

In our passage last time, we read about how Paul became the leader in the first missionary journey. Full of the Spirit, he stood up to a false prophet named Bar-Jesus, and pronounced that he would be blind for a time, because of his opposition to the gospel, and everything that was godly. The result of this encounter was the advance of the gospel, as the governor of the province gave his life to Jesus.

This was the climax to Paul and Barnabas' mission in Cypress. In tonight's passage we will read of the events surrounding their next area of mission and focus primarily upon Paul's explanation of the gospel from a Jewish perspective. Please follow along as we read Acts 13:13-41.

Notice the phrasing of verse 13. Paul and his companions set sail. Up until our passage last time, Luke spoke of Barnabas and Saul, but after Paul's bold stand. when he was full of the Holy Spirit, he became the leader among the group. He also becomes the most bold and outspoken defender of the gospel on each occasion, with the one exception when he and Barnabas return to Jerusalem to defend Gentile believers from having to become Jews in order to be saved. Barnabas was gracious to let Paul lead, and Paul remains the leader in the rest of the book of Acts, taking the gospel to unreached areas of the world.

The plural use of the word "companions," coupled with the fact that John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem, suggests that there may have been others who followed the missionaries on their journey. The bible does not tell us why John Mark returned to Jerusalem, but it is significant because of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas as to whether or not to take him along with them on the second missionary journey.

Some have suggested that John Mark may have become disillusioned because of the change in leadership. Others speculate that he may have been resistant to the emphasis on gentiles, that he was afraid of the dangers associated with the journey, or that he was just homesick. I suspect that there may have been a personality conflict between John Mark and Paul. Whatever the reason, Paul loses faith in John Mark, and refuses to take him along next time.

Paul and Barnabas set sail for a new area and came to Antioch in Pisidia. This can be somewhat confusing, because their home base was Antioch in Northern Syria, and they traveled from Cyprus to another city named Antioch, which is located in Southern Turkey. Following the pattern in our previous passage, they go first to the Jewish Synagogue in that area.

Next we have the first recorded sermon of Paul, as he shared the gospel with the Jews, and the Gentile God-fearers among them. The message here is a little different than the way Paul preaches to a primarily Gentile audience. His message focuses on Israel's history, and the Old Testament references to Messiah. When speaking to groups of people who are not Jews, and who do not have an Old Testament reference, he uses other approaches in the way he explains the gospel, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the same reason why in Luke's gospel, there are few references to Old Testament scriptures, because his primary audience was gentile. On the other hand, Matthew's gospel is full of Old Testament references, because his audience was primarily Jewish. This reminds us that, with the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we need to be as sensitive as possible to the background of any person with whom we share the gospel.

If we discern that a person has some biblical knowledge, we can use the scriptures to convince them of salvation in Jesus' name. If we speak to someone who has no Christian

background, or knowledge of God's word, we have to take a different track, and explain the biblical principles in terms that he or she can understand.

After reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers invited the missionaries to speak a word of encouragement to those gathered. The Law and the Prophets refers to the Old Testament scriptures as we have them today. Remember that the Sadducees, who oversaw temple worship, only recognized the first five books of the Old Testament as scripture, which are also known as the law, the Pentateuch, the books of Moses, or the Tora. The Pharisees were in charge of the Synagogues, and they recognized all of the Old Testament scriptures as the inspired word of God, as did Jesus.

When invited to speak, Paul takes the initiative and once again shows his role as the leader. He seizes the opportunity to show how the Old Testament promises of Messiah are fulfilled in Jesus. He breaks his message down into three parts: the events leading up to the coming of the Messiah, Israel's rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah, and what it means to his audience, along with an appeal to faith.

Paul crafted his presentation of the gospel message to convince people, who understood the Old Testament, that Jesus is their Messiah. Since he was a trained leader among the Pharisees, Paul was right at home in the Synagogue setting, and was perfectly equipped to speak to them, and make an appeal to faith in Jesus Christ. He begins with a recounting of Israel's history and how God's hand had always been at work among His people, to bless them, and to accomplish His will.

While this passage has 5 direct quotes from the Old Testament, we have to remember that Luke records just a sampling of the message. Paul did not convince them by speaking just a few paragraphs. I am sure he gave many convincing proofs, and went into great detail. After all, we read this passage in just a few minutes, but this sermon will be about 45 minutes long, and it would probably be longer if there were no time constraints.

God choose the Israelites through the patriarchs. He built them into a nation while they were in Egypt, and then delivered them from bondage. They wandered in the wilderness for forty years because of their sin. God went before them, and gave them the Promised Land, defeating all of their potential enemies. Next, He raised up judges, and allowed them to have a king, Saul. When he removed Saul, He installed David, a man whose heart was aligned with God's.

With the introduction of David, Paul transitions the focus to Jesus. The Jews, and the gentiles present, who were familiar with the scriptures, understood that the promised Messiah would be called the Son of David, and that many of David's psalms included prophecies of the Savior who was to come.

Next he spoke of John the Baptist, who came in the power and spirit of Elijah, as the scriptures foretold. John preached a message of repentance, in preparation for the coming Messiah. I think it is important at this point to remember the centrality of repentance from sin, in order to be ready to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, so that if we accept Him as Savior and Lord, it is necessary for us to turn from our sin, as we turn toward God. God's grace is free, but it is not cheap. Without a heart of repentance, there can be no salvation. Jesus assumed the cost of our sin with His life, and under His lordship, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, a person who confesses Christ, must not continue to live in willful sin.

In fulfillment of God's plan, and in complete agreement with Scripture, God sent the Messiah to Israel, but the rulers did not recognize Him. They could not see how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies, which they read every Sabbath. Their lack of understanding, jealousy, and the

challenges to their traditions, compelled them to have Him executed by crucifixion on a Roman cross. They took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb, but God raised Him from the dead.

In this section, Paul covers Jesus' sacrificial death, and His resurrection from the dead, which brings people of faith victory over sin, and death. Notice, that in his presentation, Paul covers all the essential elements of the gospel message. Notice too that just as repentance from sin a necessary prerequisite to receiving Jesus, faith in His resurrection is essential to the salvation process.

Probably, none of the people in Paul's audience were present in Jerusalem as eyewitnesses of these things, so he states that there are many eyewitnesses, still alive at that time, who saw Jesus Crucifixion, so that they might know that He really died, and many also so saw Him alive after His resurrection. No one today was alive when these things took place, but we have the eyewitness testimonies recorded in scripture that all agree that Jesus really did arise from the grave. It is faith in Jesus, His sacrifice for our sins, and His resurrection from the grave that brings salvation to a lost sinner. The gospel message is that if we confess and repent of our sins, and trust in Jesus' sacrifice, and His resurrection from the grave, that He becomes our personal Lord and Savior, so that we are forgiven of our sins. He seals us with His Holy Spirit, and we inherit eternal life. The gospel message is the same today, as it was on the day that Paul preached this message. Only the times and the audience have changed.

Paul concludes His message with a series of Old Testament quotes to show how Jesus fulfilled prophecies concerning the One who was to come. Jesus was the Son of God. The covenant blessings that were promised through David's seed are realized through faith in Jesus Christ. The resurrection fulfills the prophecy that God's Holy One would not see decay.

In verses 38 and 39, we see the promise of faith. "Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, and everyone who believes in Him is justified from everything which could not be justified from through the Law of Moses." In effect, Paul tells the Jews that their faith is in vain, apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Today it reminds us that measuring how good a person is cannot save them, nor can the good works they do. Salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and Him alone. He died for our sins, according to the scripture. He was buried and rose again according to the scripture. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father, but by Him.

Paul concludes his sermon with a quote of scripture that warns of the consequences of not believing in Jesus. Those who scoff at the gospel message will vanish away. Those who refuse the gospel message will have hardened hearts, that makes it increasingly difficult for them to understand the simple message of God's grace, so that they will remain lost in their sins, and miss out on all that God would give them, if they would only come to Him in faith.

In our passage next time we will see the pattern that repeats itself throughout the book of Acts. Some get saved, and some reject the gospel message. Those who reject the message, persecute the messenger. Still, no matter what the opposition, the gospel continues to spread, offering salvation to all who will believe. This is the message we must carry to the lost world today.

God's plan and purpose through the ages was to deal with the problem of sin, by offering the only suitable sacrifice for sin. In Jesus Christ, God took on flesh, and offered Himself, to take the penalty for sin that you and I deserve. Out of His limitless love for us, He suffered and died. But sin and death had no hold on Him, because after three days and three nights in the grave, He arose. He showed Himself to hundreds of eyewitnesses so that we can know for certain that He is

alive, and we have victory over sin, and death through faith in Him. If there are any here who have not yet trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, you can be saved tonight by confessing and repenting of your sins, and trusting Jesus into your heart as Savior and Lord. For all of us who are saved, let us live for Him, in the power of His Spirit, and share the good news with the lost world.