

† Why?

- *Have you ever asked WHY? Of course you have. WHY is probably the most common question we ask. As soon as we can talk, we are asking WHY.*
- *Why is a gift that drives us to learn, understand, making our lives and the world better.*
- *WHY also can be a curse holding us in bondage to pain and questions we can never answer. Something we must release to receiving freedom from the prison of what we can't understand, making room for healing and forgiveness.*

- *As followers of Christ, why has the power to lead us into deeper intimacy with God and His Word.*
- *And yet, why is a demand we must ultimately surrender to God, trusting in faith that His goodness is greater than our need to understand.*
- *Ultimately, scripture's answer to why is "Because I AM God."*

- *TODAY our road trip with Paul and Barnabas will raise multiple WHY's. We will look at most of them quickly, because at the heart of this text is one of scriptures greatest unanswerable questions. Question often avoided, distorted, or met with great protest. Question that profoundly challenges our deep desire for things to make sense on our terms. Ultimately, question requires surrender...*
- *"Lord, I don't understand, but I trust" This is hard to do.*

- *FIRST! TODAY SUNDAY May 30- TO, PE... BUCKLE IN...*

- *We left off last Sunday as Paul proclaimed that thru FAITH IN CHRIST, we are set free from every sin, a freedom in all things that the LAW could never do. IF YOU MISSED...*

- *Paul finishes his talk, Luke tells us...*

† **People wanted to hear more about the Word of the Lord.** Why?

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.

- *The entire town gathered to hear because the message Paul and Barnabas brought was NEW. It spoke of redemption, forgiveness, FREEDOM, a restoration to God unchained from the empty roman pagan religions and the performance based acceptance of the mosaic law. This was not a message of more religion, it was a message of LIFE.*
- *HEAR! The church today has Incredible technology, incredible speakers, incredible music, entertainment, publishing, movies, you name it.*
- *Nothing wrong with these- but this passage points to the truth that what brings people to God is the MESSAGE OF JESUS, THE undiluted TRUTH OF THE GRACE OF GOD, THE WORD OF THE LORD. MAY THIS ALWAYS BE WHAT WE PROCLAIM.*

- *Even though a majority of the Jews would reject the gospel, many did believe, along with many gentiles. To these, Paul urges them to 'continue in the grace of God'...*
- *FAMOUS GREETING IN STAR WARS... For these early believers, their greeting was "May the Grace be with you"... more accurately, may the Grace of GOD be with you.*

– **We'll come back to this next week- but now story continues, and not surprisingly...**

✠ **The religious leaders opposed Paul, Barnabas, and the message of Jesus Christ. Why?**

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.*

- **“The Jews” refers to the leaders of the synagogue. The religious leaders of the community were people of influence, status, and some degree of power. They had this status because people listened to them, were influenced by them.**
- **NOW, many of the people who had looked to these leaders for their religious security were turning to the message of the Gospel- this was a threat to their standing, they were jealous, and so they actively opposed Paul and Barnabas.**
- **The tragedy here is that the Gospel message had been proclaimed first to them- the Jewish leaders of the Synagogue- but they missed it because they saw a threat to their tradition and power. They cared more about protecting their tradition than they did listening to and considering the message of Salvation for their people.**
- **AS THE CHURCH, may we never allow a desire to protect our standing, our tradition, or even our resources, to keep us from hearing and responding to God's leading.**

– **Paul responds**

Acts 13:46-47 *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.’”*

✠ **The Word of God had to go to the Jews first. Why?**

- **Paul is quoting from Isaiah 49. This is a messianic prophecy, where God essentially says to his servant, the messiah- “it's not enough for you to only restore Israel to me. I also am making you a light to the gentiles- your salvation will be for all the world.**
- **In the big picture, Paul here describes how God has brought the message of Salvation, through Christ, and offered it to the nation of Israel. If Israel had accepted Jesus as messiah- the message of ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST, then it would have been through Israel that the gospel would have gone to the rest of the world.**
- **But Israel, as a nation, rejected Jesus as the messiah, and so now God is using Paul, Barnabas, and others, to take the gospel directly to the gentiles. Luke records...**

Acts 13:48 *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*

✠ **...and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.** Wait, what?

- **And here we arrive at one of the biggest theological questions Christians have wrestled with for as long as there has been Christianity. Goes by different names...**
- **Doctrine of Election. Predestination. Calvinism vs. Armenianism. Today, movement known as 'Reformed theology'- although RT is about more than the doctrine of election.**
- **Concept of God's SOVERIEGN WILL- of Gods SOVERIEGN GRACE- the idea that God chooses who will accept His Grace, and by the Holy Spirit, God gives faith and makes it possible for a person to believe and receive His Grace.**
- **As I said before, this question is often avoided- and when honestly approached, profoundly challenges our deep desire for things to make sense on our terms.**

✠ Why is this such a struggle for us?

– **FEW THOUGHTS- first, it pushes against...**

• Our concept of justice and fairness

- **If the reality of the human condition is that everyone comes into this world bound to sin and separated from God...and THEN, if God makes it possible for SOME to believe- he APPOINTS SOME FOR SALVATION- then what about everyone else? ALL sorts of questions arise from this, and none of them have easy answers.**
- **Paul acknowledges this in Romans 9- here he is discussing this issue, and at one point he rhetorically asks...**

Romans 9:14 *What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!*

- **Paul- The answer? No, God is not unjust, even though we struggle with this from our perspective. If this question hasn't been a struggle for you, I humbly submit you haven't thought it through.**

• Our great idol: we want to be in control

- **In regards to our faith in Christ, we want to say "I heard the gospel, I thought it through, I came to the point where I chose to believe and accept God as Lord and Savior of my life. I BELIEVE, and it was my understanding, my choice that led me to believe.**
- **It's harder to say "I only went through that process- I was able to come to that conclusion- because the Spirit led me, opened my heart and mind, gave me the faith that made my belief possible." "From my perspective, it seemed like I came to God, but in reality, GOD CAME TO ME." "From my perspective, I accepted God, but the amazing truth is that GOD ACCEPTED ME"**
- **SO, when we consider this question- HOW AND WHY DID I BELIEVE? Did I choose God, or did God choose me....**

✠ So what do we do? Let's consider what scripture clearly says...

• God is sovereign over salvation

- **We believe because God chose us to be his children, and made it possible for us to believe. God gave us the faith to believe, and apart from His Spirit at work in our hearts, we never would have believed.**

Ephesians 1:3-6 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

Colossians 2:13 *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.*

- **What ability does a dead person have to choose life? Imagine I died from a disease, and a year later a doctor came to me with a cure. WOULDN'T HELP! For me to receive that cure, I first would have to be brought to life.**

- **In 1963 comedian Lenny Bruce was convicted in New York on charges of obscenity. He died two years later. In 2003, NY Gov George Pataki issued a posthumous pardon for Bruce, clearing his name. BRUCE forgiven! As if crime never happened? But what's the problem. HE WAS DEAD! Forgiveness wasn't his problem- He needed LIFE.**
- **Our salvation- both the cross of Christ, and our faith to receive the life of Christ- is an act and gift of God.**

John 6:37-39 All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me...

- **There are MANY MORE passages we could consider. POINT- the teaching of God's Sovereignty over salvation is one of the most consistent and present teachings in all of the NT. It cannot be missed, unless we choose to ignore it.**
- **ANOTHER THING SCRIPTURE MAKES CLEAR... Truth that...**

- **Whosoever will believe**

- **This is the Biblical proclamation that the Good News of Jesus Christ is available to WHOEVER, ALL, ANYONE, and EVERYONE who believes- calls on the name of Jesus Christ.**

John 3:16-21, 36 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever** believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ **Whoever** believes in him is not condemned, but **whoever** does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ **Everyone** who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But **whoever** lives by the truth comes into the light,,
³⁶**Whoever** believes in the Son has eternal life, but **whoever** rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

- **If you closely consider this passage, especially verse 36, we see a strong picture of a MORAL CHOICE... the moral choice, upon hearing the message of Jesus Christ, to either BELIEVE or REJECT the gift of Eternal life through faith in Christ.**

Romans 10:9-13 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says, "**Anyone who believes in him** will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "**Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord** will be saved."

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to **everyone who believes**: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

- **THEREFORE**
- **You are IN CHRIST because at some point you heard the gospel message, considered the invitation of God's Grace to respond, and you surrendered... came to faith- you believed. This invitation is for EVERYONE. THIS IS CONSISTENT PROCLAMATION OF NT.**
- **ALSO, You are IN CHRIST because God, in His Sovereignty, Grace, and Mercy, chose to make it possible for you to believe. HE appointed you for salvation, for eternal life.**

• **SO!** How do we resolve this tension? We DON'T

- There are **LIBRARIES** of books you can go read that will make the case for either a full Calvinist perspective (God chose you), or a free-will perspective (you chose God).
- There are all sorts of theological constructs built with the objective of **FIGURING THIS OUT**, using our powers of logic to create a system by which we can stake out a position- understand this according to our perspective, on our terms.
- I've read many such arguments. I've stayed awake many nights. I've wrestled with this, trying to answer the many questions to my satisfaction, seeking to resolve this tension. **I CAN'T DO IT.**
- **REALITY** is that the concept of God's sovereign will, and our free will, **DO NOT EXIST IN SCRIPTURE TO THE EXCLUSION OF EACH OTHER. BOTH ARE THERE.**
- Back in Romans 9- Paul has just asked the question 'is God Just'... to which he answers **YES. But GOD is SOVERIEGN. He continues...**

Romans 9:19-20 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?

- In other words, when it comes to this tension between God's Truth and our perspective, **IT IS NOT OURS TO RESOLVE. IT IS NOT OURS TO UNDERSTAND. This is the great WHY that we must surrender to God. We must be HUMBLE.**
- You may ask "Ethan- if God appoints us for salvation, how is that just for those not appointed?" My answer? **I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T UNDERSTAND. There is a much bigger conversation we could have, books we can read, but at the end of the day, THIS IS NOT FOR ME TO KNOW.**
- **GOD IS JUST. GOOD IS GOOD. But most importantly, GOD IS GOD, and I am not.**
- **CHURCH.... One of the great desires of our humanity is to be CERTAIN. We want to know HOW AND WHY things are the way they are. We want to be able to pick up the Bible and say THIS IS WHAT IS TRUE, THIS IS WHAT I AM CERTAIN ABOUT.**
- But certainty, to a large extent, is an illusion. **I AM CERTAIN SCRIPTURE IS TRUE... But every year, the longer I open my heart to scripture, the less certain I am about what that Truth always means.**
- When I was a younger believer, there were many theological hills I would die on, where I would plant my doctrinal flag and proclaim- this is the absolute truth. I still have some of those hills, but not nearly as many.
- You see, God doesn't call us to be certain. He calls us to **TRUST HIM. TO FOLLOW HIM. TO LOVE HIM- and through His love, to LOVE THOSE AROUND US. THIS leads us to my last point.. another clear teaching of scripture..**

✠ It is God's plan and purpose to reveal His goodness and the good news about Jesus Christ through us. **Why?**

- If God has already appointed those who will receive Salvation, why does He call us to proclaim this salvation to all the world? Why not just have those he has already chosen go to heaven when they die?
- **BECAUSE GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION IS NOT JUST ABOUT GOING TO HEAVEN WHEN WE DIE. THIS LIFE, THIS WORLD- RIGHT NOW- MATTERS TO GOD.**
- **SALVATION** is about receiving, and experiencing, the transforming power of God's Truth in our lives, by the Holy Spirit, **NOW. It is about knowing freedom from the pain, loneliness,**

and devastation of sin, NOW. It is about experiencing the Hope, Peace, and Joy of HIS PRESENCE, NOW.

- **As Jesus taught his disciples to pray, it is about God's Kingdom- the kind of life that is possible when God is loved, worshipped, obeyed... His Kingdom being present on EARTH, NOW, Just as it is in heaven.**
- **Our world is full NOT JUST of people who face an eternity separated from God. THAT IS TRUE. But our world is also full of people suffering under the brokenness, fear, loneliness, desperation, suffering and bondage that comes from sin and separation from God.**
- **To these people, to this world, God proclaims the Good news of Jesus Christ, and his bullhorn through which he makes his invitation is US.**

Romans 10:14-15 *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

- **Luke goes on to say that...**

Acts 13:49 *The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.*

† **And the word of the Lord spread. Why?**

- **It spread because The spirit was at work. The word of the Lord spread because this was God's plan, and God's plan and purposes never fail.**
- **AND YET, AT THE SAME TIME, The word of the Lord spread through that whole region because the believers- Paul, Barnabas, and many others whose names we do not know- trusted God and became the beautiful feet by sharing the message that had changed their lives with those around them.**
- **The Word of the Lord spread because of the faithful testimony of Jesus' disciples, and God's Sovereignty, working together, in union.**
- **This is our calling, and our great hope, today.**
- **I DIDN'T FINISH... We will pick back up here next week. Right now, let's pray.**