

## FRIDAY 05 August 2022 "Voice of Truth" (Acts 13:38-43)

Hello, my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

*I wonder what you do when you hear powerful statements claiming to be true, especially if they are spoken by people who seem confident of what they are saying, or especially if they are supposedly experts on the topic?* Most people just accept the confident statements as true, especially if they believe those speaking are authorities on the subject! That applies in education, business, politics, health care, in fact in almost every segment of life, do you see that happening where you live?

This is certainly what was happening 2000 years ago in the Synagogue in the city of Pisidian Antioch as Paul the fiery Pharisee turned preacher was speaking. That's where I left you yesterday, and Paul isn't finished yet... so let's go back into that Synagogue to see what happens next! You'll find the account in Acts 13 in the Bible.

Paul had just shocked these good Jewish men and their Rabbi with this Sabbath day statement: ***"My brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Jesus everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."*** (Acts 13:38,39) Paul called them ***"my brothers"*** leaning on the confident truth that these were Jewish men, if not by birth, then at least by religious belief and practice. Paul was both... born into the Hebrew tribe of Benjamin and a Pharisee, practicing the laws of Judaism with all of his energy. But Paul was something else... this Jewish Paul was being transformed by a personal encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, now several years ago, and Paul was DAILY being taught and transformed in his thinking by the Holy Spirit of God!

So, Paul did as he so often did, he built a bridge of relationship and then led these Jewish men to consider spiritual truths beyond anything they had ever imagined. Forgiveness of sin was then as it is now, a deep desire for every person living anywhere in the world, and *if you'll look closely, it's amazing the extreme to which some people will go to earn or purchase that forgiveness.* But Paul was clearly proclaiming **God's forgiveness is not for sale, nor can it be earned...** it is awarded by God in response to the work Jesus accomplished in His obedient, sacrificial death on the cross. *And then God's forgiveness is awarded to a sinful person in response to their full trust in the truth of Jesus and His atonement accomplishment!*

These men were stunned. This Sabbath day had certainly turned out to be far different from what they had expected when they came to Synagogue that morning! But Paul wasn't finished. It was time for a warning! Acts 13:40 records that Paul said: ***"Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you!"*** I wonder if Paul paused right there for a few seconds, looking around, maybe pointing his finger at them. Paul had memorized hundreds, perhaps thousands of Old Testament verses. He had

memorized entire chapters, so it wasn't difficult for Paul to find the passage of warning he was looking for without asking for the old scroll of the prophet Habakkuk: **"Look you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you!"** (Acts 13:41 & Habakkuk 1:5)

You'll notice Paul had used the plural, "**prophets**" in his warning. Perhaps Paul was also thinking of what the prophet Isaiah had written in Is. 42:9 **"See the former things have taken place and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you."** Paul was now proclaiming to these Pisidian Antioch Jewish men what God had foretold hundreds of years before... **a new truth, a glorious Gospel, the wondrous message of Jesus and God's forgiveness of sins because of what Jesus had accomplished in His life, His death and His resurrection!**

These were wise men. They had listened very carefully; their Rabbi in particular was paying very close attention. They knew the Scriptures well. They heard the warning. The last thing any of them wanted was God's judgment poured down upon them for being hard hearted, prideful, or rejecting Paul and what he had proclaimed. But at the same time, this was such a radical teaching, they needed to be very careful they were not duped into believing lies, distortions, and then incurring God's wrath for turning away from what they and their ancestors had held tightly to and lived carefully for centuries.

*What should they do with Paul and this teaching? Throw him out of town or listen to even more of his teaching?* So, let me ask you my friends, what do you do when you hear something that **counters** what you've always believed? *What have you taught your kids and grandkids to do* when they hear statements made which counter what they have known to be the truth they've believed all their lives, especially if that truth is presented by someone who seems confident, they know what they are talking about?

The record says: **"As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the Synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God."** (Acts 13:42,43) I love that my friends, what about you? I see people here who were genuinely hungry to know the truth, but not yet ready to swallow this new truth hook, line and sinker, as they say in the language of fishermen. They needed time to think, to reflect, and probably to gather around their Rabbi and ask him to explain to them what it all meant!

So, they asked Paul and Barnabas to stay around town and come back next Sabbath, one week later. Do we do that my friends? *When we hear information that doesn't resonate with what we have believed, do we pass it off as nonsense or do we embrace it without much thought, or do we hit the pause button and ask for time to think, time to discuss with others we trust, and especially time to seek God's perspective?*

But I also see one more important thing happening as the people walk out of the Synagogue that day with Paul and Barnabas. Do you see it? *Paul and Barnabas did NOT press the people for a decision.* They did not berate them for not quickly believing this new Gospel, rather Paul and Barnabas encouraged them and as Luke writes it **"urged them to continue in the grace of God."** That sounds to me very much like what Barnabas did in Syrian Antioch when he first went there to investigate reports of a spiritual revival in that city, remember? Luke records that when Barnabas had arrived in Antioch **"He saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts..."** (Acts 11:23)

Now what can we learn from that my friends? Do you and I urge people to pursue the grace, the kindness, the love of God? Do we encourage them to keep learning, keep seeking truth? *Do we assure them that God sees their hearts and loves to help them find His truth?*

Two of my favorite Old Testament Scriptures just came to my mind: Psalm 14:1,2 which says: **"The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God'... The LORD looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God."** As God is watching our world, your town and mine today, what is God seeing in the hearts of people all around us? And then this great verse from 2 Chronicles 16:9 **"The eyes of the LORD roam to and fro across the whole earth looking to strengthen those whose hearts are fully devoted to God."** Do you see that is what Barnabas and Paul were affirming in the people as they left the Synagogue that day? I wonder how many of them invited the two visitors home for Sabbath meal with them that day? Would you have?

Let's pause right there and ponder what we've seen today, just as all those people did. And here's a powerful song about the voice of truth to help us reflect...

**Today's Scripture is Acts 13:38-43.**