**Your Response is Your Responsibility**

Acts 13:26-52 (read v. 26-33; 42-52)

Our title today comes from **Celebrate Recovery** and the 12 steps. What has happened to you in life is what it is. But ***“your response is your responsibility.”*** There is a really helpful moment in step 4 when you write down all the things that happened to you and all the ways you responded - both good and bad. Then you draw a line down the middle between what happened and what you did and over what happened you write, “Not my fault.”

That is very freeing to think about childhood abuse, the loss of a loved one, a wayward child or grandchild - things that happened to you - and know, ***“That was not my fault.”***

Now, the other side of the line - what I did - that is my fault. **I have to take responsibility** for how I responded to the things that happened to me. And that moves you along in the steps as you seek forgiveness from God and then from the people you harmed, seeking to make amends and move forward in your life.

We learned last week:

God **Chooses** who will be saved and this choice perfectly considers the individual **Choices** of every person.

“As many as were ***appointed*** to eternal life ***believed***.” Acts 13:48

That one verse sums up the point. **God appointed** a certain number of people for salvation. But each of those people had to ***freely choose*** to receive this salvation. God appointed. People believed. Both took place. Both are necessary.

God’s sovereign choice in election somehow factors in the choices people freely make - and are therefore responsible for. This is a mystery that makes our brains hurt and causes college freshmen to have many a long and agonizing conversation as they try to solve the mystery.

Here you go. I’ll give you the answer.

God is **Sovereign** and people are **Responsible**

J.I. Packer explains this in a small book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. The Bible is clear on both of these points. Arguably the main message of the Bible is that **God is sovereign** - that He is the Almighty Creator God who calls us to serve Him with reverence and awe. The Gospel can be summarized as ***Jesus Christ is Lord*** - and Lord means Master, the exalted King over all things. In other words, the **Sovereign**.

But the Bible also clearly teaches that ***people are responsible***. You make choices. I make choices. We all do. And we reap the consequences of those choices. In His justice, God will be sure that every single person receives exactly what they deserve in the end. He will hold every person RESPONSIBLE. Choices matter.

God is sovereign. People are responsible. Both are true. Both are clearly taught in Scripture.

God is **Sovereign** and people are **Responsible**

* How both can be true is difficult for our finite minds and calls us to **submit in faith** to the God of all wisdom and justice.

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” Rom. 11:33

After writing on this topic for three chapters Paul concludes with this prayer of worship and surrender. Acts 13 clearly teaches the sovereignty of God. But let’s walk through the same text again today and see ***how it also clearly teaches the responsibility of people***. We will see the different responses of people to the gospel and the different results based on those responses. First, here are the **three decisions** of those who ultimately reject Jesus.

**Some Rejected Jesus:**

* **Resisting** God’s Word

“They did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath.” Acts 13:27

The Jews in Jerusalem who welcomed Jesus into the city with palm branches and songs on Sunday were calling for his execution on Friday. “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Seeing the sarcastic placard over his head “King of the Jews” the people and their leaders scoffed at Jesus saying, “If you can save others, save yourself, KING!”

***They thought they understood the Scriptures*** - that the Messiah wouldn’t come from Galilee. The Messiah wouldn’t break the hygiene laws and eat with unwashed hands. He wouldn’t heal people on the Sabbath. He wouldn’t touch lepers and prostitutes or hang out with unclean, despicable tax collectors.

**They thought they knew God’s Word** but in fact they were ***RESISTING God’s Word***. Jesus said, “You have heard it said, but I say to you.” He tried over and over to help them see that the whole Bible was talking about HIM. He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it! He came to show the Jews what a life of total devotion to God and the Law looked like.

But they missed it completely. They did not receive His Word as God’s Word. And the Jews continued to reject God’s Word through the apostles, like Paul.

**Some Rejected Jesus:**

* **Resisting** God’s Word

“Almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowd, they… began to contradict what was spoken by Paul.” Acts 13:45

Now don’t miss the key point here. The Jewish leaders used the Bible too. They did the same thing that false teachers do today - saying, ***“That’s just your interpretation. Here is mine.”*** They would not have come out to say, “We are resisting God’s Word.” They would have said, “We are preaching the TRUE message of God’s Word.”

That’s what many do still today - **claiming to teach the truth** but watering down the Bible or twisting it to say that everyone will be saved and that a God of love wouldn’t send anyone to hell or that love should mean that anyone should be able to marry anyone or that anyone should be able to change their God-given gender…

The first decision of those who reject Jesus is that they resist God’s Word. Secondly:

**Some Rejected Jesus:**

* **Opposing** Christ

“...Condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt… they asked Pilate to have him executed.” Acts 13:27-28

They rejected his message and ultimately the Jews in Jerusalem ***rejected Jesus Himself.*** They couldn’t get any two witnesses to agree, the charges against him were so obviously false. Everyone knew Jesus was the most righteous person to ever live. In spite of all the evidence in his favor, they hardened their hearts, they closed their eyes and doubled down in their opposition to him.

Again, the Jews did the same thing to the apostles they had done to Jesus.

**Some Rejected Jesus:**

* **Opposing** Christians

“The Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men… stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out.” Acts 13:50

These choices are obviously interconnected. By rejecting their message, it was inevitable the Jews would **reject the messengers as well**. For a little while they tolerated the preaching of this message. But when crowds began to gather and the Jews saw this teaching as a threat to their authority, their status, their attendance figures in the synagogue - that was when they could no longer tolerate these out of town preachers. They had to be removed.

There are **two applications** here. On the one hand, these descriptions of people who reject Jesus can guide us away from those who are actively living in opposition to Him to focus our attention on those who are moving toward Him. But on the other hand, these descriptions can reveal sinful tendencies in our own hearts.

I’m sure to this point we’ve all been **thinking of OTHER people** who resist God’s Word and oppose Christ or Christians. ***But let’s look honestly at our own hearts***. How have YOU been resisting God’s Word recently? Have you been like the good soil that receives the word with total openness to whatever God has to say? Are you not just a hearer of the word but a doer of the word? Do you let Scripture change you every day, every week?

What about **when another Christian approaches you**. Are you responsive to meet up? Or do you avoid the invitation? Are you willing to share how you’re actually doing or are you dodgy and evasive? Nobody is in this room today with a conscious intention to one day reject Jesus. At least I hope not. But statistics tell us that some in this room - in a few years or a few decades - will not be walking with Jesus anymore. The pathway to such a fall from grace is marked by these decisions: resisting God’s Word and opposing Christians who come to you with His Word.

One more decision in the negative line before we switch to the positive.

**Some Rejected Jesus:**

* Seeking Honor for **Self**

“When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict… Paul.” Acts 13:45

The Jews who resisted God’s Word and opposed the missionaries **reveal their motivation** here in verse 45. They were jealous. This was the same issue in Jerusalem just a few years before. The Jewish leadership became ***jealous of the attention Jesus was getting***. He was drawing followers away from them and into his camp. Refusing to join his camp, they began to oppose him and eventually had him executed.

The Jewish leaders continue this pattern all through the book of Acts. This shows that it wasn’t pure theological conviction that drove them. It was personal jealousy. **It was pride.** They wanted the attention. They wanted the spotlight. They wanted the followers. They wanted the kingdom, power and glory - like Herod Antipas from chapter 12.

I think we can all see this danger in our own hearts. We all have this ***tendency to knock Jesus off of His throne and replace him with ourselves***. That throne is awfully comfortable. It is nice to be in control and the center of attention - the center of your own universe. This is our whole culture - the culture of SELF. And Christians are not immune to it. Far from it. This passage gives us a clear and **strong warning**.

**Some Rejected Jesus:**

* Seeking Honor for **Self**

“Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: ‘Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish…’” Acts 13:40-41

Scoffers not only reject wisdom, they mock those who follow God’s wisdom. They are on the path to destruction but seek to bring as many with them as possible!

Sadly, we have had one prominent leader after another revealed for **terrible hypocrisy** in recent years. Bill Hybels and James MacDonald were two mega church pastors in Chicago - the two most prominent Christian leaders in my home city. One fell to sexual immorality, the other to the abuse of power.

Recently you may have heard of the scandals revealed in the life of the late apologist and author [**Ravi Zacharias**](https://www.christianheadlines.com/contributors/milton-quintanilla/late-apologist-ravi-zacharias-did-engage-in-sexual-misconduct-rzim-board-confirms.html?utm_source=ChristianHeadlines%20Daily&utm_campaign=Trending%20Now%20-%20ChristianHeadlines.com&utm_medium=email&utm_content=4133285&bcid=b8dc41fcae9cab14d9568bde34082116&recip=523105624%20). I was shocked and broken hearted to hear of another great gospel hero who - for years apparently - was hiding secret sexual sin.

How do otherwise great leaders like this fall into such terrible, ongoing, longstanding patterns of sin? ***The idolatry of SELF***. Their attention shifts from Jesus to their own name - their own reputation - their own legacy… In the case of Ravi, it was his back pain that led him into massage parlors and that slippery slope proved his downfall.

Here who is a man who was preaching the Word but at the same time **resisting it** in his private life. He was supposedly helping Christians but secretly **opposing Christians** and not letting anyone get close enough to really know him. He was supposedly honoring Jesus and doing everything for the glory of Jesus, but in reality his allegiance had shifted - at least in certain areas of life - **to himself**; his own pleasures and desires.

Now, let’s turn to the positive. Some people rejected Jesus. But others - praise the Lord! - received Him! May we be much more like this latter group! Here are the **three decisions** that people make in order to follow Jesus!

**Others Followed Jesus:**

* **Receiving** God’s Word

“The people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.” Acts 13:42

After hearing the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection, these Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue were intrigued. They wanted to hear more! So they invited Paul and Barnabas to come back the next Sabbath and tell them more. In fact, **they BEGGED them** to come back! They were not just open to hearing more, they were eager - desperate - to hear this message from the Lord! They sensed that this was wonderfully good news and they wanted to understand it better.

**Others Followed Jesus:**

* **Receiving** God’s Word

“The next Sabbath ***almost the whole city*** gathered to hear the word of the Lord.” Acts 13:44

One week later this group not only came back, but they **brought the rest of the city** as well! That must have been one crowded synagogue!

Notice what they came to hear: not just a message from a Jewish teacher. They came to hear “the word of the Lord.” They recognized that the gospel was a message ***directly from God to them***. God was speaking to them through Paul and Barnabas.

What is **your attitude to God’s Word these days?** Are you receptive to Scripture? Are you like the good soil that takes in the seeds of God’s Word, believes and obeys them and bears the fruit of a changed life?

* Or are you more like the ***hard ground*** - and the devil snatches the truth away before it can sink in.
* Are you more like the ***thorny ground*** - you read and listen to the Bible some, but busyness and distraction keep it from penetrating your heart and life.
* Are you more like the ***shallow ground*** - you get excited for a little while when you do hear something in church or at small group or in your reading - but other desires and commitments choke out your follow through and those seeds fail to germinate…?

May we ***ACTIVELY RECEIVE God’s Word!*** May we open the Word every Sunday and every day, seeking to hear from the Lord, to receive whatever He has for us - and to respond in obedient faith!

And as we reach out to friends and neighbors, this is ***the kind of person we are looking for*** - the one who is interested in spiritual conversation; who is open to studying the Bible with us; who starts reading the Bible on their own. This is the good soil of the heart in which gospel seeds will grow and flourish. We need to keep reaching out to everyone, but to focus on those who RESPOND. The first decision of those who follow Jesus is to receive God’s Word. Second, look for people:

**Others Followed Jesus:**

* **Moving** toward Christians

“Many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas.” Acts 13:43

 After the service in the synagogue ended, a number of people stayed after to hear more. They followed the missionary preachers, who “urged them to continue in the grace of God.” The next week:

**Others Followed Jesus:**

* **Moving** toward Christians

“The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.” Acts 13:44

Again, these truth seekers not only came back to hear more, they brought everyone they could with them! This is one of the best signs that God is moving in a region - that people feel **a strong interest in God’s Word** and they come to hear from God’s people. They are drawn toward Christians, not running away from Christians.

***What is your attitude toward other Christians right now?*** Are you regularly and openly connected with believers? Are you committed to a small group? Do you have one or two accountability partners? Women, do you have an unveiled friend? Men, do you have a missional huddle?

After the worship service, do you stick around to catch up with people? Are you looking for someone new to greet and welcome? Are you looking for someone to encourage and maybe pray for?

***Are you moving TOWARD Christians or AWAY from them?*** What is the direction of your life right now?

Those who choose to follow Jesus 1) actively receive God’s Word and 2) purposefully move toward Christians. One more important decision they make:

**Others Followed Jesus:**

* Giving **Honor** to Jesus

“They began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.” Acts 13:48

When the Gentiles heard that the good news of Jesus was for THEM and not just for the Jews, they were overjoyed! “We are no longer stuck on the outside looking in! We have been included in the saving work of God!”

They gave the praise to the Lord and to the message or “word of the Lord,” which is the gospel. And look at the fruit of that:

**Others Followed Jesus:**

* Giving **Honor** to Jesus

“And the word of the Lord was spreading through the whole region.” Acts 13:49

These excited new believers not only praised Jesus when they were together, ***they talked about Jesus everywhere they went!*** Their lives were reconfigured - no longer focused on themselves, but reoriented to worship Jesus and follow after Him.

So here is the contrast in Acts 13:

**Different Responses:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Some Rejected Jesus** | **Others Followed Jesus** |
| 1. Resisting God’s Word
 | 1. Receiving God’s Word
 |
|  2) Opposing Christ(ians) |  2) Moving toward Christians |
|  3) Seeking Honor for Self |  3) Giving Honor to Jesus |

We see different responses to Jesus. Some rejected Him and others followed Him. Some received the Word with joy, and others drove the missionaries out of town. You can see three decisions contributed to their **ultimate posture toward Jesus**: 1) their attitude toward Scripture; 2) their attitude toward Christians and 3) their attitude toward themselves.

Those who resisted God’s Word, rejected and opposed the messengers of God’s Word, jealous for attention and recognition and the advance of their own agenda. They refused to bow to King Jesus and His agenda.

**But the Gentiles** - the surprising reveal of the book of Acts - the pagan, barbarian, unclean Gentiles were the opposite. They received God’s Word with openness and joy. They followed after Paul and Barnabas, seeking to learn more. And they did not think about their own desires or reputation but gave glory to God, to Jesus and to the message of their salvation.

And look at the results!

**Different Results:**

* Those who reject Jesus Experience:
	+ The **Absence** of God and the Absence of **Joy**

“The leading men of the city stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their district.” Acts 13:50

By driving out the messengers of God, they drove out the presence of God. They cast out their opportunity to be reconciled with God. Listen to how Paul expresses it to them in verse 46:

**Different Results:**

* Those who reject Jesus Experience:
	+ The **Absence** of God and the Absence of **Joy**

“Since you thrust [the word of God] aside and ***judge yourselves*** unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.” Acts 13:46

What a striking phrase - “judge YOURSELVES unworthy.” By casting Paul and Barnabas out of their town, the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia were ***casting THEMSELVES out of heaven!*** Thinking they were judging these preachers as unworthy, they were pronouncing themselves unworthy.

Hold onto this perspective **as you reach out** to people with the Gospel. It is not for US to judge who may or may not respond. Our job is to share the good news with EVERYONE. But those who reject the message - by resisting the Word, avoiding or opposing us and choosing themselves over Jesus - are ultimately judging themselves. They are choosing their own fate.

**Different Results:**

* Those who reject Jesus Experience:
	+ The **Absence** of God and the Absence of **Joy**

“But they shook the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.” Acts 13:51

With the absence of God comes also the absence of joy and blessing and peace, hope and life. In place of those things comes judgment, condemnation, suffering and death.

This is what Jesus taught the apostles to do. Any town that accepted them, they were supposed to stay and continue to preach. Any town that rejected them, they were to ***“shake the dust from your feet”*** as a testimony against them. It was a symbolic act saying, “even the dust of your town is unworthy of us and will face the coming judgment of God.” It was like our phrase today, “I wash my hands of this.”

Imagine the missionary team surrounded by ***the light of God’s glory*** as they walked out of Antioch, leaving darkness behind them. Thankfully there were some who believed in that town, but their work as salt and light in a dark and resistant city would be difficult.

Now let’s turn again to the positive side.

**Different Results:**

* Those who follow Jesus Experience:
	+ The **Presence** of God and the presence of **Joy**

“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 13:52

Rejecting Jesus and the gospel banishes God from your life, which banishes lasting joy and peace and life. But trusting in Jesus, following Jesus invites God in! The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. **Wherever the Spirit of God goes He brings the life of God** - which is love, joy, peace, and every other spiritual blessing.

It’s like ***the Nile River valley*** - where the River goes, there is life. Where the River does not go, there is dead, barren desert.

So here is the final contrast in responses and results:

**Different Results:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Those who reject Jesus experience:** | **Those who follow Jesus experience:** |
| * The Absence of God
 | * The Presence of God
 |
| * The Absence of Joy
 | * The Presence of Joy
 |

We heard some tragic, negative examples earlier. Let’s close today with an encouraging story.

<https://www.moodyradio.org/programs/in-the-market-with-janet-parshall/2021/01/1.11.2021---turn-your-season-around---women-who-risk/>

Janet Parshall had a guest on her show a few weeks ago (Jan. 11) who is active in the Middle East, sharing the gospel and training leaders. He told a story they titled, ***“The worst husband in Syria.”***

There was a woman we’ll call Sarah who was married to a man we’ll call Mohammed. Mohammed didn’t just have the four wives often allowed by Muslims. **He had 66 wives**. Through the practice called “temporary marriage,” some parts of the Middle East have effectively legalized prostitution. Men can have a “temporary wife” for a few hours, a few days or a few months. The result is they have access to as many women as they want.

While enjoying his 66 wives and neglecting Sarah, his first wife, Mohammed was active in supporting ISIS as an arms dealer. Needless to say, Sarah was not happen - her resentment and hatred for her husband was growing day by day.

Then one day **a battle broke out** and they were separated. Mohammed was huddled with a few other men in a building that was actively being bombed, so they couldn’t move. A mysterious man brought this small group bread every day - keeping them alive. Mohammed insists the man was Jesus.

Now think about **Mohammed’s life to this point**. He was a fairly devout Muslim who read the Qoran and said his prayers, but was ***resistant to the Bible*** and certainly opposed to the Christian gospel. He avoided Christians and worked against them when possible - viewing them as infidels worthy of death. And with his 66 wives, he was all about his own desires and pleasures.

**But then Jesus brought him bread.** Jesus visited him with bombs falling all around. Jesus kept him alive.

So after the battle, ***Mohammed went to find one of the Christians he knew***, who shared the gospel with him and led him to Christ. From opposing Christ and Christians, Mohammed became devoted to Christ and active in the underground church in Syria. **From resisting God’s Word, Mohammed began to actively study God’s Word** and eventually became a great preacher, church planter and trainer in the region!

It took **a while before Sarah could trust what was happening** in Mohammed. But when she saw him put a stop to his relationships with other women and start being faithful entirely to her, it got her attention. When he stopped being harsh and became affectionate toward her, she began to soften. She, too, was resistant to the gospel at first. But in time, seeing how his life had been totally transformed, she became curious about this Jesus who had visited Mohammed in the battle.

Now Mohammed and Sarah are ***a “power couple” in the Middle East***. For years they have been evangelists, reaching many Muslims with the gospel, bringing healing to very damaged marriages and training believers to make disciples and plant new churches.

This brings us full circle. God alone chooses who will be saved. In His sovereign grace He perfectly factors in the individual choices each of us will make. Some reject Jesus for a long time but then come around to follow Him. Others appear to follow Him but in reality are rejecting Him all along.

**God is sovereign.** ***But you are responsible.*** Your response to whatever happens in your life is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY. Above all, your response to JESUS is your ultimate responsibility.

Are you receptive to His Word?
Are you connected and engaged with His people?
Are you giving honor and glory to Him?

Let’s pray to that end!