

## What Do the Chosen Do?

### Acts 13:38-49 (NIV)

<sup>38</sup> "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. <sup>40</sup> Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: <sup>41</sup> "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you." <sup>42</sup> As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup> When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him. <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> For this is what the Lord has commanded us: " 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' " <sup>48</sup> When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup> The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

What does it mean to be God's chosen people? God chose Abraham and his descendants, the Israelites, to be his people, to be the family line through which the promised Messiah would come. As such, they were also chosen to pass this promise down from generation to generation, telling others of the coming Savior of the world.

However, the Israelites, later called the Jews, stretched this title to mean that God had chosen all of them as a nation, as descendants of Abraham, to be saved and go to heaven no matter what they did. To them, it didn't matter if they worshiped idols or sacrificed to them while also sometimes paying lip service to God and went through the motions of their God-instituted and commanded worship life. They believed that they would be saved regardless of what they did because they were chosen. It was a message that had to be preached against.

When Paul and Barnabas come to the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch on the Sabbath, they take the leaders up on the invitation to speak. They relate to the Jews and converts to Judaism the history of the Exodus from their slavery in Egypt, the Messianic promises to King David, the significance of the preaching of John the Baptist which pointed people away from sin and to Jesus, and then to Jesus himself and his ministry, particularly his death and resurrection. Our verses begin with the conclusion of their message:

"Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.'" (verses 38-40) They preached at the synagogue first because the Jewish believers would have the history to be able to connect the dots to see Jesus as the one who fulfilled the law of Moses for them, paid the price for their sins, and covered them instead with his perfection. This is what they had because Jesus, the Messiah, had come. Receive it. Believe it. Honor it. Don't lose it. Don't trust in yourself or your bloodline to be the chosen; trust in Jesus.

The people wanted to hear more and so invited Paul and Barnabas to come back the next Sabbath. Others immediately followed after Paul and Barnabas because they wanted to hear more right now! When the next Sabbath came, Luke recorded, "On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him." (verses 44-45) Were they jealous of the interest and desire that the people had to hear more about the forgiveness of sins through Jesus, afraid that they would lose the members of their synagogue to this "new" teaching of Paul and Barnabas? Were they clinging to the law of Moses as the only way that they could be right with God? Did they hold to the idea that they might not be God's chosen people only on the basis of being literal descendants of Abraham? But, in doing so, they had rejected the forgiveness of sins through Jesus and the eternal life offered through him and him alone to be the chosen.

Surely we are not like these entitled, jealous Jews, right? But we are tempted to think the same way as they did about being chosen.

There is a teaching in the Bible that we call the doctrine of election. It's referenced here in verse 48 when Paul and Barnabas preached the forgiveness of sins through Jesus to the non-Jews, the Gentiles. "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." (verse 48) People were appointed by God for eternal life. We could say, "God chose them in advance for eternal life." This is the teaching of election or predestination.

God chooses people to be brought to faith, adopted as his children through the preaching of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. Other parts of the Bible tell us that this choosing happened even before the creation of the world, before we came into being. This teaching is meant primarily to be a comfort for believers, that God moves heaven and earth in order that we know Jesus and all that he has done to set us free from every sin forever, to declare us not guilty before God as he fills us instead with his holiness and perfection. The Bible only ever speaks of God choosing people for eternal life in heaven, never choosing people for eternal damnation in hell. No, the only reason someone goes to hell is if they reject the forgiveness of sins through Jesus.

But such a teaching can surely be twisted by Satan. If whether or not we are going to live with God forever in heaven is already predetermined, then maybe it doesn't matter what I do. It's fated. I can't change it. I can do whatever I want and God will save me regardless. He has to because Jesus lived and died for me. Then we don't worry whether or not we honor the Word of God. Church becomes an afterthought, something to do when I feel like it or when it doesn't inconvenience me. Or worse, we still go to church but it's just lip service, just for show. Our daily devotions and prayers turn into mindless readings and recitations, or we drop them all together because it doesn't matter if we do these things. When we do these things, we've turned God's grace, his forgiveness of our sins, into a license to sin.

When this becomes our attitude, we fall into the same entitlement for salvation as some of these Jews, thinking we are chosen by virtue of who we are and where we have come from. When this is our reason for thinking we are chosen, we're not set free from our sins but instead have chosen to reject Jesus' forgiveness and his perfect life and remained condemned by God's law.

And so the message of the forgiveness through Jesus moves on. Paul and Barnabas boldly answered the hostile Jews, "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. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." (verses 46-48)

For those of us who then start are becoming anxious wondering if we are part of God's people chosen to be saved or not, we first and always go to his Word and find ourselves in Christ – his perfect life lived for us, his innocent suffering and death done in our stead. When we find ourselves here, we are set free from every sin and assured that we too, like these Gentiles, are appointed, chosen, for eternal life with God through the forgiveness won by Christ.

Knowing what Christ has done for us changes us. This makes us want to live differently, to live in line with God's will for us, his commands. It makes us want to cast off sin instead of indulge in it as if it doesn't matter because he has freed us from its chains. This message makes us want to hear it and soak it in again and again and again without it ever feeling old or tired because this is where we know with absolute certainty that we are forgiven, that we are loved, that we are saved, that we will live with God forever, that we are chosen. It's all because of what Christ has done for us.

We then also honor the Word of God as the only source of knowing what Christ has done for us. We honor it by believing it, not doubting it. We honor it by gladly hearing and learning it instead of giving it a low priority or putting it up on a shelf somewhere in our lives like those Christmas presents we once appreciated but now no longer use. We honor it by giving it our full attention, and not making it a checkbox of holy living and mindlessly listen to it.

Another response in honoring the Word of God, in honoring the Gospel, is to spread it. Luke records after the Gentiles heard the forgiveness through Christ and were glad and honored it and believed it, that "the word of the Lord spread through the whole region." (verse 49) We honor this message of the forgiveness of sins through Christ by spreading it. We spread it because we know that Christ came and lived perfectly for all people and paid the penalty of every single one of our personal sins by his suffering and death. We know that he rose from the dead as a preview of what he will do for us at the resurrection on the Last Day. We don't know who will believe when we share this message, but we do know that God the Holy Spirit is working whenever the message of what Jesus has done for us is shared. We know God wants all people to be saved – Jew and non-Jew, Gentile, alike. So, we preach it, knowing that it doesn't rely on us figuring out who the chosen are, but instead trusting God to bring people to faith as he has promised.

We know that Christ came for us. So, we gladly hear his Word again and again to have the forgiveness won for us by Christ. By this, we know that we are chosen by him. We gladly share his Word because we know that Christ has done this for every single person and will use this message of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus to bring many more to faith who were appointed for eternal life. This is what the chosen do. Amen.