

SEPTEMBER 15, 1991

## PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS

We are always getting things in the mail that try to entice us to buy a book or some magazines or flowering bulbs. Many of these will have some sort of give-away associated with them. These promotions promise you the chance to win millions of dollars. Apparently, there are people who do win these prizes. How would you react if your name came up as the winner of \$5,000,000? You'd probably be really happy and would tell your children, your best friend, your neighbors, might even tell the folks in your Sunday School class or whatever civic club to which you belong. You would have good news and you would want to share the news -- probably not the money, but the news. There are other types of Good News other than winning a sweepstakes or the lottery. The message of how God provided for our salvation through Jesus Christ is the Best News there has ever been. In fact the word translated "gospel" literally means "good news" in the Greek.

The early church was given a commission by Jesus to take this Good News to all the world. What happened was that they took the message to Jerusalem. After the persecution started, they took the message to wherever they were forced to go, usually, sharing it only with other Jews. The sharing of the Gospel was on a fairly casual basis in most cases. I don't believe that this was exactly what Jesus had in mind when He gave the Great Commission to the church. I believe that He wanted the word to go out in a more deliberate, even planned, fashion. There is a word that people are starting to use to describe this type of planned, deliberate initiative and that word is "proactive." The early spread of the Gospel was mainly a "reactive" response to the circumstances in which they found themselves.

In the church at Antioch, things began to change. This group of Christians began to take some action. Under the leadership of Barnabas, they brought in some help to teach those that had become Christians. Barnabas traveled to Tarsus and brought Paul back with him. Not only did this group study the Word of God, but they also prayed and fasted. How did they know to pray and fast? Those actions were a result of studying the Scriptures. They wanted God's direction as to what they should be doing as a church so that they would be doing His will. You might ask why they didn't just look in the last chapter of Matthew's Gospel and they could see that it was clearly stated. The reason they didn't was because Matthew had not yet written the account and even if he had, it would not have been available to everyone. In response to their seeking to know the will of God, they were given an answer.

**ACTS 13:1-3** So many times we are uncertain as to what we should do in specific matters related to the will of God and how we will impact the Kingdom of God. All too often we do something in spite of our uncertainty without spending the time to seek the will of God. It is my opinion that when we have not had a clear word from God, that we should continue to "wait upon the Lord" rather than act out of our own limited wisdom. When God does reveal His will, then what we do will be in His power and we will know the meaning of "they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." We can learn a lot from the church at Antioch of Syria.

Barnabas and Paul left the church at Antioch in Syria on what is commonly called the First Missionary Journey of Paul. One of their stops on this journey was the city of Antioch of Pisidia. They visited the synagogue on the Sabbath and Paul was given an opportunity to speak to those who came to worship. He started with the story of the exodus from Egypt and covered the highlight of the Jewish history relating things that pointed to the coming of the Messiah and showed how Jesus of Nazareth was clearly God's Messiah.

**ACTS 13:26-29** As part of Paul's concluding remarks, he tied in the events that occurred in the life of Jesus, especially His trial and crucifixion with the prophecies of the Old Testament. There are so many points of fulfillment of specific prophecy associated with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that only a fool would think that it was just coincidence. Even though the Jews that were in Jerusalem had heard the reading of the Scriptures every Sabbath, they could not or would not connect the message in the Scripture with the message that was evident in the life of Jesus and they had rejected him in direct fulfillment of the very prophecies they had been reading. We need to guard ourselves from hearing the Word of God and not asking ourselves how it applies directly to our lives. Even though the Jews in Jerusalem had rejected Jesus they could not overrule what God was doing in bringing salvation to mankind.

**ACTS 13:30-37** Folks, God is going to win. He will be victorious. We have a choice of picking which side we want to be aligned with. God's word is going to come to pass. It will happen!

Paul continued to present convincing arguments regarding the resurrection of Jesus relative to the Old Testament prophecies. Using scripture references from the Psalms and Isaiah, Paul tied the passage to its fulfillment in Jesus. Some may have thought that David was writing about himself when he said in Psalm 16, "Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Paul pointed out that David died and was buried and his body decayed just like everyone else. But Jesus was resurrected with a new body that was not subject to deterioration.

**ACTS 13:38-39** The conclusion of Paul's arguments was a direct outcome of the alignment of the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus with the Old Testament. God's promise of salvation was through Jesus. Our justification before God which could not be achieved by the keeping of the Law of Moses was accomplished in our accepting, by faith, what God had provided for us in Christ.

The response of those who heard the message was that they wanted to hear more and they urged Paul and Barnabas to return the next Sabbath. When they met the next week the whole town turned out to hear the message. The word had gotten around and people wanted to know more about this Good News.

The availability of the salvation of God to ALL who will believe was certainly good news to the people. There was also a realization by the people that they had responsibility in this matter to make a choice. The logic of Someone paying the penalty for our sins was reasonable to those that heard the message. The sufficiency of Jesus to be the One to pay the price was validated in His resurrection from death. These events that Paul presented were directly related to promises that had been recorded thousands of years before and showed the grand design and significance of what had occurred. The natural outcome of all these things is to respond to God's provision for the forgiveness of our sins and to accept His promise of New Life in Christ.