



"Responses to God's Offer"
Sermon Series: "The Way of the Spirit"
Acts 13: 13-24, 26-33, 42-52
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Acts 13:13-24

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In Pisidian Antioch

¹³ From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."

¹⁶ Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! ¹⁷ The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, ¹⁸ he endured their conduct^[a] for about forty years in the desert, ¹⁹ he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. ²⁰ All this took about 450 years.

"After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. ²² After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

²³ "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴ Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 13:18](#) Some manuscripts *and cared for them*

Acts 13:26-33

²⁶ "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. ²⁷ The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. ²⁸ Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹ When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰ But God raised him from the dead, ³¹ and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

³² "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers ³³ he has fulfilled 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.^{[a],[b]}

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 13:33](#) *Or have begotten you*
b. [Acts 13:33](#) Psalm 2:7



Acts 13:42-52

⁴² As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

"I have made you^[a] a light for the Gentiles,
that you^[b] may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."^[c]

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

⁴⁹ The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹ So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 13:47](#) The Greek is singular.
 - b. [Acts 13:47](#) The Greek is singular.
 - c. [Acts 13:47](#) Isaiah 49:6
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This will not be a traditional sermon this morning, it will be more a sharing of what God has done in my life and in this scripture and hopefully it will encourage you. I have to warn you, if you are not careful church attendance and listening to messages, sermons about God can inoculate you against listening for personal messages from God for you. You can become dull on the inside to the living God in Jesus Christ, especially to Him speaking to you personally.

Let's pray together and let me urge you my prayer is living God in Jesus speak to me personally and I will trust you and do whatever you say. Let us pray together.

Living Christ thank you that you proved that you are alive again from the grave to people of that generation and generations that followed, who then desired to connect other people personally to you. I thank you for the church I grew up that prepared the soil of my heart to be connected to you personally when I was young and how you have proven yourself through thick and thin as I have grown older. Continue to deepen our living connect with you through Jesus, that He might produce His fruit through us. And all God's people said, Amen.

This text starts off with what God has done and actually what is going on in a very real sense, Barnabas and Paul – Barnabas is the lead in terms of this journey and Paul is the one who is the spokesperson; but they are a team together. You might think of them as scattering seed, the seed of Jesus – God's work in Jesus, the people in various types of soil.



Before I go further in that, let me reiterate the truth. It is true that God really does communicate personal messages to people to encourage and help them in life in specific situations. God really does do that. Secondly, God charges you and me through scripture and other means to open up as fully as we possible to Him, in Jesus Christ. He will do the rest.

We all have places of resistance inside which I hope to illustrate from my own life and in this scripture that we need to identify and remove that becomes barriers to trusting and obeying the living God in Christ. Some of you know my story. I went to a Bill Graham Crusade when I was in junior high and my Presbyterian church took me and I heard the message and responded to the call and when I walked out of the coliseum in Charlotte, North Carolina, I had this piercing sense of rejection that buried itself inside of me. I never told anybody about my commitment and never told anybody about that piercing sense of rejection. Years later when I was in seminary was putting on a Rock Eagle mission conference and the Presbyterian minister who was speaking gave an evangelistic invitation and I got physically nauseated due to the pain from that prior experience. It was buried inside of me and I remember telling my friend about that and ask, "What do I do with this?" I'm going to come back to that, because we can have pockets of resistance.

My question as we look at this text is:

Are you as fully open as possible to the Lord speaking to you personally through Jesus Christ?

The follow-up question is:

What barriers to you feel inside?

Usually, my innards tightened up when something comes to me that I am already resistant to. The Holy Spirit is real and I've shared this before as well, but I was leading a little church in Alabama for twenty-one plus years ago and we had a traditional service and then we started a contemporary service at 8:30 a.m. and I had asked a friend who had been run out of his church if he would work in leading this new service. He did the message, and back then we didn't have these fancy screens, I did the overhead projector and moved the acetate sheets on which we had the praise music. One Sunday, I'm moving the song sheets and I had this inner prompting to stand up and raise your hands in praise. Little did I know how much resistant I received. Presbyterians don't raise their hands, they sit on their hands. The resistance started with a tightening in my stomach and it kept coming back to stand up and raise your hands in praise to Me.

Now, if you listen to that, that appeared to me to be a personal word from the Lord for me to do something and everything within me resisted because I'm on the front row of this little congregation and that meant I had to stand up and raise my hands in praise with all the Presbyterians looking at me from behind. I did it and it healed something in me and set me free. See I can do this (raised hands in praise) even in a traditional worship service. Barriers will be felt with the tightening inside.





Paul and Barnabas are in Antioch of Syria and the Holy Spirit tells the leaders of that congregation to send them out on this seed scattering journey. They go down to Seleucia then get on a boat, they sail to Cypress at Salamis. They have a strategy in what they are doing. They show up at a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath and they give the Word of God and it says they did this – it doesn't say what the response is or what the soil was like in that synagogue. It just says that they went and shared the Word of the Lord and then they left and travelled the length of island and ended up in Pathos where they did the same thing. They show up in the synagogue and they give the personal message of God about Jesus and a government official named Sergius Paulus somehow gets word of it and sends for them and he wants to know more and so they go to this government official, he is the proconsul and tell him about Jesus and he is interested. We know he is not hardened resistant. We don't know what the final result is, but we do know that he was very interested and he desired to know more about God's personal message through Paul and Barnabas.



But we also know that one of is attendants, this guy named Bar-Jesus, he is a magician, a false prophet, also called Elymas – he is hardened path, he is resistant and he doesn't want his



patron to give himself over to God in Jesus and so he resists this with everything in him. We know he is bad. We know that at least Sergius Paulus was interested.

I give you that background and I told this story with the children because Jesus gives a filter by which to understand what is going on. Let me ask you to read this along with me. Read it aloud if you can see it...it is in Mark 4:2-9...

Jesus taught them many things in parables, and in His teaching said:

“Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.”

⁹ Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Four different types of soil / personalities. The disciples come to him after he tells this first parable and they say, “What do you mean by that?” He said, “I’m going to give you the secrets to the Kingdom.” He explains that these types of soil are the way people respond to God in the message about Jesus. **Four types: 1) path, 2) rocky soil; 3) among thorns; and 4) good soil.**

This is speculation on my part, but I’ve meditated on this for years and **let me propose to you the dynamics of path. It is people who are trampled on, beaten down either by life experience or by other people, they’ve been betrayed and they are hardened on the inside and they are resistant to not just to trust in the Lord, they are resistant to trusting anyone.** They’ve been hurt, they’ve been wounded and they are opposed to anyone who tries to get them to trust. In point of fact, they are sort of closed up tight on the inside.

Frankly I was probably more like rocky soil, the surface of my life was very open, but you go down any level inside of me and I was so locked up inside I couldn’t see straight. Just ask my wife about that. The soil in rocky places apparently open on the surface. You go to Israel, some of you have been there, you will see they have plowed fields in the springtime and there are rocks everywhere, they can’t pick them all up. They are these fences made out of rocks where they have plowed field and planted wheat or other crops. It is just rocky everywhere.

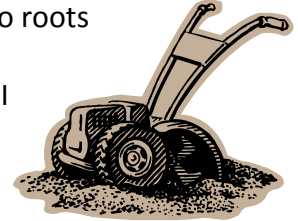
I had purchased a house when I was younger in Alabama and a friend of mine was a real estate agent and she built the home as a spec house and it wasn’t selling so she gave me special deal and we didn’t have any money at the time. She said, “We won’t do any landscaping.” So, I said, “That is all right, I’ll do it.” I got out my chainsaw and I cut down sixty-five trees and there were thirty-two left.

Now, I just have to tell you all just as an aside, when I gave one of my first messages in Amarillo, Texas, eleven years ago, I shared that same experience and there was this gap in the



congregation. I thought, I heard it and I had no idea what the gasp was about. Somebody came up to me and said, "You cut down sixty-five trees." I learned that every tree in the panhandled is planted and they prune them and guard them like gold.

Well, I cut them down and I bought a tiller and I tilled the front yard. I ran into roots and I dug out roots and I kept running in to these huge rocks underneath the surface. I had a wagon and I filled that wagon. I finally ran into this boulder. I mean it was big and I thought what in the world am I going to do with this. No wonder grass doesn't grow here. There was soil on the top, but no grass would grow. I hammered on that boulder and finally cracked it open and pulled it out with my car and a chain and disposed of the boulder and filled up the hole with soil and grass began to grow there. I also had to add lime to the soil, because the soil was highly acidic, but grass eventually would grow there. There were all these rocky places and there were also thorns that were growing there, which leads to the rocky places. There are pockets of hardened resistance below the surface.



The Word penetrates. It says, "They received it with excitement and joy, but when the sun came out it was scorched." When Jesus tells them it means persecution and rejection arises because of the Word, the person backs away from Jesus, like Peter did. There are hidden hurts underneath, covered up hesitancy to open up and trust anyone and because they withered with rejection and persecution I believe they were like me, they desired to make everybody happy and have no one to be upset with them. Rocky soil / places.

Then there are seeds sown among thorns. Jesus said, "They're worried about things of this life, wealth and other things." So it is primarily priority of life is that I've got to take care of others things is really not much interest inside in terms of hearing a personal word from God and focused on making money and what it will provide and improving this life. None of that is bad, but it can choke out God's personal word to you. Just like me not wanting people to be upset with me, was choking me standing up a personal Word from the Holy Spirit to raise my hand.

We know this is true in several examples in scripture. The rich young ruler said that he wanted to follow Jesus and know more about inheriting eternal life and Jesus says, "Keep the commands." The ruler says, "I've done all of that." Jesus tells him to sell all of his possessions, give to the poor and come back and follow me. Guess what the ruler did, he turned and walked away sad. Mark says, "And Jesus loved him."

Rooted in him was the security that wealth brings to all of us and he was not going to let it be uprooted and given away if the Lord said to him personally do this.

The last is good soil, which I think is basic to the person is the desire to trust the Lord God. It doesn't mean you do, but that desire is there. You might not know how. You might have questions. You want to hear Him personally. You are tired of just hearing sermons that are sort of general in nature. You want a personal word, Lord - give me your encouraging Word. You



have a commitment and you might not know how to do it, but to trust His promises and to hold them and you are devoting to doing whatever He says to do somehow, someway.

Four types of soil and Jesus ends, **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”**

How many don’t have ears to hear. I read that and I thought what in the world is He talking about? Some people have accidents and you now their ears are cut off. I know that some of us don’t hear as well as we use to. You want me to speak up back there? I was in a meeting this past week and it was a good meeting. It was out of our Next Steps Task Force and they were interviewing some of us on staff. They interviewed the other staff members and they turned to me and said, “What do you think about this?” So, you know me and I just waxed eloquently and it was just incredible what I said. After I finished another person there said, “You lost me.” Normally my feelings would be hurt. However, I wondered where I lost him. So, I asked him, “At what point did I lose you?” He said, “When you suggested this, I was so intrigued by that, I started thinking over this direction.” Of course, I went on talking and I said, “I didn’t lose you at all.” The seed was planted that began to take root inside of him, but he did have ears, but he didn’t hear anything else I said after that point and praise God for it.

Each one of us knows that in a worship service, you’re sitting here - some of you are already doing it – something will be keyed, your mind will start going in that direction, you hear this noise from up here in the front, but you are somewhere else. It might be that you’ve heard a personal word from the Lord and you are meditating on that. It doesn’t matter what anybody else says, because sometimes He will speak that way in a worship service – the Holy Spirit will give you a prompting that is directly for you and might not be anything any preacher says, it might come from the choir or elsewhere. The Lord does things that just amaze me and will amaze us and is amazing. Let’s don’t say to Jesus, “You lost me.” When you don’t understand, just like I did, go back to where you started thinking in a different direction, because he is probably doing something anyway.

What kind of soil are you? Do you have ears to hear God’s personal message to you and through Jesus. Are you dull and resistant inside to God speaking to you personally? Think about that – speaking to you personally. God desires to communicate with you personally in and through Jesus. He intends his word to take root inside of you, to sprout and grow until they bear his fruit. How many gardeners in here? (asking for a show of hands.) Good, you know about this, you have to till that soil, you have to add nutrients, you have to provide the right amount of sunlight, add water – it is what the Holy Spirit does, because God desires and intends to bear fruit in our lives. The fruit God is looking for is called the fruit of the Spirit in one place. Some of you know that, Galatians 5:22-25 – love, joy, peace and I forget the rest of them and they are very important.

You could say it this way. **God wants to produce in us the kind of love of only the living God can produce.** Everyone of us has human love. He wants to produce His kind. The Holy Spirit wants to work inside of us.



The whole series Peter has been going through in Acts is the *Way of the Spirit*. **He wants to work inside of us to make transformations, make changes so that you experience wholehearted love for the living God.**

I grew up as a Presbyterian, so we were thinkers. I knew how to love with my mind. I didn't know how to engage my heart or my feelings or anything else and I had to pray, Lord teach me how to love not only with my mind but with my heart and my soul and it has learning every since because I have a tendency to be locked up inside. So that His love is so rooted in you and your experience that you want to love others they way Jesus loves them. How open, receptive and trusting are you? Do you desire the Holy Spirit to do this transforming work?

Let me go back to that text. I want to talk about just very briefly about the soil of the hearts of these people. These are probably third or fourth generation exiles. They are strangers in a strange land. They don't want to lose their identity. They are disconnected from the city and culture. They might live in a ghetto or in an enclave. These are Jews longing for their homeland. They feel disconnected. He asks, "If you have a word of encouragement from Jerusalem speak it."

They remembered God speaking in the past because they met every week to go into the Old Testament scriptures, the law and the prophets. They are remembering God has done all this in the past and I think they are fertile soil because they want a word of encouragement from God, not just what He has done in the past and with his ancestors, we need help right now in Pisidian of Antioch. I'm assuming because of what the text says, that they follow them out to know more and when you come back and speak next week – so, they had to be good soil, at least rocky soil – fair enough? They desired that God speak to them personally.

When the whole town shows up the next week, buried within the religious leaders is the attitude that we want to stay in control of this synagogue and we don't want anybody messing with it and they become jealous and so they attack Paul and Barnabas and essentially run them out of town. But, Paul and Barnabas tell the gentiles and tell them that they are thorny on rocky soil. Tell them we offered you God's word in Jesus and you've rejected it and so we're going to concentrate on the gentiles. Barnabas and Paul knew the Lord speaking to them personally, through Jesus Christ. They knew if they could connect people personally with Jesus, that the risen Jesus would do the rest.

You know I prayed in seminary, Lord what do I do with this hurt from Dr. Graham. Years later I worked for Clayton Bell at Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas and Billy Graham was his brother-in-law and he would bring him in and we would have dinner at his house. One summer I was at Montreat Youth Conference and Dr. Bell surprised me and a friend and took us up to Dr. Graham's house. Ruth Graham served us Boston cream pie and mint tea sitting on the porch. I got to talk to Dr. Graham personally and I thought I would never have this chance ever again and so I pumped him with every question I had the nerve to ask him. The time period was Watergate, Nixon had just resigned and Billy Graham had just played golf with Howard



Baker the week before and got to ask him about that. He said, "You know the public thinks I'm close friends with Richard Nixon, I'm not very close to him at all. I'm really the closest to Lyndon Johnson." I got up the courage to tell Dr. Graham, "You know you really hurt me and I use to be terribly angry with you." He said, "Oh, really, why?" I replied, "You came into town and invited me to commit my life to Christ and then you left and abandoned me." He said, "You know that happened to me too." I thought later, that at the time I wished I could have asked him why did he do that. But, he is like Paul and Barnabas and **I was healed that day from that hurt** from before because he knew that if he could connect this young kid to Jesus, Jesus would do the rest and have and he continues to speak his Word in scripture and in sermons and in music by the choir and in prayers and in tapes and books and **I just want to be good soil** and I hope you do too.



Risen Jesus, I praise you that you are alive and that you continue to communicate if we would just stay connected with you and open. Lord, we confess our resistance. Lord, there are things that some of us experience that we don't know how to get rid of and yet you pour your grace into people who open their hearts to you and work to keep them open. Lord, continue to do that in us and all God's people said, Amen.

