



Central Peninsula Church

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Acts 13:44-52

Rob Hall

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Good News Travels Fast

SERIES: Acts: The Rest of the Story

Good morning and welcome to CPC. If you are new to our church, we are especially glad that you have chosen to be here this morning. My name is Rob Hall and I am the Community Life pastor. Since I am new to CPC and I've shared my FaithStory at the Outdoor Service, I thought it would be helpful to explain to you a few more important things about me.

First, I sweat a lot. I am a very sweaty man. For some reason, God has blessed me with an unusual gift to sweat when no one else is sweating. On stage, with lights blazing and with the pressure of preaching on my shoulders, you will begin to see large dark spots form underneath my armpits. No need to worry, I usually wear an undershirt which acts like a sponge. I've tried to get help with this blessing from God and I've tried every form of antiperspirant and deodorant known to man. In fact, the only thing that seems to work is Lady Speedstick! I once asked a doctor friend of mine for advice; he did some research and told me that I could get a shot of Botox into my armpits. I told him to go to a very unfriendly place and decided to instead embrace my calling as a sweaty man.

Secondly, I have a lot of energy, enthusiasm and passion for the Lord and for life in general. Trust me, I am not pretending to be anything other than what God has made me to be. I really do not need to drink coffee or a Red Bull for energy, even though I enjoy both of those drinks. I am just naturally, or you might say supernaturally, excited about life, about the Lord, and about making an impact in my lifetime. I'm told that my enthusiasm is both contagious and at times very annoying. Whatever you end up believing about that is fine with me—just know that I love the Lord, I love my wife and my kids, I love life, and like a good football coach, I can get very fired up pretty easily and ready to go.

Third, you just have to know that something very interesting happened to me several years ago. For most of my life, I trained myself to keep my feelings and emotions on the inside. It was a coping mechanism I used to keep it all together through the rough days of my childhood. Crying only happened when I just

couldn't take things any longer. I would NEVER cry in public; I thought it was a sign of weakness. Then I got married and had my first child, and it was almost as if God turned on a light switch within me. Now I get choked up at almost anything! To be honest it is a little embarrassing! When my wife and I go to a movie, I am the one who usually cries first, and she lovingly looks over at me and begins to laugh! She is very compassionate. I need to warn you that from time to time, I'll be preaching and for some reason I'll just get choked up. And being that we are such a grace-filled church, many of you women will send me warm emails while you men will slap me on the back and ask if the crying baby needs his bottle! To summarize, I sweat, I am very passionate, and I cry.

Now that I bared my soul to all of you, let's open our Bibles to Acts 13:44-52.

“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 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.”’ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Let's pray. Father, we come before you as broken people. People who are in desperate need of a touch from you this morning. We bring to you today our hopes, our fears, our dreams, our problems, and we lay them at the cross of your son Jesus. We ask for you to teach us through your word. Would you bring the scriptures alive to us this morning? Give us ears to hear and eyes to see your work in our lives today. May we leave transformed by the power of the Gospel. In Jesus name, Amen.

Well, I am curious how many of you are daydreamers? Anyone? Maybe you daydream about vacations you are going to take, or the job you wish you had, or you think about the things you have going on in your life. I am a big time daydreamer. My wife often catches me in the middle of them and says something like, "hello, where did you go?" Since I've been here on the Peninsula I have driven up and down the Peninsula countless times. I see all the high-tech buildings and people driving. I love getting into the City and driving around looking at people and exploring new places. I don't know what you daydream about, but very often I daydream about what would happen if authentic true revival took place here on the Peninsula. What would that look like? How would that happen? I daydream about abandoned corporate centers being converted into thriving churches. I dream about the Gospel of Jesus being made famous here on the Peninsula. I see families exchanging the fast pace, corporate ladder climbing, keep up with the Jones's lifestyle for a life changing relationship with Jesus. I often wonder, to be honest, if it is even possible. I know that we live in one of the most unchurched areas of the entire country. Where church takes a backseat to work, school, and many other things. Is it possible to see revival here on the Peninsula, in our lifetime? Well, I think it absolutely can happen.

Today we are looking at a very encouraging passage of Scripture in which we see the Gospel unleashed on a city and the response from the Jews and the Gentiles to Paul's first recorded sermon in Acts chapter 13. Last week Mark reminded us that the story of Jesus is God's story of salvation for all who believe. My message today is really the people's response to Paul's sermon. We are going to see what happens when the radical word of God is unleashed on a city. When the word of the Lord comes to a city, that city is greatly impacted.

I. The word of the Lord impacts a city (vv. 44-45).

In verse 44 we read of how Paul and Barnabas were begged by both Jews and Gentiles to stay around for another Sabbath and to teach the word of the Lord. In fact, this is the first time in Acts where we read of an overwhelming response from the Gentiles. On that second Sabbath, much to the surprise of Paul and Barnabas, almost the entire city shows up. Can you imagine the scene? I envision thousands of people surrounding Paul and Barnabas saying, "please tell us more, don't leave, we are desperate people, we are broken and we've heard of this Jesus who forgives sins, who heals people, who is the Savior of the world, don't go anywhere until we hear of this news, until we understand, until we get it."

What is amazing is that the people were not gathering to hear the eloquent words of Paul or Barnabas. They were not gathered around their personalities or charisma. Unfortunately when we turn on the TV today and when I watch the "famous" preachers of our time, it is not always the word of the Lord that is attracting people. Instead it is sometimes the dynamic personalities of these folks, blended with a self-help mantra of "God helps those who help themselves" that attract people by the millions. Let me be honest, this is a trap that I fall into myself sometimes. I have to be very cautious that I do not allow my personality, ego, and charisma to get in the way of what God wants to do. There were many times in my ministry in Las Vegas where I leaned heavily on myself and my talent to "get the job done." Isn't it true that oftentimes our greatest areas of strength can also be our greatest areas of weakness? And so I need to constantly come before the Lord, and say, "I do need you Lord. I want you to lead me." I want to have the same attitude as John the Baptist who said, "I must decrease, He must increase." It is a struggle.

But here in Pisidian Antioch, what attracted almost the entire city was the word of the Lord—nothing more, nothing less. In fact, in these nine verses, Luke makes this point four times. Verse 44, "**the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.**" Verse 46, "**We had to speak the word of God to you first.**" Verse 48, "**the Gentiles were glad and honored the word of the Lord.**" Verse 49, "**The word of the Lord spread.**"

I don't know about you, but to me that is very encouraging. We as the people of God do not need to be polished or to have all the right answers. Instead it is the word of the Lord that does the work! We just need to lift up Jesus and the Good News of his death and resurrection and the new life that is found in him. And when we do that along with the evidence of our changed lives, people are drawn in. They look at our lives and say, "I want what you have. I see joy in your life and I want that." The word of the Lord attracts people because it is the Good News that God found a way to rescue a broken and fallen world. This is Good News and Good News travels fast. So the entire city shows up to hear the word of the Lord.

II. The word of the Lord impacts a city by challenging racial lines.

The second thing we see in this passage is that not only does the word of the Lord impact a city, but it also challenges racial lines. The Good News being spread by Paul and Barnabas arrives in Antioch and when the Gentiles hear the message of grace, the message that it is not about keeping the Mosaic Law, instead is all about Jesus, they respond in a way that stirs up great anger and jealousy in the hearts of the religious folks, the Jews. In verse 45 we read that when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. While the Gentiles were hungry, open, and receptive to the word of the Lord, certain Jews on the other hand were jealous. I don't think they were jealous because of the large crowds of people; they were jealous because of who was in the crowd and because of the message Paul was preaching. We need to remember that to be Jewish was to be a Jew ethnically. In order to get God's approval, Jewish leaders taught Gentiles that they must in fact become Jews. They must be baptized, be circumcised, and practice all the ceremonies and things the Jews did. But here comes Paul, preaching that it is not following the law that makes someone right with God; instead it is trusting in Jesus that makes them right with God. Paul tells them that Jesus is the only one who has ever actually obeyed the law perfectly and lived a sinless life. Paul tells the Gentiles to come to Jesus as they are.

Some of you are here this morning and you think that you need to clean up your act before you come to Jesus. "I need to quit smoking first, or I need to change this or that first". No, that is not it at all. You come as you are and Jesus begins to change you from the inside out. When the Gentiles heard this, they were like, "right

on!", especially the men who were not all that excited about circumcision. Who can blame them? The Jews were jealous because they were in essence prejudiced. The Gospel is not only being presented to the Gentiles, it was also being received by them as they are without all the other requirements. Paul is preaching that the Gentiles are made right with God (justified) by faith in Christ alone.

All throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, we read of God's love for all people, everywhere. In Genesis 12:3 we read of God's promise to Abraham and he says, "**I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.**" Fast forward to Revelation 7:9, "**After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.**" In fact the original word used most commonly for Gentiles and used here in our text is the Greek word "Ethne." We get the English word "ethnic" from this word which literally means people groups. God's purpose of bringing salvation to the ends of the earth started with Israel, was paramount in Jesus, and now is extended to those who believe, you and me. We are called to be God's light of salvation here on the Peninsula and to the ends of the earth.

The tragedy of many churches today is that they have become a religious institution, which exists for the benefit of their members. We need to remember that the church is the only institution in the world that exists more for those who are outside the walls than for those who are inside them. We are God's missionary people. We are called to be salt and light to a dying world. I've been impressed with CPC in this area because we seem to really get this. I love the fact that we have a booming ministry to recovering addicts. I love the fact that we at CPC, ethnically, are 25% Asian. But seriously, I love the fact that we are opening our doors to some of the Lost Boys of Sudan. I am overjoyed that we do whatever we can to help people with food and to get them on their feet financially by working with organizations like CALLPrimrose and by making our retreats and ministries open to those without the means to pay for them. I am so happy that we support missionaries around the world and send short-term teams all over the place. I hope that in

the years to come, we not only continue to do these things but that we grow in our desire to reach ALL the people of the Peninsula and send them to the ends of the earth.

III. The word of the Lord calls for a response (vv. 46-48).

The word of the Lord not only impacts a city and challenges racial lines, but it also calls for a response. Here is the bad news of the Good News. The word of the Lord is either rejected or honored. There is no middle ground.

Luke seems to keep both God's sovereignty and human responsibility in tight tension here. In verse 46, Paul and Barnabas rebuke the Jews for their jealousy and explain to them why they preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. They remind the Jews that they have rejected the word of the Lord and do not consider themselves worthy of eternal life. That phrase literally means that these Jews by their words and actions have totally walked away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They've firmly said, "no thank you" to eternal life. While God gave Paul and Barnabas the responsibility to be a light to the Gentiles and to bring salvation to the ends of the earth as verse 47 says, the Jews have decided to also reject this responsibility and instead set up a legalistic country club for themselves. Paul quotes from a well-known verse from Isaiah, a verse that is not only a messianic prophecy, but one that a good Jew would be fully familiar with. In essence Paul is telling them that "this man Jesus that I preached about a week ago is the one who fulfilled this prophecy."

The remarkable thing here is that while some of God's chosen people abandoned the Good News, the Gentiles fully embraced it. Verse 48 tells us that these Gentiles **"were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed to eternal life believed."** In other words, some of these Gentiles got saved! They responded to the Gospel and to God's work in their lives. In fact, they rejoiced and received the Gospel with arms wide open. Their response led them to honor the word, which means to obey it. These Gentiles heard the Gospel, they believed in Jesus Christ and began to obey him and follow him. Isn't it true that our obedience is proof that we really believe? As John 14:15 says, **"If you love me, you will obey what I command."**

Let me take a moment to look a little more closely at verses 46-48, because I think some of you will read this and use it as a proof text to justify the doctrine of election and I think we need to be careful here. Election or

predestination is the theological term that suggests that God before the beginning of time, in his love and mercy, ordained some to eternal life. While I do not want to try and solve the great debate between free will and predestination, nor can I do so, I do want to point out the fact that at least in these verses there is a mystery and a tension because Luke seems to hold to both positions. However, predestination and free will are not even the point of this passage; the focus is on the word of the Lord. What we do see is God extending his love and his mercy to the Gentiles and their response to him. God is Sovereign and in control, but like the Jews here, we have a choice to reject him or to honor him. I love what Ray Stedman says about these verses, "It is not men who are trying to find God, it is God who is trying to find me." Simply put, it is God who saves, he is on a mission to seek and to save the lost. We simply respond to God's activity in us. And this is what is happening in Antioch. The word of God is moving and people are responding because Good News travels fast.

What about yourself? How are you doing at responding to God's activity in you? Maybe you are here this morning because you sense God is drawing you to himself. You are investigating Jesus Christ and wondering if he is really "the way, the truth and the life." If that is you then do not hesitate, put your faith and trust in Jesus by saying to him all that I have, all that I ever want to be, all that I am belongs to you Lord. On the other hand, many of you here this morning are followers of Jesus. What has God been doing in your life lately? Have you responded appropriately?

The word of the Lord impacts a city, it challenges racial lines, and it calls for a response. The last thing we are going to look at is that the word of the Lord has results. Good News travels fast.

IV. The word of the Lord has results (vv. 49-52).

We read in verse 49 that the word of the Lord spreads throughout the entire region! These new baby converts were already spreading the Gospel to their community and the surrounding areas. Good news travels fast! Do you think the Jews were excited about this evangelistic campaign and revival? No! In verse 50 the Jews stirred up men and women of stature to run Paul and Barnabas out of town. Isn't it true that conflict will often occur when the Gospel is preached? The persecution was apparently intense

enough that Paul and Barnabas not only left the city, but on their way out, they shook the dust off their sandals in protest to them in verse 51. This shaking off of the dust was a symbolic gesture. Upon entering Jerusalem from a distant land, the Jews would shake the dust off their sandals to get the pagan soil off their feet. Jesus also told his disciples to do the same when a city did not welcome them and their message. In essence Paul and Barnabas were telling the unbelieving Jews that they were no different than unbelieving pagans. Their destruction is fully their own fault. In contrast, verse 52 tells us that the disciples were **“filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.”** While the Jews are filled with jealousy the Gentiles are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit! What a great way to end chapter 13! These new disciples are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit because they have put their faith in Christ, they have trusted and embraced the Gospel. They are even spreading the Gospel to their friends, family, and surrounding communities.

What makes you joyful? What brings a big smile to your face? Unfortunately, I meet many Christians who, let me be honest, act and look miserable. They are uptight, mean and angry. Joy is the last thing on their mind. Now, I understand that there are times where life is just not going well and times where we feel down. I am not talking about those folks. I am referring to those Christians who are always such downers. We need to very often remind our face of the person living in our hearts! I am not saying we need to come to church with a “happy face” and pretend that everything is ok, but we need to remember that joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and should be evidenced in our lives. How is it that joy is central to the character and nature of God and yet many times absent in our lives? It shouldn't be.

CONCLUSION

After studying this passage, I thought about my time in Guatemala some years ago. In college I was a business major and I became good friends with one of my professors, Bruce Wydick. Bruce was a professor of economics and was also a committed believer. He was our staff advisor for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a Christian college ministry. He led a small group of men that I was in, and throughout my four years at USF, he disciplined me and became a mentor to me. His area of expertise in economics is called “Micro-Enterprise Lending.” Basically, he studied the potential benefits and shortfalls of giving poor entrepreneurs in Guatemala small business loans in an attempt to get them out of poverty. What he, along with others in the field, have

found is that these so-called “risky borrowers” actually are 95% likely to repay their loans. Not only that, but once they get a loan of maybe \$100-\$200, these savvy poor businessmen and women are able to hire workers and buy the machines and materials they need to set up and run a successful business. Micro-enterprise financing is now a world phenomenon all across the globe and is alleviating poverty for hundreds of thousands of people.

After my junior year of college, Bruce asked me and a small team of students to travel with him to Quezaltenango, or “Xela,” Guatemala for three months to find and interview borrowers of a certain micro-enterprise program in that city. My job was to ride a dirt bike into the countryside and jungles, looking for these borrowers, who mostly lived in mud huts. While my Spanish was not very good, it didn't really matter because we were mostly interviewing a native people group called the K'iche' who spoke Spanish as a second language.

It was an amazing experience for many reasons. When we arrived in Quezaltenango and all during my time there, I noticed how different this city was from any other city I've ever been to. This city was absolutely in love with Jesus Christ; it was unbelievable. First, on almost every car, bus, truck and vehicle were stickers and emblems that read things like, “Mi Amo Jesus” (I love Jesus), “Jesus es Rey” (Jesus is King). Almost everything was plastered with banners, stickers, and paint expressing their love and devotion to Jesus. Businesses would paint their walls with Christian phrases and billboards and signs all around the city had Scripture verses or invitations to church.

Then, on our first Sunday, we went to a local church and the place was hopping! It was unbelievable. There was powerful preaching, great worship, dancing, singing, kids running all over the place, people coming forward for invitations to put their faith in Christ. And this happened every Sunday! I was told that it was common for church services to go on all day and for people throughout the week to come back for events like all-night times of prayer. Our host home where we lived was an amazing house of a family with three older sisters. These Christian ladies served us for three months as though Jesus himself was living there. They washed our clothes, fed us, prayed for us, and when I was deathly sick they took care of me. I never heard them complain or anything.

When I drove out to these villages and saw the poverty, the one thing that always amazed me was the joy I saw on these peoples' faces. While they did not have much materially, they had Jesus, and it was more than enough for them. Honestly, Xela felt like revival was happening every day. It seemed like everyone was a Christian or on their way to becoming one. The city was absolutely impacted by the word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The word of the Lord impacted Quezaltenago and called for a response, and the response was overwhelming. As I think and dream about the Peninsula, I often wonder what would happen if the word of God impacted the Peninsula the way it did in Pisidian Antioch and in Quezaltenago Guatemala. Do I believe it is possible? Absolutely! But what will it take? How will it happen? From our text this morning, we are reminded that first, it is the word of the Lord, and the word only, that can impact a city. God providentially brought Paul and Barnabas to Pisidian Antioch because of Paul's bad health, remember? God then brings the people to hear the word of God in verse 44. Those who heard the word responded to it by honoring it in verse 48. Then the word of the Lord spreads in verse 49.

Henry Blackabee, who wrote the book, *Experiencing God* said that our job as Christians is to find where God is working and what he is doing and get on board. Currently through Vision 2010, God is leading and directing our church to areas on the Peninsula where he is at work and we are trying to figure out how to respond. It is not enough to dream and hope that God impacts the Bay Area—we need to pray for it, preach the word of God, and we need to be willing to go wherever he leads us.

As I've processed this passage during the week, I sensed the Lord asking me this question, "Rob, has the word of God impacted your life this week?" As I've thought through that I came to the conclusion that the only way the word of God is going to impact the Peninsula is when it first impacts our lives and my life. Verse 52 tells us that the disciples were "**filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.**" Both the disciples who were left in Antioch and those who traveled with Paul and Barnabas were impacted by the word of God.

I hope we leave here this morning impacted by the word, filled with the fruit of joy and the Holy Spirit so that when we interact with people from Monday through Saturday, they walk away asking themselves, "Man, there is something different about that guy or that woman."

The word of the Lord impacts a city, it challenges racial lines, it calls for a response, and it always has results.