

August 25, 2024
As You Are Going: A Message for the Mission
Acts 13:13-52
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Intro...

Last week we left Paul, Barnabas, and young John on the island of Cyprus at Paphos, the capital city where they came across two men, a sorcerer named Elymas who was a spiritual advisor to Sergius Paulus, the governor of the Island. Because of his opposition to the gospel, Elymas was struck blind, and we're told that the governor believed and put his faith in Jesus. And having accomplished what they set out to do on Cyprus by preaching the gospel there, and under the continued leading of the Holy Spirit, they, again, set sail and take the message of the gospel up into Asia Minor, what is now modern-day Turkey. This is where we pick up the story as we continue in Acts 13. Because of the length of the passage we are going to cover today, I will not have you stand, but rather, we will make our way through this passage a couple verses at a time and so you can stay seated. So, let's start in Acts 13:13-15. [Read]

Now there's a few things to notice here right off the bat. First, notice the shift from "Barnabas and Saul," which has been used previously in Acts in referring to these two men, to the phrase "Paul and his companions." This really marks the beginning of Paul's leadership of this missionary journey and from this point on in the Book of Acts, Paul's name is always first in any listing as he becomes the focus of Luke's narrative.

Another thing we're told in these first few verses is that John left them and went back to Jerusalem. Now, we're not told exactly why John went home. Maybe he was homesick. Or, maybe, he was afraid of the tough and dangerous travel through the mountains that laid ahead of them as David Guzik and other commentators point out. A strong case can be made, and some scholars believe, that Barnabas was John's cousin and so maybe he resented the fact that Paul had assumed a leadership role over his cousin Barnabas. Maybe he had lost confidence in Paul as, according to Gal. 4:13, it was during this time that Paul suffered from poor health, most likely an eye condition, another possibility suggested by the commentator David Guzik. So, we're not sure why John left but we know it caused friction among the team. And we will see this play out when we get to Acts 15, where we see this friction between Paul and Barnabas lead to them splitting up over the question of taking John with them again on another journey. This reminds us that as great and godly as these men were, they were not perfect and still had problems they need to work through.

So, the text tells us, they set sail from Cyprus and came to Perga, and from there, they traveled about 100 miles through the treacherous terrain and finally arrived at Antioch. This is not the same Antioch in Syria, which was where the church was located that they were sent out from. This is another Antioch in the region of Pisidia, which was part of the ancient Roman province of Galatia. So, when you read Paul's letter to the Galatians, you are reading a letter written to the Christians in these cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, all places Paul preached the gospel and planted churches in along this first missionary journey we are now following.

We read they came into the synagogue first which, as we saw last week, is Paul's custom because God had said that the gospel was to go to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. And after reading from the scriptures, they were invited to speak, as we see at the end of vs. 15, "Brothers,

if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” Talk about a God given opportunity. This is similar to what we saw last week when the governor of Cyprus invited Paul and Barnabas to share the Word of God with him. We need to pray and watch for such opportunities.

And its here we find Paul’s first recorded sermon in the scriptures which shook the whole city as we’ll see in a moment. It breaks down into three sections which we will look at more closely as we go. The first section is Paul’s re-telling the story of Israel. [Read Acts 13:16-25]

We’ve seen similar messages already in the Book of Acts. Twice, Peter preaches messages to the Jews in chs. 2 and 3 by reminding them of God’s involvement in their story. But, more importantly, for our purposes today, in Acts 7, Stephen preached a similar message before the Sanhedrin, the group of religious leaders made up of both the Pharisee’s and the Sadducee’s, of which Saul of Tarsus was a member. As a result of that sermon, the people drug Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death all under the watchful eye of Saul. But then God changed his heart and it seems that Saul, now Paul, never forgot the power of Stephen’s message and the way he stood his ground even in the face of death. The gospel message had reached his own heart and resulted in his own conversion and now we find him preaching the very same message in our text today.

Like Peter and Stephen before him, his point is that Israel’s history centers on God. It is God who has always been working in their story. Paul points out 10 different instances of what God did during Israel’s history: "God... chose our fathers, and made the people great, ... he led them out of Egypt." "God put up with them in the wilderness." "God destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, and gave them their land as an inheritance." "God gave them Judges..." "Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul." "And when he [God] had removed him, he raised up David." And finally, "God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised."

And he quotes the testimony of John the Baptist concerning the greatness of Jesus. [Read] And so, Paul starts building his case by using Israel’s story as his introduction.

What was God’s plan? In the second section, Paul lays out the message of salvation, the gospel: namely, the life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus. [Read Acts 13:26-31] To Paul the gospel was very clear. It consisted of the coming of the Lord Jesus, his life, his death by crucifixion because of the sins of men, and his resurrection as the Scriptures had promised. Remember how he puts it in 1 Cor. 15. [Read 1 Cor. 15:1, 3-4]

That is the good news, the gospel. It is the basis for everything that God does, and here Paul makes that very clear. He is giving us the answer to a question that many people hearing him would have been asking. "If Jesus was the Messiah predicted by the Old Testament Scriptures, and if he fulfilled these when he came, how is it that the Jews did not recognize him?"

Well, Paul gives two reasons: First, he says, they simply didn’t recognize him. (vs. 27) They were misled by their misconceptions about him. They looked at him and saw nothing but a carpenter's son. They saw that he had no money and no influence or standing in society. They saw that he had no prestige. He had never been taught by a great Rabbi, and so they wrote him off and paid no attention to him because they were looking for someone else. Someone like a military leader who would help them overthrow the Romans and establish Israel’s kingdom once again.

The second reason Paul mentions here as to why they didn’t recognize him was because they did not understand the scriptures, again in vs. 27. Here were the people who had “heard the utterances of the prophets every Sabbath.” They knew and had large portions of the scriptures

memorized but they did not understand them. They did not take them seriously. The reading of the scriptures had become just a ritual they went through every Sabbath. People went and did their thing in the synagogue, and then went home again. That was all there was to it. But before we come down to hard on the Jews here, there are a lot of people like that in the church today. People go to church Sunday after Sunday on their best behavior, they sing a few songs, listen to a sermon and then go right back to their day to day life without giving one thought to the things of God and what it means to be a Christ follower living a life on mission. I know I'm not describing anyone here today only those other people in those other churches, right?

But, you see, that was the reason why they missed the coming of the Son of God and did not recognize him as the Messiah because they did not understand what the scriptures said about him. And so, as Paul says, they fulfilled the very prophecies they didn't understand by condemning him and turning him over to Pilate to be crucified.

Now, in the third section, Paul zeroes in on the resurrection itself as the central point of God's story by pointing them, again, back to the scriptures. [Read Acts 13:32-41]

Paul quotes several verses here in this section. The first comes from Psalm 2 in vs. 33 which promises that the Son of God would be begotten as a man and would come into humanity. He then quotes Isa. 55:3 and Ps. 16:10 in vs. 34-35 as clear predictions that there would come one, this same Son of God, who would never see corruption, whose body would not decay in the grave.

As we would expect, Paul would have had skeptics in his audience that would have said that these OT references didn't refer to Jesus, but they simply referred to either David or Isaiah themselves. But Paul answers this argument when he says in vs. 36-37. [Read]

In other words, Paul's point is you cannot apply this psalm to David because he died and was buried and his body decayed just like everybody else's. So, this scripture is clearly pointing forward to someone who would come later, of the offspring of David, who would never see corruption when he died. Remember, he already pointed out back in vs. 31, that there were witnesses, over 500 of them he tells us in 1 Cor. 15, who saw Jesus alive in his glorified state after the resurrection and he had no signs of decay or corruption.

And here we come to the main point of the message. [Read Acts 13:38-39] Remember he had a Jewish audience, people who revered the Law of Moses as the greatest word that God had ever given to mankind. They were trying their best to live up to it and many of them realized that they were falling short. But they still thought that the way to God was to obey the Law, in other words, to be good. But now Paul declares to them that they will never find acceptance by God in this way. You cannot be accepted by God on the basis of trying to be good. The Law will not help you one bit, it can only condemn you because you can never be good enough, no matter how hard you try.

That's the bad news. But the good news is that God has made a way for us even though we cannot be good enough, and that way is through faith in Jesus, and the resurrection was the proof that the plan succeeded. Can you imagine how this shocked these people. They had never heard anything like this before. The amazing, good news that God would accept them, not on the basis of their perfection in keeping the Law, but on the basis of one who had lived a sinless life for them, and it was his righteousness that was credited to their account through faith in his atoning work for them.

Many people find this message difficult. It seems too good to be true. Paul evidently saw some disbelief on people's faces as he spoke, because he immediately adds these words he quotes from Hab. 1:5: [Read Acts 13:40-41]

Paul is saying here that when you hear the good news of the gospel, that God has made a way for you to enter into a relationship with him not by anything that you have done, but by what Christ has done for you, it's decision making time. You can either accept it and embrace it by faith, or you can reject it and turn away. But, if you reject it and turn away, you will find yourself in danger of God's judgement and you will perish. And so, Paul concluded his message to the synagogue in Antioch with the message that the only way one can be freed from sin and guilt is by the acceptance of the work of Jesus on their behalf.

Now, we'll finish up our time this morning by looking at the results of those who heard this message, some believed and some didn't. [Read Acts 13:42-52] In the immediate aftermath, after Paul finished, the people were so amazed that Paul and Barnabas were invited to come back the next Sabbath. So far so good. But when the whole city turned out for this second message is when the problems started.

Heb. 4:12 says, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The gospel cuts its way through everything that's fake, all the noise, and it becomes the dividing line as to where we stand with God. There is no middle ground. We're told that "certain Jews and devout converts followed Paul and Barnabas." But there were also those who were filled with jealousy and hostility, and ultimately they reject the gospel and begin to contradict the message Paul had shared with the people. And this never went away and plagued these newly formed churches as I believe that the seeds were planted here that lead to the reason Paul had to write his letter to the Galatians astonished that they had turned back to trying to obtain salvation through the Law.

Paul, then, quotes scripture again, this time a prophecy in Isa. 49:6 that foretold the message being rejected by the Jews and authorizing them to now go to the Gentiles in vs. 47-48. The Gentiles rejoiced at this good news and many came to faith in Christ and the word of God went out into all the surrounding region which indicates Paul and Barnabas were there for an extended time, probably several months.

And after that time had passed, many of the Jews were disturbed by the fact that the church was growing and the word of God was spreading that they went around behind scenes and stirred up opposition and drove Paul and Barnabas out of their district. Don't be surprised when you face opposition brothers and sisters. The text tells us that Paul and Barnabas shook off the dust of their feet against them, symbolizing that they had done all that could be done there and whatever happened next was between them and God and they went to Iconium which is where we will turn our attention next week.

But, the text ends on a high note, as we're told in vs. 52, that the disciples, isn't that cool, who remained in this area "were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." Even in the midst of persecution and opposition, even though Paul and Barnabas had been run out of town, the gospel had been preached and had taken root in the hearts of those who believed and the church continued to grow one believer at a time.

In our text today, Paul took the opportunity he was given to share the Gospel with his fellow Israelites. A message that God has provided a way to be reconciled to him through faith in his Son, Jesus. That we can be freed from the guilt of our sin because Jesus already took the penalty upon himself for us. We have a marvelous message to share and if we are going to be a church on mission, then we must share this message with a world that so desperately needs it. Let's pray.