

# WEDNESDAY 03 August 2022 "New TRUTH??"

## (Acts 13:14-35)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

You can tell when someone you are talking with is really listening and when their mind has drifted off to something else, even though they might still be looking right at you as you are speaking, am I right? **LISTENING** is a really important skill in communication that needs work to develop, and it's amazing how many people are not good listeners! Active listening engages body language, questions, comments and learning, do you agree? In our continuing journey with Paul and Barnabas, they have left Cyprus Island and sailed to the coastal city of Perga. They didn't stay there long. It appears when they started inland toward Pisidian Antioch John Mark left them and sailed back to Jerusalem as we discussed yesterday.

Luke records for us what happened next in Acts 13 starting in verse 14. *For Paul, the place he felt most comfortable, in any town or city, was the local Synagogue. He was a Pharisee remember and he loved any opportunity to discuss or even debate the Jewish Scriptures.* He was remarkably well schooled and had dedicated his life to being a teacher of these great Scriptures. But since Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and the personal instruction he'd been receiving from the Holy Spirit, those familiar old Scriptures had taken on entirely different meaning and Paul loved to show Jews, Rabbi's and other teachers in the Synagogue, how **Jesus their Messiah** could be found throughout the Old Testament. *When he did, it was always a startling challenge in listening!*

The record says: **"On the Sabbath Paul and Barnabas entered the Synagogue [in Pisidian, Antioch] and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the Synagogue sent word to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.'** (Acts 13:14,15) Now that's probably not how it works in your church my friends, but in the Jewish Synagogue in those days visitors were always invited to speak if they had a word of encouragement or exhortation from the Scriptures. For Paul and Barnabas, that was the invitation they hoped would be extended to them, and if you read Acts chapter 13, you'll see Paul launched into quite a speech, spontaneously. In fact, it required 25 verses for Luke to record all that Paul said! Paul, of course, traced the Biblical history of God's dealing with the people of Israel and took the opportunity to weave in the insights the Holy Spirit had given Paul about how Jesus should be seen in those Old Testament Scriptures. *Those present listened... I mean they really listened.* They leaned forward, eyes wide open, straining to capture every word and the mind stretching implications of what Paul was saying.

Paul was not only a learned student, but he was also a proficient teacher. He knew how to weave his knowledge and the well-known and revered history of Israel together and then punctuate with his challenging point.

Like most church audiences, those present anticipated hearing much the same as they heard every Sabbath, but it didn't take long, and their brains started exploding as their ears heard new truth. For instance, can you imagine their response when Paul proclaimed to them about their ancestors: **"our ancestors asked for a king and God gave them Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. After God removed Saul, God made David their king. God testified concerning David, 'I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart..."** (Acts 13:21,22) Look around the Synagogue, my friends, can you see everyone nodding in agreement, elbowing each other as they approve of how eloquently Paul is speaking and reviewing their great Hebrew history? But now watch for the shock as Paul next said: **"From this man David's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus as He promised!... Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent."** (Acts 13:23-26)

I imagine Paul paused right there, letting his outrageous statement sink into those listening ears. These Jews in Pisidian Antioch, more than 500 miles from Jerusalem, had probably heard some rumors about this man Jesus. But for Paul to claim their Hebrew God had brought this Jesus to them, Jews of the first century, and for Paul to declare God intended that they recognize Jesus as their God sent Savior...well that was outrageous! *All Jews strongly believed God would someday in the future send their Savior, the Messiah, but Paul was saying the future had come, it was NOW! And that God promised Messiah was Jesus!* But Paul wasn't finished. He continued: **"The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning Jesus they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read in the Synagogue every Sabbath."** (Acts 13:27) Oh these Pisidian Antioch Jews and their leaders knew the Old Testament prophets very well and Isaiah 53 was one of their favorite passages, yet they never imagined it was fulfilled in Jesus! Their hearts were pounding, their minds struggling to comprehend such outrageous yet powerful declarations about their revered Scriptures.

Paul then proclaimed some words that I'm sure penetrated his heart deeply for he had been very active in the Jerusalem leadership which had condemned Jesus to death, remember? *Paul, at that time was known as Saul the zealous Pharisee, and he had likely been one of the most outspoken demanding that Jesus be killed as a blasphemer!* So, we can imagine the personal grief and shame Paul felt as he proclaimed: **"Though the Jewish leaders found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have Jesus executed. When they had carried out all that was written about Jesus, they took His body down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb..."** (Acts 13:28,29) As Paul spoke those words I wonder if tears rolled down his face, tears of profound personal regret. He had been among those who rejoiced when word came from Golgotha hill that Jesus was dead. Anger had risen up in Saul Paulus when two fellow Pharisees, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, had gone to Pilate asking permission to remove Jesus' body from the cross and bury it.

I imagine on that day Saul Paulus launched a movement to have those two men defrocked, removed from the Sanhedrin, and publicly renounced as blaspheming, traitor Pharisees. *Oh, how wrong Saul had been.* Perhaps that is yet another reason he changed his name to Paul, leaving such shame and regret in his past.

Paul enthusiastically continued: ***"But God raised Jesus from the dead, and for many days Jesus was seen by those who had traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now HIS witnesses to our people. We tell you the good news [Gospel] what God promised our ancestors He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus from the dead... God raised Jesus from the dead so He will never be subject to decay..."*** (Acts 13:30-34) All across the Synagogue that day wide eyes turned to squinting eyes deeply pondering what was said. Arms folded, hands pulled slowly on beards and rubbed chins and foreheads. Words like these had never been heard in Pisidian Antioch. Not in the Synagogue, not in the market, not even behind closed doors. *Either this man Paul had lost his mind, or he was speaking heresy, or he was speaking new truth from God which needed to be considered. But how could they test the veracity, the truthfulness of what Paul had just proclaimed?*

Let's pause right here friends and ask ourselves the same questions. *As your ears hear wild claims these days about all subjects, how do you discern the truth?* Where do you find truth in the current controversies regarding Gender identity, Gender pronouns, Gender identification on passports and driver's licenses? Where do you find truth about eligibility for marriage? Where do you find truth about the beginning of life and the legitimacy of a fetus in the womb? God declared in Isaiah 45:12,18,19 ***"It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens and marshaled the stars... I am the LORD and there is no other. I the LORD speak the truth, I declare what is right."*** So, you and I, my friends, are faced with the same challenge those men sitting in the Pisidian Antioch Synagogue were faced with that day as Paul spoke. ***What is the TRUTH? And how do I discern and respond when the truth is denied or distorted? What is your answer my friends?***

**Today's Scripture is Acts 13:14-35.**