

# Joyful Disciple

## By Paris Reidhead\*

Will you turn, please, this evening to Acts, Chapter 13. Acts, Chapter 13, and verses 14-31, a rather extended reading, but it again is the Advent message as it was delivered by Paul. And I think that it is a new window, another window, not new, into the truth with which we have been so familiar. I'll read the 13th verse in order that we may have the setting:

Please Read -Acts 13:13-52

Now here is a sermon. It is a sermon which has to do with Bible history, prophecy, the birth of Christ, the life of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ. There it is. And if you would like to understand how you can witness to Jews and Gentiles alike, here it is. Not just to memorize and repeat what you have heard, but to understand that Paul is hereby establishing the truth against which there is no argument. It is a declared message. In verse 26 he says, and states explicitly, that we have declared these things among you, to you is the word of this salvation sent. God had intended it to be heard. Angels declared it that first night-as they came across the field of Bethlehem, they astounded the shepherds by saying, "We bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11)

Now the message is to all people. It is intended to go to all people. Thus God has explicitly stated that to all men everywhere are to hear. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" is the unchangeable, unamended command of Christ to His church. (Mark 16:15) This Word of salvation is to be declared everywhere.

Now of course, Christmas, 1962, forces us to examine the measure of our success; how well are we proclaiming this message. Is it not a strange and wonderful thing that the men in aeroplanes can encircle the world in hours, not days but hours now. They have not, but it is possible, and with the astronauts encircling it in minutes, you would not think that a world, apparently no larger than this, could have two thirds of its people in ignorance of the Gospel. But this is the case. Two out of three now living have never heard effectively and savingly the message of God's grace. And so with all the means that have been at our disposal, all the means which are available to us, and have been in this last hundred years with increasing efficiency in transportation and communication, we have not been able to get the message to people as rapidly as they are being born.

There is something troublesome about this to my heart. Here in this year of years to us at least, the last we have had and could be the last we will have, we have to ask ourselves as to how effective have we been. How many have heard through you the message that was delivered through Paul? How many have become acquainted with the clear claims of Christ because you have been able to say as much as is set forth here?

Now I am certain of this, that if we were to memorize this message and present it to our day and generation, it might not be too well understood, and I am not suggesting that. I said earlier that you should understand the principles and use them and employ them. But the question that has to be faced by you, Have you and have I been to the degree that God has understood our ability and His purpose, have we been effective in the past twelve months in making this message known to someone. Oh, everybody knows it. - No they do not, even though they live in New York City, they do not know it.

I had an interesting conversation a little earlier of a young man that came to know the Lord since coming to New York, coming to school here. A roommate, one whom he said was unusual, extraordinary in many respects; one whose life and conduct had such eccentricities that it would hardly be possible to think that such a vessel could carry such pure water. Nevertheless this man knew the Gospel of the grace of God, and presented it to this young man, and through this means he came to know Christ. God has ordained that through the foolishness of preaching men should be saved.

Have you been faithful? Missionaries have visited tribes that have never had a missionary until this year; the Gospel has been going out by literature, tracts falling into the hands of some, who have read for the first time the claims of Christ and the offer of His grace. We have to face it. Paul went to this people, expecting that his purpose in going was to deliver a message, to

share a testimony. God provided it in Christ, and God is prepared to prove it by the Holy Spirit, and this is what is before us tonight. 1962 is but another year in this continuous chain, and every time we give the date, we are in a sense rebuking the church for her failure in declaring the message. Do you realize that you cannot sign a legal document without identifying it with Christ? You cannot sign a check and have it cashable without bringing the birth of Christ to bear upon it. Every time you thus affix the date, you are as a Christian identifying that moment, that day, with something that happened two millenniums ago, the birth of Christ. And every time you change the little desk calendar, flip it over so that the next number occurs, you are giving yourself a subtle and quiet sermon, Have more heard? Is this the day the last one will hear? Is there someone to whom I should speak today that has not had an effective presentation of the grace of God before?

Paul viewed this message as one that he was responsible to communicate. He took a verse that was general. He had no particular way of identifying it with him other than the fact that the Holy Spirit had applied it to his heart, and Paul said that the Lord has commanded us to first come to you, for he said, "To the Jew first and also to the Greek, the Lord has commanded us to turn to the Jews saying, I accept thee to be a light to the Gentiles that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth." Do you accept that as personal? Do you accept as your responsibility to tell someone about Jesus Christ? This is the case. It is a message that is to be declared by everyone that has heard it.

And what of you? As we go through these next few hours of this Christmas season, what have you done during the past twelve months to communicate to some lonely, hungry, needy heart the way of eternal life. I do not mean, Have you attended church and heard the proclamation? That is different. I do not mean, Have you given to send missionaries? That, too, is good. I do not mean, Have you been encouraging to those that were going to — serving the Lord — going to the field, some distant field or here. That is good. But have you accepted as your personal responsibility the clear teaching of Christ that you are to be a witness to this truth? to this testimony?

God has provided it freely in the Lord Jesus, He has offered it freely to all men everywhere, but He has ordained that those of us who have heard it shall share it. He does not use angels any more. Undoubtedly, this would be more efficient. But since angels have no share in His grace, they have no longer any share in making known His grace. You are God's witness and God's servant.

But notice that it is not only to be a declared message, but it is also set forth here that it is to be a despised message. This is the way it was in the beginning, and it is the way it will undoubtedly be till the end of time. So when the ones to whom you speak turn up their nose, twist their lips and sneer, nothing is happening to you that has not happened to others. In this particular occasion, coming into the Antioch in Pisidia, they went to the synagogue. And, as I understand it from the records available, there was a certain section in the synagogue, not similar, but you can visualize it, such as our choir loft would be where, those who were accustomed to take leadership in the synagogue would sit. And if anyone came as a visitor, who in his own synagogue would be prepared to speak or bring some word of exhortation, he would be expected of his own accord to go and sit in this section where the leaders and the teachers would assemble. And so as the service of the synagogue would go, they would notice that here was a stranger, sitting in the seat of the teachers. And it would be the custom, by the rule of the synagogue, the one who was in charge, to address these, Do any of you have anything to say? On this occasion, duly addressed, You that are visiting with us, you strangers, seated here in this section, do you have anything to say? And this is the logical, and proper, and polite opportunity for Paul to say what is on his heart. And this is exactly the record of what he said.

Now God said it by angels, the shepherds came and worshipped, the kings from the East came and left their gifts, and Herod's soldiers came and slew the infants. There is a mixed reaction to the news of Jesus Christ wherever it is proclaimed. There will be the humble who bow. There will be the wealthy who bow. And there will be another company represented by the organized rejection of those who will do everything they can to exterminate Christ and the testimony of Christ. As it was that first day, undoubtedly it is ever going to be. That same crowd that on the day of His entrance into Jerusalem cried, Hosanna to the One who comes as King, from those very same throats 24 hours later, or just a few hours later were crying out, Crucify Him. There is a fickle group that are going to follow anything that is popular, anything that is exciting, anything that offers entertainment. But at the same time that this is the case, there is that company that are going to follow Him; even though the disciples forsook Him and fled, when they knew He was alive and had seen Him, they were prepared to die. And of the eleven,

all died martyrs' deaths, save John. A small handful, wouldn't you say? from the multitudes that He fed, 3 thousand on one occasion, 5 thousand on another, healing all that were sick, all that were diseased; 120, possibly 500, a few more had savingly believed on Christ in 3 years' ministry.

So if this is the record from our Lord's life, we are not at all surprised that when Paul gives this message here in the synagogue that there is going to be a mixed reaction. He rather understood it. In verse 40, he said, "Beware therefore lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." (Acts 13:40,41) We must understand that what happened then is going to happen in your ministry: not everyone to whom you speak is going to receive Christ. Not everyone to whom you minister is going to receive Christ.

And you might ask this question, Why will God ask me to pray for someone, and witness to someone, and then have them finally lost? Well, I do not believe that any such question is of easy answer. But I am certain of this, that God has such great concern for people that He is prepared to extend mercy, even though in His omniscience He knows they will not receive it. And furthermore there are times when it is necessary for God to offer mercy in order that the judgment might be complete. This is the effect of preaching. It is a savor of life to life, and a savor of death to death. And therefore when you witness in the coming months, as I trust you will with an increasing intensity, and zeal, and earnestness, and longing, recognize that some to whom you speak may have needed that witness, not because they are going to be saved, but because now by this testimony that you have brought, they are exposed to God's dealing in a manner that they could not have been until you came, or someone came. Judgment is also as much an act of God's mercy as is grace, for we will be quite clear in remembering that had men lived indefinitely evil would have multiplied enormously. When you think what a man can do in the space of 70 years, you are very grateful that God has changed man's life span from 150 or 900 at one time that it was to the 70 or 80 that it now is. And consequently you can recognize that this shortening of man's life has been a boon and a mercy to the human race and family.

Be it understood by you then that when you speak to someone you are not necessarily going to see that person come to Christ. Paul did not. No reason for you to think that you will. If you are wise, therefore, you are going to bear in mind that when you speak your responsibility is not necessarily to make a sale, you see. If you have an idea that you have to sign up everyone to whom you bring the testimony of God's grace, you are going to be intimidated by your first failure and feel that it is some lack of anointing, or perhaps some lack of equipment or intelligence, or training. I think this is one reason why the church has been silent. And perhaps we preachers have been responsible for it, intimidating you. For instance, we will tell about the fact that Charles Finney<sup>1</sup> was filled with the Spirit. The next day he spoke to 16 people and within two months all 16 had repented. Do not for a moment think that this was true the rest of his ministry, in spite of the great way God used him. And there were many to whom Charles Finney spoke who rejected and scoffed and mocked, and did everything they could to exterminate him, because they hated him.

And we, by using such illustrations, may possibly discourage timid hearts. Maybe you need just what you have heard tonight, that when Paul with as much anointing as Peter had, Paul with as much gift as Peter had, went into this Synagogue, he did not have a revival; he had a riot. It just might be that your heart is somewhat encouraged; because, if I know correctly, not everyone you have spoken to in the past 12 months, if you have done any witnessing at all, has come to Christ. A little discouraging in the office when you speak to someone sincerely and earnestly, and every time they see you after that they mock you. They make fun of you. They sneer. You thought they were serious. They were, but you see since you have something they do not have, and they are not prepared to seek the price, the world is not big enough for both of you, and so they are either going to seek what you are presenting or get rid of you. And the way they are trying to get rid of you is to scoff at you.

When these Jews in the synagogue heard what he said about Christ, and there could only be forgiveness, and pardon, and life, through Christ, they were not prepared to submit to Christ. They had said a few years earlier, We will not have this Man to rule

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) An American Presbyterian minister and leader in the Second Great Awakening in the United States.

over us. And their attitudes were unchanged. And when Paul said, Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses. They rejected that. They are going to reject it when you say it.

Paul had an anointing of the Spirit of God, Paul had the gifts of the Spirit, Paul was equipped, and if you think that for one moment knowing the fullness of the Spirit, and the equipment of the Spirit is going to mean that everyone you speak to comes to Christ, you are utterly mistaken. That is not the case at all. Not everyone is going to come to Christ. They did not in Paul's case. They were despised. And this is always going to be the case. He was despised and rejected of men when He was alive, and He is going to be despised and rejected of men afterwards. This is why all teaching that someday the Gospel is going to make a perfect world for the Lord to come back to is so ridiculous. The idea that the world is going to get better and better until it is a fit place for the King to come and rule is such a complete contradiction of Scripture that it is nonsensical to believe it. The Scripture tells us that to the contrary things are going to get worse, and even worse.

Let us understand that in the midst of all of this there is still your responsibility to make known this message to the people that live in the same apartment house, the people who live in the streets, to everyone that you meet. Whenever, said one of the leaders of another day, whenever I have the opportunity to direct the conversation, I direct it to the One who is my best friend, Jesus Christ, and try to present Him and His claims to those of whom I speak. Now they are not all going to receive Him. It is going to mean too many that they are going to join Herod's ranks and do everything they can to destroy His memory from the earth.

Notice that the Jews in the synagogue decided that Paul was finished, they rejected him and rejected Christ with him, and so they had to have some support, and the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women in the city. Here was a company of people that were noted for their devotion, noted for their earnestness. Isn't it amazing how easy it is to get a committee for almost any project? I was reading just now something that was going on in the city for juvenile delinquency, not to promote it, but to correct it you understand. And there was quite a list of people that were there, enormous list, prominent people. Five hundred outstanding business men, and civic leaders, and they were not all listed, but they were apparently all at the banquet over at the new Hotel Americana a week or two ago, and undoubtedly doing good. But it was amazing how prominent names brought out 15 hundred people to pay quite a good sum for the meal and for the evening at this banquet.

It is easy to get a committee. Many times men do not even know what their names are on. Some men, you will find their names on 40 or 50 different committees. Someone comes in, presents it, are you willing to sponsor this, and they are prepared to do it. This is what has happened. Devout and honorable women in the city. They needed prestige, they needed help. And so apparently a committee was organized, and the Jews went around and said, You don't want this terrible, Saul, this Saul of Tarsus, this defrocked rabbi, this fanatic, this criminal, you don't want him here corrupting, do you? Oh no, nothing like that. We certainly don't. And so they get their name on the letterhead. Devout and honorable. This is not cynicism, this is not sarcasm. This is just God's way of saying that the blind are always blind. And you know, This is God's way of saying that the prominence of the person adds nothing to the effectiveness of the matter. Here is an outstanding Pharisee, one that has been well known throughout all of Israel, Paul of Tarsus.

You would say, My, what tremendous help he could be if he were converted. He has been converted. What a tremendously effective one he could be in reaching the Jews. He is reaching the Jews. What is happening? They are organizing opposition to him. And the more effective he becomes, the quicker the opposition organizes. You say, Well I don't want to be criticized. Well, that is easy, just do nothing, and you won't be criticized, but the moment that you start to do something expect it.

Somebody is going to find fault with it. They are going to criticize. If you want to be without criticism, then be content to get into a box, a casket, and it is amazing. You know, I have never heard any criticism levelled at anyone in the casket. I have had in the course of 25 years of ministry to stand at the head of many a casket as people have gone by, but I have never heard a word of criticism. It is always, even though, regardless, Doesn't so and so look natural? even complimenting the undertaker. There is not a word of criticism.

But when that person was on their feet, or when that person was living and breathing he couldn't do anything right. Now that he is dead, he can't do anything wrong. And if you are prepared, if you want to live through life without being criticized and having opposition, then fit yourself to a pleasant casket, and stay there. Do not move to the right or to the left, backwards or forwards. Stay there with the cover on, and nobody will criticize you. But the moment you lift your finger for God and your voice for Christ expect it. Devout and honorable men are going to be raised to come and say, What meaneth all this? Do not be surprised about it. He was not. He knew that these who were criticizing, in a little while would be slain by the Spirit of God and become His dearest friends. And so here you have to be quite content to recognize that what happened to the Lord Jesus, and what happened to Paul, is going to happen to you, if you are going to serve Him.

Be content, recognize that these chief men that were willing to get their names on another committee, and these honorable women, were doing what they thought was right. This was for the protection of pure Judaism, it was for the establishment and maintenance of the old standards, and they were doing what was right. O, dear heart, do not try to judge motives. Paul does not have anything to say. No more conflict. No more fighting. He has no argument. He simply said, Well, you have made your choice, and so we are going to go here. You won't. All right. He said... He did not say, I've got rights. He forfeited them when he came to Christ. He had no more rights than the Lord Jesus had. He is quite prepared to accept this as God's direction. If the street says, Dead end, do not force your way through. It is probably a dead end street. But recognize that if that is a dead end street, the Lord has one that is open.

I remember 10 years ago now one man said to me, We are going to close your ministry. You'll never preach again. We are going to shut every door in your face. You are finished. I looked at him and said, Well, if you can do that it proves that you have far too much power. And if you can do that, it proves that the God I have been preaching does not have nearly power enough, and I had better find it out. Well, I have forgotten just who it was that said that, but it happened, you see. They didn't close the door. He said, I have said before you a door that no man can shut, and so don't you say, Well, it's going to... It isn't. You mind Him. You serve Him. You walk with Him.

They said, You can't come to this synagogue. We'll close every door in this city to you. Paul smiled, and said, Other cities, other doors. No. So he turned to the Gentiles. Someone refuses the message? Don't despair. There is another. Oh, that you could get into your heart something of the persistence of the Mormons. When the Reidheads migrated from Maine, one of them stopped in Minnesota, and the other one went out to Utah and became a Mormon. No boys, but one daughter by the name of Fish. And now Utah is filled with Fish that are 2nd cousins of mine. And whenever they come they look us up, some of the relatives. Oh, how persistent they are. My dear, out in Minneapolis, a woman said, "Well I have some relatives out in Utah who are Mormons;" she said, "I would like to talk with you. That was enough. They cannot be insulted, they cannot be hurt, they just are prepared and determined to go on, and to go on, and to go on." Oh, I wish that somehow you could not be dissuaded. You start to speak of Christ and someone tries to brush a fly off their forehead. You think they are frowning at you, and you won't say a word for the Lord for 30 days. Frightened. May God give to us the courage that we are prepared, even in the face of rejection, and the face of spurning us, we are willing to go on witnessing for the Lord Jesus.

Why? Because this is a delivering message. If you will look here in verses 46 to 48 you will find that even though they were those who despised and hated Paul and those that were with him, and rejected it, there were still some to whom God had sent them. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. God has His Own. There are those to whom this message is going to be the message of redemption. It may not be the next one to whom you speak. It may not be the one beyond that. But if you will continue, sowing in season and out of season, in rainy weather and in dry weather, in good soil and bad soil, you will find that where you least expect to find response there it will come.

A young man this afternoon told me of a work that is going on up in the western section of our city, up north of us a little, and they have a working meeting Saturday afternoons, and they had made up their minds which of the first one of the boys and girls they were gathering in that was to be converted. Someone came one Saturday, second visit, and was talking to one person, and someone that was the least likely, the least expected of all that were present sweetly opened their hearts to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. You do not know who it is going to be, but you are responsible to declare this message even

though men may despise it, knowing that God has those that are ordained to eternal life, the ones who in His wisdom and knowledge He has seen repenting and believing, and receiving the Son of God. And so angels did not sing in vain. The shepherds heard and came. Wise men were drawn of God to kneel at His resting place. By the same token, you are to recognize that wherever God sends you, there is someone there to whom He wants you to speak. You thought you went to work at that factory just to get a living? just to get a salary? just to get a check coming in so that you could buy groceries and pay your rent? Oh no. That is too simple. God still has ravens that can bring bread night and morning. He does not need that. You need the experience of work for your own mental health. But it is something else. There is someone there that needs the testimony that God wants to bring through you. You thought you lived in that place simply because it was the only place that you could find, where you could get an apartment you could afford. No, that was not it at all. God had the intention of putting you there, because there is someone He wished to reach through you. There is no such thing as accident in the Christian life; and if you are alert and sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, you will discover that there are a myriad of opportunities that God is putting at your feet.

Some of you say, Oh, I wish I could have been a missionary. How I would love to have gone to Africa. I wish that I might have been trained in time so that I could have been one of those out in New Guinea. Oh, I do not want to discourage you. I just want to say this, that the amount of witnessing you have done this year is the determination of how valuable you would have been to Christ if they had spent the money on sending you out to New Guinea. Do you understand? What you have done this year is just about the determination as to how much value you would have been to Christ if we had sent you to New Guinea, or have sent you out to Africa. You say, Well then it would have been much easier for me to witness if I'd have gone there. Never. Oh, I would have been much more effective if I could have had a long ocean voyage. No. No. Do not tell me that. I have been there. I have been through it. You can be just as intimidated by a chief, standing there with nothing on but a little dignity, and looking down his nose at you, and saying, No, I don't want to hear your message, as you can by someone that wears a Bond suit looking at you and saying, I thank you, but I am not interested.

Human personality can convey its rejection of Christ, regardless of the circumstances. You have measured your effectiveness for Christ by your witness for Him in the past year.

Someone like myself might say, Well God called me to preach, and if I preach that is all. God called me to sing. God called me to write. God called me to teach a Sunday School Class. Did He? I wonder about that. I think God called every one of us to be witnesses for Jesus Christ, and regardless of what other tasks we may have, if we are not doing that we are failing Him. It seems to me that we have got to go back to Acts 13 and let the Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul speak to us and say, This is a message that must be declared, even though men may despise, there are still those to whom it will be the power of eternal life, a message of deliverance. And if this can bring you to the place that as you go into these next hours, thinking again of the journey, the lonely journey of Mary and Joseph to a Bethlehem stable, if somehow you can come with the kings of old and kneel there and say, O Lord Jesus, I have not gold, frankincense and myrrh, but I have got a body, and a mind, and a heart, and I am bringing this to you anew, and I want you to use my mind and heart and body to make known the message of your grace and dying love to those that wait to hear. This is what you ask for.

Let us bow together in prayer. It would be wrong for us to have spoken of a message declared and a message despised, and a message that delivers all who receive it, without urging you who are here and do not know Him to ask God by His grace to save you, and make you His Own, As so as I speak to anyone or ones, and you do not know Him whom to know is life eternal, O do not go, do not despise, but tonight open your heart, and come as a confessed, acknowledged sinner, and make your peace with Jesus Christ to receive Him as your Lord and your Savior. But for the most part, I know you professing Christians, loving the Lord Jesus, and I hope I have disturbed you. I have disturbed me. I hope I have troubled you. It is not fair that I should be the only one troubled. We ought to be troubled together, as we ask ourselves anew, afresh, What have we done; if we believe that this is a message so important that angels could take time off from their busy duties to declare it to humble shepherds, how much more ought we consider it our prime task to declare it to those who await to hear it through our lips, the message of the Savior's dying love. There will be those who despise it, but there will be those to whom it is a savor of life unto life, the power of God unto salvation. May we commit ourselves anew, afresh to making it known, and may God give each of us the

courage of sharing it with someone tomorrow, with someone whom He sends and has been sending, but we have not seen them, because we have been looking too hard at other things.

Father, one day soon we are all going to stand before Thee, and the days of time will be past, and hours of journeying will be over, the privileges of witness will be withdrawn. And oh, then how we are going to wish that we had sanctified the time, redeemed the moments, and used the minutes. Forgive me; I pray Thee, for my lack of alertness to the needs of those whom I meet. O God, forgive this people, of whom I am one, cleanse us, purge us, and give to us tonight a renewed commitment to the task that whatever else our responsibilities, we are first witnesses for Thy Son. Bring to our minds anew, afresh that perhaps to us is the means by which the next person whom we meet and have opportunity for conversation is to hear savingly of Thy Son's life, and death, and resurrection. Breathe upon us. Might we see something happen in my heart, and in our hearts, together, that we will be willing to join our voices to the voices of those that have sung and testified and preached in other days, and that we will no longer be a silent people, but a people who speak what they have known and heard and seen of the Lord Jesus Christ. Break us before Thee, Lord, by the memory of those to whom we might have spoken had we cared as much as we want Thee to think we care when we sing, My Jesus, I love Thee. Give to Thy Son through us a witnessing church. For His Name's sake. Amen.

Let us stand for the benediction. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion and the fellowship, and the empowering and strengthening, guiding presence of the Holy Spirit be and abide with us now and until Jesus comes again. Amen.

\* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Evening, December 23, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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