



**Sermon Text:** Acts 13:44-52

Sermon Date: April 29, 2018

As we study the Bible, we must not stop once we understand what the passage says—understanding. We should always strive to understand what the text means for us—application. While application must always be rooted in proper understanding, if we don't apply the text to our lives, we will be left unchanged. On Sunday, we saw how this text causes us to confront some hidden idols that may be lurking in our hearts. An idol can be anyone or anything that claims the allegiance of our hearts that only God should have.

### **AN UNEXPECTED TURNOUT**

Our text picks up the story of the missionaries' ministry in Pisidian Antioch. On the next Sabbath, nearly the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord taught. Suddenly, unexpectedly, the place is packed! This is every pastor's dream. Pastors and churches yearn to grow numerically. Therefore, an idol of the heart we must be aware of is **the idol of success**. Churches can subtly shift and make their goal to gather a large crowd, often by minimizing God's Word. Yet Luke writes in such a way as to emphasize that Paul and Barnabas still focused on God's word, and that it was God's word that attracted the crowd (see verses 44, 46, 48, 49).

### **JEALOUS OPPOSITION**

One would assume that the Jews would be thrilled that their synagogue is the talk of the town, and that people are desperate to hear God's Word, but they're not. Seeing the crowd, they are filled with jealousy and they revile the message and the messengers. Their hearts are being exposed and **the idol of identity** residing there. As Jews, they were God's chosen people—they were special! And now, a huge crowd of Gentiles had overtaken their synagogue and they were being told that they could enjoy the blessings God promised to Israel. Their identity was threatened, so they reacted violently. We too can make an idol out of our church, our roles, and our ministries.

### **GENTILE SALVATION**

Since the Jews thrust aside the message of God's salvation, Paul and Barnabas will turn their attention to the Gentiles. At that announcement, the Gentiles in the crowd begin to rejoice and glorify God's Word. Luke says, "And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Here and elsewhere in Acts, Luke maintains that God is in charge of human history and the agent of salvation. This challenging truth causes many to encounter **the idol of autonomy**—that we are independent and completely in control of our own lives and destinies. This idol causes us to say that if we can't fully understand a doctrinal point—like God's sovereignty and human responsibility—then it can't be true. Yet, in our text, both God's sovereignty ("and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed") and human choice and responsibility are taught ("and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed"). A God we could exhaustively understand is a god in our own image—an imaginary god.

### **PERSECUTION, JUDGMENT, AND JOY**

The gospel message spreads throughout the region, and the Jews mount a violent counterattack in response, eventually forcing Paul and Barnabas to flee the region. Nevertheless, Luke summarizes, "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." They had joy in the midst of rejection, opposition, and affliction—in the very absence of earthly security. **The idol of security** causes us to think that we can be joyful and content only when we are secure in our finances, our jobs, our health, and our relationships. Here, however, we encounter lasting joy through the Holy Spirit that is not propped up by circumstances.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. What are some of the negative consequences of routinely understanding a passage without prayerfully discerning how it applies to your life? On the other side, what are the pitfalls of seeking to apply a passage without first doing the hard work of properly understanding it?
3. Of the four hidden idols Pastor Justin highlighted on Sunday, which one do you find lurking in your heart? How does this hidden idol shape you? How do you properly apply the message of the gospel to that particular idol, unseating it from the throne of your heart?