearers, both on Jews and (especially) on Gentile God-fearers, and a large number of them believed the gospel. The Gentiles spread the news among their friends, and next sabbath day there was a great influx of Gentiles into the synagogue. This was not altogether to the liking of many members of the regular congregation, who found themselves crowded out. The orderly procedure that had marked the service the week before broke down on this occasion. Paul was heckled and contradicted as he began to speak, and the meeting broke up in disorder.⁵

The difference in the crowd size from one sabbath to the next seems to indicate that the people had been busy speaking to others about Christ and inviting them to hear more about this Jesus that Paul said was the Messiah and Savior.

16. Christianity, from its very beginning, has been a “movement by invitation” (see John 1:40–42). How does a church create and cultivate this type of “invitation culture”?

What things keep you from inviting people to church and other events where Christ and His Word are preached?

INDIGNATION

Luke writes with pardonable exaggeration, and we should not give ourselves headaches, like some skeptical literalists, who wonder how the crowds could have been accommodated in the synagogue. The effect of the crowds, however, was to make the Jews envious of the missionaries; presumably their own missionary efforts had been much less successful. At the same time, they probably disagreed with the message that was being preached, and so they argued against the missionaries, and defamed (RSV, “reviled”) them. It was no doubt only a section of the Jews who adopted this attitude, in view of verse 43.

⁵ Bruce, F.F. Acts: A Bible Study Commentary (Kindle Locations 1229-1235). Kingsley Books. Kindle Edition.

Nevertheless, it was plain that official Judaism, as represented by the synagogue, was rejecting the gospel. Paul and Barnabas found it necessary to speak out openly and boldly, declaring their intention to take the gospel to the Gentiles. They had fulfilled their duty of going 'to the Jews first'; the basis of this duty is never made absolutely clear in the New Testament, but presumably rests on the nature of Israel as the covenant people of God to whom He continued to offer His promises of salvation. Now that the Jews as a body had said "No" to the gospel and disqualified themselves from receiving eternal life, the missionaries were free from obligation to them and could direct their full attention to the Gentiles.⁶

17. It was the religious establishment that sought to hinder the work of God that was impacting many. Does this type of hinderance exist today, and if so, where and how?

IMPACT

And the word of the Lord was being spread: It was being spread through the efforts of Paul and Barnabas, but especially through the lives of these people being brought to Jesus Christ.

It's remarkable to think that this church was born in a little more than a week. On one Sabbath Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue and there was a wonderful response. The following Sabbath there was a mixed response, some very hostile and some very receptive. They took the receptive ones and started a church that lasted for hundreds of years, and through that church, the Word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region (Acts 13:49).

Sometimes remarkable works of God happen quite quickly. We should be happy for such seasons of rapid progress in God's work.

18. Look over the text and ask the following question: What good and bad things would help Paul and his associates to believe that they were doing successful ministry?

Do churches use the same measurements for ministry today?

⁶ Marshall, I. Howard. Acts: 5 (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (p. 244). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

In verses 50–52 we see that the great gains for the church were stifled by opposition. The opposition was so severe that Paul and his friends were forced from the city. It would have been easy to become discouraged and angered by such a chain of events and yet we see that they “shake the dust from their feet” and move on to the next city.

19. What enabled these men to keep their joy when all their hard work was apparently being ruined by the opposition?

20. What lesson is there for us from verses 50–52 that will equip and encourage us for ministry to a lost world this week?