

"AND IN SAMARIA"
Acts 8:1-25

Intro: I want you to notice that I have taken my subject for this message from Acts 1:8 -- words of the Lord Jesus in which He announced to His disciples the way in which the Gospel was to be preached, starting at Jerusalem, and going to the ends of the earth! (Quote Acts 1:8.)

Thus, what we observe in this passage is the carrying out of the sovereign plan of God! Be sure to notice this, especially when we see how it was all initiated.

There was a long history of bitter hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a mixed race. They had their own priesthood, and their own place of worship (which they taught had been established by Joshua on mount Gerezim). They even had their own copy of the Pentateuch which they claimed was the original copy from Moses. They were the chief competitors of the Jews. The woman of Samaria in our Lord's day summed it up nicely when she expressed her amazement that the Lord would ask her for a drink, adding, "for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). *Also, a carry-over from the days of the divided kingdom!*

When the disciples first began their ministry, they were told by the Lord, " . . . and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" (Matt. 10:5).

Luke is the Gospel writer who says the most about Samaritans:

- 1) James and John wanting to call down fire upon the Samaritan village that would not receive the Lord (cf. Luke 9:51-56). It is interesting that in our text for today John is one who came with Peter to pray that these early Samaritan believers would receive the Holy Spirit!
- 2) Luke 10:25-37 -- the story of the good Samaritan.
- 3) In Luke 17, when the Lord healed the ten lepers, the only one who returned to thank Him was a Samaritan. See Luke 17:11-19.

It is impossible for us to know how deep the hatred was between the Jews and the Samaritans, but we need to recognize that this was the case. One of the greatest obstacles to the preaching of the Gospel has been the personal hatred that people have had for each other -- and it can be seen historically in many ways with many different people. Sin has made us feel that we are better than others and that there is something meritorious about us that is not to be found in others. But remember John 1:11-13! Also, Eph. 2:8, 9.

But let us turn to our text in Acts 8 and notice, first of all,

I. THE STRANGE WAYS OF GOD (Acts 8:1-4).

Mine to comfort in distress,
Suff'ring in this wilderness;
Mine to show by living faith
Man can triumph over death.

-- Trinity Hymnal, #614, verse 3.

What was the situation in Jerusalem at this time, and how did that have a part in the spread of the Gospel to Samaria?

- A. It was a time, not just of persecution, but of "great persecution." And this persecution was not just against the Apostles, or the deacons, but "against the church which was at Jerusalem" (v. 1).

Consequently, these early Christians had to leave, and one of the places they fled to was "Samaria"! See v. 1.

This is what the Lord used to move the believers out!

Before we deal with that, let us notice a couple of other things:

- B. It was a time of testimony (Acts 8:2).

Notice what some "devout men" did for Stephen: they buried him!

This would have further endangered their lives, but they disregarded that

- 1) Because of their love for Stephen, and
- 2) For the sake of their testimony concerning the hope that believers have which carries them beyond the otherwise-hopelessness of death!

Calvin says with reference to burying the dead,

For the rite of burying doth appertain unto the hope of the resurrection, as it was ordained by God since the beginning of the world to this end. (XVIII, 326).

What a marvelous thing to have happen at this particular time!

And yet this did it with "great lamentation" (v. 2).

Banner of Truth publishes a little book called, Christians Grieve Too. It is good for the world to see this. But there is a difference. See 1 Thess. 4:13, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, . . ."

No fear of death would keep these early believers from doing that which was right before God concerning the body of Stephen, and even in this giving their testimony!

This was true also of the disciples of John the Baptist when he was beheaded. See Matt. 14:12.

- C. It was a time for preaching (Acts 8:4).

It is always the time for preaching. They did not go to hide, but they went "every where preaching the word" -- and, as we have seen, one of those places was Samaria!

How strange are the ways of the Lord, and yet how wonderful! The persecution did not extinguish the work of the Lord; it caused it, under the blessing of God, to multiply. And it caused the believers themselves to do a work which they had not done before and in a place that they obviously would never have chosen to go!

Study the Word to see what God does through our trials -- things which apparently have to be done that way. It is very clear that if you pray to escape trials, you are praying for God to withhold His blessings.

Cf. Isa. 55:8, 9 again.

But let me go on to my second point. Verses 5-13 go together, but I want to separate them to emphasize two separate truths. So let us look at verses 5-8 first to see

II. THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD (Acts 8:5-8).

What an illustration of Rom. 10:17 -- "So then faith cometh by hearing, . . ."

Notice the connection: Philip preached Christ by preaching the Word, which means the preaching of the Gospel, and the result was, as stated in v. 8, "there was great joy in that city." (Notice how Luke uses the word, "great," in this passage.)

Miracles were also performed, but that was a supportive evidence; the main thing was the preaching of the Word!

The lesson: If we want to see people believe, we must give them the Word.

But there is another thing about the ministry in Samarian that we must not miss. It is this: the evidence of

III. THE IRRESISTIBLE GRACE OF GOD (Acts 8:9-13).

Notice the obstacles that had to be overcome in seeing people saved. Not only were the preachers Jews and the hearers Samaritans, but for a "long time" these people of Samaria had been "bewitched" by Simon, the sorcerer!

This means that, in a special way, they had been blinded and held in bondage by Satan! This was a stronghold of Satan,

and it had been for a long time! But, just as we are going to learn in Acts 9 in connection with Saul of Tarsus, when the Lord gets ready to save people, they are going to be saved!

How wonderful to see this! Not only were many of the Samaritans saved, but even Simon! (There are many different ideas expressed about Simon, but I am like Campbell Morgan in this: I am willing to leave it where the Word of God does.

But we are not through with the lessons of this passage yet. Notice how the coming of Peter and John emphasizes

IV. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 8: 14-17).

We do not follow this procedure today with reference to the Holy Spirit. In Acts we are seeing the introduction of new aspects of the Holy Spirit's ministry. That is particularly clear in Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19. But, as the work of the Church became established, the Holy Spirit came to believers at the time that they were saved, and without any special prayer. That is the way it has happened to us.

But why the special emphasis here, and why should Peter and John come for this in particular? After all, couldn't Philip have prayed for them that they would receive the Holy Spirit? What is the answer?

It seems to be this: In Acts 8 we are seeing the first evidence that "the middle way of partition" (Eph. 2:14) is being torn down, and, by the Holy Spirit, we are seeing peace established between Jews and Samaritans as they are brought together in the body of Christ, the Church!

Therefore, it was necessary for Peter and John to come for this occasion because, as Paul also tells us, the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

Thus, we not only have the Gospel going to Samaria, but we have the Church being established there.

It is extremely important that we realize how important the ministry of the Spirit is. No one would be saved apart from Him, nor would there be a Church without Him.

Finally, it should be of interest to see that the first order of business in the church at Samaria gives us

V. AN EXAMPLE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE (Acts 8:18-24).

This should be a warning to us in our work. It is clear from the request of Simon that forces were **active** from the very beginning of this work to corrupt the church in Samaria.

Campbell Morgan makes this comment about Simon's request to be able to purchase the power which Peter and John had:

There was born that which in the history of the Church has been described as simony (italics mine), the buying and selling of position and office within the Church; the idea that ecclesiastical preferment can be procured in any denomination by money; the conception that the things of the Holy Spirit and of the Church can be purchased in current coin, of any state, or country (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 208).

I am not going to say, like many do, that Simon was not truly saved. This chapter seems to say that he was, and I am going to accept it that way. But I do believe that here you have a case where a babe in Christ was seeking, through ignorance, to introduce something very evil into the work of the Lord -- the substituting of financial influence as a basis for spiritual ministry, rather than spiritual character.

Have we not done this very thing today in many, many instances -- bringing men into the Lord's work because of what they have instead of what they are?

There has always been pressure to do this. What was Peter's response? Did he feel that they needed to go easy on Simon because of his influence and because alienating him might destroy all that had been done?

No -- Peter was not a religious politician. Peter believed that things had to be right in the Lord's sight, or the blessing would stop. And so he spoke to Simon in the strongest way!

How did Simon react? (This ought to help us, too.) He took the rebuke, and you have his words in verse 24.

We need to keep our eyes on the Lord in doing His work, and firmly stand against anything, from the first sign of it, that is in conflict with the ways of the Lord.

Concl: The last verse of our text tells us how Peter and John went back to Jerusalem, preaching "the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans."

What a marvelous passage, full of instruction and encouragement, especially when we see how these Jewish believers accepted their trials as from the Lord and then saw the Lord use those very trials as a means of opening a great door to preach in Samaria, and to see many Samaritans turn to the Lord.

HOW GOD DREW AN ETHIOPIAN TO CHRIST

Acts 8:26-40

Intro: We have said over and over again that the Lord is the One Who has raised up Trinity Bible Church. Furthermore, we believed that He has raised up this work to proclaim truths which the Church has been neglecting, and denying, in recent years. It seems that if truth is neglected, it is only a matter of time until that truth is denied. And, then, when neglected truth is proclaimed again, those who proclaim it are treated as though they were teaching heresy. That, to some extent, has been our experience. It amazes us to hear some of the rumors that are going around about this ministry. I admit that we have departed from much of the traditional teaching of the Church in this century (because much of that teaching has been contrary to the Word of God), but at the same time I deny in the strongest possible way that we have departed from Scripture. We are getting back to truths that the Church has been leaving alone in her attempt to get closer to the world. In neglecting the truth we in the Church have been declaring by our actions that there are some things in the Word of God which the Lord would have done better to leave out of Scripture.

I am speaking of the truths which have been known historically as the doctrines of grace. These are Biblical doctrines which firmly establish the sovereignty of God in salvation. They are truths which show that our preaching of a man-centered evangelism, that man determines his own salvation, that there is still some good in man to which we can appeal for a decision for Christ, are truths which are contrary to the Word of God. I am speaking about the truths of man's complete depravity because of sin, of God's eternal election of certain sinners to salvation, of the death of Christ as accomplishing the will of God in providing for those sinners, of God's irresistible grace in pursuing those sinners and drawing them to Himself, and of the evidences that we must see in the lives of professing Christians that they have truly been born of God!

Although these truths have been proclaimed by many of the best-known servants of the Lord in the past, and, I might add, by many today, is not the ultimate test. The real test is this: Are they the teaching of Scripture? Don't let somebody else decide for you. I am thankful to be able to talk about these truths today, and thankful that we can broadcast these over the air. We believe that we are only a small part of what God is doing in these days to bring His people back to what Peter calls, "the true grace of God" (1 Pet. 5:12). But, by that same grace, we want to be a vital part. These are the truths that glorify God, and these are the truths that bring peace to the hearts of those who believe the Gospel. These are the truth -- I am firmly convinced that they are -- truths that will bring the blessing of God, truths that have brought great spiritual awaken-

ings in the past, and truths which the Lord may use to do the same thing again in our day. I have been praying for you who hear my voice this morning like Paul prayed for the Ephesian church when he wrote to them almost 2,000 years ago --

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:"

and that

"The eyes of your understanding (lit., your heart) being enlightened; that ye may know . . ." (Eph. 1:17, 18a).

Before I turn to our text in Acts 8, let me show you that these doctrines of the grace of God are to be found in some of the passages that most Christians know so well and love to repeat.

Listen to these:

- 1) John 1:11-13.
- 2) Eph. 1:3, 4.
- 3) Rom. 8:28-31.
- 4) 2 Tim. 1:9, "Who hath saved us, and called us . . ."

These are only a sample of many others that we might refer to. Can you deny them? You might not have heard about them before, and you might not like them because they are so contrary to what you have been taught, but can you deny anything that is in the Word of God? Is there any doubt as to the plain meaning of these verses? Let me plead with you to listen with your heart. You can never be established in the Gospel of the grace of God, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, unless you are established in the truths that I am going to proclaim from Scripture right now.

Let us turn to Acts 8, to the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, or chamberlain, and I want you to see how this passage teaches the sovereign grace of God.

I could have entitled my message, HOW AN ETHIOPIAN FOUND CHRIST -- and he did! But that would cause you to look at just the human aspect of this story, which is definitely secondary. Instead I have given my message the subject, HOW GOD DREW AN ETHIOPIAN TO CHRIST. This is really what was going on, as you will see. This is the primary meaning of the passage.

Now -- as we begin, let me point out, first of all, that there are

I. OTHER DOCTRINES OF SCRIPTURE WHICH WILL HELP US IN OUR INTERPRETATION OF THIS PASSAGE.

No passage of Scripture is to be interpreted by itself. All Scripture is to be understood in the light of what all of the Word of God teaches. That explains why the more you understand about all of the Bible, the more you will be able

to understand each part.

So, on the basis of Scripture, what can I assume to be true of this Ethiopian eunuch both (1) because he was a man, and (2) because he was saved through the ministry of Philip?

Let me mention three things:

A. The doctrine of total depravity.

I cannot go into all of the aspects of this doctrine but let me explain that I do not mean, and Scripture does not mean, that this Ethiopian eunuch was as bad as he could be! But it means, among other things, two things which I want to point out.

1. First, that he would never, if left to himself, seek after God.

Cf. Rom. 3:11, which is a quotation from Psa. 14 and Psa. 53, so it is OT teaching as well as NT teaching. The eunuch's interest in God and in Scripture has to be explained in some other way than by what we could find in him.

2. Second, the doctrine of depravity teaches that the eunuch could not come to God on his own.

Cf. John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except . . .

Man cannot come to God because he is a slave to his sin, because he is held captive by Satan, because he is at enmity with God and is not so inclined! That is the reason that you do not see people standing in line before our churches, wanting to be saved. They will not come, as the Lord said in John 5:40, but it is equally true that they do not want to come, nor can they come!

However, we see another truth that is evident in this story. It is the truth of

B. The doctrine of God's irresistible grace.

In the light of what we know about the natural heart of this eunuch, we must recognize that it is apparent that God was dealing with him, that God was drawing him. And the eunuch was not being forced to do something that he did not want to do. The Lord had worked in his heart to such a degree that his interest in God and in Scripture had become the greatest priority in his life. He was searching for God because God was drawing him! When God

draws men, they come. Cf. John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; . . ."

But there is another truth which we can affirm about this eunuch because we know what the outcome was. It is

C. The doctrine of election.

In this story we see God doing a work which He had planned to do before the foundation of the work -- and that was to save this particular Ethiopian eunuch (and I should add) in this particular place at this particular time and under these particular circumstances! The salvation of men is not in the hands of men; it is in the hands of God.

Now, I should explain, we do not know who the elect are until after they are saved, and that is the reason that we preach the Gospel to every creature! But God knows who they are, and where they are! Speaking of His chosen ones in John 10:27 ff., our Lord said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and . . ."

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of the Dallas Theological Seminary (of which I happen to be a graduate) wrote in his *Theology*, Vol. VII, p. 136, with regard to the grace of God and to the doctrine of election, "that none will ever come (i.e., come to God for salvation) apart from this divine call, and that call is extended only to His elect." (Italics, mine.)

So, what you have in this passage is God calling a helpless, hopeless sinner to Himself, and that sinner is coming, and is eternally saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

I want you to recognize these basic truths as they are illustrated in this passage, and we cannot really understand what was going on unless we understand these great doctrines of Scripture.

But now I want you to note another aspect of this story which is a part of the sovereignty of God in salvation. It is

II. THE EVIDENCE OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

Providence speaks of the way in which God works through circumstances and in the hearts of men so that His own purposes are fully accomplished.

We see the providence of God in this story in so many ways that it should really be impossible for us to miss it!

Note:

- A. The fact that the eunuch had been to Jerusalem "to worship" (v. 27).

This is generally taken to mean that he had become a proselyte of the Jewish religion.

Often men are like Samuel was when the Lord begins to call them, and they begin to look in other directions before the Lord finally gets the truth across to their hearts. Before people are saved they often get interested in religion, or in church, or in morality, before they turn to Christ!

- B. The fact that he was reading from the prophecy of Isaiah, and even the passage that he was reading.

See vv. 28, 32, 33.

The implication from the text is that he was reading aloud, and that he was completely absorbed in what he was reading.

"Faith cometh by hearing, . . ." (Rom. 10:17), so that inevitably when the Lord is preparing to save anyone, that person in some way is directed to the Word of God.

- C. A most amazing thing -- the fact that right at this particular time Philip was there in the desert and was directed by the Spirit of God to go and speak to the eunuch, and not to let him get away!

Note that prior to this "an angel of the Lord" had told Philip to leave Samaria and to go, without any explanation as to why, to this desert place.

Surely anyone can see the providence of God in these things.

But there is another evidence that God was at work:

- D. The fact that the eunuch somehow realized that Philip could help him, and that he was willing to listen to Philip. Cf. vv. 30, 31.

Next we see the providence of God in

- E. The question that the eunuch asked. Cf. v. 34.

Sometimes people's interest in Scripture has to do with things that are not of the greatest importance, but this

eunuch could not have asked a more important question! Perhaps the Jews in Jerusalem had said that Isaiah was speaking of Israel (because this has been a common Jewish interpretation), but, if so, the Lord would not let this man be satisfied with that interpretation!

The Lord was also in Philip's answer. How often we are guilty of talking to unsaved people about things that are not to-the-point. What did Philip do?

F. The providence of God in the message of Stephen (v. 35).

"Preached" here means that he preached the Gospel. He "preached unto him Jesus."

It may have been the same "angel of the Lord" who appeared to Philip who had also appeared to Joseph, the husband of Mary, and who told him, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21)! Obviously the eunuch was one of those people.

We are not given the details of his message, but undoubtedly it was very similar to the messages of Peter that we have already considered in this book of Acts.

III. THE RESULT.

The result was that the eunuch was saved, but it is described as having three parts:

A. He believed.

He believed Philip's explanation of Scripture. The Holy Spirit used the Word to give the eunuch saving faith (because it comes through the Word, and is itself a gift of God -- not a work of man), and he received Christ as his Saviour! Cf. again John 1:12, 13.

B. He was baptized -- by immersion (vv. 36-38). (V. 37 does not have the strongest manuscript authority, but it does have some, and must represent some of what Philip said to the eunuch.)

C. "He went on his way rejoicing"! (v. 39).

And this is stated in such a way to indicate that he kept on rejoicing. This speaks of the perseverance of the eunuch in the faith. Philip might be caught away, but he had Christ -- and salvation depends upon Christ!

Joy is one of the main evidences of salvation. After

speaking of salvation and its results in Rom. 5, Paul concluded by saying,

And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation (v. 11).

Concl: In this story the Lord enables us to see what happens every time a person is saved -- and what is involved in our salvation. Oh, God doesn't always work like this. In fact, I don't know of another instance like this one in Acts 8. But the principles of grace are always there.

And this story of Philip gives the tag of a lie to the idea that seems to be gaining support among some evangelicals, that the Lord will save men if they only live up to the light that they have. Why, then, did an angel send Philip (at the bidding of God) down to the desert to speak to one man about "Jesus"? There can be only one answer and that is that no one can be saved except through Christ!

Perhaps the Lord brought you hear this morning as a part of His providential dealing in your life. If so, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

What an encouragement this ought to be to all of us who know the Lord and who are here in this world to glorify God by bearing witness to the Gospel of Christ! We are not trying to do something for God; HE IS ACCOMPLISHING HIS ETERNAL WILL THROUGH US. Therefore, how important it is for us to obey Him because He knows where His sheep are, and who they are, and He will use us to reach them!

A TROPHY OF GOD'S GRACE Acts 9:1-22

Intro: It is interesting to contrast the cases of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 with that of Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9. One was a Gentile; the other was a Jew. One was seeking for God; the other felt that he knew God. One was deeply interested in the Scriptures; the other seems to have been more interested in letters from the high priest. The Lord sent Philip to one of them; with the other, He intervened Himself. We hear no more in Scripture about the first one; the influence of the second one is still being calculated. But it took the same grace of God to save the one that it did to save the other. Christ obviously died for both of them, and so they both had the same Saviour. They were headed in opposite directions even geographically when they were saved -- the eunuch, going south; Saul of Tarsus, going north. Both had to be trophies of the grace of God, as is every saint, but somehow it seems especially important to call Saul A TROPHY OF GOD'S GRACE because of the kind of a man he was, because of what he had devoted his life to do, and because of the sudden, amazing transformation that took place in his life, and because of the unusual way in which God saw fit to use him!

Listen to his testimony and to his praise in one of his last Epistles, written many years after the incident that we are going to consider this morning: 1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17.

The account which we will consider this morning in Acts 9 is repeated by Paul as a testimony in Acts 22, and again in Acts 26.

In Acts 9, it is interesting to notice the development of the record. Although Paul has other people with him at the beginning of the account, and at the end, yet we see him mainly by himself in both places -- at the beginning, as a persecutor; at the end, as a preacher. Geographically these verses tell us of how he went to Damascus, of how he arrived, of the change that took place in him there, and of his ministry in that city. We also see how the main account of the story seems also to be limited to two persons:

- 1) Saul and the Lord.
- 2) The Lord and Ananias.
- 3) Ananias and Saul.

The first meeting took place on the road to Damascus; the second two, in the city of Damascus itself.

Let us notice first

I. SAUL THE PERSECUTOR (Acts 9:1, 2).

What descriptive words Luke uses at the beginning of this

chapter -- and yet they are terrible words. They speak of a man whose heart was so full of hatred that he was more like a wild animal, than a man. Blasphemy was on his lips; murder was in his heart. He would not even spare women, as soldiers used to do in times of war. It is a dreadful picture.

Damascus has been referred to as possibly the oldest city in the world. In Scripture we read of it as early as Gen. 14: 15, and it must have been the case that, among the many Jews who lived there, quite a number had been saved and were followers of Jesus Christ. Thus, Saul was after them, not so much because he hated them, but because he hated Christ, and they loved Christ. It was a most serious time for the believers in Damascus!

But what happened? Our second section tells us about

II. SAUL AND JESUS. Cf. Acts 9:3-6.

Whereas an angel of the Lord had spoken to Philip in Acts 8, the Lord Himself spoke directly to Saul here in Acts 9.

The Lord used:

- 1) Spectacular circumstances, to show His great power.
- 2) His own voice, so that there could be no question as to Who was speaking.
- 3) Words designed to show what Saul was actually doing.
- 4) All of these events were designed to humble this proud Jew so that he would do whatever the Lord wanted him to do.

Note:

- 1) That the Lord Jesus knew who Saul was.
- 2) Note the tenderness of the Lord toward His people.
- 3) From the latter part of verse 5 (although not in some MSS) we can see that the Lord had been working in his life, by "pricks," -- now with sterner measures.

If you want the best example in Scripture of THE IRRESISTIBLE GRACE OF GOD, here it is! Think of this in connection with what Paul wrote later in Phil. 2:10, 11, "That at the name of Jesus . . ."

Let this passage be a warning to those who would ignore Jesus and an encouragement to every believer!

Look at the change that took place.

III. THE PATHETIC ENTOURAGE (as they went on into Damascus). Cf. Acts 9:7-9.

No one really knew what the Lord was doing, but it is now

apparent that Saul and his companions were dealing with Someone greater than they were, and Someone greater than the Christians at Damascus.

But note the next step.

— IV. THE LORD AND ANANIAS (Acts 9:10-16).

What an illustration this is of the way in which the Lord uses His people in places where He could have done the work Himself! There is not a thing here which the Lord told Ananias to tell Saul that the Lord could not have told Saul while Saul was prostrate on the highway to Damascus!

Why does the Lord work this way -- as He did with the angel and Philip in the last chapter?

We do not know all of the reasons, but obviously, here, one reason is that he wanted Ananias to know what was happening to the great enemy of the Church.

Another reason would be that the Lord was continuing to work in the heart of Ananias!

— And still another reason would be the further humbling of Saul! After all, who was Ananias in comparison with Saul? This is similar to what Elisha did in the case of Naaman, the Syrian (remembering that Damascus is in Syria). The Lord never caters to the pride of men, to their sense of self-esteem.

Ananias objected.

But again we see the overruling hand of the Lord in accomplishing His own will. Note: "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way . . . And Ananias went his way . . ." (Acts 9: 15a, 17a).

What was Ananias to tell Saul? Two things -- but the second thing had two parts to it:

- 1) Who he (Saul) was: "he is a chosen vessel unto me."
- 2) What he was to do:
 - a) "To bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

He was to be a preacher of the Gospel. What would Ananias think about Saul going to the despised Gentiles? We do not know. But this probably was for Ananias to learn something about God's plan.

But there was a second thing that Paul was going to do:

- b) To suffer: "I (the Lord Jesus) will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

(All of this is in vv. 15, 16.)

Here Paul was to become familiar with a word which was to be very important in his own ministry to others: the word, "vessel." The Lord did not say, Apostle. Nor did He say, a mighty evangelist. Nor did He say, one who would write more books of Scripture than any other man! Nor did He say, the one to whom I will reveal the truth concerning my Church. The Lord did not say many other things that He might have said. Instead He said, "For he is a chosen vessel unto me."

Note the word, "vessel" -- "a chosen vessel unto me."

Is it not clear from this passage that the foundation of this relationship between Saul and Jesus was not Saul's choice, but the Lord's? And Saul was to become the Lord's "vessel."

What is a "vessel"? It is an instrument like a pan, or tongs, or a shovel -- like the priests would use in their service in the temple -- SOMETHING WHICH WAS OF NO VALUE WHATSOEVER UNLESS IT WAS IN SOMEBODY ELSE'S HAND!

Cf. about vessels in 2 Tim. 2:20, 21; Rom. 9:15-24.

What a lesson there is for us in these words of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Lord does not choose us, nor use us, because of anything great in us. He makes us His vessels, His instruments, that all of the glory may be His!

He uses us as He pleases, but we must be ready to suffer also if we "bear his name," that is, if we preach His Gospel.

But note the next very precious scene:

V. ANANIAS AND SAUL (Acts 9:17-19).

Saul had started out to lay murderous, hateful hands on the Christians in Damascus; when he arrived, one of the Christians placed loving, tender, helpful hands on him! See v. 17.

And then Ananias called him, "Brother Saul." They were no longer enemies, but brothers in the family of God!

And then Ananias told him what was going to happen next -- that he would receive his sight, that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, etc.

Ananias also taught him. And then Paul was baptized. Could anything have been more wonderful than all of this? Let us remember the words of the Lord Jesus in John 6:44, 37 -- "No man can come . . . All that the Father giveth me shall

come to me . . ."

And note what Paul wrote about this at the very end of his life in 2 Tim. 1:8-12.

You see, salvation is a work of God, carried out in time, but according to the plan of God laid out in all of its details before the foundation of the world. And an angry Jew, filled with hatred, was no match for the Lord Jesus when the time came that the Lord had planned to save him!

But there is one other thing before we close.

VI. SAUL, THE PREACHER (Acts 9:20-22).

A pattern is set here from which the Apostle Paul was never to depart. Cf. Acts 17:1-3.

But notice: He did not preach his experience on the road to Damascus.

He did not preach Ananias.

He did not preach himself.

"And straightway he preached Christ . . . THAT HE IS THE SON OF GOD."

Cf. Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 2:2, "For I determined not to know . . ."

Concl: Isn't this a most encouraging story? God's elect are often the most unlikely candidates for salvation and for heaven. This ought to strengthen those of us who know the Lord in our witness to others about the Gospel -- but let us remember that we, too, are only the Lord's vessels!

Are you here this morning without Christ? Have you been feeling the pricks of the Lord? Listen to what Calvin says about the statement, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

This is a proverbial sentence, taken from oxen and horses, which, when they are pricked with goads, do themselves no good by kicking, save only that they double the evil by causing the prick to go farther into their skins (XVIII, 371).

If the Lord has been pricking you, He probably intends to save you. And, if He intends to save you, you will not be able to get away! Therefore, come to Him now. The pricks will only get more severe. You cannot come on your own, but you cannot always stay away when He calls you to Himself. Come now. Put your trust in Christ. He alone can save you from your sins.

TWO MEN OF GOD
Acts 9:23-43

Intro: Up to this point in the book of Acts we have seen two mighty works of God:

- 1) The birth of the Church in Jerusalem, through the preaching of the Apostles, but especially through Peter's ministry, and
- 2) The preaching of the Gospel to the Samaritans, by Philip, and the establishing of the Church there.

The record of the work in Jerusalem covers the first 7 chapters; the record of the work in Samaria, in the first part of chapter 8.

An additional account of the salvation of an Ethiopian eunuch is given in the latter part of chapter 8 -- anticipating the third step in the plan of God: the door of salvation opening to the Gentiles, and the establishing of the Church among them.

Peter was to be the man who would go to the Gentiles first, but this ministry was to be placed primarily in the hands of the Apostle Paul. Consequently we have the story of how he was saved in the first part of chapter 9. He had been the notorious Saul of Tarsus, probably the worst enemy of the Gospel and of the Church during the first century.

But he was saved. And so in the latter part of chapter 9, our text for this service, we take a special look at these TWO MEN OF GOD, Paul first, and then Peter, and we see them in connection with that which is mentioned in Acts 9:31.

Note carefully what this verse tells us -- four things:

- 1) First, a great work of God was to be seen throughout the length and breadth of Israel: in "all Judea" to the south; in "Galilee" up north; and in "Samaria" in between them!
- 2) Secondly we are told, "Then had the churches rest" For a time the persecution stopped -- and we will see why as we consider the whole passage.
- 3) Thirdly, this was a time when "the churches . . . were edified." So it was a time for great spiritual growth among the people.
- 4) Finally, "the churches" also "were multiplied"! So many were saved and added to the churches at this time.

It certainly had to be one of the greatest of all times in the history of the early Church.

But we need to ask ourselves, Why did the churches have rest? How were they edified? And, How did this great increase of the churches come about?

The answer to those questions in general is this: It was because of what God did through two men: Paul, and Peter.

Since Luke begins with Paul (who was still known by his original name, Saul), let us begin with him.

I. THE FIRST MAN OF GOD: SAUL (Acts 9:23-31).

We see him in three places:

- 1) In Damascus (vv. 23-25).
- 2) In Jerusalem (vv. 26-29).
- 3) Sent to Tarsus (v. 30).

And then these three accounts are followed by the comment which Luke makes, and which I have already referred to, in v. 31. (Read.)

So you can see that what the Lord was doing with Saul at this time was one factor that contributed to the rest that the churches had. In fact, we can say that there were two things about Saul that contributed to that rest:

- 1) The first was that he had been saved.
- 2) The second was that he was no longer in the land. This latter point was a factor because, after Saul was saved, he was the special target, first of the Jews in Damascus, and then of the Hellenists in Jerusalem. When Saul went to Tarsus, the persecution stopped.

For a proper background for this passage we need two other passages of Scripture from the writings of Paul:

- 1) Gal. 1:11-24.
- 2) 2 Cor. 11:32, 33.

The first of these tells us that the opposition toward Paul described in vv. 23-25 probably took place three years after Paul was saved. In the meantime he had gone down to Arabia, and then back to Damascus, before being forced out -- and then he went to Jerusalem to see Peter.

The second passage (2 Cor. 11:32, 33) tells us that the governor of Damascus, Aretas, had joined the Jews in Damascus in their attempt to apprehend Saul. Paul wrote about it later indicating that it was a most serious time. It really was due only to the providence of God that he escaped!

So these passages help us to understand our text in Acts 9.

But let me ask and answer two questions:

- 1) Why, in the providence of God, did Saul experience such opposition?
- 2) What did this mean to Saul as God was obviously preparing him for the tremendous ministry he was to have among the Gentiles? At this point the Jews wanted to kill him, and the believers were afraid of him. So he was not really wanted by anybody!

In answer to the first question . . .

At least five reasons can be given for the hatred of the Jews toward Saul:

- 1) Because Saul had deserted them.
- 2) Because of his effectiveness.
- 3) Because they could not refute him.
- 4) Because their consciences obviously had to be troubled by the way Paul was exposing them to the truth. This had been a big factor, you will remember, in the reason for the stoning of Stephen.
- 5) Because Saul's work was a threat to their work.

God was obviously at work, and the Jews did not like any part of it. And it is only by the providence of God that he survived.

But what about the second question? What was the Lord doing in all of this -- not only the opposition by the Jews, but Saul's rejection by the Church in Jerusalem, and even by the Apostles?

It had to be a discouraging time for Saul.

There are several answers:

- 1) Saul, the Church, his enemies -- all had an opportunity to see that Saul had really been saved. You would have thought that this would have turned him back to his former friends and his former work! But it didn't! Instead we see:
 - a) The perseverance of this saint.
 - b) The strong desire of Saul to be in with the people of God.
 Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17 and 1 John 3:14.
- 2) A second reason has to do with what the Lord was doing in Saul's heart -- teaching him humility, and patience. Both of these are absolutely necessary for every child of God, but especially for one who would be used like Saul was to be used.

Note, also, that this would serve to strengthen Saul's faith -- to see how the Lord had Barnabas there at the right time to do the right thing. See v. 27. Whether or not Barnabas had known Saul before, we do not know, but he is the one the Lord used to gain acceptance for Saul with the Apostles.

So, at this point Saul had to be sent away -- and "then the churches had rest."

We really do not hear much about Saul until we get to Acts 13 except for the brief references to him in Acts 11:25-30.

But now let us turn our attention to

II. THE SECOND MAN OF GOD: PETER (Acts 9:32-43).

Tying this latter part of the text in with v. 31 we see why "the churches . . . were edified; and . . . were multiplied."

What was Peter doing at this time?

V. 32a gives us our answer: He was going throughout "all quarters," which seems to mean throughout all Judea,

and Galilee,

and Samaria.

He was visiting the churches, teaching them, and, in the course of his work, performed two outstanding miracles:

- 1) The first one on a man who was hopelessly palsied, and who had not been able to get up for 8 years! This was in Lydda -- about half way between Jerusalem and Joppa, the scene of the second miracle (which was on the coast).
- 2) The second was on a lady who had died: Tabitha (her name in Aramaic), a believer, called Dorcas in Greek.

What we are mainly interested in ~~are~~ the results of these miracles as far as the Lord's work was concerned. This, too, was the Lord's doing, because we can see this in the passive verbs, "were edified . . . were multiplied."

For the results see v. 35, and then v. 42. This has to do with the multiplication of the saints! Peter obviously could not have done this on his own. God did it through Peter, and it was God who produced the results in the hearts of the people who saw the results, or heard about them!

But how does this help us? We do not see miracles like this today. How can a passage like this help us? We want to see blessing. We want to see the Church edified and multiplied. Does this passage show us how?

Yes, it does! Let me point out the main things for us to notice in particular:

- 1) First, it is obvious that the blessing was brought by God, not by Peter, and not by Saul. We need to look to Him, and to expect the blessing from him. That is the reason that prayer is so extremely important as we seek the blessing of God.
See v. 40. Cf. Matt. 6:6.
- 2) Secondly, will you notice the manner in which Peter worked? There was nothing ostentatious about him. He made clear to Aeneas that "Jesus Christ" was healing him! And when he went down to Joppa to the house of Dorcas, he did not make a big display of her restoration to life, but he put everybody out, and then raised her in secrecy after he had prayed, kneeling!

What a lot of blessing we lose because we want to share in the glory! Cf. Isa. 42:8.

- 3) Third, will you note that Peter went to the people --

he did not wait for them to come to him.

If we are going to see the Lord's blessing, we must go!
But there are two more points:

- 4) The way the people were living: "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit"!

This meant that they were especially careful about pleasing the Lord. His will had to be done; His Word had to be obeyed.

And our Lord's words in John 14, 15, and 16 make it clear that the comforting work of the Holy Spirit is done primarily through the Word of God. The Word was uppermost in their lives.

Illus: Isn't it tragic that today, if you seek to teach the Word of God, that even many of the Lord's people think that you belong in a Bible school, or in a seminary, but not in a church! The Church of the 20th century has, for the most part, ceased to be the place where you can always hear the Word of God. That is where we are far inferior to the early Church.

And all of this has to mean that

- 5) Peter was himself a teacher of the Word of God -- as his messages earlier in Acts clearly show.

Concl: No one can dictate to God as to when or where He will work. But the Word of God and the history of the Church show that these conditions which we can see in this passage have usually accompanied and even preceded the blessing of God . . .

- the ministry of the Word,
- prayer,
- obedience to the Lord and to His Word,
- humility coupled with a desire to see the Lord alone glorified,
- and going to the people of God, teaching them, praying with them and for them, and seeing the Lord open opportunities to deal with lost sinners, as the Lord opened doors for Peter.

And, as chapter 9 closes and chapter 10 begins, we see how Peter was waiting on the Lord to know what the next step for him would be in the work that the Lord was doing through him.

These are certainly the conditions of blessing. Let us persevere in doing the will of God for the glory of God, and perhaps the Lord will enable us to see the first spiritual awakening that has ever been seen in the Northwest! May God grant that it will be so!

A PROVIDENTIAL PRAYER

Acts 10:1-23

Intro: From the standpoint of historical importance, Acts, chapter 10, would have to given a place of importance that would be rivaled by few chapters in all of Scripture. After having gone through ~~36~~⁴³ books of the Bible, and after having covered the whole span of human history from creation to those days in the early history of the Church, God officially opened the door for the preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles!

Campbell Morgan, in his commentary on Acts, has this to say:

The admission of this man Cornelius rocked the Church to its very centre, threatening to divide it in twain. It was the beginning of a long-continued controversy, in the process of which the man now in Tarsus had to fight over and over again for the right of his apostleship, and for the larger ministry which he exercised (p. 264).

One of these times of controversy, referred to by Dr. Morgan, is recorded for us in Acts 15 when a Council convened in Jerusalem to decide whether or not Gentile converts should be circumcised. At that time Peter had this to say about what happened here in Acts 10. Listen to his words in Acts 15: 7,

. . . Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

A few verses later we find the words of James (in verses 14, 15), as follows:

Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; . . .

Now let us be clear: Gentiles had been saved before, probably thousands of them. We do not really have any way of estimating how many. BUT NEVER BEFORE HAD THE MINISTRY OF THE LORD'S SERVANTS BEEN DIRECTED TO THE GENTILES AS IT WAS TO BE FROM THIS TIME ON! In fact, Saul of Tarsus, whose remarkable salvation we learned about in Acts 9, was appointed by God, as well as by his brethren, to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. (Read Gal. 2:7-9.)

But here in Acts 10 we learn that it was Peter who was first directed by the Lord to go to the Gentiles!

The opening of this door has to do with what God was doing in the life of a Roman soldier, a centurion (which means that he commanded 100 men), who was stationed in Caesarea for the purpose of maintaining order among the Jews -- and who headed up a band of men who were all from Italy (and probably all from Rome)!

We do not have time to take up the whole story, but I do want to

cover, the Lord willing, the first 23 verses. In this passage we have three events:

- 1) Cornelius and his vision (vv. 1-8).
- 2) Peter and his vision (vv. 9-18).
- 3) The mission of Cornelius' three men (who went to find Peter) (vv. 19-23).

Cornelius was given his vision in Caesarea where he was stationed; Peter at this time was only about 30 miles south in the town of Joppa. Both of these places were in Israel, and both were on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Before we look into these three sections, let us notice two aspects of this chapter:

- 1) Peter and James in Acts 15 make it clear that this was something that GOD was doing. (See the verses quoted on the preceding page of these notes.)
- 2) The "angel of God" in the vision given to Cornelius made it clear that this was something which Cornelius wanted. It was in answer to his prayers. (Read Acts 10:3, 4.)

Add to this, from the Godward side, the fact that James said in Acts 15:15 that this is what the OT prophets had predicted would happen.

Thus, this prayer, or these prayers, of Cornelius deserve some explaining in view of two things:

- 1) At this time Cornelius was not saved. To prove this, read Peter's report in Acts 11, verses 13, 14. So you have GOD answering the prayer of an unregenerate man!

But notice this also:

- 2) How will we reconcile this with the statements in John 6:44 and Rom. 3:11? They tell us that "no man can come to me . ." and "there is none that seeketh after God." Was Cornelius an exception to all of this? NO! We see this Gentile, this Roman soldier, who had been experiencing the work of God in his heart for a long time, as he is being drawn by the Lord so that he would not only be saved, but that he would provide the circumstances for this historic event when the Gospel was to go to the Gentiles!

THAT IS WHY WE CAN CALL CORNELIUS' PRAYING, A PROVIDENTIAL PRAYER. God had moved upon the heart of Cornelius, an unregenerate man, to pray for the very thing that He, God, intended to do -- and this intention was from eternity past, both with respect to the salvation of Cornelius, and with respect to all other Gentiles that have been saved from that day until this!

But let us look at some of the details.

We have a passage before us that has a message for everyone.

- 1) The first 8 verses contain an important message for every person who is not saved.
- 2) The next 10 verses contain an important message for every

true believer in Christ.

- 3) And then the last 5 verses show how God prevailed in the life of Peter for the accomplishment of His own gracious purposes.

I. CORNELIUS AND HIS VISION (Acts 10:1-8).

Here I want to talk to those of you who do not know the Lord as your Saviour. I have already established from Acts 11:14 that Cornelius at this time was not saved -- that he was not, as we would say today, a true Christian.

He was not saved even though:

- 1) He was a man of very excellent character.
- 2) He had become very religious. He was a man of good works.
- 3) He exercised a good influence over others.

Let us look at his character first of all. The men whom he sent to Peter said to Peter that Cornelius was "a just man" (v. 22). This meant that in their eyes Cornelius always did the right thing. He was faithful in his work. He treated people right. He was not immoral. He always did what he was supposed to do.

That is the kind of a statement that you cannot make about many people -- especially about a soldier who is serving in a foreign country.

Secondly, look at the religious things that are said about him. He had to be a Jewish proselyte.

- 1) He was devout.
- 2) He feared God.
- 3) He "gave much alms" to the people, probably meaning, to the Jewish people.
- 4) He prayed always -- which seems to mean at the times prescribed by the Jews. That is probably what he was doing when he had his vision. See "the ninth hour" which is mentioned in v. 3.

All of this is mentioned in vv. 2 and 22.

Thirdly, notice his influence:

- 1) He had brought his family along with him in his religious life. V. 2 says that he "feared God with all his house." This must include not only his wife and children, but also the servants mentioned in v. 7.
- 2) He also influenced his men. One who went to get Peter was a devout soldier" (v. 7) -- the same word which is used to describe Cornelius in v. 2.

NOW -- except for the fact that this all tells us that Cornelius was an outstanding person, what does it teach us about salvation in view of the vision that he had?

It teaches us at least four important things about salvation -- and I trust that you are listening to what I am about to say:

- 1) It teaches us that no one can have his sins forgiven, no one can go to heaven, in short, no one can be saved, because he is a good person! If that had been the case, Cornelius would never have been instructed to send for Peter
- 2) It also teaches us that no one can be forgiven, no one can go to heaven, no one can be saved, because of all of the religious things that he does -- praying, giving alms, even fearing God. If a person could, then Cornelius would have been saved.
- 3) It teaches us, furthermore, that no one can be forgiven or go to heaven just because he exercises a good influence on others.

All of these are most commendable, but these are not the way of salvation. Cf. Tit. 3:5; Eph. 2:8, 9.

But there is another very important point here. It is this:

- 4) This passage teaches us that no one can be saved without Christ! Cornelius certainly seems to have been a man who was living up to the light that he had -- but this was not enough. He needed Christ! Christ is the only Saviour. Cf. Peter's word in Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation . . ." Also our Lord's words in John 14:6!

What is your hope for salvation -- in your character, in your religious activities or feelings, in your influence upon others? These will never get you to heaven. You need to trust in Christ. Cf. Acts 16:31. If you trust in anything else, you are not only misled, but you are misleading everyone else you are trying to influence in a religious way.

How wonderful it would be if someone would be saved today! If you would like to speak to any of us after the service, please let us know.

But now let me say just a word to those of you who are believers in Christ. Peter's experience has a tremendous message for us.

II. PETER AND HIS VISION (Acts 10:9-18).

By this vision the Lord was preparing Peter for an enlarged ministry through a greater understanding of the doctrines of grace. Peter was about to learn something about salvation that he had not known before -- that there are going to be many, many Gentiles in heaven, and that Gentiles are to be included in the Church, too!

But look at his initial reaction: "Not so, Lord"!

We might even say that Peter's full name was Simon "Not So" Peter. Let me prove this.

- 1) When the Lord first began to teach His disciples about His death, Peter objected. Cf. Matt. 16:21-23.
- 2) When the Lord began to wash the disciples feet, Peter objected again. Cf. John 13:6-9.
- 3) When the Lord told His disciples that they would all be offended because of Him, Peter objected. Cf. Matt. 26:31-35.

Great issues were involved in each case, and each time Peter said in so many words, "Not so, Lord"!

Are you that way when the Lord seeks to show you something from His Word that you have not known, have not believed, before? All of us are like Peter to some extent even though Paul tells us that none of us knows anything the way we ought to know it. Cf. 1 Cor. 8:2.

People are like this about election, about the grace of God, even about depravity.

I received a letter just this week from a Seminary friend of mine who is in Hongkong. I had written to him to tell him about our experiences recently here which led to the establishing of Trinity Bible Church, and in his letter he reminded me of an illustration that Dr. Chafer gave us one time in class at the Seminary.

A Presbyterian woman was asked if she believed in total depravity. She shrugged her shoulders and said, "Well, I expect it's as good as any other doctrine, if you can just live up to it!"

Are you closing your heart to any truth in the Word of God? What a tragic thing this is! And how serious it is! Please take a lesson from Peter as we look at

III. THE SEQUEL TO THE TWO VISIONS: THE MISSION OF CORNELIUS' THREE MEN (Acts 10:19-23).

Stated simply it is this: Cornelius did what the Lord wanted him to do, and so did Peter.

The Lord "worketh in" US TOO, "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). He is not going to let us stand in His way. Peter did what he had never done before: he entertained Gentiles where he was, and then went to the house of Cornelius to preach the Gospel to people he had previously despised!

Concl: Thus, whether you know the Lord, or do not know Him, there is a message for you in this passage. May the Lord open your heart to Himself and to His Word. There is great blessing in knowing the will of God -- and then doing it!

ONE OF GOD'S GREAT DAYS
Acts 10:24-48

Intro: Psalm 118:22 is an Old Testament verse which is quoted at least 4 times in the New Testament. This is the verse, The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

"The stone" is Christ. "The builders" are the leaders of Israel. Their refusal of Christ was demonstrated at the Cross. And the fact that Christ has "become the head stone of the corner" is an indication of His glorious triumph and His key place in the building of God!

This verse is quoted in Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10, 11; Luke 20:17; 1 Peter 2:7.

Immediately after this verse in Psalm 118 we have two other verses which I would like to read:

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

" . . . the day which the Lord hath made . . ." Note that expression!

The word day in Scripture is used in various ways -- of 24 hours, of a period of time, of some special event, etc. When I speak of Acts 10 as giving us ONE OF GOD'S GREAT DAYS, I am speaking of an outstanding event in the unfolding of God's eternal purpose, a "day which the Lord hath made."

We wish each other "a good day" -- and I enjoy hearing that greeting. But we also have to face the fact that Proverbs 27:1 is still true,

Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

Men have no control over their days, the events of their lives; GOD MAKES HIS -- and He makes ours, too! Ephesians 1:11 teaches us that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." So, when we speak of GOD'S GREAT DAYS, we are not speaking of things that just happened, but we are speaking of things which God has done, things which are according to His plan and His eternal purpose.

Let me mention some of GOD'S GREAT DAYS.

In the sovereign purpose of God we must recognize these days "which the Lord hath made":

- 1) Creation.
- 2) The call of Abraham.
- 3) The Passover.
- 4) The giving of the Law.
- 5) The anointing of David.

- 6) Days having to do with Christ Himself:
 - a) His birth.
 - b) His baptism, marking the beginning of His public ministry, His works.
 - c) His death.
 - d) His resurrection.
 - e) His ascension.
- 7) Pentecost.
- 8) The salvation of Saul of Tarsus.
- 9) Acts 10 -- the salvation of Cornelius and other Gentiles!

There are other days that we might mention, both before and after, but this will give us some of the more important days and get us thinking about GOD'S GREAT DAYS.

Let me point out some of the ways in which this was ONE OF GOD'S GREAT DAYS!

I. IT WAS A GREAT DAY FOR PETER.

Read Acts 10:24-26, first of all.

- A. It was a day when he had to face the fact that all things had to be done for the glory of God.

He had to stop Cornelius from worshipping him. He had to get him up on his feet, off of his knees. He had to make Cornelius realize that he was only a man! Peter was faced with the truth that Paul mentioned in Romans 12:3, For Isay, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

There was a day when Peter would have enjoyed this, but not any more!

It is A GREAT DAY when we realize our depravity, and that, whatever we do, we are to do for the glory of God! The continual cry of our heart should be the words of Psalm 115:1,

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.

But it was a good day for Peter in another sense.

- B. It was a day when God opened his heart even more to the depth of the meaning of the word, grace.

He was learning more about the doctrines of grace!

Note what he said in verse 28. Note especially the words, " . . . God hath shewed me . . ."

See also the beginning words of his message in verses 34 and 35.

Thomas Manton, one of the Puritans, has this to say about Peter:

Peter before this had read in the prophecies of the old testament much about the calling of the gentiles; he had heard from the mouth of Christ the command of discipling the nations, Mat. xxviii.; yet he did not comprehend the thing till he was prepared by a vision from heaven, and now found Cornelius endowed with great graces given by God. Thus we often hear the truth propounded, explained, proved, yet we conceive it not. So rely this was a great error in Peter, so difficult to come over to this truth after the ascension of Christ, that still he should think God to be the God of the Jews only, and not also of the gentiles. But good men do not see all things, even those things which are before their eyes, especially when blinded with prejudice, and prepossessed with contrary interests and opinions. Therefore we had need all look about us lest we be ignorant of an obvious truth (Vol. 18, p. 406).

And then Manton says this with regard to Peter's change in doctrine:

The godly, when convinced, ingeniously confess their errors: as Peter doth here. Controversies would sooner be at an end if we could but learn this modesty. But men fear the disgrace of a change of mind or opinion and so are the more entangled. It is better to confess and give glory to God, and yield to a conquering truth, than for credit's sake obstinately to persist in a received error; for it is no disgrace to humble ourselves before God and men, and to submit to such means as he hath appointed for our conviction (Ibid.).

Calvin makes this comment, speaking of the impression that this should have on us:

Although we be also taught by this example, how hard a matter it is for us to wind out ourselves out of our errors once conceived, especially when they are of any continuance (XVIII, p. 453).

We may not be bothered about preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, but are there other doctrines that we have trouble with, doctrines which we know are taught in Scripture? What about the sovereignty of God in salva-

tion? What about the eternal predestination of the elect? What about the necessity of God drawing men to Christ, or they will not come? What about the purpose of Christ in His death? What about insisting upon the fact that a person who know Jesus Christ will live a changed life? What about the nature of man -- so hopelessly ruined by sin that there is nothing about him that would cause God to love him, or save him?

But you could say, as Peter could say, we haven't been taught these things. We have had teachers who have had nothing to say about these truths; how can we accept them now?

Listen! This is the point: It is not whether or not our teachers have taught us these truths (they could be just as wrong as Peter was); it is whether or not it is to be found in the Word of God. If it is there, then you and I have no alternative but to receive the truth!

What a great day it was for Peter when the grace of God became clearer to him, and he went to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, contrary to all that he had believed before. "God . . . shewed" him, and he "went" down to see the Gentiles!

But it was also God's great day in another way.

II. IT WAS A GREAT DAY FOR CORNELIUS AND THE OTHER GENTILES WHO WERE AT HIS HOUSE.

- A. Cornelius was seeing his prayers answered.
- B. Cornelius was seeing his obedience rewarded.

He had been told to send for Peter. He sent for him, and Peter came!

- C. Cornelius himself was saved, and so were "all them which heard the word" (v. 44).

This was the DAY that God had ordained from the very beginning. He had spoken to Abraham about it. The prophets of the Old Testament had proclaimed it. Cornelius saw the first of it, and we have not seen the last of it yet! These men were the first of hundreds of thousands of Gentiles who were, in the providence of God, to be drawn to Christ! Of all of God's Great Days, this surely has to be one of the greatest!

But there is more.

III. IT WAS A GREAT DAY FOR THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.

There have been periods in the history of the Church when the preaching of the Gospel has had its bad days, its evil days. I believe we are living in such a period today. The Gospel has been changed into a man-centered message. God and Jesus Christ have been degraded in our preaching to the human level. We are more concerned about man's pleasure than we are about God's righteousness. We are more interested in results than we are purity of doctrine. I could go on and on. What a relief it is to see how Peter preached!

- A. He preached grace (vv. 34, 35).
- B. He preached the sovereignty of God: "He is Lord of all." See v. 36.
- C. He preached Christ (vv. 37-41).
- D. He preached the judgment of God (v. 42).
- E. He preached what the Old Testament prophets had preached (v. 43).
- F. He preached the need to believe in Christ (v. 43).
- G. He preached the forgiveness of sins (v. 43).

Read his message over and over, and compare it with the man-centered approach we hear so frequently today. In fact, a lot of so-called Bible teaching today is nothing more than secular psychology with a few Bible verses thrown in. How we need to get back to the kind of preaching we have here, the kind of preaching Paul was talking about when he wrote, . . . not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth . . . (1 Cor. 2:13).

Let me add one other thing:

IV. IT WAS A GREAT DAY FOR THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL (Acts 10:44-48).

Will you note carefully the words in verse 44, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word"?

We will never witness a great work of the Holy Spirit unless we see a return to true Gospel preaching -- for the glory of God!

These were special manifestations, all of which have not continued down to the present day, but note what they were:

- A. The work of the Spirit.

B. Speaking in tongues.

C. Baptism.

D. The attitude of the Gentiles afterward: "Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."

Concl: Acts 10 is the account of what God was doing -- for Cornelius and the Gentiles, for Peter, and through the preaching of the Gospel. It was truly ONE OF GOD'S GREAT DAYS!

It was like a second Pentecost -- only here we are seeing what He did with Gentiles.

They "DAY" will never be repeated as it was then, but the blessing continues. We need to have our hearts opened to all of the truth, as Peter's heart was opened, and then we need to preach the grace of God, the sovereign grace of God, praying that we, too, will see in our day another mighty movement of the Spirit of God as God's elect are drawn into the kingdom of God!

CALLED TO ACCOUNT

Acts 11:1-18

Intro: One of the great doctrines of the faith is the doctrine of the divine inspiration of Scripture. This doctrine has to do with the manner in which God gave the Scriptures to man. It applies just as much to the New Testament as it does to the Old Testament. It is the doctrine which teaches us that God exercised such control over the writers of Scripture that the final product, all 66 books, cannot be adequately described in any other way than by saying that they are THE WORD OF GOD!

This divine control extends to the very words which men used in writing the Scriptures. Although a passage like we have before us this morning could have been written as any other history could have been written, yet in Scripture we have the overruling, controlling influence of the Spirit of God, so that the knowledge the experience, the judgment, the personality of the writer is clearly seen, and yet the message down to the very words is nothing less than the Word of God.

It is not my purpose this morning to deal with the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, but, in approaching a chapter like the first part of Acts 10, it is good to be reminded of this basic doctrine.

This doctrine is taught many places in Scripture, but there are two passages in particular which seem to be the key passages. One comes from the Apostle Paul; the other comes from the Apostle Peter. The first is found in 2 Tim. 3:16 -- the last of the Pauline Epistles; the second is found in 2 Peter 1:21 -- the last of the Petrine Epistles. The first says this: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"; the second, " . . . holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

I have said all of that to say this: When you come to a chapter like the first part of Acts 11, a passage which practically restates the preceding chapter, we must realize that it is there by divine design -- not because Luke was trying to enlarge the book he has written. It is here because God wanted it here. Luke could have said, "Read the preceding passage to see again what actually happened in Joppa and Caesarea." But God did not want it that way! What we have here is exactly what God wanted us to have. It speaks of the importance of those events in Joppa and Caesarea, and we need to recognize how important they really were.

Those events were important because:

- 1) They have to do with one of the major changes in God's dealings with men -- one of the greatest in all of the Word of God.
- 2) It shows us how God prepared Peter for this change.

- 3) It shows how this change was initially rejected by Peter, as well as by the other "apostles and brethren" (Acts 11:1).
- 4) It points to the issue which was to divide the early Church and to throw a cloud of confusion over the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God.

The issue was not a question about preaching to the Gentiles; it has to do with eating with Gentiles. It was not a question as to whether or not Gentiles could be saved, but it was a question as to whether or not they could be saved without actually becoming Jews, i.e., submitting to the distinctive Jewish rite of circumcision.

Thus, in reading about what happened we must see that these are the main things that God wanted emphasized because of the tremendous importance of this matter which divided the leaders of the early Church.

I want you to notice one thing in particular. Please do not forget this even if many of the details of my message get away from you. Notice this: "THE APOSTLES AND BRETHREN" ASKED PETER WHAT HE HAD DONE; PETER RESPONDED BY TELLING THEM WHAT GOD HAD DONE!

Be sure that you notice this! And remember that by the Biblical doctrine of inspiration, God intended to have Luke write this in addition to what he had written in Acts 10, and that God intended for Luke to write it just as we have it here!

Now let us go to the text.

The first thing we have is

I. THE CHARGE AGAINST PETER (Acts 11:1-3).

As I have just said, the problem boils down to this: They were asking Peter how he could possibly have done what he had done -- not preaching to the Gentiles, but eating with them!

They were so concerned about their ceremonies that they could not rejoice in the fact that a group of Gentiles had been saved!

Galatians, chapter 2, indicates to us that Peter himself continued to have trouble over this. We do not easily give up our earlier training, but this issue was extremely important because:

- 1) It had to do with the definition of God's grace, and
- 2) It had to do with the meaning of salvation.

But let us go on to the next point --

II. PETER'S RESPONSE -- HIS REPORT (Acts 11:4-17).

Before we examine what Peter said, let us notice from verse 4 how Luke describes Peter's attitude and the nature of his report.

He does not rebuke "the apostles and brethren" for questioning him, as though he were above their rebuke or their suspicions. He does not show any irritation. Instead his report gives every indication that he wanted them to understand, that they needed to understand. And so he went into detail as he "rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them."

Notice the words, "by order."

J. A. Alexander in his commentary on Acts has this to say about the expression, "by order":

The Greek word here used (καταεξῆς) is peculiar to Luke, who applies it to time, succession, motion, and arrangement (p. 422).

Peter reviewed the whole thing just as he had gone through it so that his brethren could see why he had done what he had done. He spoke to them about God!

There are four things that happened that he wanted his fellow-believers to know.

A. Part I -- Peter's vision (Acts 11:5-10).

It had to do not only with what Peter saw, but the words that he heard.

And -- so he would know that it was actually taking place, it happened, not just once, or even twice, but three times!

Peter wanted his brethren to know that he, too, had objected, but that he had been overruled. (Read the words which were spoken to Peter.)

This all was followed providentially by

B. Part II -- Peter's visitors (Acts 11:11, 12).

There were "three men" -- and this explained why the vision had been given to Peter "three times."

They had come to get Peter to go down to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, but even this was not the most impressive thing (although he must have been greatly influenced by the sequence of events).

The most important feature of Part II, however, was in

what the Holy Spirit said. Look at the first part of verse 12: "And the Spirit bade me go, doubting nothing." The NASB renders it, "without misgivings." In the margin it has, "without making any distinction." The NIV: "The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them."

So that was the second significant thing that had happened, the second thing that God had done.

What next?

C. Part III -- Cornelius' vision (Acts 11:13, 14).

An angel had appeared to Cornelius, and it had been the angel who had told Cornelius to send for Peter, and told him where he could be found, and also had told him that Peter could tell him how to be saved!

Whether Peter knew this or not at the time, Hebrews 1:14 tells us that angels are "all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

Peter could not fail to see the hand of the Lord in what Cornelius was telling him. He surely knew that no Gentile would be seeking salvation unless God were at work in his heart. All of the events were making a solid impact upon the heart of Peter.

But even this was not all.

D. Part IV -- the Spirit's work (Acts 11:15, 16).

Peter had not finished his message. In fact, he had only started when the Spirit "fell" on Cornelius and his family and friends just like HE had fallen on the Jews in Acts 2 -- the identical work of God was done!

This expression, "the Holy Ghost fell on them," indicates a superior, a divine influence coming upon the people from above, from heaven, from GOD!

And, at that moment, Peter remembered what the Lord had said about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and he realized that this was happening again -- this time to Gentiles.

And so we come finally to

E. Peter's question (Acts 11:17).

His point was that this was undoubtedly a work that GOD was doing. Who was he that he could stop it?

Peter had had another lesson on the sovereignty of God.

And Peter's defense, so to speak, brought "the apostles and brethren" to the place where they could not oppose Peter, and impose sanctions on Peter, without opposing God.

This must be our emphasis regarding all of the doctrines of grace -- and all of the works of God.

Cf. Rom. 9:20-26.

I may be speaking to someone this morning who is having trouble with the Biblical doctrine of salvation -- and all of the doctrines that are related to it. You may not like what the Bible teaches about man. You may not like the idea that salvation is only through Christ. You may rebel against the Scriptural teaching that salvation is ALL of God. You may have been taught that your works are your contribution to your salvation, or that you have some personal merit that has placed you above other people. You may have a lot of ideas -- BUT WHO ARE YOU THAT YOU THINK YOU CAN WITHSTAND GOD!

Will you notice what "the apostles and brethren" did, and then pray that you will do likewise?

III. THE REACTION OF "THE APOSTLES AND BRETHREN" (Acts 11:18).

Their opposition crumbled: "they held their peace."

But they also "glorified God"! How? By what they said. What did they say? They said this:

Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

"God . . . granted repentance." That is, He, in addition to everything else that He had done, gave the Gentiles the ability and the willingness to repent!

Illus: Early in his ministry, while he was still at the Park Street Chapel, Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached from Acts 11:18 on Sunday morning, September 23, 1855 -- 126 years ago this September!

As he was concluding his message, he brought out this truth from his text -- that God gives repentance to men. This is what Spurgeon had to say, in part:

'Repentance,' my dear friends, is the gift of God. It is one of those spiritual favours which ensure eternal life. It is the marvel of divine mercy that it not only provides the way of salvation, that it not only invites men to receive grace, but that it positively makes men willing to be saved. God punished his Son Jesus Christ

for our sins, and therein he provided salvation for all his lost children. He sends his minister; the minister bids men repent and believe, and he labours to bring them to God. They will not listen to the call, and they despise the minister. But then another messenger is sent, a heavenly ambassador who cannot fail. He summons men to repent and turn to God. Their thoughts are a little wayward, but after he, the Divine Spirit, pleads with them, they forget what manner of men they were, and they repent and turn. Now, what would we do if we had been treated as God was? If we had made a supper, or a feast, and sent out messengers to invite the guests to come, what would we do? Do you think we should take the trouble to go round and visit them all, and get them to come? And when they sat down and said they could not eat, would we open their mouths? If they still declared they could not eat, should we still make them eat? Ah! believed, I am inclined to think you would not do so. If you had signed the letters of invitation, and the invited would not come to your feast, would you not say, 'You shall not have it.' But what does God do? He says, 'Now I will make a feast, I will invite the people, and if they do not come in, my ministers shall go out and fetch them in bodily. I will say to my servants, go ye out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that they may partake of the feast that I have prepared.' Is it not a stupendous act of divine mercy that he actually makes them willing? He does not do it by force, but uses a sweet spiritual suasion. They are first as unwilling to be saved as they can be; 'but,' says God, 'that is nothing, I have power to make you turn to me, and I will.' The Holy Ghost then brings home the Word of God to the consciences of his children in so blessed a manner, that they can no longer refuse to love Jesus. Make you, not by any force against the will, but by a sweet spiritual influence changing the will. O, ye lost and ruined sinners! stand here and admire my Master's mercy. He sets not only a feast of good things before men, but he induces them to come and partake of them, and constrains them to continue feasting until he carries them to the everlasting eternal mansion.

Oh! sovereign grace, my heart subdue!
 I would be led in triumph too;
 A willing captive to my Lord,
 To sing the honours of his Word.

(Spurgeon's Sermons, Vol. I, p. 337.)

Concl: You see, "the apostles and brethren" realized that it was not only because of God's grace that Peter went to the Gentiles, and ate with them, but it was because of God's grace that the Gentiles wanted him to come, and that they repent-and believed when they heard the Gospel.

THE WORK OF THE LORD IN ANTIOCH
Acts 11:19-30

Intro: The ministry of the Church in the Book of Acts is something which we see as gradually developing. Later the Apostles were to write in great detail about the Church's ministry. But at this stage in the Book of Acts, while undoubtedly the early believers had a clear idea of their call to "preach the Gospel," yet there were other things such as details that we will see here in Acts 11 which were thrust upon the Church by the pressure of circumstances, or by the needs that they were facing, as well as by the gifts of the men involved. God, of course, was behind all of this. It was He Who was ordering their circumstances, and it was He Who was showing them the needs that they were seeing!

Before we speak of that ministry, let me say just a word about Antioch.

There were several cities by this name throughout the Roman Empire; two of them are mentioned in Scripture.

- 1) This one in Acts 11 is the first, and the most important. It was the capital of Syria, and, as we will learn from Acts 13, was to replace Jerusalem as the center of the work of the Church. Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their first missionary journey from Antioch, not from Jerusalem.
- 2) The second Antioch is mentioned for the first time in Acts 13:14. It is called, "Antioch in Pisidia." It was located to the north and west of the first Antioch and was in the larger area known as Galatia.

It is important to distinguish between these two places.

Now, before we look at the way the work of the Lord developed in Antioch, let us consider for a moment

I. HOW THE GOSPEL CAME TO ANTIOCH.

We have our answer in verse 19; it came as a result of the persecution against Stephen in Jerusalem.

Note the other places that are mentioned in the same verse.

Here we have added proof of the sovereignty of God! That which, in the words of Calvin, seemed to leave the Church of Jerusalem "torn in pieces" was to result in the spread of the Gospel throughout the Empire. Locate these places on a map.

Cf. Paul's statement about his own imprisonment in Phil. 1: 12. The Lord often uses the most trying of circumstances for His people to spread His Word into places where otherwise

it would not, and could not, have gone! This is something that all of us need to remember.

But I want to spend the major part of my time this morning on one thing: the nature of the work of the Lord in Antioch. When these persecuted believers (and others who had joined them) got to Antioch, what did they do? What was the nature of their ministry? What can we learn that will be of help to us here in Portland as we do the work of the Lord?

A careful reading of the text will, I believe, show that there were four distinct features to their work. It was, in effect,

II. A FOURFOLD MINISTRY.

They did not do four things that were separate from each other. As you will see, they did not do a lot of the things that are going on in churches today. They did four things that combined made up their ministry! Our text not only shows us how that ministry began, but how the church in Antioch continued to grow after it had begun!

Let me use the four words which Luke uses in this passage to describe the ministry, and these four words will make up my four points under this ministry.

- 1) The first, preaching -- in verses 19 and 20.
- 2) The second, exhorting -- in verse 23.
- 3) The third, teaching -- see the word, "taught," in verse 26.
- 4) The fourth and last, giving -- the idea expressed in verses 29, 30.

As it is discussed in our text, note also these features:

- 1) All of the people, i.e., the believers, did the preaching.
- 2) Barnabas did the exhorting.
- 3) Saul of Tarsus and Barnabas joined together to do the teaching.
- 4) The church did the giving.

In each case, too, there will results that followed, which we will take up as we consider each part of the ministry.

But let us look, first of all, at

A. The preaching (Acts 11:19-21).

Luke uses two words for preaching: one in verse 19; another in verse 20.

The word which he used in verse 19 simply means to speak in ordinary conversation. It is the kind of preaching

which every Christian ought to be doing. They simply were talking to people in Antioch about the Word of God! This was the subject of their conversation. They did not talk about a lot of trivia, but they were talking about the Lord, and about the Gospel.

It is interesting to see how some persecution even effects what we like to talk about!

Verse 19 speaks of their ministry to the Jews.

In verse 20 we have a different word, the word which means to preach the Gospel, or to evangelize. We might even paraphrase the words, "preaching the Lord Jesus," as meaning, preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus!

Putting the two verses together we can say that those who came into Antioch were talking about the Word and they were talking about the Lord Jesus.

The part of the ministry mentioned in verse 20 had to do with the Greeks!

So this was a work that was touching both groups that were in the city -- Jews and Gentiles.

What was the result?

It is stated in a twofold way in verse 21:

- 1) "The hand of the Lord was with them."
- 2) "A great number believed, and turned to the Lord."

The first part of verse explains why, and the only reason why, there came to be a church in Antioch. It shows why people believed, why they came to the Lord. If the Lord is not "with" us, our work is in vain. If the Lord does not draw people, they will not come.

"The hand of the Lord was with them" because they were doing what He wanted them to do; they were speaking about the Word; they were speaking about the Word!

This expression, "the hand of the Lord," is an expression which speaks of the Lord's power. One of the first times we have it in the OT is in Ex. 3:19, 20, where the Lord is speaking to Moses about Pharaoh. Listen to what He said:

And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand.

This was Pharaoh's hand. He would exercise all of his power to keep the Israelites in Egypt. But notice how the Lord continued:

And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.

The contest in Egypt was a contest of two hands: Pharaoh's, and God's! And God won. Remember that when the hand of the Lord is with His people, then we see men doing what God wants them to do -- even though it is initially against their will!

Acts 11:21 teaches us that if you talk about the Lord, there are going to be those who will believe in the Lord. This pleases the Lord, and His hand blesses such work.

But let us look at the second part of this ministry.

B. The exhorting (Acts 11:22-24).

This is a very interesting development in the work.

The Apostles and brethren in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to "go as far as Antioch" to help get the church in Antioch established.

Notice the kind of a man that Barnabas was, according to verse 24a.

Notice what his response to the work was when he arrived in Antioch, according to verse 23. Be sure to see that expression, "Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God . . ." It means that what he saw he knew to be the work of God, the work of God in grace! And it made him "glad"!

But what did he do? This is the point. He "exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (v. 23b).

I have listened to Dr. Lewis Johnson's tape on this passage and he points out some of the things that Barnabas did not say to them. He did not tell them that they ought to call a pastor. He did not tell them that they ought to get the work organized and set up a lot of committees. He did not tell them to look for property and build a building. He "exhorted them that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord."

Note the meaning of Barnabas in Acts 4:36 -- just what he was doing here! He was "the son of consolation"!

Barnabas meant that it was to be their settled plan of life ("with purpose of heart") they should remain true to the Lord in that pagan city. They were encouraged to "cleave unto the Lord."

This meant that they were to learn of Him, to make Him the center of their personal lives, of their fellowship with each other, and of their ministry to Antioch. They were to love Him and glorify Him. They were to talk of Him.

How the Church today needs this kind of exhortation and encouragement! And how good it is to have somebody like Barnabas around to remind us that this is what we need to do!

• What about the result of this kind of living?

See verse 24b: ". . . and much people was added unto the Lord" -- not just added to the church, but "unto the Lord."

Again we can see what pleased the Lord, and what brought His blessing!

But let us go on to the third part of their ministry:

C. The teaching (Acts 11:25, 26).

Why Barnabas went on north to Tarsus to get Saul, we do not know. Perhaps he recognized that he was a gifted teacher. But however that might be, he went after Saul, and then the two of them spent a whole year teaching "much people."

What was the result? The world in Antioch started calling them "Christians" -- so identified were they with Christ! What an honour!

This is what the Apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and elders, and deacons did -- they preached, but they also taught! You cannot have a strong church unless that church is firmly grounded in the Scriptures. This is not only neglected today; it is actually opposed by many in the church! But what are we going to take -- the opinions of men, or the example of the early Church?

D. Finally, the giving (Acts 11:27-30).

This was a famine that was foretold through Agabus by the Spirit of God.

Notice the desire that it prompted in the hearts of the believers in the church at Antioch:

- 1) They felt a special responsibility toward the saints in Jerusalem.
- 2) The desire to help was spontaneous -- not commanded by their leaders.
- 3) It was made voluntary -- as they were able.
- 4) It was determined.
- 5) It was carried out in an orderly fashion.

But what is so important about this, and why is it included in this report on the work of the Lord in Antioch?

One reason certainly must be that it shows the fruit of a spiritual ministry of spiritual men. It made the church concerned about believers elsewhere, and in particular for the believers who had given the Gospel to them in Antioch!

It is always true that instructed, growing Christians will give, not because they have pledged, nor because they are forced to give, but because it is in their hearts. And they will do it with a determination and a faithfulness that you will not find under any other conditions!

This is how to get people to give -- get their lives centered around Christ!

Concl: Many of us have been praying for blessing here at Trinity Bible Church. It does not just come because we pray. As we pray, the Lord will show how it comes. He has been doing that this morning. And what a tragedy it would be if we can put our Bible down, say that this has been an interesting message, and never come back to it! We need to follow the example that is given here . . . of talking about the Word,
 of preaching the Gospel,
 of cleaving to the Lord,
 of Bible teaching,
 and of giving.

All of this pleases the Lord. All of this brings His blessing. He will enable us to do it, and His hand will be with us, too. As we do His will, the blessing comes, and continues to come, and continues to increase. People will be saved, and the church will not only become numerically greater, but, what is most important, it will become spiritually stronger.

Pray that those who know the book of Acts will think of Antioch when they see what the Lord is doing at Trinity. May God grant that it will be so!

THE KING WHO THOUGHT HE WAS A GOD
Acts 12

Intro: There are three things that I would like to point out about this chapter before we take it up in some detail:

- 1) This is the last chapter that has to do with the ministry of Peter. The only time that he is mentioned after this in the book of Acts is in Acts 15:7 (verses 6-11). From Acts 13 on we are concerned with the work of the Apostle Paul.
- 2) Acts 12 gives us the first instance of political power being used against the Church. Before it was the Sanhedrin; now it is Herod Agrippa I -- an ominous sign.
- 3) The words with which the chapter begins, "Now about that time," indicate a close connection with the events of chapter 11 and this chapter.

It means that the Church was being hit by two things: (1) famine, and (2) persecution (and from a new source). Thus, it was a very critical time for the Church in Jerusalem, and for the ministry of the Gospel. How important it is, therefore, for us to see the consequences of all of these events!

But let us look, first of all, at

I. HEROD.

We need to note several things about him.

A. The man himself.

The chapter indicates that he was cruel (more about that in a moment). He was very proud. That is brought out especially in the latter part of the chapter. He was outwardly very religious. History tells us that he scrupulously observed the feast days of the Jews. But, as the chapter shows, he had to be a hypocrite. It seems that, while he was not popular with the people, he was feared, and he feared them -- and so he would do anything to win their favor. And this leads me to the last thing I want to point out about Herod as a man: he was a politician. He was not governed by a sense of right and wrong, but by what would be to his advantage!

It seems that he was only "king" for 3 or 4 years, and this chapter in Acts tells us why.

B. His cruelty.

There is abundant evidence of this. Note:

1. What he was doing to the Church (Acts 12:1). "Vex" here means to persecute. We do not know what all

he was doing because Luke says no more at this point than just Herod was using all of his power "to vex certain of the church."

2. What he did to James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of the Apostle John (Acts 12:2).

He probably beheaded him.

It all seemed so easy for Herod to do. The people might have asked, "Where is the Lord in all of this?" How different it was to be with Peter! But God's ways are past finding out. We have to say that James' ministry was at an end. But it was a sad time for the Church.

3. What he did, and intended to do, to Peter (Acts 12:3, 4).

Peter was put in prison under maximum security. Sixteen Roman soldiers were assigned to guard him -- four at a time. (See v. 6.) After the Passover (not Easter) Herod intended to satisfy his sadistic nature by dealing with Peter. Peter was in an inner prison, behind two wards (and we are not sure what that means).

It looked really hopeless for Peter, and the Lord allowed things to go right up to the last minute before doing anything to help Peter.

But there is more.

4. Note what he did to the sixteen Roman guards (Acts 12:19).

Without one bit of evidence that they had been delinquent in their duty, he had them put to death.

This certainly had to be a time when Herod should have realized that another power was at work for Peter, but he seems to have given that no consideration at all.

5. What he did to the people of Tyre and Sidon (Acts 12:20).

Why he was "highly displeased" with them, we do not know, but he moved to cut off their food supply at this time of famine in order to humble them -- and it worked!

But this is further evidence that Herod would stop at

nothing to accomplish what he wanted to do.

But now let us take a look at that which was at the root of all of Herod's problems:

C. His vanity, his pride (Acts 12:21, 22).

This is seen in three things:

1. His clothing: "royal apparel."

Again -- history tells us that he was very vain about his clothes, and that he had garments woven with silver and/or gold!

2. His speech: he "made an oration."

The imperfect verb indicates that it went on and on.

3. His attitude: see verse 22.

The pride of his heart was such that he was not hesitant to take to himself the glory of a deity!

But now let us look in another direction. Let us look at the Church! What were the people of God doing during this time?

II. THE CHURCH -- PRAYING (Acts 12:5, 12).

This is one of the reasons that the Lord allows His people to suffer -- it keeps them praying!

Note the details of the last part of verse 5. "Without ceasing" speaks not just of the continuity of their praying, but of its intensity, the earnestness with which they prayed.

They did not appeal to Herod, nor to any other man, but "unto God"!

And the whole church was there, praying especially for Peter.

See also verse 12. It could be paraphrased to fit our situation.

How little this seemed to be, and yet it proved to be a mightier force than that of the Empire! Let us always check ourselves when we are inclined to say, "All we can do now is to pray!"

But why were they so surprised when Peter showed up at the home of John Mark?

Probably because they had not been praying for his release,

but for his witness, and for theirs! The early Church prayed differently from the 20th century Church. But here was an instance when the Lord did "more than" they could "ask or think" -- and this in spite of the fact that Peter had been delivered once before. . See Acts 5:19, 20.

And so we see

III. THE SOVEREIGN, OVERRULING HAND OF GOD.

See Acts 12:7. Then notice verses 11 and 17. God sent an angel, but Peter looked beyond the angel and gave the glory all to God!

Look at all of the obstacles that stood in the way, and yet the Lord removed them all -- the chains, the guards, the door, and so on and on! Nothing was too great for God!

And it was at the last moment.

The Lord permits men to do all that they can, and for things to go to the limit as far as time is concerned, that He might have the greater glory!

How this should encourage us to pray, and to trust the Lord. If God doesn't do what we ask Him to do, He will do something better!

So we see the hand of God in

A. The deliverance of Peter.

But we see it in another way:

B. The humiliating death of Herod.

It was clear that God's hand was against him. And, as God saw fit to deal with Pharaoh and with Egypt, it was through creatures of a much lower place than man that God used to bring these monarchs down from their place of exaltation.

Herod's death was humiliating to him because it had to be offensive to anyone who was around him at the time. No gold or silver apparel could overcome this!

What confirmation we have to Nebuchadnezzar's words after the Lord humiliated him -- " . . . and those that walk in pride he (God) is able to abase" (Dan. 4:37b).

How even we who know the Lord need to fear Him, and to take heed to ourselves lest we displease Him.

But now, for the glory of God, and for our encouragement, let us look at

IV. THE CONSEQUENCES (Acts 12:24, 25).

First,

A. Concerning the Word of God (v. 24). (Read.)

"Grew" means that the ministry of the Word, its people, its mission, became more powerful than ever before!

Herod died; the Word of God lives on!

Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the church of Jesus
Constant will remain;
Gates of hell can never
'Gainst that church prevail;
We have Christ's own promise,
And that cannot fail.

Listen to what the Lord Jesus said when He was talking about the trouble of the last days:

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away (Matt. 24:35).

Paul sounded the same note when he was speaking in Romans 8 about all that seems to disrupt the work of God:

As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Rom. 8:36, 37).

But notice another point of importance as we think of the consequences. It has to do with what Luke says at the end of this chapter

B. Concerning Barnabas and Saul (v. 25).

Notice that we are not told here about Peter, but we are simply told that Barnabas and Saul left Jerusalem, after they had completed the mission mentioned at the end of chapter 11, and, as Acts 13:1 indicates, they went back to Antioch.

I see three things that the Spirit of God seems to be telling us in this last verse.

1. Peter was, after all, like James, dispensable.

The story goes on just like Herod had killed Peter. Peter passes off the scene. Barnabas and Saul move on.

Today Paul is gone. Peter is gone. The Apostle John is gone. Abraham is gone. Moses is gone. Elijah is gone. David is gone. Isaiah is gone. Daniel is gone. Augustine is gone. Calvin is gone. Luther is gone. The Puritans are gone. Spurgeon is gone. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is gone. And, if the Lord tarries, you and I will soon be gone.

And, so what!

The Word of God is here. The Lord is here. The Holy Spirit is here. God is here. And so the work of the Lord goes on.

What an important lesson for all of us to learn! The Lord uses us while we are here, but He can get along without any of us!

That is the first thing I see here.

2. Jerusalem was dispensable.

God is not limited to people, nor is He limited to places.

The scene is not only shifting here in Acts 12 as far as the principal characters are concerned, but it is shifting as far as cities are concerned -- from Jerusalem to Antioch.

But even now it is not in either place.

The woman of Samaria was confused about places. See John 4:20-24 -- and what she said about the Samaritan fathers, and then our Lord's reply.

Let the work of God be devastated in one place, and the Lord will raise it up in another. This is another great lesson for us to learn.

Listen to the third thing of importance in this last verse:

3. God was preparing for the next great movement in the spread of the Gospel -- as chapter 13 clearly indicates.

The very Empire which Herod represented was to be shaken from one end to the other by the power of

Gospel until Paul would actually run out of places to preach the Gospel for the first time!

Concl: Are you worried about the Church? Or about the outcome of the preaching of the Gospel? Or about the purposes of God? Are you worried about those enemies of the Gospel, men or nations?

Acts 12 ought to teach you to fear no more.

Listen to these words of Isaac Watts:

Great God, how infinite art thou!
How poor and weak are we!
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
And pay their praise to thee.

Thy throne eternal ages stood,
~~Ere~~ seas or starts were made:
Thou art the ever-living God,
Were all the nations dead.

Our lives through various scenes are drawn,
And vexed with trifling cares;
While thine eternal thought moves on
Thine undisturbed affairs.

Great God, how infinite art thou!
How poor and weak are we!
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
And pay their praise to thee.

Whatever the opposition, no man, no king, no nation, can stand against God. He is the sovereign One, and His purposes shall stand. Let us count on that, rejoice in it, and give God the glory which belongs to Him.

For those of you who do not know the Saviour . . .

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MISSIONS
Acts 13:1-13

Intro: Perhaps this is a good time for us to be reminded that the Book of Acts is, in reality, the Book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

We have had many references to the Holy Spirit in the first 12 chapters. I will not summarize them this morning because it would take a great deal of time to do it, but I hope that you will as you look back over those wonderful chapters.

However, let me mention one verse we had at the beginning of the book because it has to do with the subject of missions, as does our passage here in Acts 13. Actually all of the references to the Holy Spirit have to do with missions, but some do more than others.

The verse to which I refer is Acts 1:8. (Quote.)

Let me make an important observation as we consider the subject, THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MISSIONS.

Frequently you will hear it said that if you are a strong believer in the sovereignty of God, if you are what has been known historically as a Calvinist, then you will not believe in missions.

Well, let me say that I am a very strong believer in the sovereignty of God and I am strongly Calvinistic in my views of salvation. I believe that a verse like Acts 13:48 is at the basis of all that God, the Holy Spirit, is doing in the world with respect to salvation. AND THAT IS ONE REASON THAT I BELIEVE IN MISSIONS. I believe that God has a people whom He intends to save!

But I really believe in missions because you cannot believe the Word of God without believing that God has commanded us to carry the Gospel to every person in the world. We do not know who the elect are. But neither does an Arminian know who is going to be saved. One difference between an Arminian and a Calvinist is that an Arminian (because of what he believes) really has no guarantee that anybody will be saved; the Calvinist knows that God has a people who must be saved, and that it is God's will for us to follow His leading and go into the whole world preaching the Gospel in order that the elect might be saved.

I would be the first to admit that there have been Calvinists (in name) who have not evangelized, have not preached the Gospel, have not believed in missions. But this is not characteristic of what has been known as Calvinism. Instead you will find that men called Calvinists have been at the head of major missionary

movements, and that they have been among the greatest preachers of the Gospel that the Church has ever had. I mention Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Spurgeon, George Mueller, Martin Lloyd-Jones, James Packer, plus that mighty group of Gospel preachers who came out of the Protestant Reformation, men who were used by God to revive the truths of the sovereign grace of God -- truths, incidentally, which the Lord is reviving again in our day! You would not have the history of missions that we have today if it were not for men and women who have been Calvinistic in their theology.

If you believe in the Bible, you have to believe in missions; you have to believe in evangelism. But the difference is this: If you believe the Bible, you are not going to believe in a lot of the man-centered methods that are being employed these days. You are not going to believe that it is "up to man." You are going to believe that it is a work of God, and that people are going to be saved today as they were saved in the first century -- through the preaching of the Word of God, and under the convicting, regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

And so I want to emphasize the fact that the people who say that if a person is Calvinistic he will not be missionary-minded, he will not be evangelistic, are people who do not know what they are talking about! We certainly do not go along with a lot of present-day methods, and we reject a lot of the type of preaching that is being done, but we believe in witnessing, in evangelizing, in missions -- and we believe in these because the Bible teaches them.

The main point is, though, what does the Bible teach about them? I think I am on safe ground when I say that most Christians, even many leaders, and a good many so-called evangelists have never really taken the time to search the Scriptures on this very important subject. If they did, they would not be doing what they are doing, and they would not be preaching what they are preaching.

But let us get back to our text.

The emphasis in these 13 verses is really twofold:

- 1) What happened in Antioch.
- 2) What happened after Barnabas and Saul left Antioch -- especially what happened on the island of Cyprus in the city of Paphos.

The first occupies the first 3 verses; the remainder takes us down through verse 13.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned three times in these 13 verses:

- 1) In verse 2.
- 2) In verse 4.
- 3) In verse 9.

Let me remind you of three other things that are important as we come to Acts 13. It marks a real point of transition in the Book of Acts. We see it in three ways:

- 1) Up to this point Peter has been the principal servant of the Lord; from now on we will be concerned mainly with the Apostle Paul.
- 2) Up to this point we have seen how the work centered in Jerusalem; from Acts 13 on Antioch is the center.
- 3) Up to this point the Gospel has been ministered especially to the Jews; from now on in Acts we will be concerned about the Gospel for the Gentiles.

We do not leave Peter out entirely, nor do we hear nothing more about the Jews or Jerusalem, but the emphasis does change to these others as you can see from your reading of the Book.

First of all, then, let us look at

I. MISSIONS IN ANTIOCH (Acts 13:1-4).

Some very important things are mentioned here. Notice the following:

- 1) It was centered in a local church -- not a mission board.
- 2) It grew out of a strong ministry of the Word of God.
- 3) It involved a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit -- in two respects (which I will mention in a moment).
- 4) It included the obedience of the church -- obedience to the will of God.
- 5) These first two missionaries were sent out by the Holy Spirit.

Let us spend a few minutes on each of these.

A. Missions was centered in the local church.

This is the emphasis throughout the passage. There was not an organization outside of the church, but it was the church itself that was sending out the missionaries.

One of the alarming thing about the Lord's work today is the way in which evangelism and missions have been taken out from under the spiritual leadership of the local church. You have outside groups telling the church when and what kind of campaigns we are going to have, and they are the ones who tell the churches what policies there are going to be, and they set the finances too -- with no real accountability to the local church. In fact it has gone so far that many (perhaps most) churches and pastors do not believe that it ever was done any other way, or could be done differently now!

I suggest to you this morning that if we are to see the Lord's blessing upon missions as it was seen in the early

days of the church, missions and evangelism have to be based once again in the local church.

- B. Missions grew out of a strong ministry of the Word in the local church.

Look at the Bible teachers that are mentioned -- five of them, not just one!

And notice how different they were:

- 1) Barnabas was a Jew, a Levite, from Cyprus.
- 2) Simeon seems to have been a Roman.
- 3) Lucius was also a Gentile, from North Africa.
- 4) Manaen was from the elite class, having been raised with Herod and probably related to him.
- 5) Saul, who had been an aspiring, ambitious young Jewish rabbi.

But all of them had been brought to Christ, and all of them had one great burden: the ministry of the Word. They were divinely appointed "prophets and teachers." And notice what is said at the beginning of verse 2: ". . . they ministered to the Lord." This is what a true ministry of the Word will be.

For the establishing of this church, review Acts 11: 19-30. How wonderful must have been the ministry there!

But as all of this was going on, the Holy Spirit sovereignly stepped in to lead the church in a new ministry. And so we have . . .

- C. The sovereign work of the Spirit.

You see it in verse 2. It included two things:

1. He called the workers.
2. He determined what their work should be.

And this latter point included two things as well: It included what they should do, and where they should go.

This is the only basis upon which people should go into the Lord's work -- because they are called by the Holy Spirit for the work. And notice that these were men who were already involved in the work. The church did not decide this on their own; neither did the men. It was a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit! It cannot be otherwise today, and yet we all know that people find their way into the pulpits of our churches and to the mission

fields of the world who have no conviction of a divine call. And this explains why things are as they are.

But notice the next point.

D. The church was obedient to the Holy Spirit.

Notice the serious way in which it was done according to verse 3 -- by fasting and prayer.

This, too, is a great weakness in the church today. We know so little about fasting and prayer. And this may be the reason (and probably is) that we know so little about knowing who is filled with the Holy Spirit, and about when the Holy Spirit is speaking to us!

Luke says that "they sent them away," or released them. It was not their right to hang on to Barnabas and Saul when the Spirit wanted them elsewhere.

Finally,

E. Barnabas and Saul were "sent forth" (meaning, under special orders) "by the Holy Spirit." See verse 4.

This was not basically their choice, but the Holy Spirit's choice. And the places they went were under the direction of the Holy Spirit. And so was the message they preached!

In all of these we have vital factors about missions that the church today cannot afford to ignore any longer. We must get back to the Holy Spirit and His work.

But now let us go quickly to Seleucia, and then to Salamis on Cyprus, and travel with Barnabas and Saul across the island to the wicked and idolatrous city of Paphos where Venus was worshipped. It was a stronghold of Satan on this island where Barnabas had been born.

II. MISSIONS IN PAPHOS (Acts 13:5-13).

Note what they did in Salamis and also in Paphos first. They were men under a divine commission from the Holy Spirit.

A. They preached the Word of God.

See v. 5, and the same is implied in v. 7b regarding Paphos. Preaching the Word is the reason for missions, and it must always be done regardless of what else may be included.

But notice that along with this

B. There was opposition.

There always will be. Sometimes it will come from outside the church; sometimes, from within. This time it came from the outside, but from a Jew. He hated the Word. He sought "to pervert the right ways of the Lord" (v. 10).

Bar-jesus, or Elymas, was not be feared as much as he was to be pitied. He had set himself on a course that was doomed from the very start. Men do not oppose God and get away with it! See Psalm 2.

But what happened? What should Barnabas and Saul do? If they were like many Christian workers are today, they would have changed something, or omitted something; they would have altered their approach. But what did they do? This is where the Holy Spirit is mentioned again. See v. 9.

C. A stand was taken (Acts 13:9-11).

How rarely you see this today! We are more concerned about gaining the favor of people than we are the proclamation of the truth of God's Word. Barnabas and Saul knew why they were there. The Holy Spirit had called them, and sent them. They were men who could not back down regardless of the opposition.

What was the outcome?

Obviously more happened than is recorded here, but we have enough to see that the blessing of God was upon them.

D. There was blessing -- in two ways:

1. Elymas was blinded.
2. Sergius Paulus was saved.

Was it possible that Saul took the name of Paul because of what happened to Sergius Paulus? Note what is said in v. 9.

But notice more particularly what is said about that which brought Sergius Paulus to faith in Jesus Christ. He "believed" because he had been "astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

Let men minimize the teaching of the Word of God if they choose to do so, but there is no other way to see the blessing of God, there is no other way to see people come to saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ!

Concl: What more needs to be said except that we here at Trinity Bible Church need to go, and do likewise! This is God's plan for missions. It must be under the direction of the Holy Spirit, through the local church, preaching the Word of God, throughout the whole world as the Lord shall lead -- and it is to be carried on through men chosen by the Spirit and sent forth by the Spirit and by the church.

Let us be simple enough in our understanding of God's Word to believe that this was put in our Bible for more than just our information. We are to be taught by this passage. And when we act upon the same principles, looking to the Holy Spirit to guide us and bless us, then we, too, will see the blessing of the Lord.

GOD'S UNBELIEVABLE WORK

Acts 13:14-43

Intro: This morning I want to preach another man's sermon. I have done this before since we started the Book of Acts. In fact, I have done it several times. And I want to do it again.

The man to whom I refer is the Apostle Paul. The sermon was preached approximately 2,000 years ago in a place called "Antioch in Pisidia" to distinguish it from the other Antioch in Syria. The sermon was not preached in a church, but in a synangogue. There were not only Jews present, but there were also Gentiles in attendance. Antioch was a city where many Jews lived.

We do not know how much time the Apostle Paul had to prepare because after the customary reading from part of the books of Moses, and then a reading from the Old Testament prophets, the rulers of the synangogue asked Paul and Barnabas who were there if they had "any word of exhortation for the people" (v. 15). At that point Paul got up, and began to speak.

We have his sermon recorded in Acts 13, beginning with verse 16 and continuing down through verse 41.

It seems that Paul must have had three divisions in mind because there are three times when he addressed his hearers as "men and brethren" (vv. 16, 26, 38), or simply as "men of Israel."

There is nothing spectacular about his message. It is doubtful if he told the people who were there anything that they did not know before. But this sermon does give us an example of the way in which the Apostles preached to people who did not know the Lord.

Let me point out some of the features of this sermon which will help us to see what the Apostle's objective was, and why he preached as he did. We will read the sermon as we go along.

I. THE THEME: SALVATION.

We can see this, for example, in verses 23, 24; and then in verse 26; finally in verses 38, 39.

This was a salvation from sin. Although these were religious Jews and Gentiles, they obviously were not saved -- and this is why Paul was preaching to them.

In fact, salvation was not only the theme of Paul's message but it was the reason behind all Jewish history up to that time. The reason that God had chosen Abraham and his descendants was for the purpose of providing salvation for men.

But let us look again at the divisions of Paul's message so that we can see

II. THE APPROACH THAT PAUL USED.

I have mentioned that he had three parts to his message which are indicated by the way he spoke to the men directly. But now let us notice what he did in each of these parts.

A. The first part (Acts 13:16-25).

It is very simple. He traces Israel's history from the time of their "fathers" (v. 17) to the ministry of John the Baptist in vv. 24, 25.

Paul spoke to them about things that they all knew very well:

- 1) Egypt.
 - 2) The years in the desert.
 - 3) Canaan.
 - 4) The judges.
 - 5) Samuel, the first of the prophets.
 - 6) Saul.
 - 7) David, of whose seed "Jesus" was born.
- And then Paul jumped from David down to
- 8) John the Baptist.

B. The second part (Acts 13:16-37).

All of this has to do with Jesus Christ -- His condemnation by Israel and His death, which was followed by His resurrection from the dead.

And then Paul cites three passages from the Old Testament to show that all that happened to Christ was in fulfillment of the promises that God had made to the fathers of Israel in the Old Testament. The passages are:

- 1) Psa. 2:7 in v. 33.
- 2) Isa. 55:3 in v. 34.
- 3) Psa. 16:10 in v. 35.

And then we come to

C. The third and last part (Acts 13:38-41).

In these verse Paul is applying to the hearts of the people in the synangogue the message of salvation which he had just been preaching.

The people only had two choices. They could believe it and be saved, or they could despise it (counting it of no value) and experience the unbelievable judgment of God!

To bring this judgment before them Paul cited another OT passage: Hab. 1:5 -- a verse from one of their prophets. But he uses this verse to go beyond what Habakkuk had spoken of, showing that the Chaldean judgment had been like all OT judgments, a foreshadowing of the final, eternal judgment that God will eventually bring upon all who are not saved through Christ! And this judgment would be, as Paul said, "a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." The expression, "in your days," has led many to say that Paul was just talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., but that would not have been the strong warning to these Jews who were not in Jerusalem. And besides, with the coming of Christ to die we are ushered into the last days in which the world awaits the final judgment of God.

But now, from Paul's message, let us notice the main features which he brings out which are

III. THE MAIN TRUTHS CONNECTED WITH SALVATION.

Let me ask you a question: How do you read your Bible? I hope you read it daily. I hope you read it by books. I hope you read it from start to finish. I hope you read it over and over. BUT AT THE MOMENT I DO NOT HAVE ANY OF THESE THINGS IN MIND. WHAT I MEAN IS THIS: DO YOU READ IT AS A MAN-CENTERED BOOK, OR AS A GOD-CENTERED BOOK?

From Paul's message we learn a most important truth:

- A. The work of salvation is God's work -- initiating it, carrying it out in every detail, and completing it.

If you read this sermon like most people do, you will be thinking about some of the features I have already mentioned -- the fathers, Egypt, the journey to Canaan, Canaan, the judges, and so on.

But let me read it to you the right way. (Read vv. 16-23.)

What does this mean? It means that everything that happened to direct the history of Israel from the calling of Abraham to the coming of Christ was a work that GOD was doing. It all had a purpose. It all was designed by God with a specific goal in mind -- the coming of a Saviour! There was a plan behind it all. It did not just happen. God was at work!

Whenever you read your Bible, notice what it has to say about God. If you don't, you will miss what God is doing.

And this leads me, therefore, to my second point about salvation, and the message that Paul preached.

B. His message was not something new.

The Jews could not accuse him and Barnabas of seeking to introduce some new doctrine; this message of salvation was as old as Abraham, and older.

It was the heart of the message of Moses and of their prophets. Paul showed it to them from the Psalms and from Isaiah.

The people in this synagogue had just heard "the reading of the law and the prophets" (v. 15), but they did not understand them at all. (This is like people read the Bible today -- as literature, as history, or as something else, but not as a revelation of God and as a revelation from God!)

The message of salvation is not only the message of Scripture, but this is the only place that you will find it. That is the reason it is so important that we read the Old and New Testaments in a God-centered way, praying that God will show us the truth.

But let me mention another thing that is strongly emphasized in Paul's message.

C. Salvation is only through Christ.

Whenever the Apostles preached the Gospel, they preached Christ! They spoke of His Deity, of His incarnation, of His death on the cross, and of His resurrection -- and they told why all of this took place.

They showed that the OT spoke of Christ.

Notice how Paul limits salvation to Christ in verses 38 and 39.

To be a Jew was not enough. To go to the synagogue was not enough. To hear the Scriptures read was not enough. No one will be in heaven except those who have had their sins forgiven through Christ.

But let me go on to some other things which Paul made clear in Antioch on that Sabbath Day in the synagogue.

D. Salvation is by grace.

There are many ways in which the Bible teaches that, but Paul showed it from the history of Israel. Think of

what happened in Egypt, on the journey to Canaan, after they got into the land, the period of the judges when the people did whatever they wanted to do. Think of Saul. Think of the thousands of times when God would have been right in forgetting His promises IF, IF, IF they had been dependent upon the worthiness of the Israelites. But it was not because of their worthiness that God provided salvation, but it was by His grace!

Cf. 2 Cor. 8:9, "For ye know the grace of our Lord . ."

This is the only reason that there is any hope for you, or for me.

But there is more here.

E. Salvation is by faith.

See verse 39.

God never intended to save all men, but "all" who believe will be saved, and "all" who intend to be saved must believe.

Saving faith is a gift from God. It comes through the Word, as Rom. 10:17 teaches us. That is certainly why Paul was careful to quote the very word of God to those who were in the synagogue on that Sabbath Day.

The same is true for us; if we are to be saved, we must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Two more things:

F. Salvation is eternal.

Paul preached that in verse 34 from Isa. 55:3 when he spoke of "the sure mercies of David." And, as he brought out to the people in the synagogue on that Sabbath Day, salvation is eternal because Christ cannot die again!

Thus, our hope is in Him, not in ourselves.

Finally,

G. True Gospel preaching must include a warning.

The work of salvation is really unbelievable, isn't it? It is all so wonderful, that it is hard to realize that it is really true. But it is!

However, just as the hope of salvation is unbelievably

good, the prospect of eternal damnation is unbelievably bad!

There is no middle ground. It is either eternal life, or eternal hell. The only way to eternal life is through CHRIST!

Concl: I am not going to finish the chapter this morning. We will do that, the Lord willing, next Sunday. But notice verses 42 and 43. Many of the people just left. The Gentiles who were present seem to have been more impressed than the Jews, but there were "many of the Jews and religious proselytes" who "followed Paul and Barnabas," and who heard more about "the grace of God."

Some of you have already believed. It is very likely that some of you have not believed. Some of you may leave church like many of those Jews left the synagogue that day -- they were interested as they were listening, but they proceeded to forget what they had heard after the service was over. Undoubtedly some of them are in torment today because they despised the Gospel of Christ just by their neglect. They heard the Word of God, but they did not believe in Christ.

I have preached Paul's sermon because I believe what Paul believed. This is the only way of salvation because it is God's way. It is what He required. The person who tries to be satisfied with less than Christ shows that they do not understand how holy God is, nor do they understand how awful sin is!

There is only one salvation -- that is God's, and it is to be received only through faith in Christ. May God grant you the grace to believe that you, too, may be saved.

THE WORD OF THE LORD AT ANTIOCH
Acts 13:44-52

Intro: On the last Sunday in July I spoke from the last part of Acts 11 on the subject, THE WORK OF THE LORD IN ANTIOCH. This morning I want to speak from the latter part of Acts 13 on the subject, THE WORD OF THE LORD AT ANTIOCH.

The two Antiochs are different. In Acts 11 we learned about Antioch in Syria; here in Acts 13 we are concerned about Antioch in Pisidia. The work in Acts 13 was started by people who had been run out of Jerusalem at the time that Stephen was killed. Barnabas had come up from Jerusalem to see what was going on, and he, in turn, went up to Tarsus and brought Saul of Tarsus back with him to Antioch in Syria. The two of them stayed there for a whole year, as Acts 11:26 indicates, teaching the people.

Here in Acts 13 things are different.

Barnabas and Saul have been commissioned by the church in Antioch of Syria, and they have started out on what has become known as Paul's first missionary journey. After going to Seleucia, they spent some time on the island of Cyprus, went back to Perga on the mainland, and then arrived in Antioch of Pisidia. It was here that Paul preached the message that is recorded in Acts 13 (which we considered together last Lord's Day). Verses 42 and 43 tell us about the immediate response to Paul's message in Antioch of Pisidia. (Read.)

Now, going back to my two subjects concerning these two Antiochs, THE WORK OF THE LORD IN ANTIOCH in Acts 11, and THE WORD OF THE LORD AT ANTIOCH here in Acts 13, let me say that we learn a very important truth by comparing these two passages of Scripture -- and it is this: The work of the Lord is done through the preaching of the Word of the Lord.

Let me read to you Acts 11:19 which brings this out.

This supported by what Barnabas did when he arrived in Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:23), and by what he and Saul did after Saul arrived in Antioch. For a whole year they taught the Word of God. See Acts 11:26.

This brings me to the first point in my message this morning. I want you to note in Luke's account of what happened a week after Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia,

I. THE PROMINENCE OF THE WORD OF GOD.

Luke mentions "the word of God" or "the word of the Lord" in 4 out of the first 6 verses of our text in Acts 13. We have the first expression 2x, coming first, and the second

expression also used 2x following the first. (Read.)

This not only means that the Old Testament Scriptures were read, or quoted, but that the Word was explained, expounded, and that from these Scriptures the Biblical doctrine of salvation was taught!

And there was another factor in the teaching of Paul and Barnabas that we must not miss was this: They taught the Scriptures as "the word of God," as "the word of the Lord." They did not teach it as their Word, or as the Word of the church in Jerusalem, or as the Word of the other Apostles, but as "the word of God," as "the word of the Lord."

How important it is for us to see this! And how important it is for us to do likewise -- to teach and preach the Old and New Testaments as they really are: "the word of God," "the word of the Lord."

Perhaps I could emphasize what I am saying by one verse which Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica: 1 Thess. 2:13,

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

We must never lose sight of this great truth. Our message is "the word of God," not just another book. It is God's Word, the Lord's Word, the living Word of God, the eternal Word of God, the unchanging Word of God, the only Word of God. It is this Word which must be proclaimed. It is this Word through which God works. The Word of God must be our message as it was the message of the early church. Remember Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Tim. 4:1, 2!

The reason that Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch was to proclaim the Word of God -- and this is exactly what they did! And this is the very reason that we are in Portland, the very reason that the Lord has raised up Trinity Bible Church -- to proclaim the Word of God!

This is the main point in our text. All that happened was related to this fact, that the Word of God was being preached in that heathen city, preached to both Jews and Gentiles.

However, related to this fact are certain other lessons that the Spirit of God would have us learn for our own guidance and encouragement in the work of the Lord today. This passage is rich in helpful instruction which we need as we seek to do the work of the Lord today. And so let us consider

II. THE MAJOR LESSONS OF OUR TEXT, lessons related to the fact that the Word of God was being taught.

The first is this:

A. The drawing power of the Word (Acts 13:44, 45a).

Luke describes the people who came with two important expressions:

- 1) "Almost the whole city."
- 2) "The multitudes."

The two expressions mean that practically everybody in the city was there. The Jews came; the Gentiles came. The rich came; the poor came. The old came; the young came. The men came; the women came. The officials came; the citizenry came. The educated came; the uneducated came. Everybody was there!

And notice verse 44 again: " . . . almost the whole city" came "together to hear the word of God"! They were there to hear the Word of God.

This does not mean that the peoples of the world are just sitting around waiting for someone to bring the Word of God to them, but it does mean that God uses His Word to draw people to Himself. The greatest attractive force that the church has ever had, or ever will have, is the Word of God, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

What a tragedy it is that we have set the Word of God aside and we are trying to attract people by music, by celebrities, by expensive and elaborate facilities, by our dynamic programs. There is no question but that these methods attract people, but it is also clear that when the crowds come, they do not come to hear the Word of God. In fact, the best way to make such crowds disappear is to start to give them the Word of God.

There is a difference between being drawn to a church, or to a meeting, as compared to being drawn to Christ. Our Lord said on one occasion, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44a), and we need to recognize that the Father draws whomsoever He wills to draw by means of His own precious and powerful Word!

May we never be guilty of turning from the Word of God to attract people.

But there are some other lessons I want you to see. The second is this:

B. The opposition to the Word.

- . See verses 45 and 50.

There will always be opposition to the Word. We have seen that throughout the book of Acts. That could be seen throughout the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is one outstanding characteristic of the Old Testament -- that the servants of the Lord continually faced opposition because their message was the Word of God.

Cf. 1 Cor. 2:14.

People oppose the Word of God for various reasons -- and people of different classes oppose the Word of God. Here it was the religious leaders of the Jews who opposed the Word, and they did it because they were envious; they were jealous! They showed that they were more concerned about their power over the people than they were about knowledge of the Word of God.

And so they began with contradicting, then blasphemed, then stirred up the best of the people, people you would have thought would have sided with Paul and Barnabas. And they finally succeeded: They "raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts."

You see, if you are going to minister the Word, you not only have to be prepared for opposition, strong opposition, but you have to be prepared to lose a few battles!

There was opposition to the Word of God.

But here it is important to notice what Paul and Barnabas did -- the third lesson.

C. The steadfastness of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:46).

You would think that they might have reconsidered what they were doing. After all, their purpose was to win people to Christ, not make them mad so as to drive them away!

But it is important to notice what Spurgeon so accurately pointed out when he preached on this text:

It never entered their minds to give up their ministry because it did not succeed among these Jews (Vol. 34, p. 534).

Their message was not determined by its "success" (in quotes), but by the call of God. Read again Acts 13:2, the words of the Holy Spirit.

People may run us out, but it is not our prerogative to change our message, nor even to stop preaching. In fact, Luke seems to want us to understand that this opposition seemed to bring about even greater liberty in the hearts of Paul and Barnabas. That is the meaning of the words, "waxed bold." They spoke freely; they talked plainly (cf. Alexander, p. 41).

Perhaps at this point I should go to the last verse of our text to pick up a related idea there. (Read verse 52.) There is something about persecution that produces joy, and praise, and worship, instead of discouragement and defeat!

Turn back to Acts 5:41, 42.

Notice, too, what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:12, 13,
Beloved, think it not strange . . .

Do you remember what Paul and Silas did in the Philippian jail with their backs bleeding from the beating they had received, and then their feet were "made . . . fast in the stocks"? We read this:

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.
This is found in Acts 16:25.

There are many other passages that we could cite, all of which speak of the liberty, the joy, the worship of God, and much more that come through persecution. We do not need to fear the opposition of the enemy, nor must we under any trouble even consider the idea of giving up our work.

There is much more that we could spend our time on very profitably this morning, but let me mention just one more, major lesson. It is this:

D. The opening of a greater door (Acts 13:46-49). (Read.)

The Jews closed the door of salvation on themselves, thus confirming the Word of God that they were "unworthy of eternal life."

And through this we can see how they, the Jews, were instrumental in opening the door to the Gentiles -- the very thing which they did not want to do. And behind all of this was the providential hand of God, accomplishing His purpose announced to Isaiah about Christ over 700 years before!

Notice what happened according to verse 48. (Read.)

God was behind all of this. The Gentiles were no different in heart from the Jews, but God was working with them. They declared the Word of God to be true, thus glorifying it, "and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

When were they so "ordained"? In eternity past.

Why did they believe? Because they were "ordained."

Who ordained them? God did.

How many believed? All who were "ordained," and no one else!

Down through the history of the Church men have done everything possible to eliminate election from this text, but they cannot do it. They have said that "as many as were disposed to eternal life," or, "as many as ordained themselves," but this verse is completely in harmony with other passages which speak of divine election. GOD ordains men unto eternal life. All who are ordained are saved. No one would be saved if God had not ordained. And this is at the foundation of all that is taking place in the world, or has ever taken place, in the work of the Lord.

If we lose sight of this, we can be discouraged. But we must not lose sight of it. God is in charge. Men may oppose Him, and oppose Christ, and oppose those who are His servants, but it only makes Him laugh, according to Psalm 2. Let the greatest human authorities stand against God, and He will overthrow them all! The victory belongs to Him!

Concl: When men oppose the Gospel, they only spread the Gospel. But I conclude where I began: The Word of God must be proclaimed. We must not let anything cause us to turn aside from our God-given ministry. To be sure, we will face opposition, but that will only be an opportunity for God to get greater glory to Himself. He is accomplishing His purposes and is saving those He chooses to save.

Have you believed in Christ? It is not by chance that you are here this morning. Your election of God can be confirmed too by your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No one can be saved who does not believe in Christ. Trust Him now!

THE DOOR GOD OPENED
Acts 14

Intro: Verses 26 and 27 summarize for us all that took place in Acts 13 and 14 -- the first missionary journey! Paul and Barnabas had started out from Antioch in Syria, and that is the place to which they returned (according to these verses). Verses 2 and 3 of chapter 13 indicate that their calling was twofold:

- 1) They had been called by the Holy Spirit.
- 2) They had been separated to their work by the church at Antioch.

Their journey was now completed, and they returned to Antioch. Luke tells us the kind of a report that they gave: verse 27. (Read.) Notice their emphasis: " . . . they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." The work that Paul and Barnabas had done was a divine work, a work of God. They were the human instruments He had used, but ultimately He had done the work! Acts 13 and 14 could never have been written if it had only been a work of two men. They, in and of themselves, could not have done any of it. Let us always keep this in mind with regard to the Lord's work.

I want to concentrate my message on that latter part of Acts 14:27 -- " . . . and how he (God) had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles."

Remember that our interest in the book of Acts has to do with learning what the work of the Lord is, how the early Church did it, and why they had such blessing!

Here is an important key: " . . . God . . . opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."

We know that the first real ministry to Gentiles began in Acts 10 when Peter went down to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. However, the OT is full of predictions that this would take place.

But, to make sure that we understand what we are talking about, let us, first of all, answer the question:

- I. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? That is, what does it mean that the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles?

There are several passages that speak of open doors:

- 1) 1 Cor. 16:9.
- 2) 2 Cor. 2:12.
- 3) Col. 4:2-4.
- 4) Rev. 3:7, 8.

Our definition, however, really comes from Acts 13 and 14.

What actually happened on Paul's missionary journey? What happened in Acts 10 when Peter went to Cornelius' house? Does it mean that God just opened a door so that they could preach? Well, it means that, but it means more than that. It means not only that the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles, but it also means that Gentiles believed! This was something which God brought about.

Listen to this comment:

" . . . it is said that the door of faith was set open to the Gentiles, not only because the gospel was preached to them with the external voice, but because, being illuminated by the Spirit of God, they were called effectually unto the faith. (Italics mine.) The kingdom of heaven is indeed set open to us by the external preaching of the gospel; but no man entereth in save he to whom God reacheth out his hand; no man draweth near unless he be drawn inwardly by the Spirit. (Italics mine.)

This was really the God-given seal that Paul was called to be an Apostle. Cf. 1 Cor. 9:2. This indicates the difference between the general call of the Gospel, and the effectual call. (Explain.)

So, when we read verses like Acts 14:1b and 9 and 23b, remember that this is the work of God!

Cf. John 6:44, "No man can come to me . . ."

So let us be sure that we know what it means that "God . . . had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27).

But now let us go on to another point:

II. HOW DID HE OPEN THIS DOOR?

The main answer to this questions is that He, the Lord, opened this door through His people, with His people -- through the church back in Antioch of Syria, and through two men, faithful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ: Paul and Barnabas.

But, after all, there are a lot of churches today, and many who claim to be servants of the Lord. What was especially important about this church and these men?

Let me answer this question from Acts 13 and 14.

A. They were men called of God. See Acts 13:2.

How lax we have become in insisting on this! This is

the first prerequisite of one who claims to be a servant of the Lord: Has he been called of God? We are not referring now to the witnessing that we all must do, but to men whom God has appointed to lead the work of the Gospel and of the Church.

- B. They were men back^{ed} by a praying church.

Cf. Acts 13:3.

Paul and Barnabas prayed, too. Cf. Acts 14:23. But do we really understand how important it is for us to be praying for those servants of the Lord who have been called by God for particular ministries.

- C. They were men whose primary objective was to preach the Word.

They were not turned back by persecution. It even seems that Paul was probably stoned to death in Lystra, but, after he was raised, he went right back to the same work. This was the work to which they had been "called," and they would not turn back, nor compromise.

Perhaps there are many other things that could be said. I commend these chapters to you for your careful and prayerful examination. But let me mention one more.

- D. They were men of humility, men who were jealous for the glory of God.

Note what happened after the lame man was healed in Lystra. Cf. Acts 14:11 ff.

This^{is} where we often lose out -- we take to ourselves the glory which belongs to God alone. We hear very, very little about humility in our day.

Cf. Phil. 2:5-11 -- one of the main lessons of the incarnation and of the death of our Lord. See also James 4:10 and 1 Pet. 5:6.

Go back over these points and you will find the main reasons for the lack of blessing in the Church today. Let us pray that we will learn why God blesses, and trust the Lord to enable us to follow the example of Paul and Barnabas.

But there is one other point that I want to make before we leave Acts 14. Was the preaching of the Gospel all that Paul and Barnabas were concerned about?

Let me say just a few words about what we might call . . .

III. THE WORK OF THE OPEN DOOR.

Notice again Acts 14:21-23.

The work certainly began with the preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God, but it did not end there.

Here are five words I want you to remember -- all found in verses 22 and 23:

- 1) Confirmation.
- 2) Exhortation.
- 3) Explanation.
- 4) Ordination.
- 5) Commendation.

All of this makes up the work of the Lord.

- A. Confirmation -- "confirming the souls of the disciples" (Acts 14:22).

This means that they gave added strength to these who were young in the faith, and they did it the only way it can be done -- by teaching them more of the Word of God.

Cf. Acts 15:32, 41.

- B. Exhortation -- "exhorting them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22).

This was a part of their confirmation (which, by the way, was not a ceremony, but an on-going work).

Every believer needs to be exhorted -- and we need it "daily"! Cf. Heb. 10:25, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . ."

The exhortation is that we stay, in our faith and in our daily living, within the limits of the Word of God!

- C. Explanation -- "and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

How we fail the people of God when we fail to explain this to them! It is warfare and conflict and testing all the way to heaven. And there will not be just one kind of testing, but many kinds -- "much."

- D. Ordination -- "And when they had ordained elders in every place, and had prayed with fasting" (Acts 14:23).

This means that churches were established "in every

place."

No child of God can get along without a church -- a fellowship of other believers under the leadership of godly men!

The word translated "ordained" literally means to stretch out the hand. Some says that it speaks of voting, but a more likely meaning is that of the laying on of hands which usually accompanied the ordination of the Lord's servants. See Acts 13:3. It meant a divine authorization.

Our last word:

E. Commendation -- "they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (Acts 14:23).

It means to entrust.

This is what Paul did with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:32. Here it has to do especially with the elders. What a tremendous responsibility they had! Only the Lord Himself could be sufficient for them for such a task.

Concl: Is it any wonder that there was such blessing in the early Church? Tribulation, hardships, and the like, but also great blessing! The pattern for us to follow is here. The Lord continues to keep that "door" open. May we have the wisdom and strength from Him to declare His Word, to seek His glory, and to care for His people, so that we, too, may see Him doing a mighty work in our day.