

## **Acts: Jealousy in Disguise**

### **Sermon 3-4-18**

### **By Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

#### **Acts 13:44-52**

<sup>44</sup>The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup>But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. <sup>46</sup>Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup>For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” <sup>48</sup>When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. <sup>49</sup>Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region. <sup>50</sup>But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region. <sup>51</sup>So they shook the dust off their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup>And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

#### **Message:**

I’m about to show a video clip from the movie “Stepmom.” To give you a little background before I show the clip, here is a description from wingclips.com, “Luke and Jackie have two children, Ben and Anna who live with their mom, and visit their dad. Luke’s girlfriend, Isabel, moves in with him, which causes conflicts during the children’s visitation. In this scene Isabel is in charge of watching Ben and Anna while trying to work on an outdoor photo shoot. At some point Ben disappears and is later found by the police at the nearby zoo.” (Play video at <https://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/stepmom/want-me-to-hate-her>) It comes with some sadness that Ben at the end of this scene picks up on Jackie’s feelings of hatred. And he rightly names it by saying, “If you want me to hate her, I will.” You have to admire a child’s loyalty. As displayed in this scene, jealousy isn’t always the first emotion that’s expressed. Jealousy is usually the root or the underside of the emotion expressed on the outside. In this case, Jackie expresses anger, disgust and hatred. Now, maybe you say she has every right to be angry and upset. And she does. But you can see that what she is expressing is more than just being angry and upset that her son was lost. There’s something more that is fueling her strong reaction. If we search deeper into Jackie’s feelings and

motivations, we should be able to recognize that jealousy is fueling this strong reaction. At a glance, we might not recognize it. It is disguised by her expression of anger. And then jealousy continues to build a larger and larger wedge between she and her ex-husband. On the one hand we can understand and identify with her jealousy and anger because it is such a difficult situation, but on the other hand, we know it could be better.

When we look at our passage, Luke, the writer of Acts, tips us off. "...when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul." Now, if we were in the crowd, or if we put ourselves in Paul and Barnabas' shoes, would we know that this is what was happening as the Jews became angry and made arguments against Paul and Barnabas? We might pick up on it. Or we might be so caught in the moment or so loyal to our Jewish leaders, that we side with those who oppose their point-of-view. We blindly choose to follow without thinking about motivations. And we might discover that our leaders are human too. And they are capable of feeling envy or jealousy of others too. I mean the irony of this scenario is that the Jewish people who are adherents to the law, know that one of the Ten Commandments is, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Essentially, you shall not want something else someone else has. And here the Jews are the ones violating this law by arguing with Paul and Barnabas because they are jealous of the crowd that came to hear them. In verse 44, it says, "...the whole city gathered..." It wasn't just a few people. All the people of Antioch came to the synagogue to hear Paul and Barnabas. Just a little bit of background, Paul and Barnabas weren't seeking this out. They weren't looking for a popularity contest. All they did was entered the synagogue a week prior on the sabbath to be part of the synagogue. And it was the officials who came to them asking them to speak a word of exhortation to the people at the synagogue. At this point in time, this was not the whole city. It was just those who normally met in the synagogue. Just like us meeting here every Sunday. They were amazed and urged them to come back the following Sunday to speak again. Well...I guess the word spread around the town and somehow it conjured up the curiosity of the whole city to come here Paul and Barnabas. Two guys who the week before were only known by a few people. Word spread quickly.

It reminds me of when I was serving at the Lancaster Church of the Brethren as their Children and Youth Pastor. A peace organization out of Lancaster was holding an event for a special speaker to come out and speak at the church on a Tuesday evening. Well...I don't think the organization understood the level of fame of this speaker. They invited Shane Claiborne to speak. Great guy. Very passionate about monastic communities and peace building in Philly. It was

incredible. As it got closer to the time for the event to start, more and more people kept pouring into the Lancaster Church. Whole vans of youth were coming to the church. Older people. Younger people. People of all ages were coming to hear Shane. Fifteen minutes before the event started, the sanctuary was full. There was no buffer seating. We had chairs in every crevice we could imagine. People started sitting on the floor on the stage because there wasn't enough room. Being on staff, I had to make accommodations. More and more people just kept coming through the doors. The parking lot was full. People were double-parked and parked in the lawn. We had to move people to the chapel and have people listen over the PA system. We even had people sitting in our children's rooms and nursery listening. Having no view of Shane, but only listening. And you understand that the Lancaster Church is a 550 member church. It is no small church. It doesn't have a small sanctuary. We were way past fire code. You get the idea. The place was overflowing. Praise God that so many people were blessed by the experience. I don't think the peace organization ever had this many people at any event. I imagine that event when I think of this experience of the whole city coming to the synagogue to hear Paul and Barnabas. For the Lancaster Church, it would be really easy to say, "Why doesn't this kind of crowd come on Sunday mornings?" Or for the peace organization to start to quibble with Shane's points to knock him down a peg and show how smart and great they are. I may have heard a little bit of that grumbling afterwards, but not much. It was incredible and intimidating. The temptation to be jealous of such a speaker and crowd was real.

I also remember when I first looked at your website, Providence Church, when I was about to interview here. The one piece that stuck out to me was you phrased something on your website something like this, "Tired of getting lost in the crowd at the Mega-Church? Come to our church where you will experience friendship and community." My first thoughts were, "They're intimidated by the mega-church and they're probably jealous." The fact that you had to compare yourself to the mega-church to show others your worth and value among the church at-large, showed me that you probably felt insecure about being a small church. And you didn't quite understand what you contributed to the at-large church. You only understood what you lacked. You had to attempt to knock the mega-church down a peg to show your value. And that's not the way of Jesus. That's not the way of the Kingdom. It's almost as if you had to reject what God was doing in the mega-church because He wasn't making Providence a mega-church. If you still feel that way today about the mega-church, I want to invite you to change your heart. I want to invite you to repent. I want to invite you to celebrate that God is doing amazing things in mega-churches. That for the Kingdom of God people are coming to Christ and experiencing the wonderful gift

of Jesus' salvation. That doesn't mean we are of less value. In fact, it probably increases our value. Because not every person is going to benefit from a big-church setting. Not everyone possibly can. And so we have to be willing to see ourselves not as less than the mega-church, but playing a different role in a grander vision. Sure, God has definitely anointed many mega-churches. But He has also anointed many small churches. This small church called Providence, has a calling. A Kingdom-sized calling that is upon it. It is called to serve it's community. It is called to share it's story. It is called to nurture and give special attention to those in need. We may not have the influence with the masses, but we play our role with every relationship we develop. God wants us to celebrate where ever the Kingdom of God is happening. If that's at Providence, let's celebrate it and praise God. If that's at a mega-church, let's celebrate it and praise God.

Coming back to our text, we might think that Luke is anti-semitic because of how he talks about the Jews. But there is plenty of evidence throughout Acts of positive relationships and positive conversions with the Jews. In this context, the Gentiles are bountiful. And Paul and Barnabas are simply working with those who are open to hearing the Gospel. <sup>46</sup>“Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup>For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” <sup>48</sup>When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. <sup>49</sup>Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region.” When we attempt to share the gospel and share our story of what God has done in our life, we may meet opposition. And this opposition is what many of us fear. Because we don't like confrontation. For the record, very few people like confrontation. But confrontation is sometimes necessary. When people oppose your sharing of the gospel, be sure to remind yourself of their motives. One of the things I had to get over when I was serving as a chaplain, was that when people rejected a visit from me, it wasn't a rejection of me. In fact, most times, it had nothing to do with me. It had nothing to do with being liked. They had their story too. And for whatever reason, at this point in time, their story had turned them off to God's story. In the Paul and Barnabas situation, these Jewish people rejected their sharing because of their own stuff. Their own insecurity. Their sense of jealousy. It came out in weird ways by getting angry, arguing with them and blaspheming. But it was their stuff that blocked them from hearing the Gospel that day. Paul and Barnabas understood that. But they also realized that the Gentiles were very open to hearing this Good News. They could have decided not to preach at all because the Jews rejected it. But then they would be robbing the Gentiles from experiencing the

salvation of Jesus Christ. Instead they worked with what the Lord gave them and "...many as had been destined for eternal life became believers."

When we're sharing the gospel or our story of God's work in our lives, we must be agile. Because you never know how others around you are going to be affected. They may reject you. They may accept you. I believe it's quite consistent across Acts and in the Gospels that we are called to spread the Gospel in places of openness. We are not to try to force people who are resistant to come to Jesus. We are not supposed to "strong arm" any person. But we do need to be aware. Aware of where God is moving. Where God is showing us a door to open. Where God is calling us share a good word. Where God is telling us to proclaim His great deeds of power. Because when we listen to those openings, I firmly believe that God will act in mighty ways through us. That He will not leave us high and dry. If we are aware of God's presence and we respond to the right moment, God will work in mighty ways. Even after the Gentiles accepted Jesus Christ into their lives, the Jews still sought to persecute Paul and Barnabas. <sup>50</sup>"But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region. <sup>51</sup>So they shook the dust off their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup>And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." Their work was done in Antioch, but they left an incredible impact on the Gentiles. And if you know Christian history, Antioch became a central hub for Christian ministry in the church for centuries to come. It is the city where the name "Christian" originated.

We live in a world that too often wants to destroy itself. And one of the main pieces of that is jealousy. The inability to recognize when we're jealous and making the decision not to act out of that jealousy. But to repent of it and celebrate another person's success. I'm sure we've all been there. Someone gets that promotion when we felt like we deserved that promotion. Someone gets a new and fancy car, when we feel like we should have a new and fancy car. Jealousy drives us to awful ends. It makes us live outside our means and drives us into insufferable debt. It drives us to be angry at people that don't deserve to be hated. It drives us to undermine another person's success because we want to bring them down to our level. All things that are undignified, wrong and sinful. Things that don't lead to the gospel. But lead to a miserable life and death. Repent today to the saving grace of Jesus and understand that he is all you need. Repent of the sin of envy and jealousy.

Providence Church, if you're still at this place of feeling jealous of another church's success, I strongly encourage you to repent of that today. Because it's not about the success of Providence Church. It's not about your personal success or vanity. We are in the work of the Church to build the Kingdom of God. To spread

the good news of Jesus Christ. To set the captives free through Jesus' work on the cross. Keep in the big picture that if lives are being changed, people are coming to Christ, families are being restored and God's Kingdom is growing, then praise be to God. Our role is to be faithful first and foremost. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." AND "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Thank goodness Paul and Barnabas understood these things. Thank goodness they knew that these Jews were jealous and were saying these awful things from an unhealthy place. From a sinful place. Whom do you identify with in our passage? Are you the jealous Jewish leaders trying to thwart God's kingdom work? Are you Paul and Barnabas trying to spread the gospel? Met with opposition, they spoke to those who were open to receiving the good news of Jesus. I know we probably all want to say we identify with Paul and Barnabas. But before you jump there, check yourself. Check if you are like those Jewish leaders. Again, God wants to do some amazing things through you Providence Church. If you need to, repent of any jealousy and allow God to work. If you want to be more like Paul and Barnabas, pray for that boldness. I can guarantee you, God will meet you wherever you're at. God wants to do great and mighty things in your life. God wants to give you things you can proclaim as His great deeds of power. We just have to be open to God's movement among us. May God be glorified in all these things. Amen.