Acts 2024 Juan Seo (July 28, 2024)

**THE WORD OF THE LORD SPREAD**

Acts 13:4-52

Key Verse 13:49

***The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.***

Through last Sunday's message, we learned that while the believers in the Antioch church were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit commanded them to set apart Barnabas and Paul for the work He had called them to. The believers in the Antioch church obeyed this command, prayed for Barnabas and Paul, and sent them off for a world mission.

Today's passage is about Barnabas and Paul’s first missionary journey. We can learn about their journey by reading Acts chapters 13-14. Look at this map. They started from Syrian Antioch, went down to Seleucia, and then sailed to Cyprus. After arriving at the port of Salamis on the island of Cyprus, they traveled through the whole island and went to the city of Paphos. Then, they sailed to Perga in the region of Pamphylia. Then, they walked for several days and ascended to Pisidian Antioch in the province of Galatia. There, they faced persecution and went to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe in the region of Lycaonia. Afterward, they returned to Syrian Antioch, strengthening the disciples. In this way, they completed their first missionary journey. At that time, sailing across the sea and traveling on foot for missionary work was not easy. There were many dangers, hardships, and persecutions. However, Paul and Barnabas willingly faced and overcame these difficulties to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I don't have enough time to explain the first missionary journey in detail. I encourage you to join your Fellowship’s Group Bible Study every week. In this message, I would like to share three key characteristics of God’s work that occurred in Cyprus and Pisidian Antioch.

***First, the word of God worked powerfully.*** What did Paul and Barnabas do when they arrived in Salamis? They proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues (5). When they went to Paphos, they also preached the word of God. The proconsul of that city, Sergius Paulus, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God (7). The proconsul believed in Jesus because he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord (12). Paul and Barnabas were excellent Bible teachers. They reinterpreted the word of God centered on Jesus Christ and taught it deeply. Because of their teachings, many people, including the proconsul Sergius Paulus, came to believe in Jesus. Paul's Christ-centered teaching is well illustrated by his message in Pisidian Antioch.

After arriving in Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue invited Paul and Barnabas, saying, ***“Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak”*** (15). It was customary in Jewish synagogues to invite visiting rabbis or mature believers to share the word of God. The leaders of the synagogue likely knew that Paul had been a disciple of Gamaliel and was a scholar well-versed in the Scriptures. Paul and Barnabas were always seeking opportunities to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, which was an excellent opportunity for them. Paul responded actively without hesitation: “Of course. Why not?” So, standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and began to speak. ***“Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me”*** (16). Paul called out to the audience and captured their attention. He later captured the audience’s attention once again, saying, ***“Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles”*** (26). Paul knew exactly who his audience was and boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul preached the gospel wherever he went, but only the sermon he delivered in Pisidian Antioch was recorded in detail. It is because that sermon serves as a typical model of Paul's preaching. Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch can be divided into three parts: first, an overview of the history of Israel (17-25); second, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (26-37); third, the application of the gospel message (38-41). It was appropriate to start with the history of Israel since the audience included Jews and Gentiles already familiar with Judaism. Paul’s message focused on the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. He clearly testified that Jesus was the Messiah and Savior promised by God. ***“From this man’s (David’s) descendants, God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised”*** (23). He also pointed out that the people of Jerusalem and their rulers, without any proper grounds, accused Jesus before Pilate and had Him crucified. However, God raised Jesus from the dead. Paul testified, ***“We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus”*** (32-33). After quoting three Scripture passages, Paul urged the audience to repent and receive forgiveness through Jesus Christ, becoming righteous. ***“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses”*** (38-39).

Paul delivered a very powerful Christ-centered message. He was always ready to deliver such a gospel message. Isn’t this truly remarkable? Are we always ready to deliver the gospel message? One day, I went to the gym, and when I told the trainer that I was a pastor, he immediately said, "Pastor, give me a word." At that moment, I was taken aback by his unexpected response and couldn't share the gospel message right away. Since then, every time I see him, I always think about what message I should share. The Holy Spirit worked powerfully through Paul's message. As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath (42). They wanted to know more about the gospel of Jesus Christ. They had a deep spiritual desire for God's word. Even after the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas (43). They had many questions about Jesus Christ, and Paul and Barnabas gave them clear answers, urging them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord (44). When the word of God about Jesus Christ was proclaimed, almost the whole city wanted to know Jesus Christ and came to hear the word of God. Verse 49 states, ***“The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.”*** What an amazing work of God!

In April 2023, I attended a UBF Staff Conference in South Korea. The conference was held in Jeungdo, Jeollanam-do. The amazing thing was that the gospel penetration rate of Jeungdo was as high as 95%. The reason behind this was the lifelong dedication of Evangelist Moon Jun-gyeong to spreading the gospel. She preached the gospel to everyone she met and established churches everywhere she went. During the Korean War, she was martyred by North Korean soldiers at the age of 60. Through her passion for evangelism, an amazing work of God took place, and nearly all the people of Jeungdo came to believe in Jesus and receive salvation.

Can such an amazing work of God happen to us as well? Do we pray for and expect such an amazing work of God's word to occur in New York, the capital of the world? Do we pray and hope that the young college students of New York will gather for Bible study, listen to God's word, hear and accept the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, receive salvation, and become disciples of Jesus? I believe that when the word of God works powerfully, we can experience such amazing works of the Holy Spirit. But to experience such a powerful work of the Holy Spirit through God's word, we must live a Spirit-filled life and build a Spirit-filled community. We must first long for God's word, read it, meditate on it, and live in obedience to it. We must be transformed by God's word, guided by the Holy Spirit, and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. We must live as disciples of Jesus, proclaiming the gospel to those who do not know Him and earnestly praying for them. May the powerful work of the Holy Spirit through God's word happen to our church and each of us.

***Second, it was a spiritual warfare against Satan.*** When Barnabas and Paul were trying to preach the gospel to proconsul Sergius Paulus in Paphos, a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was the proconsul’s attendant, opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith (8). He called himself Elymas, which means wise man, but in reality, he was a false prophet. He had gained the proconsul's trust and enjoyed wealth and power. If Sergius Paulus came to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ through Barnabas and Paul, Elymas risked losing his wealth and power. Therefore, he actively tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. In response, Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and rebuked him severely, saying, ***“You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun”*** (10-11). Immediately, mist and darkness came over him, and he became blind. What do you think about Paul's words and actions in this situation? Do you think he was too harsh? Does it seem like Paul showed no respect for this sorcerer? From a human perspective, it might appear that way. However, if we recognize that this was a spiritual battle against Satan, Paul's words and actions were bold and right before God. When the proconsul saw this, he came to believe in the Lord, accepting Jesus as his Savior, for he was amazed at the teachings about the Lord.

What happened in Pisidian Antioch? As mentioned earlier, an amazing work of the Holy Spirit occurred through God's word. On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. However, when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him (45). Moreover, the Jewish leaders 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 (50). Their opposition to Paul and Barnabas was due to jealousy. They became jealous because people were following and respecting Paul and Barnabas more than them. Because of this sin of jealousy, they opposed the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ. How did Paul and Barnabas respond to this? They shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. Paul and Barnabas remained bold and steadfast in their spiritual battle against Satan.

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12). Therefore, when we serve the gospel ministry, we must always be spiritually alert to discern Satan's works and put on the full armor of God, fighting actively with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Satan does not want even one person to repent and believe in Jesus. He tries to obstruct the gospel work in various ways. Without prayer, we cannot win this spiritual warfare. God has been blessing our NY UBF. We desire to become a Spirit-Filled Community and serve God’s mission more actively. More people are coming to our church to know Jesus. So, Satan is jealous of us. He especially targets those who do not pray, planting doubts and leading them into sin to turn them away from a life of faith. This is why we should pray even more. May God help us to pray even more so that we can win the spiritual battle against Satan and bear abundant fruit for the glory of God.

***Third, the Holy Spirit led them to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.*** We observe that Barnabas and Paul had a principle for evangelism during their missionary journeys: they first preached the gospel to the Jews. When they arrived in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. Similarly, in Pisidian Antioch, they first entered the Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, the Jews rejected the gospel. So what did Paul and Barnabas say in response? They spoke boldly to the Jews: ***“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’”*** (46-47). Paul and Barnabas gave the Jews, God’s chosen people, the first opportunity to accept the gospel. However, since they rejected it, Paul and Barnabas decided to turn to the Gentiles. A similar incident occurred in Corinth, where Paul once again resolved, saying, ***“From now on I will go to the Gentiles”*** (Acts 18:6). In fact, Paul was called by Jesus to ***"proclaim the name of Jesus to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel."*** The Holy Spirit guided Paul according to this calling, and when Paul preached the gospel to the Gentiles, it bore much fruit.

Last Sunday, we learned about God’s call. I mentioned that there is both an individual call and a communal call, and our individual call should consider the communal call of the church to which God has called us. It is essential for us to discover God's call for us and to fulfill our mission by obeying God’s call. Last Friday at the Praise & Worship Night, Missionary Moses Kang shared about his calling as a 1:1 Bible teacher, which was very inspiring to us. Our church is called to teach the word of God. Specifically, we are called to teach the word of God to college students and raise them as disciples of Jesus. In addition, God is leading our church to become a multicultural and multigenerational congregation. Please pray for our campus evangelism and discipleship ministry, and that we may become a truly multicultural and multigenerational community. May God help us to follow His leading and carry out the mission He has given to us.

Through today's message, we have learned three important characteristics of the gospel ministry. First, the word of God; second, the spiritual warfare; and third, the leading of the Holy Spirit. May God bless each of us and allow us to participate actively in the gospel ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.