

Next Door: Unexpected Doors that Advance God's Story!

Week 5: A Door of Declaration

I. We're wrapping up a series of messages today, but don't be dismayed. If you missed one be sure to catch up on YouTube or on the Podcast. We've looked over the past few weeks at one of the first churches ever recorded in history and it's the:

[Slide]: Church of Antioch

- A. How Antioch was founded was through a set of unexpected doors and we've used this as a template for how God works many times today. We have a plan. We're logical beings. God grants us wisdom when we ask. Those are all true and yet we look back at our lives and we can see that it was often unexpected doors that shaped the trajectory of our lives. That's a part of the dynamic nature of the Christian life. We're called to walk by faith and not by sight. That means, as we are being proactive in our lives, we walk daily with God open to the doors He presents. God is good and trustworthy even when those unexpected doors are difficult like most of them are. There is no neutral zone in the Christian life. We're either being conformed into the likeness of this world or transformed into the likeness of Christ. Which option would you like to choose?
- II. We ended last week with Paul and Barnabas being selected and sent out, by the Holy Spirit, on the first ever missionary journey. The gospel: that Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and was resurrected to new life, and so us too when we believe in Christ, was such great news that it couldn't be contained in the church walls of Antioch. They set sail for the island vibes of Cyprus.
- A. We know one event took place in the court of the proconsul. Sergius Paulus is primed to hear the gospel and a Jewish sorcerer attempts to block it. Barnabas and Paul step through a door of dissent. They take a stand for the gospel. God uses the boldness of Barnabas and Paul (primarily Paul) to bring this Gentile ruler into a saving relationship with God. The first recorded conversion of Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey. Pretty cool!
- B. From Paphos, Barnabas and Paul set sail for Antioch. But not so fast! Antioch was much like Washington is today. I try to give you at least one nerd nugget of the day and would anyone like to guess how many cities are named Washington in the USA?

[Slide]: 21

III. The team heads for Antioch Pisidian which is not the same as their supporting church's city.
So here they are in the 2nd leg of the first missionary journey.

A. Let's pick up with our companions:

Acts 13:13-15 [Slide]: 13 Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, but John left them and went back to Jerusalem. 14 They continued their journey from Perga and reached Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. 15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, you can speak."

B. There is one door we need to touch on, but it won't be the primary door today. It very well could have been!
It's a:

[Slide]: Door of Demotion

1. Luke is a 3rd party writing this account, and in customary Greek style, he indicates the key player in a narrative by listing the name first. To this point, Barnabas has been the lead dog, but it was the dissent of Bar-Jesus that turned the tables. And remember, Saul, before he was Paul was being sidelined by the church in Jerusalem. No one would embrace him apart from Barnabas. It was Barnabas that goes to Tarsus and seeks Saul out as a companion for ministry.
2. What does Barnabas get in exchange? He quickly takes on the secondary role. Let's not put any Christian spin on this. This stinks!
 - a. I felt convicted to write a note this week to someone from my past that the Lord used to walk me through a door of demotion. Time has a way of clarifying things! We had a new position open in the former

church I served with, and it was a teaching pastor role. This role would supplement our senior pastor in preaching, and I wanted that role so bad. I felt like I was God's gift to preaching and everyone else needed to get on board. I didn't get that role; a new guy did. I got the role of picking him up from the airport and welcoming him to the team. Additionally, the 3-4 times a year I did get to preach under the former paradigm was stripped away. So, I did what good Christians do; I cussed and grumbled under my breath. I'm sorry if that's offensive but it's the truth. I was wounded.

- b. Then I heard him preach. And I realized that he was a very gifted preacher, and two, I had a lot that I could learn. So, I swallowed my pride and made it my aim to learn everything I could from him. I studied him like a hawk. I have a different style and presentation, but I didn't learn the mechanics of preaching in a seminary class. I learned that from watching Blake.
- c. Who knows what would have happened if I would have gotten that role? But it was God's will that I walk through the door of demotion. God wasn't punishing me; He was preparing me! God wasn't punishing Barnabas either. There was a time coming when he would be back in the forefront. God was preparing him for the season ahead.

C. Paul is leading the team and in Antioch Pisidian they share the gospel in a similar pattern as before. They enter the synagogue on the Sabbath and the Jewish leaders in the city give them a platform to share the gospel. "If you guys have any word of encouragement for the people, go for it!" Do they ever! Paul and Barnabas are prepared to enter our door we'll be discussing today. It's:

[Slide]: A Door of Declaration

- 1. It's an unexpected door for this synagogue crowd. A synagogue was the gathering place for those who believed in the One True God. Those who had a Jewish background and those who were classified as God-fearers. And as a God-fearer or Jewish person, the foundation of your belief was that when you obey the Law, good things happen. When you disobey the Law, things don't go so well.

Everyone has faith in something and for Paul's audience it was in their adherence to the Law.

D. Like last week, a door of declaration is partly regarding our willingness to step through the door. The other part is in how we step through the door. Paul does not change the gospel to conform to the numerous cultures he is in. But Paul does contextualize the gospel. This is a huge point!

- 1. The same gospel truth is delivered in Antioch of Pisidia in a totally different package than the package Paul utilizes in Acts 17 in Athens. Two different audiences. This is my one hang-up with tracts and prepackaged gospel presentations. Please hear me, God can use anything, but we can also do damage when we make no attempt to bridge with someone's world view. The way we would present the gospel to an inoculated religious person should be different than we would a post-modern person. I hope!
- 2. Let's see how Paul proceeds through this door of declaration. We won't read Paul's entire sermon, but he begins with their shared history and goes through Israel's history until:

[Slide]: King David

a. Why?

The Davidic Covenant was the last covenant God made with Israel before Jesus!

Acts 13:23 [Slide]: 23 "From this man's descendants, as he promised, God brought to Israel the Savior, Jesus."

- b. Paul warns that those at the religious epicenter of the Jewish world rejected Him and did not recognize the very word of salvation that had been spoken every Sabbath.

He's challenging them with the gospel based off the very Scripture they cherish.

Acts 13:29-33 [Slide]: 29 When they had carried out all that had been written about him, they took him down from the tree and put him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead, 31 and he appeared for many days to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. 32 And we ourselves proclaim to you the good news of the promise that was made to our ancestors. 33 God has fulfilled this for us, their children, by raising up Jesus, as it is written in the second Psalm: You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

- c. Paul is making a declaration of the gospel steeped in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Verse 33 in the Greek is an emphatic declaration, “For us their children! (meaning to Israel and the ancestors of whom the promise was given) God has fulfilled this.”

- d. Paul is utilizing Psalm 2:7 in a very specific way. Jesus did not become God’s Son. That’s heretical. There might be those who have denied Jesus as God’s Son, but the resurrection has made that fact evident! The resurrection has become the pivotal event in history making evident the divine Sonship of Jesus. Paul doubles down beginning in verse 35:

Acts 13:35-39 [Slide]: 35 Therefore he also says in another passage, You will not let your Holy One see decay. 36 For David, after serving God’s purpose in his own generation, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and decayed, 37 but the one God raised up did not decay. 38 Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers and sisters, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you. 39 Everyone who believes is justified through him from everything that you could not be justified from through the law of Moses.

- e. Paul has done his homework and through the Old Testament Scripture declared that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel. And this Jesus was rejected for the very work that He came to do! The Law was a gift to Israel, but it was an incomplete gift. Why? Because the Law was incapable of:
[Slide]: Justification

We see the inclusivity and exclusivity paradox from last week demonstrated here as well. Everyone and everything! I like those words! We all have been extended an invitation that is redeemable ONLY in Christ! And it is the invitation we all desperately need, to be forgiven of sins. Justification is the declaration from God the Father that we have been made righteous. We’ve entered a new and permanent state of right-standing before God. The Law was an impossible vehicle to get us there. It was only made possible through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

3. There was great excitement initially brought about from the declaration of Paul and Barnabas.

The verses that follow indicate that many of the Jews and devout converts followed them to hear more! And we get this report starting in verse 44:

Acts 13:44-45 [Slide]: 44 The following Sabbath almost the whole town assembled to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what Paul was saying, insulting him.

4. Paul and Barnabas stepped through a door of declaration. They were mindful of their audience and contextualized the gospel in a way that many believed. But when the leadership of the Jews saw the crowd of people (they saw the power shifting), they responded in jealousy, refuting Paul, and ultimately blaspheming. The word for “insult” is really that strong. You can’t blaspheme another person, but the word of God was being declared through Paul and the Jewish leadership was blaspheming that word.

- E. Stepping through a door of declaration won’t always be met with a loving embrace.

There is inherent tension when we declare the gospel, but if we’re faced with opposition how do we respond?

1. We must gauge our audience. In Acts 17, Paul responds to ridicule in Athens by walking away. But here it is a different situation. It’s the Jewish leadership that is making the straight paths of the Lord crooked. Paul doesn’t personally attack but he is frank. People who know the truth about God, and not only reject it, but block the path of Jesus for others, should be confronted with the Scriptural truth (again not opinions).

Acts 13:46-47 [Slide]: 46 Paul and Barnabas boldly replied, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first. Since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles to bring salvation to the end of the earth.”

2. Paul and Barnabas begin a similar pattern that will be repeated in subsequent cities:

[Slide]: Declaration – Celebration – Rejection

3. Some will receive, and some will reject. That’s not on us to determine. Our responsibility is to step through the door of declaration. That’s a door the Lord will open and sometimes in the most unexpected of ways. Those within the ‘in crowd’ rejected the message and those who were considered far from God gladly received.

Acts 13:48 [Slide]: 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and honored the word of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed.

4. These Gentiles (those who were non-Jewish) rejoiced and honored the word of the Lord! They had been appointed to eternal life! This is one of the strongest verses in Scripture that refers to the sovereignty of God over our salvation. When we step through a door of declaration, we should be bold because God is the one who controls the salvation process from beginning to end. Does that deny the free will of humanity to choose God? No, I don't believe it does. I can't explain it, but both are true.

IV. You might be listening today and experiencing the pull of God's Spirit. That is God drawing you into a relationship with Him. Don't deny that. God has appointed you to eternal life, but He doesn't force eternal life. Accept the gift of His grace by acknowledging the death of Jesus for your sins and believe that God raised Him from the dead. We too can rejoice and honor God's Word as those who have been appointed to eternal life.

A. We've started with a door of distress in Jerusalem that pushed the first believers beyond Jerusalem. Barnabas and Saul make their way to Antioch where God opens a door of new direction for Gentile converts. A door of desperation leads to an outpouring of worship and a mobilization for the mission. From Antioch, the gospel goes to Cyprus and a door of dissent and ends in Antioch Pisidian with a bold door of declaration.

1. This is a series of unexpected doors that launch the gospel message in the direction of the ends of the earth. And here we are today! That series of unexpected doors has continued to progress to this moment. We get to join God on this incredible journey to grow in our knowledge of Him and share the gospel message from Norfolk to the nations!