

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Acts 13

⁴⁴On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with envy and began to contradict what Paul was saying by slandering him.

⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas responded fearlessly, “It was necessary that God’s word be spoken to you first. But since you reject it and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life, look: We are now turning to the Gentiles! ⁴⁷For this is what the Lord has instructed us:

‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.’”

⁴⁸When the Gentiles heard this, they were rejoicing and praising the word of the Lord. All who had been appointed for eternal life believed.

⁴⁹And the word of the Lord was being carried through the whole region. ⁵⁰But 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 district. ⁵¹So they shook the dust off their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵²The disciples continued to be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.



I love dissonant chords. A dissonant chord contains a clashing note, one that isn’t quite right, but it gives you the feeling that it will resolve. It seems like disarray or discord, because it isn’t correct according to the textbooks. But it is so right even as it defeats textbook, straight chord combinations. One hymn that bears dissonant chords include *the Tree of Life*, which we sang three weeks ago; also, *Jerusalem the Golden*, which we will sing as a closing hymn; adding to its beauty.

In this text, we have a dissonant chord; the Jews are envious at the relief the gospel provides. The messengers of the gospel faced persecution. But we know that the dissonance will resolve because of the power of God’s Word, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the gospel that results in joy: 1) joy for the hearers; and 2) joy for the messengers.

GODLY JOY OUT OF EARTHLY DISCORD

I. JOY FOR THE HEARERS

The news of a great preacher spread. Nearly the whole town of Antioch was in the synagogue. The place was packed, standing room only. All wanted to fill their hearts with the preaching of St. Paul, the converted persecutor of the church. He had explained the good news of Jesus Christ the previous week. In this good news was an invitation to those who did not have Jewish roots, who did not have a heritage of the Messiah, and who didn’t yet know the laws of Exodus and Leviticus.

Now we have a declarative statement for the second part of the book of Acts, essentially St. Paul’s missionary journeys. “*It was necessary that God’s word be spoken to you first. But since you reject it and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life, look: We are now turning to the Gentiles!*” (v. 46) When rejected by Jews, who knew the prophecies and promises of the coming Messiah; Paul and Barnabas would go to the Gentiles (that is, the non-Jews).

This isn't all bad. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. So the good is that the Gentiles would receive the message.

Just ask a Gentile that day how joyful it was. They praised the Word of the Lord. It was unlike anything they had ever heard. *'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'* These Gentiles had the comfort of knowing not only that God had this message for them, but it was a long time coming. The Old Testament in the prophet Isaiah already wished to be a light for the other nations, the non-Jews, a.k.a. 'Gentiles.' The Jewish God, Yahweh, Jehovah, Elohim, truly wanted to be their God with all His truth and love.

But there was something joyful from much farther back. There was also an eternal appointment. Even outside of space, matter, and time, God chose these individual sinners to be His very own, and elected them to eternal life. We are told, *All who had been appointed for eternal life believed.* God was not coincidentally juggling people, as if by chance some believed and others didn't. God caused the faith of certain sinners, before the world was created, for that very day. God's eternal election comes to individual faith through the passage of time in mission work. We don't know who, but God knows who, so He puts the saving message in various places at various times to convert sinners.

This may be your comfort today, too. It was ordained and appointed outside of space, matter, and time that you who believe would hear this Word today. Many are called, but few are chosen. Those of you who rejoice and praise His Word alone must learn from today's text that it is not by chance. This Word goes out into all the world, but by no mistake does it sound in your ears today.

Some of you today may consider yourselves "*unworthy of eternal life.*" Some Jews in our text "*rejected*" or "*thrust away*" God's Word, which is explained as to "*consider oneself unworthy of eternal life.*" To "*judge oneself unworthy*" goes against the judgment of God at the cross; by Jesus' sacrifice alone all sinners are valuable to God.

The Lord wants you to know that He wasn't juggling your fate, as if He might fumble you and forget you. Do not act as judge in your own case, since you have Someone's life of righteousness to call your own. This Someone is Jesus Christ, who was counted valuable and worthy in your place. Because of His inevitable sacrifice for sinners, the Father has judged you perfect, righteous, and pleasing in His sight. God in His grace counts you who believe "*worthy*" to receive eternal life through the Savior Jesus Christ. Would you count yourself as unfit what God your Judge has declared yours? His Word is worth more than your words of doubt. His merits are worth more than what flows from your mouth. His blood is worth the world and then some.

II. JOY FOR THE MESSENGERS

The Jewish hearers in the synagogue that day could have been the head of the caravan to heaven, but in their jealousy these enemies of the gospel altogether chose to abandon God, who loved Gentiles too. Instead, there was envy.

Envy came not from the fact that Paul had a greater following. Instead, envy came because Paul shared the message of God's eternal life with Gentile believers. Not only that, but He had used the Jews' own Bible to do it, requiring the enemies of the gospel to also be enemies of the prophet Isaiah. The Jews would have to go through Isaiah to get to Paul. And according to Isaiah, God's servant would be a light to all nations, not just to Israel.

So those who did have Jewish ceremonies and roots, the heritage of the Messiah, and knew the laws of Exodus and Leviticus felt slighted. How diligently they had studied the Scriptures! How thoroughly they knew the Law! How hungrily they ate up the prospect of restoration and hope for Jerusalem and

the temple! And now Paul was saying any Gentile could waltz right in by grace and belong to God through faith.

So they decided to discredit Paul and Barnabas. They slandered these two Christians. They dressed them down. They dragged their name through the mud. And they contradicted the good news about Jesus Christ. They were getting the message that their understanding of the Scriptures did not allow for the actual fulfillment of the Christ. They were beginning to gather that God's Gospel was predominant over God's Law. They did not like the way the Christ chafed against their heritage.

Paul and Barnabas were undaunted. They *responded fearlessly*. What gave these two bringers of the Gospel confidence? The Scriptures, of course, gave them the courage to *wax bold*. As much envy as we see in the gospel's enemies, we see more joy in the messengers.

This may have even been one of those three times when Paul was beaten by the lictors with rods (2 Cor. 11:25). ⁵⁰*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 district. ⁵¹So they shook the dust off their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵²The disciples continued to be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.*

Throughout this discord, there was still joy and praise. They were contradicted, slandered, rejected, insulted, and thrust away along with their Bibles, the words of Jesus, and even of the prophet Isaiah. But they still had the best Paraclete, the best Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who filled their hearts and gave them joy. The Bible here doesn't mean a charismatic presence of the Spirit; but the gracious spiritual presence, mediated by the Word and received by faith in the Savior Jesus.

The original language shows a condition of having the Spirit that continued indefinitely. Their joy and praise will go on through many tribulations. These messengers would go to many synagogues throughout the book of Acts only to be kicked out with their good news of Jesus Christ.

Could that affect you? to know that these men were popular for a day in Antioch but preached a message that saved a few? to know that they were opposed and tossed away? I think it could. I think you could get to know and love dissonant chords.

Today I challenge you to renew your joy in the gospel. This week, I want you to risk something for the joy of the gospel. I want you to find a passage in the Bible, put your Bible in someone's hands, and ask him to read it. That's it. Seek out a passage that is beautiful to you in the Bible. Put your Bible into someone's hands. Tell that person, "This is a beautiful passage, and I just have to share my joy. Will you just read that for me?" I guarantee you will find joy in this exercise. More than likely, the person will respond positively, because you will catch him or her off guard. Even if the person doesn't respond positively, you let God's Word speak, and He will mediate His Spirit with His Word.

Once upon a time, there were two friends for 20 years. John belonged to a church; Henry did not. Henry took sick, and as the days passed it became certain that his sickbed would be his deathbed. One day as John sat at his friend's bedside, he told him about Jesus, the Savior. The only answer he received was, "John, I've waited twenty years for you to tell me about things like that, but now it's too late." The same night Henry died. Is there someone in your home who does not believe in Jesus? Do you have an unbelieving friend or acquaintance? Will you try to gain that kind of person for Christ before it is too late?

Of course you will. Life is too short to stop before eternity, and Jesus doesn't want to wait until heaven to have a close connection with you and your friends. Listen to Him now, as He gives His new

command: "*Love one another.*" Love one another enough that you would share the godly joy you have, the gospel in its truth and purity. Amen.