*DEVOTIONAL*

February 5 - 10

Paul’s Witness

**Monday, February 5 Acts 13:1-12**

*“Dedicate to me Barnabas and Saul”*

 The prophets and teachers of the Antioch church were led by the Holy Spirit to dedicate Paul and Barnabas for a work to which the Spirit had already called them. In other words, the two had an inner call which the church recognized and supported. It was not first the idea of the church. Rather, the responsibility of the church was to recognize what the Spirit had accomplished in creating the desire to be a part of the Lord’s work. In my own calling as a pastor, the inner leading of the Spirit has been affirmed by the churches in which I have served.

 Luke uses the occasion of their ministry on the island of Cyprus to introduce Saul’s name as a Roman citizen. Paul was his Latin or Roman name, Saul his Jewish name. In this passage we see both “Saul” and “Paul” as he ministers to two very different people. As a Jew he confronted the troubled Jewish man by the name of Bar-Jesus who was a false prophet and a sorcerer; and as a Roman he influenced the life of a Roman governor named Sergius Paulus. Saul/Paul’s background in both the Jewish and Roman world was being used for God’s glory.

*May the church, Lord, encourage its members in their mission to the world. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 6 Acts 13:13-41**

*“Paul stood and started speaking”*

 Here in an initially receptive atmosphere, Paul preached the first full message that has been recorded for us. Up to this point, we have had one-line synopses of what Paul said in the synagogues of Damascus and Jerusalem, or to the people in Syrian Antioch. Now, as a part of this first missionary journey, we have a chance to be part of the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch to listen to a comprehensive, theologically developed communication of what Jesus Christ has done to set us free from sin.

 The key to Paul’s sermon are verses 38 and 39. Everything he had said up to that point led to the thrust of these verses, and everything that happened in Antioch was because of it. The basic meaning of these two verses is that it is by faith, and not by obedience to the Law of Moses, that a person is forgiven and set free. The Law could not justify anyone, for all have broken it, but forgiveness is offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus. God is doing something special “in their day,” and Paul encourages them not to miss it.

*It is by your grace, Lord, through faith, that we are saved. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 7 Acts 13:42-52**

*“The Jewish leaders were jealous”*

 The people in the synagogue hear Paul gladly and ask for him to speak in the next service the following week. The news of his exciting preaching spreads throughout the city. When the synagogue meets again, almost the whole city turns out to hear more. Now the crowd included Gentiles not previously attracted to Judaism. This is more than the Jewish leaders can take. Out of envy they oppose Paul and Barnabas bitterly.

 The violent reaction led Paul to a watershed which he had probably been approaching in his mind. It would be reiterated often in the future: because of the resistance of the Jews he would turn to the Gentiles. But note that Paul says that it was necessary that the Word of God should first be spoken to the Jews. If he had begun with the Gentiles, he would never have had any hearing in the Jewish synagogues. Enacting Jesus’ recommendation that when an authentic effort is made and hostile rejection occurs, they shake the dust off their feet and move on to the people waiting to hear elsewhere.

*In spite of opposition, Lord, we will share the gospel with all who will hear. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

February 5 - 10

Paul’s Witness

**Thursday, February 8 Acts 14:1-7**

*“Some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles”*

 Paul and Barnabas continued their missionary journey. Moving on from Pisidian Antioch they came to the city of Iconium. Filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, they repeated the pattern of Antioch, going first to the synagogue and making a forceful presentation of the Gospel, and then dealing with the strange mixture of tremendous acceptance and terrible rejection. They did not allow the latter to diminish their efforts to work tirelessly with the first. They were discovering how to deal with rejection, a reality that all Christians wrestle with from time to time. In fact, we come to realize that a sign of spiritual effectiveness is its opposition from those it seeks to serve.

 Paul and Barnabas persevered with the ministry of the word and of miracles; the latter were a confirmation from God of the message preached. The confirmatory role of miracles had been implied in the believers’ request to God to send miracles to their ministry (see, for example, Acts 4:30). Here it is explicitly stated. The gospel caused the city to be divided, and a plot against Paul and Barnabas forced them to flee to Lystra and Derbe.

*We know, Lord, that some will accept the gospel but others will reject it. Amen.*

**Friday, February 9 Acts 14:8-20**

*“They stoned Paul”*

 The healing of the cripple with which the account of the ministry in Lystra begins probably took place sometime after Paul and Barnabas had arrived in Lystra, for it is clear that by the time Paul is stoned, there were already believers in the city who went to his aid. Identification of Paul and Barnabas with Zeus and Hermes is understandable, for Zeus was the most widely worshipped god in this Roman territory and was often linked with the god Hermes. When Paul and Barnabas realized the plan to treat them like gods, they tore their clothes, which was the required response of Jews when they heard blasphemy.

 What must Paul have felt as he was being stoned? Did he reflect on how he had approved of Stephen’s stoning? Before he lost consciousness and was then dragged out of the city, apparently dead, did he commit his spirit to God, believing his life was at an end? We are not told what he thought, but we do learn what he did: he got up, went back into the city, and continued his missionary journey with Barnabas.

*Whether treated as heroes or villains, Lord, we remain faithful to you. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 10 Acts 14:21-28**

 *“Paul and Barnabas returned again”*

 Their return journey took Paul and Barnabas through the three towns they had just ministered at: Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. They had been expelled from one of them and had fled from the other two. But this time they went in a new role of follow-through care of the converts rather than in pioneering evangelism. Four important truths are given about this ministry of follow-through care. (1) They strengthened the disciples. (2) They encouraged them to remain in the faith.

 (3) They warned them about approaching hardship, showing them that hardship is a necessary requirement along the path of Christian maturity. Paul implies that Christians will not sail through trouble with consummate ease. Rather, we will struggle with difficulties of various kinds. (4) They helped the new churches get organized by setting up leadership teams of “elders” (*presbyteros).* The elders appointed by Paul and Barnabas were committed to the Lord, and their commissioning was accompanied by prayer and fasting.

*Thank you, Lord, for those you send to care for your church. Amen.*