

Church 2.0

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)

Paul’s Missionary Preaching

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Acts 13:13-52

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 13:13; that’s on page 921 in your pew Bibles. A couple of weeks ago, as I’m sure many of you are aware, Tim Keller passed away from pancreatic cancer and entered into his eternal reward. I had the privilege meeting Tim a few times and I had the joy of hearing him preach the Word multiple times. He was a generational voice. Whether you agreed with Tim or not, you were happy that you had the chance to hear him preach – I imagine that people said the same thing about Charles Spurgeon’s ministry 150 years ago. It is a privilege to hear the Word of God faithfully and powerfully expounded.

Which leads to me to my question: if there was one preacher in the history of the Christian church that you would like to have heard live, who would it be?

MLJ? Spurgeon? Luther? Augustine?

Well, this morning we have the incredible privilege of HEARING from the Apostle Paul himself. He is not here LIVE of course – sorry to disappoint you - but through the inspiration of the Scriptures he still speaks.

Today we are going to be looking at the Apostle Paul's preaching in the synagogue in a place called Antioch of Pisidia. There were at least three cities in the ancient world named Antioch – all in honour of Antiochus The Great, one of the Greek rulers who followed Alexander the Great. This one was in the Roman Province of Galatia in modern day Turkey. Luke records this particular sermon so as to give us a representative sample of Paul's preaching. In subsequent stories when Luke mentions that Paul was teaching in the local synagogue somewhere, we are to assume that he brought a message that was at broadly similar to the one he preaches here. So this is quite a privilege really. In this chapter we get a behind the scenes look at the message that turned the 1st century world completely upside down. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 13:

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, ¹⁴but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After 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."

¹⁶So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. ¹⁷The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. ¹⁸And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. ²⁰All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²²And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' ²³Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

²⁶"Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. ²⁷For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. ²⁸And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they

took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.³⁰ But God raised him from the dead,³¹ and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers,³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’”

³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’”

³⁵ Therefore he says also in another psalm, “‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’”

³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption,³⁷ but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,³⁹ and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.⁴⁰ Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

⁴¹ “‘Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’”

⁴² As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.⁴³ And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.’”

⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:13–52 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

This morning I want to divide this story up into three parts: the sermon itself, the various responses to the sermon and then the incredible results that Luke records for us in verses 46-52 at the end of the chapter. Let's begin with the sermon itself.

The Sermon:

As I mentioned a moment ago, what Luke has provided us with here is a representative SAMPLE. This is presented as an example of how Paul typically preached in a Jewish synagogue. A Jewish synagogue service in those days began with a recitation of the Shema, which was the essential Jewish Creed, followed by a series of prayers, followed by a reading from the Law, and then another reading from the prophets AFTER which, if there was anyone competent to preach, that person would be invited to bring an exposition BASED on the readings of the day, which is exactly what we see happening here. Look again at verse 15:

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 13:15 ESV)

So Paul preached a sermon BASED UPON the assigned readings – he would have known what those readings were ahead of time and evidently, he came prepared to preach a sermon about Jesus rooted in those particular texts. His sermon has two points and a closing challenge.

His first point is that:

1. Jesus is the Son of David and the long-awaited Saviour of the world

Like Stephen in Acts 6 Paul begins with a little Old Testament history. He begins in a fairly general way and then he immediately ZEROES in on the storyline of David. In verse 23 Paul says:

“Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.”
(Acts 13:23 ESV)

This focus on the storyline of David, leads many scholars to conclude that one of the synagogue readings for that day must have been 2 Samuel 7 – which is the passage where God promises to David that one of his descendants will sit on an everlasting throne. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead is put forth by Paul as PROOF that Jesus is the Son of David to whom all of these promises ultimately point, so look at verse 34-37:

³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

³⁵ Therefore he says also in another psalm, “You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, ³⁷ but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. (Acts 13:34–37 ESV)

So Paul says, “God made a series of promises to David and his house, but we know that those promises did not land ultimately on David himself, because David is dead! His body lies rotting in the ground - but the body of Jesus DID NOT ROT IN THE GROUND! His flesh did not experience any corruption at all because there was no taint of sin in him whatsoever. Therefore, death could not touch him, the grave could not hold him – he went down into DEATH as a VICTOR, he set the captives FREE, and he rose again in TRIUMPH on the third day!!!

Hallelujah!

That’s the Gospel!!

Jesus is the SON OF DAVID, the Saviour of the World – and the ONE we have long been waiting for. That's his first point. He begins to move seamlessly into his SECOND POINT in verse 38.

He says:

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man **forgiveness** of sins is proclaimed to you,³⁹ and by him everyone who believes is **freed** from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38–39 ESV)

Paul's second point is that:

2. Jesus is offering forgiveness and freedom from sin

So let's be very clear – salvation in the bible is SALVATION FROM SIN – its penalty and its power.

One happens IMMEDIATELY and one happens PROGRESSIVELY.

Paul talks first about forgiveness – that has to do with the PENALTY for sin.

According to the Bible the wages of sin is death – that was the agreed upon price for rejecting the Lordship of our Creator - but the miracle of the Gospel is that God, in the person of his Son Jesus, pays the debt we owe so that the PENALTY associated with our sin is OBLITERATED – it is PAID IN FULL. It no longer exists.

Think of it like this: imagine that you were arrested for running a red light and you went to traffic court and the judge said: “Mr. Smith, we have you on camera running a red light. What is your plea?” Well, what are you going say? They have you dead to rights. So you're going to say: “I plead guilty.” And the judge will say something like: “Alright, Mr. Smith your fine is \$1000.”

Fair enough. But what if you don't have \$1000? What if you can't pay the penalty? Then you're really stuck. You might lose your licence until you can pay. That's a serious situation!!

Now imagine that the judge, who happens in this illustration to be your father, goes outside to the teller's office and pays your debt out of his own personal account. Would there be any injustice in that? No! Why would there be? Afterall, a fair verdict was rendered and the agreed upon price was paid – but the mercy in this story is that the DEBT that you owed was paid by someone else.

That's the Gospel – or at least, that's the FORGIVENESS part of the Gospel - and that's why Paul is so eager to stress the innocence of Jesus in verse 28 here, because if Jesus had been guilty of any sin whatsoever than his death would have been merely the death that HE OWED to God, but because he was perfectly INNOCENT, and because he himself was infinitely WORTHY, his BLOOD is precious enough to pay for the sins of the entire world.

That's the MATH or the inner logic of the Gospel: on the cross an INFINITE deposit of merit was made such that all who come to the cross in repentance and faith are reckoned FORGIVEN. Their account has been squared. There are no outstanding debts. There is no remaining barrier keeping them from enjoying a relationship with God.

Hallelujah!

But – if that was ALL that the Gospel was then we would have a big problem wouldn't we? Because you'd still be you! You'd still be broken and sick and confused. Jeremiah 17:9 says:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)

According to the Bible, sin is like a VIRUS that deceives and diminishes us as human beings. So for the Gospel to be GOOD NEWS it has to deal with the PENALTY for sin and it has to deal with the POWER OF SIN – and it does!

Look again at verse 39, he says:

“and by him everyone who believes is **freed** from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:39 ESV)

Here we get a little window into Paul’s perspective on the LAW. He doesn’t say that the law is BAD he just says that it wasn’t strong enough to arrest our descent into sin. The law was like a barrier that we, as fully committed sinners, ploughed right through. The LAW couldn’t RESTRAIN US – the law couldn’t TURN US AROUND - so something stronger was going to be required. And according to Paul that something stronger was JESUS!

Jesus sets us free from the POWER of sin by giving us a new heart and an empowering Spirit. You have to have a NEW HEART in order to be truly saved. We don’t talk about this as much as we used to and that’s too bad because it’s in the Bible. Jesus said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3 ESV)

That’s the miracle of regeneration! Because your heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked you need a MIRACLE to happen in your innermost being. You need a new heart. You need Jesus to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Your old heart is diseased beyond repair. It can’t be taught. It can’t be fixed. It needs to be removed and replaced – that’s what it means to be born again.

And then it needs a new influencing and guiding power – and Jesus provides that too! To everyone who is born again he gives the Holy Spirit of God! The Holy Spirit is the ANTIDOTE to the corrupting influence of sin. Slowly but surely, by one degree of glory to another, the Holy Spirit begins to heal and transform us from the inside out. He undoes the damage done by sin. He reverses the curse. He restores what sin effaced. He makes us over into the very image and likeness of Christ. He HEALS our thinking and transforms our desire. That’s the very definition of freedom in the Bible! That’s why Paul says:

“where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (2 Corinthians 3:17 ESV)

Freedom, in the Bible, is when you live like the image bearer you are – not because you HAVE TO but because you WANT TO.

That is freedom – that is SALVATION, thanks be to God!

Alright, those are Paul’s two main points – now in verse 41 he leaves them with a closing challenge. He says that:

3. Failure to respond to this offer of salvation will result in terrible judgment

Look at verse 41; he says:

“Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.” (Acts 13:41 ESV)

He’s quoting there from Habakkuk 1:5 which may well have been the SECOND reading in the synagogue service that day. In that passage God was telling the people that if they did not respond to his call through the prophet then he would send upon them a FANTASTIC judgment by the hands of the Babylonian army. They would suffer a siege, many would die, many would go into exile – it was THE CATASTROPHE in the Old Testament period – and Paul is saying to these folks: “You are standing today at a similar crossroads. You have been offered mercy. And now you are responsible for how you respond. The choice is clear: Embrace Jesus Christ or face a terrible judgment.”

Those are Paul’s terms. He offers them a binary choice and he calls on them to respond and to receive abundant and eternal life.

Now let’s take a few minutes and look at the various responses that Luke records for us.

The Responses:

You can see those in verses 42-45. Some people became enthusiastic followers and some people became virulent opposers.

- 1. Some people became enthusiastic followers**
- 2. Some people became virulent opposers**

Verse 43:

And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God. (Acts 13:43 ESV)

So many Jews and Jewish proselytes were converted and Paul and Barnabas encouraged them to continue in the grace of God – but Luke also says in verse 45:

“But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.” (Acts 13:45 ESV)

So some responded very positively and some responded very negatively – that’s a pattern we are going to see repeated again and again over the rest of the story in the Book of Acts.

Now let’s talk briefly as well about the EFFECT – because by the grace of God, this sermon was EFFECTIVE. It DID things. It ACCOMPLISHED things. Like a giant TSUNAMI it washed over this city and it changed the landscape in several significant way and Luke describes several of those changes for us in verses 46-52.

The Effect:

The first effect of this sermon was:

1. Division

You can see that in verse 46-48.

The synagogue that day was immediately split down the middle. Some believed the message that Paul had preached but some didn't and as soon as they reject it, Paul for his part, turns away from them. Look at verse 46. He says to the synagogue as a whole:

“It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.” (Acts 13:46 ESV)

“We came here to preach a message of salvation”, he says. “Those of you who believe it can come with us, but as for the rest of you, God is leaving you behind. You judge yourself unworthy of eternal life, ok, that's your decision. You're out then and we're moving on.”

That's the meaning behind the little sand symbol in verse 51. When they leave the city they shake the dust off their sandals. I. Howard Marshall explains the symbolism here saying:

“The Christians were demonstrating in a particularly vigorous manner that Jews who rejected the gospel and drove out the missionaries were no longer truly part of Israel but were no better than unbelievers (cf. Luke 9:5; 10:11; Acts 18:6; 22:22f.).”¹

That's what the Gospel does – it divides. Jesus said that it would – and it does. It hives people off from their old associations and it joins them into the new and eternal family of God. The Gospel is like a sword and when it passes over you, it leaves you on one side or the other.

The second result – and there are more – I've cut this down from 5 to 3 for the sake of time – but these are the main three – the second result is persecution.

¹I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 245-246.

2. Persecution

Look at verse 50:

But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. (Acts 13:50 ESV)

When people really understand the Gospel they either EMBRACE IT or REJECT IT – if they are indifferent towards it, then they didn't understand it.

You know, it's interesting, I think for the first time maybe in the history of this country, Canadians are actually beginning to understand the true implications of the Gospel. When I started in ministry the challenge was to convince people that the Gospel was TRUE. Then about halfway through the challenge became convincing people that the Gospel was GOOD. But the challenge today is convincing people that the Gospel is SAFE.

Why?

Because people are starting to figure out that the Gospel is DISRUPTIVE. It will divide us from our family. It will divide us from our culture. It will divide us from OUR DESIRES. It will completely UPEND our lives. When Jesus comes into your life he takes full and complete OWNERSHIP. He walks around and starts pointing at stuff: "This. OUT. That. OUT." He comes in as LORD and that ISN'T SAFE!!!!

But it is good - because his ways are GOOD and REAL and TRUE and ENDURING but – it's not SAFE. It is completely and totally disruptive and once people understood that many of them became active and even violent persecutors.

That's what generally happens when the Gospel begins to truly and deeply penetrate a foreign culture.

And then lastly; we see division, we see persecution, and paradoxically, we see JOY.

3. Joy

Look at verse 52:

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:52 ESV)

Now, why in the world would this be? They had just been DIVIDED from their synagogue, their families, their entire CULTURE!! And they had just been told that Jesus was going to do surgery on them, removing their hearts, healing their desires and transforming them entirely and there was no way that could be anything OTHER than painful.

So why were they rejoicing? Why were they FILLED with JOY?

And the answer is: BECAUSE JESUS IS BETTER.

His ways are RIGHT, his words are TRUE, his grace is ENOUGH and his Spirit is LIFE abundant and eternal – praise the Lord!!

That was Paul's Gospel – that was the message he preached and by the grace of God that is the message that is still preached in faithful churches all over the world today. It still does the same work – and it still comes with the same warning. You can't listen to this message and walk away unaffected.

Like it or not you have been AFFECTED today.

A dog whistle has been blown in this room – and some of you have heard that and drawn nearer to the Master whereas others of you have been pushed further away.

But some of you may have heard that whistle today for the first time – your ears are perked up, your eyes are open – and to you I say, as one dog to another: Come.

Come!

Come right now. Come today. Come and follow the Master. Leave aside the idolatry of self and the deceitfulness of sin! Leave it all behind right now and COME! Come unto Jesus and be saved.

Thanks be to God, let me pray for us.