

**LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS, PART 4**  
**Acts 13:42-52**

At my house we have some of these little solar lights that help us navigate our way from our cars to the front door in the door. When it's dark out, those little lights are really helpful to guide us on the path. Well, biblically speaking, those little lights remind me of Christians who are called to be lights in a dark world, guiding others on the path to life in Christ and everlasting life with Him in heaven. For the last few weeks, we've been in Acts 13 talking about being "lights in the darkness." Acts is all about witnessing and witnesses are analogized as lights. Philippians 2:15 says that we appear as lights in a crooked and perverse world. Jesus said, "*You are the light of the world.... Let your light shine before men.*" Don't put your light under a basket, hiding it. Put it on a lampstand for all to see. So we'll keep looking today at some key witnessing principles from this amazing chapter, learning to be winsome and effective, bright lights.

I'll remind us briefly that this is a **pivotal chapter** in the book of Acts, taking us into the **3<sup>rd</sup> section** and **2<sup>nd</sup> half of the book of Acts** with the gospel advancement to the Gentiles beyond the borders of Israel. We are in the **first missionary journey** of Paul in **Pisidian Antioch of Turkey**. Paul has preached a message about how God promised to send the Savior, how He kept that promise, and **through faith in Jesus**, people can be **completely forgiven** for their sin and be **justified** – declared righteous and have a perfect, righteous standing before God. Now, as we pick it up in **verse 42**, the people are begging Paul and Barnabas to come back and tell them more about Jesus.

*42 "As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next. 43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. 46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us,*

*'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles,  
That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'*"

*48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them [a way of signaling that responsibility for action is left with them; like washing your hands of something] and went to*

Iconium [about 85 miles southeast of there]. 52 *And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*”

## I. **THE ANTIOCH PEOPLES’ RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL.**

As always we see two different and opposing responses. The **first response** is **positive**. Some follow the apostles, they invite them back, they want to hear more, some believe. And when they come back on the following Sabbath, nearly the whole town shows up! Wouldn’t that be great? To be able to share the gospel with almost an entire city at once? What an opportunity!

You can tell that all throughout the week that people were conversing with their family and friends and neighbors, saying, “*Did you hear?! These two men shared last Saturday in synagogue about how God kept His promise in a man named Jesus. They said He died for our sins and rose to life again so that we could be forgiven and justified without all the religious jargon Gentiles are used to! And they were using Scripture to back it all up! I can’t wait to hear more. I think you should come to synagogue with me next week.*” And I can imagine the friend or neighbor responding, “*Yeah you know, I haven’t been to synagogue in a while - for a reason! - but that does sound interesting! I think I’ll join you.*” Just imagine how word spread like that through town – natural conversation at work, at the marketplace, at tea, maybe two neighbors mowing their lawn run into each other... As they went about their week the word spread. I think that’s the way the majority of people end up coming to know the Lord – through regular folks living regular lives in regular relationships. And it reminded me of the principle:

### **Lights make disciples as they’re going.**

Some Bible scholars, and one of my old professors used to emphasize this, that Jesus’ commission to “*go and make disciples of all nations...*” (Matthew 28:19) could be rendered “*...as you go, make disciples of all nations...*” or “*As you’re going, make disciples.*” That’s helpful to all of us who settle down and aren’t Paul and Barnabas on the move all the time. As we go through our day to day and week to week, we should be gospel-minded. *Does this person I work with know Jesus? How could Jesus really help them? Have they heard the clear gospel message of grace before? Have I invited them to church? To Bible study?*

The town’s conversation reminds me of the “**come and see**” concept from John 1 where Philip starts to follow Jesus and he tells Nathaniel, “*We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*” Nathanael says, “*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*” Philip replied, “*Come and see.*” Come see for yourself! Sometimes it’s just a simple invite to church or to a study, a “come and see” that God uses to save people. I wouldn’t be here today if someone hadn’t invited me to Alliance Berean Church saying, “*Come and see.*” You know what I saw there? I saw something different than I grew up with. I grew up with a gold-plated family Bible that only the priest could really understand. But these Bereans were weird. They carried Bibles and studied them and spend the majority of their worship service in the Word! They shared the gospel and gave me a Bible and were very patient with me. If they

were lights, I feel like I was a bug drawn to that genuine, biblical spirituality. This week I heard Pastor Andy Woods at Sugarland Bible Church share some of his testimony. He's quite the influencer now and you know how he got saved? He grew up as an altar boy in the Catholic Church like me, but one day a friend invited him to a Bible study and they talked about the new birth from John 3. He'd never heard of such a thing! But he was born again that night by faith in Christ.

Fishing for men is a lot like fishing for fish. There are many approaches to fishing. Many reels and many lures. You can cast, jig, troll, or use a bobber. There's many different ways to go about it, but one main goal – same with evangelism. You never know when or where or what God is going to use to bring people to faith in Christ. One thing is certain too: you'll do more casting than catching. But just as we wait patiently for the fish to bite, we're always ready to help guide people to the Savior (1 Peter 3:15). While some fish are going to bite, most fish just aren't going to be hungry enough yet, but they might be later. Fishing & evangelism require patient endurance.

The **second response** we see is that some, mainly the **Jewish leaders, respond negatively**. Looking at the crowds that Paul and Barnabas are drawing, they become filled with jealousy and start to thwart their ministry. I can imagine they're upset about many things. For one, the synagogue is filled with Gentiles. All their favorites seats are taken by sinners. They've been pouring over the Scriptures all week looking for ways to refute Paul and Barnabas's teaching that Gentiles are accepted without Jewish custom. When Jesus started drawing large crowds, they became jealous of His following. These religious men weren't so concerned about truth and listening to what the Scriptures had to say. They mainly didn't want to lose people and power.

In verse 46 we see that these Jews **repudiate** – push aside forcefully – the gospel. They reject the message of eternal life. If anybody should be worthy of eternal life, it's the Jews, right? The irony is that they are so zealous for the Law that they fail to see the purpose of it (to reveal our sin and need for a Savior – Gal. 3:19-25) and that Jesus is the fulfillment of it. It's men like this who will later try to put believers under Law and why Paul has to write the book of **Galatians** encouraging them to **continue in the grace of God** and not go back to Jewish customs like circumcision.

## II. THE RESPONSE OF THE PAUL & BARNABAS.

For **the first of several times, they turn to the Gentiles** (18:6; 28:28). This becomes a pattern. This **“turn to the Gentiles”** is a major turning point in the Luke & Acts narrative with the advancement of the gospel to all nations. Luke is very deliberate in informing the first recipient Theophilus on church history in this regard. In **Luke 2**, Luke records **Simeon** quoting **Isaiah** who prophesied Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles. And just like Simeon, **Paul** is in verse 47 quoting **Isaiah** saying that they are **lights going to the Gentiles** as an extension of Christ's ministry. So Simeon's prophecy is in fulfillment in **Acts 13**. And get this: the final words of the book of Acts in **Acts 28** will be Paul speaking to unbelieving Jews, quoting **Isaiah** *“Go to this people and say, you will keep on hearing but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and*

*understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.” Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles and they will also listen.” (28:28).*

This great shift in God’s program from primarily Jew to Gentile was also depicted by how Saul, a Hebrew name, starts to go by Paul, a Roman name. He becomes the self-proclaimed **apostle to the Gentiles** (Rom. 11:13). It was also depicted in his run in with **Sergius Paulus** and **Bar-Jesus** on the island of Cyprus. What happened between those 2 individuals is now happening amongst the crowds for the rest of his ministry and in the sovereign program of God during this age which Paul explains in Romans 9-11. Romans 9-11 teaches us that God is not done with the Jews, but a **partial hardening** has happened to the nation. He still saves a remnant today and that’s what Paul is after too. Paul loves his Jewish brethren and says that by turning to the Gentiles, he optimistically seeks to provoke the Jews to jealousy (that God is working among the Gentiles) and win some (Rom. 9:1-5; 11:11-14).

Humanly speaking, **Romans 9:30-10:4** reveals why Israel in the present is experiencing rejection: Remember how we were talking about imputed righteousness being a gift received by faith last week? Listen to this: *“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone [i.e., Christ], just as it is written, “Behold, I lay in Zion [i.e., Jerusalem] a stone of stumbling and rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” Brethren my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*

Paul says how instead of letting the Law show them their sin and need for a Savior in Christ, they used it to try and conjure up their own stockpile of righteousness that they’re going to wheelbarrow into heaven before God as their reason for why He should accept them. They’re stuck in a works-based righteousness mindset. They think their religious works and good works will measure up against God’s holiness. But it’s like we talked a lot about last week – we need a righteousness, yes – but one that is not our own. **We need the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to our account.** And once you get this, you’re really understanding the gospel! Jesus died for your sins so that by faith in Him, He would give you *His* righteousness. This is necessary because **God is perfect and Heaven is perfect.** Proverbs 5:4, a verse worth memorizing for witnessing, says, *“For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil can dwell with You.”* **Our problem:** we’re all wicked! We all fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23) and cannot dwell with God. **The Solution:** Christ takes our sin and credits His perfect righteousness to our account so we can have a perfect standing before Him. It’s called **the great exchange: your sin in exchange for His righteousness, giving you a perfect standing before God, forever.** Not something you earn or something you deserve – just a free gift received by faith in Him.

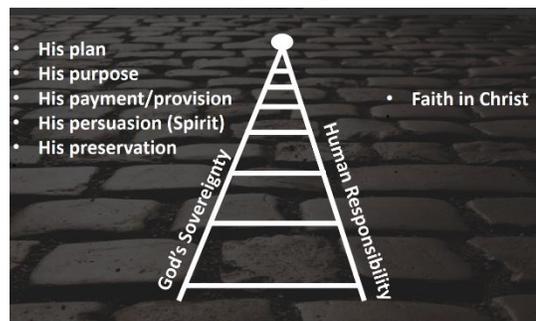
Paul said he was once the most zealous Jew there was. He kept the Law to a T. But now he says in **Philippians 3:7-9** it's all rubbish! He wants *"to be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ Jesus, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith."* Paul says these Jews had **zeal** but they had **no knowledge** of or **did not subject themselves** to God's righteousness.

### Lights operate with zeal and knowledge.

It's important for us as lights to operate with zeal and knowledge. Some Christians have **knowledge**, but they've lost their zeal to live for Him and to evangelize. We should have **zeal** for this life-transforming, destiny-changing message of the gospel; zeal that goes beyond caring what people think of us and makes us unashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16); zeal that cares more about peoples' destiny and God's glory; zeal that is ready and willing to give a reason for what we believe (1 Peter 3:15); zeal that says, *"Woe to me if I don't preach the gospel!"* (1 Cor. 9:16).

But at the same time, many possess zeal with no knowledge. Those Islamic men who blow themselves up have zeal, but they don't have **knowledge**. Many Christians today have zeal, but they don't have knowledge because they don't take the study of the Word seriously. Someone said, *"Zeal without knowledge is like fire without light."* It's like getting on your horse and riding off frantically in all directions. As believers we need some knowledge about imputed righteousness to communicate the gospel clearly; knowledge to differentiate between position and condition so we don't confuse people when we present the gospel. Relevant to Acts 13 and Romans 9-11, we need the knowledge that when witnessing that we can't force some believe in Christ or pressure them with gimmicks and eloquence, but that we need to rely on the divine work of the Spirit of God through His Word. We want to help win people to the Lord (Prov. 11:30) and be the means God uses to guide them to Himself, but we are not the ones who do the saving. God has His purposes and ways and timing. We sow the Word, but He has to grow it. If anything teaches us that, it's God's dealings with the nation of Israel.

I think God's sovereignty and man's free will are both right here in this passage and both are needed in witnessing. Paul and Barnabas can witness and trust the Lord with the results. They shake the dust from their sandals, signifying they have testified and the city is kept with their own responsibility to respond (Mark 6:11). But then you see verse 48 where "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" – I think that's meant to shock Theophilus a bit that God would choose Gentiles. God's sovereignty and man's free will are both there like two rails of a railroad track. I did a sermon on that a while back that you might find helpful. Resources > Titus > Titus 1:1-4.manuscript.pdf.



Before we wrap it up, let's note another way in which these men were lights. Even though they are persecuted and maligned and driven out of the area, they aren't filled with anger or jealousy or

discouragement, but with **joy** and the **Holy Spirit**. We might say that the fact that they are not angry and grumbling, but are filled with joy, is proof they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

### **Lights move forward with joy and the Holy Spirit.**

Philippians 2:15 says the way in which we are lights is by **doing all things without grumbling or disputing**. There will be times when like Paul and his companions, people and culture will attempt to pressure us into silence in various ways. But we cannot let it make us angry or discouraged or grumblers, diminishing our light. Like Paul and Barnabas, we stay focused on **eternal matters**. They don't have their minds on what people think of them or how they've been mistreated, but on Jesus' promises like Matthew 5:11-12, "*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" They also have their minds on the **mission**. Just the term "mission" has a sense of difficulty and opposition connected to it – military terms. When you're on mission, you expect hardship and difficulty. Whether the gospel is received or rejected, the mission goes on with the joy of serving.

The other day, I went fishing with my father-in-law. When we left my house to go fishing, the wind wasn't that bad. It was sunny and nice. But as soon as we turned to go to the lake, the weather had changed dramatically. In fact, one of our friends had already loaded up his boat and was leaving and said, "*I feel bad for that guy heading to the lake!*" and then realized it was us. He called us to tell us they left the wind was so bad. While everyone was struggling to load up their boats, we were putting in! We were there to fish. The wind was howling, we had trouble keeping the boat straight. It was cold. There was rain off and on. My father-in-law had gloves on. I had opened packs of hand warmers. We even forgot to pack supper and survived on chips and Dr. Pepper. It wasn't easy, but we ended up with 3 keeper walleyes and a beautiful sunset. Some fish didn't bite until the last minute, but at the end of the day, it was worth it! It would be interesting to know how many casts we made that day – hundreds! But for 3 casts, we were rewarded. Fishing for men is a lot like that. It's not always easy. Not always the most enjoyable. But at the end of the day, is there anything more rewarding than seeing someone find life in Christ? The difficulties only add to the sense of accomplishment.

Sharing the gospel and making disciples is messy and difficult at times, but be encouraged that by God's design, light always overpower darkness – never the other way around. Rather than huddling under a basket (Matt. 5:14-16), like lights in on a pathway, we spread out and light up our communities. Howard Hendricks wrote, "*There is no excuse to huddle in the darkness. We need to move out where the action is and mix it up with the society to whom God has called us to minister.*"<sup>i</sup>

A prayer for us: *Lord, just like a solar light, You are the Light that charges us and enables us to light the path for others. Use us, we pray, to light up our community and guide others on the path to everlasting life in Christ.*

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<sup>i</sup> Howard Hendricks, *Heaven Help the Home!* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 54.