

ACTS 13:16-52: PAUL'S FIRST RECORDED SERMON

We have been in the book of Acts for a while. We are in the middle of Chapter 13. This is Paul's first recorded sermon – probably not his first sermon, but the first one that is recorded in the book of Acts. The setting for this morning's lesson is Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

Just a quick recap... They have made it from Antioch of Syria to the island of Cyprus and there they recorded their first convert (Sergius Paulus). This man was the governor of the island and a Gentile. From there they went north back across the Mediterranean to Perga. That is where they experienced a setback. A member of their team, a young John Mark left and returned home. No reason was given. We talked about all that last time. Paul and Barnabas then made their way across Pamphylia, uphill, 100 miles into the Taurus Mountains, to an elevation of 3,600 feet above sea level. They arrived at the town of Pisidian Antioch. We have talked about their home church being in Antioch, which is located in Syria. This is obviously a different Antioch. This one is located in the region of Pisidia that borders Galatia.

As will be Paul's practice throughout all of his missionary journeys, the first place that he and Barnabas go to preach is the local synagogue. We left off with these verses last time: "They went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it'" (Acts 13:14-15). That leads us to our verses for today.

Paul, never one to shy away from an opportunity to share the Gospel, stands up and begins to preach. What we are going to look at today is his first recorded sermon in the book of Acts.

READ Acts 13:16

Paul's audience is primarily Jewish which makes sense because they are in a synagogue. These are the "men of Israel." But there are also in this synagogue some Gentile proselytes (God-fearing followers of Judaism) who are in attendance. These are referred to as "those who fear God." So, Paul here is addressing his audience.

READ Acts 13:17-18

We all know that story, don't we? The people grumbled and griped at Moses the whole time! Paul is familiar with the Old Testament. That statement in v 17, "with uplifted arm He led them out of it," is language borrowed from Exodus 6:6 where God tells Israel, "...I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment." And God certainly did that, didn't He? Through Moses, God delivered His covenant people, the Jews, out of Egyptian bondage. Paul is just telling them what they already know.

READ Acts 13:19

The Promised Land. We Christians sing songs about the Promised Land. Most of them refer to us enjoying a future life with Christ. But there was a real Promised Land, a real physical land. And here Paul is talking about the real Promised Land – THEIR land. Paul mentions the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. After coming out of Egypt He gave them the land that He promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The seven nations mentioned here in this verse that God destroyed in the process are listed in Deuteronomy 7:1 – "the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites." Then God adds this commentary: "seven nations more numerous and mightier than you." It was not as though they, the Israelites, by their own might, defeated these nations. GOD defeated these nations. GOD is the One who moved them out of the way to allow Israel to possess the land. GOD destroyed these nations. GOD gave His people, the Jews the Promised Land.

I want to stop here and address something that Paul has just reminded his audience about. It just so happens to be a very hot political

issue today. I believe that as Christians it is a good thing for us to formulate our opinions based on a biblical world view whenever possible. This is such a case. Let me point something out to you. There is an issue today that pertains to the nation of Israel. It is in the news. Many voices out there insist that Israel needs to adopt a two-state solution if they are going to achieve peace in that part of the world. A two-state solution was adopted and proposed by the United Nations in 1947 when Israel became a nation. But some things happened since 1947 that changed all that. Israel was twice attacked by the Arab countries around them (the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973). The Arab countries tried to annihilate them because they did not want a Jewish state in Israel. Israel won both wars, I believe with divine intervention.

Today the current Israeli government is opposed to a two-state solution. They have good reason for this and it comes from the Bible. According to the Bible, the land of Israel was promised by God to Abraham and Isaac's descendants, the Jews. Ismael's descendants (the Arab world that includes the Palestinians) were NOT promised this land by God. *Consider the following verses (this is only a start, there are many more): Genesis 12:7, Genesis 13:14-15, Genesis 15:7, Genesis 15:18-21, Genesis 17:18-21, Genesis 26:3, Genesis 28:13, Genesis 35:11-12, Exodus 6:4, Exodus 23:30-31, Numbers 34:1-15.*

So, if you want to argue that the Palestinians have a legitimate claim to the land, go ahead. You have every right to do that. But just be aware that when you make that argument, you are pushing back against the Old Testament and the promises that God made to His covenant people the Jews through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Is that covenant still valid? Some would say that it is not, but I believe that it is. Here is why I say that: I can find nothing in the Scriptures that renders the Abrahamic covenant – which included the promise of the land – as no longer valid.

OK, I just wanted to point all this out since Paul brought it up in his sermon and, believe it or not, 20 centuries later it is still relevant.

Paul continues his sermon...

READ Acts 13:20a

From the time God promised the land to Abraham back in the book of Genesis until the people finally possessed the land in the book of Joshua was 450 years. You know the story. If the people had just been obedient, it would have been less than that. But they had to wander around for 40 years!

READ Acts 13:20b-22

Why did God remove Saul from being Israel's king? He was removed because he refused to do God's will – disobedience. God then replaced Saul with a man who WOULD do His will. That parallels the account of 1 Samuel 13:14... God speaking to King Saul says this: "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." Then He found David, a man after His own heart. We all know the story about how God replaced Saul with David. God then made a covenant with David to establish his kingdom as an everlasting kingdom. Paul's audience is fully aware of the Davidic Covenant.

So far in Paul's sermon this has all been a history lesson. All of this is familiar to us and it was familiar to them.

READ Acts 13:23

God promised a Savior, a Messiah King to David that would come from his lineage. Paul now connects the promise that God made with David directly to Jesus. Part of the covenant said that He would come from David's royal line. Did Jesus come from that line? Read the genealogies in Matthew and Luke – absolutely. The promised seed of David, the Messiah was fulfilled in a man named Jesus. Now, the people in Pisidian Antioch probably had not heard of Jesus. They are living out in the middle of nowhere. So, Paul is going to tell them the story.

READ Acts 13:24-25

The Messiah's coming was no surprise. It was announced by this prophet, John the Baptist, out in the wilderness who said what we read here – "There is One coming who is greater than me." When Jesus arrived on the scene, John pointed to Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" So, John pointed Jesus out to the people.

This is Paul's good news to his audience here in this synagogue: "You don't have to wait for the promised Messiah any more. He has already come! Let me tell you about Him!" From here Paul introduces the Gospel. He begins with a message about what happened to Jesus, to their Messiah.

READ Acts 13:26-29

We all know this story, but this is probably the first time the people in the synagogue are hearing this. Paul is telling the story about Jesus and His crucifixion. Those responsible for crucifying Jesus failed to listen to their own prophets and to obey God's word. In the process they killed their own Messiah. So, Paul says that Jesus was innocent. He did not deserve to die. And yet they crucified Him. Now, those in the synagogue that day might push back a little against this and say, "I had nothing to do with Jesus's death. I wasn't there." I have heard people in our own day say that. "I didn't put Jesus on the cross." But, the fact of the matter is that we all share the blame for what happened to Jesus. The Scripture tells us in 1 Peter 2:24 that, "He Himself bore OUR sins in His body on the cross that WE might die to sin and live to righteousness." In other words, Jesus died in our place. He took our place on the cross. He died to remove my sins from me. He died to remove your sins from you! And He died for every person that was there in that synagogue that day. That is Paul's message.

So, while it is a sad thing that the Messiah was killed, it served a purpose, didn't it? Paul now offers some good news...

READ Acts 13:30-31.

There were actually people who were still alive in Paul's day who were witnesses to the resurrected Jesus. This is not something that Paul made up on his own. There are people who can testify to this.

READ Acts 13:32-34

Verse 33 is a quote from Psalm 2 about the Messiah. Verse 34 is a quote from Isaiah 55 about how God fulfilled His covenant to David by raising Jesus. Through Him, through Jesus, the eternal kingdom that God promised to David will come.

READ Acts 13:35-37

Jesus's resurrection fulfilled prophecy. In verse 35 Paul quotes from Psalm 16:10. This is the exact same text that Peter quoted at Pentecost when he talked about Jesus's body not seeing corruption. God raised Jesus from the dead.

READ Acts 13:38-39

What Paul is telling his Jewish audience here is that you have forgiveness of sins. This is what God offers through Jesus Christ, their Messiah. God's condition for forgiveness, for our justification, is a person's act of faith. Paul would later tell the Ephesians, "By grace are you saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). This means that we willfully choose to believe that Jesus is God's appointed Savior and Lord. When we do this, by faith, a relationship is established with the living Lord. The result is what we call "justification" – being declared as righteous before a holy God. What Paul says here is that keeping the Mosaic Law or any other set of moral standards will not justify anyone before God. It requires faith in Jesus. That is how you get forgiveness.

Paul wraps up his sermon by offering a word of warning to his listeners. This is very important. He says, "Beware." The Gospel always comes with a warning. Paul quotes here from that well-known prophet Habakkuk. This comes out of Habakkuk 1:5...

READ Acts 13:40-41

To refuse to accept Christ as your Savior and be “saved” is to willfully choose to perish. Why? Because, to do so is the same thing as ignoring God’s free gift of salvation, which comes through faith in Jesus. Let’s say that you are out in the open gulf. Somehow you got separated from the boat and you are treading water. The waves are coming and you are surrounded by water and you are getting really tired. You know that you will soon sink and die. You are going to drown. Suddenly someone comes along (in a boat, raft or helicopter) and they offer you a life line to grab hold of and get to safety. Why would you not take it? You would, right? Why would you refuse it and face certain death? You would not. That would make no sense. Why then would you choose to ignore, to scoff at and perish when you have been given this free gift, this offer of life? That is basically what Paul is saying. Listen to the warning of the prophets. Do not ignore it. Take God’s free offer and live!

So, what is the reaction that Paul receives from those in the synagogue that day? It may surprise you.

READ Acts 13:42

They said, “We want you to come back and tell us more!”

READ Acts 13:43

Both the Jews and the God-fearing Gentile proselytes invite Paul and Barnabas to stay. They want to know more.

READ Acts 13:44

Word spreads throughout the entire town about this good news that these men have come to share. The next week you not only have the usual religious crowd that shows up to the synagogue, the Jews and Gentile proselytes, but most of the town is there too!

READ Acts 13:45

The interest and popularity of Paul and Barnabas makes a number of the Jews jealous. They undermine Paul’s message and try to make him

look bad. I found this jealousy here to be very similar to the reaction of the Jews in Jerusalem toward Jesus. He got this big following and they got jealous. The Jews here in Pisidian Antioch argue with Paul and contradict the things he had said. Basically, the Jews in the crowd reject the Gospel message that Paul had presented the previous week. They refuse to believe in Jesus. So, just like what had happened before on the island of Cyprus when God was dealing with Sergius Paulus – you had this guy that was trying to interfere with the man’s salvation – here too Satan is working overtime to try to prevent the Gospel message from being received. Satan stirs up a group of people to hinder those who might otherwise be persuaded to follow Jesus.

READ Acts 13:46-48

After the Jews of Pisidian Antioch openly reject the Gospel, Paul and Barnabas adopt a new strategy. They announce that they are going to turn their complete attention and full energy to the Gentiles. They are going to go outside the synagogue and preach to them. Paul and Barnabas view themselves as the fulfillment of Isaiah 49:6 – “It is too light a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations [Gentiles], that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Of course, when the Gentiles hear this, they are delighted to no end. God begins to pour out His Spirit upon the Gentiles and they receive the Gospel message with great joy. Many Gentiles in the village of Pisidian Antioch get saved and a church is established.

READ Acts 13:49

Whenever you tell somebody good news, they have to share it with someone else. It would be nice if the story ended there. But it does not. Satan is relentless in his efforts to thwart the spread of the Gospel. Look what happens next.

READ Acts 13:50-51

The Jews pull some political strings and run Paul and Barnabas out of Pisidian Antioch in disgrace. It says that, as the missionaries left, they shook off the dust of their feet. This is in keeping with Jesus's command to His disciples in Luke Chapter 10: "Whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you...'" (Luke 10:10-11). This is symbolic. It is a dangerous thing to reject the Gospel message. To do so is to reject the very Lord of Glory. And there may be no other opportunity granted by God to embrace Him as Lord and Savior! You just never know when you have had your last chance.

Paul and Barnabas may have been kicked out of Pisidian Antioch, but the Gospel message they delivered remains in the hearts and lives of those who DO believe, and many do.

READ Acts 13:52

God fills the new disciples in Pisidian Antioch with joy and with the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit despite the persecutions that they will suffer.

One of the things that I respect most about Paul is that not only did he have a strong heart for evangelism – that is certainly true – but he also saw the importance of discipleship; of teaching. He placed a high priority on strengthening and encouraging new converts in the faith. The book of Titus is all about Paul strengthening and encouraging a young pastor. Paul saw this as an important part of his ministry.

Later in Chapter 14, Paul and Barnabas will make a follow up visit to the city of Pisidian Antioch on their return trip home. What do you suppose they find?

"When they had preached the Gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to [Pisidian] Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every

church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:21-23).

So then, the new disciples of Pisidian Antioch have remained faithful to Christ and the local church formed there is ready to ordain leaders. No earthly opposition can stop the eternal work of God in lives that have been truly transformed. These new Christians will learn that the entrance into the kingdom of God is often accompanied by trials, opposition, and even persecution. It is not an easy road, is it? However, their joy and transformation by the work of the Holy Spirit far outweighs the fiery darts of Satan. The result is a deepening of their spiritual roots and a confirmation that the power of Christ can overcome any situation in life. These are people who are growing in their faith.

I close with these words from Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:14 – “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere.” Yes, even way up in that remote mountain village of Pisidian Antioch.

What can we take away from this first sermon of Paul’s here in Acts Chapter 13?

- In Christian ministry we can expect both blessings and opposition.
- It is important to have a biblical world view. In the age we live in information is found everywhere. Be discerning in what you hear. The Bible is your best source of truth.
- The Gospel message is for everyone. Be faithfully to share the truth in love with anyone who will listen and then leave the results up to God.