

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL

Acts 13:42-52

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In today's message, I'm going to point out four emotional responses to the Gospel in Acts. I'll also talk a little about how the brain works in layman's terms.

This sermon has four points:

- Some people were curious.
- The Jews were jealous.
- The Gentiles joyfully believed.
- The leaders were angry and violent.

REVIEW: Let's review where we are in the book of Acts. Paul and Barnabas are in Pisidian Antioch. As was their custom on the Sabbath, they visited the local synagogue. When the local leaders finished the reading of the scriptures, they asked Paul to speak. Today, we pick up immediately after Paul's presentation of the gospel.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:42-44

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.

SOME PEOPLE WERE CURIOUS

EXPLANATION: Paul's attempts to connect with his audience obviously worked. Remember last week, I told you how Paul carefully established common ground with these strangers before presenting the Gospel. They were interested and wanted

to hear more. Some of them even followed Paul and Barnabas around. It makes me think of the way we might invite a visiting preacher to go out to eat with us. They hung out with Paul and Barnabas after the Sabbath meeting was over. They got to know them a little better, probably asked a few questions. Everything seemed to point to a successful revival taking place in this important commercial center.

ILLUSTRATION: Curiosity is the desire to know or learn more. Psychologists at the University of California used an MRI study to learn more about curiosity. They found that when we are most curious, certain parts and activities of the brain are triggered. For example, there is a boost in the activity of the hippocampus, the part of our body that regulates our emotions and stores our memories. The brain also releases dopamine, known as the “feel good transmitter” in our bodies. Basically, to a large extent, curiosity feels good.

- It feels good to solve a problem.
- It feels good to learn something new.
- It feels good to answer a question.

Maybe that’s why these people initially seemed so enthusiastic about Paul’s message. It was new. It was different. It was interesting. Their brains were just on fire!

ILLUSTRATION: There is a guy I’ll call Robert who is an engineer and a very do-it-yourself kind of guy. If something is broken in the house, Robert will fix it. If the car or the lawnmower stops working, Robert will get it back in working order. And if he does not know how, he’ll find a Youtube video to teach him. Robert’s curiosity does not just serve to make him feel good. It’s also practical. It helps him solve problems.

Another guy named Christopher also loves Youtube. He watches videos on all sorts of things. He has watched videos on how to build a house or how to paint his car. As of right now, Christopher has never built a house or painted a car. In fact, he has applied very little of the knowledge he has gained from those hours of video footage.

Robert's curiosity prompts him to learn and motivates him to put that knowledge to practical use. Christopher's curiosity is satisfied with the accumulation of stories and facts.

EXPLANATION: Just like the crowd in Pisidian Antioch, some people today listen to a testimony or a sermon, and they ask questions. They visit a church, and they come back again. They may even pray about it, read their Bible, and schedule an appointment with the pastor or their teacher to learn more. The problem, though, is not what they know. It's what they do with that knowledge.

THE JEWS WERE JEALOUS

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:45

When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

EXPLANATION: As more and more people were drawn to hear Paul's message of salvation, the Jews (most likely the religious leaders who had first invited Paul to speak) became jealous. Instead of accepting the truth, they began to compare their ministries with Paul's. They felt threatened and saw themselves in competition with him. Quite a few weeks ago, I shared with you my thoughts that the Jewish leaders' desire to shut down Jesus' ministry was no doubt based on the fact that they perceived salvation through Jesus as a threat to their livelihoods.

Here we are several years after Jesus was on earth and some of the Jews were acting the same way.

- The message of the cross brought an end to the old covenant ways of worship.
- No longer would there be a need for temple sacrifices since Christ was the last, perfect sacrifice for sin.
- No longer was there a need for priests, since Christ is the Heavenly priest interceding on behalf of his people.
- If the crowds accepted what Paul was teaching, the Jewish leaders' worship, their way of life, and even their jobs would be at risk.

ILLUSTRATION: Jealousy is a two-part emotion that results from a desire to have what someone else has and to keep what we have. If curiosity helps produce feel-good chemicals in our brain, jealousy has the opposite effect. Jealousy stimulates the flight or fight response in our bodies. Basically, it stresses us out. Even worse, it makes us irrational.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

- Music producer Phil Spector supposedly locked his wife in their estate home for years because of his jealousy.
- A British woman earned the title of “The World’s Most Jealous Woman” because of her obsessive jealousy of her husband. She made her husband take a lie detector test every time he left the house for more than 15 minutes.
- Of course, we all remember Saul and how his jealousy drove him to hate David and seek to kill him.
- These are examples of irrational jealousy.

Jealousy can drive a person mad and quickly lead to disaster. The Jewish leaders who so enthusiastically listened to Paul’s message only a few days before saw the crowds and had a change of heart.

Some people were curious, but the Jews were jealous, and their jealousy was sure to lead to trouble.

THE GENTILES JOYFULLY BELIEVED

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:46-48

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 light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”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.

EXPLANATION: The Jewish leaders started arguing and contradicting Paul. If you’ve ever taught a hostile group of students, you might have an idea of how

difficult this would have been, but Paul was undeterred. He and Barnabas were steadfast in their mission, and their perseverance paid off. The Gentile listeners believed.

Even God-fearing Gentiles experienced some amount of discrimination among the Jews. In order to completely convert to Judaism, male Gentiles had to be circumcised, a practice that was not readily accepted among many Gentiles. Gentiles who had converted to Judaism were not allowed in certain areas of the temple and were never really looked upon as being a part of God's chosen people. So, can you imagine how excited they must have been when they heard Paul's words?

ILLUSTRATION: A number of chemicals within our brain are responsible for our feelings of happiness. One of those is serotonin which, according to one report, "can be thought of as the confidence molecule." The brain produces serotonin when we feel significant or important. Paul was affirming that these Gentiles were loved and accepted by God, that salvation was for them too. No longer did they need to be seen as second-class citizens in the kingdom of Heaven. Christ died for them too. That was great news, and they were glad.

Some people were curious. The Jews were jealous, but the Gentiles joyfully believed.

THE LEADERS WERE ANGRY AND VIOLENT

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:49-52

The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jewish leaders 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 off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

EXPLANATION: How quickly people can change! One day, they were asking Paul to speak in their synagogue, curious to learn. A few days later they were arguing with him. Within a week, they had grown so angry that they gathered a mob and tried to kill the missionaries. Remember that visiting pastor you took out for

lunch? What would make you angry enough to want to kill him only seven days later?

ILLUSTRATION: There are two parts to the brain: the cerebral cortex, which is the thinking part, and the limbic system, which is the emotional center. Inside the limbic system is the amygdala. The amygdala is responsible for helping us process our experiences and decides whether to send the information to the limbic system or the cerebral cortex. Sometimes, when our experiences trigger an especially emotional charge, the amygdala completely overrides the cortex. That's when we do really stupid things without regard to the consequences.

Provoked by the Jewish leaders, upstanding members of the community got riled up and allowed their emotions to control their behavior.

- Some people were curious.
- The Jews were jealous.
- The Gentiles joyfully believed.
- The leaders grew angry and violent.

CONCLUSION: Whether we are watching a ball game or listening to a sermon, we will experience a range of feelings. Our bodies are hard-wired for emotion. Paul preached the simple message of salvation. We are all sinners. Christ died to pay the price we could not pay. By admitting our sin, asking for forgiveness, and committing our lives to him, we can be saved. How does that message make you feel?

- Are you curious? Do you want to know more? That's great. Ask questions. Learn, but remember no amount of knowledge will save you. Knowing about it simply is not enough. You have to commit.
- Are you clinging so tightly to your own will and your own ways that you are jealous of God's plan, afraid that He will ask you to give up something that you do not want to release?
- Or maybe being called a sinner just makes you angry. Maybe you think you are good enough, and you do not want anything to do with God or his plan of salvation.

Martin Luther wrote, “Feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving; My warrant is the Word of God--Naught else is worth believing.” We cannot always control what we feel, but we can control what we believe and what we do. Amid the difficult and changing emotions present in this story, we see two times when there was joy.

The first was when the Gentiles believed. “*They were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*” Based on what we have learned about the science of the brain, that makes complete sense. They heard good news. They responded with joy. But let’s look at the final verse of this passage again. “*And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*”

What? This had not really been a successful evangelistic effort. The revival had not ended well. They were being persecuted. They had been forcibly thrown out of the town, and yet, they were filled with joy. Why? Because they knew the secret to real happiness, real peace.

When we trust God with our lives, regardless of the circumstances, when we fill our hearts with his presence, our feelings will fall in line with the facts of God’s word. Joy comes from knowing the Lord and committing our lives to Him.

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