

The Full Message of God's Salvation, Part 1

Acts 13:23-41

When all our praise is directed to our God, the Living God who saves us, who called us to a holy calling and who is alone worthy of all of our glory and honor and praise. Among all of his manifold mercies, our God sent Jesus Christ to live and to die, and to rise again in order to save us from our sins.

Somebody asked me what I planned to preach for resurrection Sunday. And I told them, I'm going to preach somebody else's sermon on Sunday and it's true. I am going to be plagiarizing pretty significantly today, but I can commend the sermon to you and the source, it's found in Acts chapter 13. This sermon gives us, some significant insight into the preaching of the apostle Paul. In the gospel that Paul preached every time he came into a new city, attended synagogue and proclaimed the gospel to a new group of people.

This is the earliest recorded sermon that we have from Paul, but it is typical of what he'd been preaching for quite some time since his conversion in Acts chapter 9. That dramatic

encounter with the risen Christ as he was heading north to Damascus to persecute Christians, drag them off into prison, he encountered the risen Christ on the Damascus Road. Paul was the last apostle chosen by the Lord, he was thoroughly prepared to minister to fellow Jews, and yet the Lord set him apart to evangelize, Gentiles, like us.

After Paul's conversion, according to the autobiographical material in Galatians 1 and 2, the Lord instructed Paul in the Gospel. He spent his earliest years in Damascus and also the Arabian desert, learning the faith becoming established by Christ in the faith and beginning to preach and to confront his fellow Jews, and even to confound them with his insistence that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, and that he has indeed, risen bodily from the dead.

And after about three years, in that early time in his life, Paul made a visit to Jerusalem and then due to more controversy over his preaching, he left, he was sent off by the disciples to Tarsus, the city where he was raised. And then we're going to pick up the story here in Acts 13 verse 1, where he's with Barnabas and the saints in a nearby city of Antioch, Asia Minor, where there was a very strong church there.

It says in Acts 13 verse 1, "There were in the church at Antioch, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, and a member of the court of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul, who was also called Paul. And while they were worshipping the Lord, and fasting. The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' And then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

And thus begins the first of three missionary journeys that Paul took in the book of Acts. It's recorded in the book of Acts. Three Missionary Journeys, which as James Boyce once wrote, changed the history of Europe forever and as a result, the history of the world. That is no overstatement by Doctor Boyce. That is exactly what happened as a result of Paul's missionary journeys at the sovereign direction of the Holy Spirit of God.

There were several cities, Roman Colonies established in Pisidia and Antioch became one of the capital cities of the Galatian province. And that is why Paul and Barnabas chose to visit Pisidia Antioch, because it was at the crossroads in a, crossroads city in the Roman Empire. It was a great place, to find people, many people of all kinds. But in typical fashion

they started ministry with the kinds of people with whom they were most familiar, fellow Jews. Says there in verse 14 that Paul and Barnabas attended the synagogue for the Sabbath day service. They heard readings that day from the law and the prophets, which was normal. And then at the invitation of the synagogue rulers, it says in verse 16, Paul began to address the people with his message and it was a Gospel message.

Sermon itself runs from verse 16 down to verse 41. It's a total of 25 verses in this sermon. So let me begin by reading it in its entirety. Look at Acts 13, verse 16, middle of the verse, Paul said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen. The 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. And for about 40 years he put up with them in the wilderness, and, then after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance.

"All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel, the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for 40 years. 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.' Of this man's offspring, God has brought to Israel a Savior Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And 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.'

"Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For 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. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb.

"But God raised him from the dead, 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. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, 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.'

"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.' Therefore, he says also in another Psalm, 'You will not let your holy one see corruption.' 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. But he whom God raised up did not see corruption.

"Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what is said in the prophets should come about: '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 someone tells it to you.'"

Now that reading took what maybe three to five minutes? Clearly, clearly that is not all Paul said when he addressed the synagogue on this occasion, and it is not just that I, as a preacher, refused to believe that Paul preached a five-minute

sermon, it had to be longer. But it is typical for the biblical writers, it was typical for Luke, who faithfully captured the essence of Paul's Sermon; his recording Paul's wording, his order, his expression, all the rest, but he has boiled the full-length sermon down to its essence for the sake of this written record. Just a comment or two about the sermon itself, it divides into three parts. There's an introduction, there's a main body or a main point, and then a conclusion, very simple structure.

And Paul spends a bit of time as we saw in introducing the subject to his mostly Jewish audience in a Jewish context of the synagogue, that's in verses 16 to 25. Then he preaches a full message of The Gospel in verses 26 to 39, and then he concludes with a call to action, there in verse is 40 to 41. And that call to action is basically consists of a warning to those who do not obey the Gospel.

At the heart of his Gospel, as you heard read, is the doctrine of the resurrection. The main section on the Gospel, verses 26 to 39 that main section comprises 13 verses. But notice that eight of those 13 verses, it's about the resurrection. The resurrection was a big, big deal in Paul's preaching. We heard that earlier in the service from First

Corinthians 15, "I delivered to you as a first importance, what I also received that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures that he was buried that he was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures. And that he appeared to Cephas, the twelve, to more than five hundred, and all the rest."

So the death, the burial, the resurrection of Christ, the appearance of Christ, it justifies the prominent place of the resurrection in Christian preaching. The doctrine of the resurrection in fact, deserves a prominent place in our evangelism as well, as we preach the Gospel to unbelievers. That's what Paul is doing here, he's preaching the Gospel to an unbelieving audience. Resurrection we can see in the book of Acts is prominent in Peter's preaching too, and I can just say, beloved, the resurrection ought to be prominent in our Gospel testimony and preaching as well.

Paul addresses, number one, the true recipients of God salvation, the true recipients of God salvation. Paul began speaking in verse 16, and when he did, text says there that he motioned with his hand, basically getting everybody's attention, telling them this is what I'm going to speak on. Calling their attention to himself and then he addressed the synagogue



congregation this way, "Men of Israel," he's speaking to his fellow Jews there, and then "You who fear God," that's addressing the Gentiles, God fearers who believed in the God of Israel. So speaking to both Jew and Gentile in the Jewish mind, that would be the entire world of people. Jew and Gentile, Paul begins by commanding their attention, "Listen," listen.

In the Jewish context, as we read, he began with a bit of historic retrospective. You'll notice in verses 17 to 22, Paul is outlining points along Israel's history; points which they were all familiar with, exodus from Egypt, the wilderness wanderings, the people's establishment in the promised land, Israel's time under the judges where God ruled through human judges, but then their demand for a king, they chose King Saul. God removed King Saul to establish David.

Those points may have been connected to the readings earlier mentioned in verse 15, the law and the prophets, but Paul is also mentioning these points and drawing them to their attention to draw them to the one who fulfilled all the law and the prophets, the son of David, who is Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel. And as I said, Paul began in verse 16 by addressing, "Men of Israel," and "You who fear God." After that introduction, he gets to the Gospel, in verse 26. The beginning

of that main section and notice how he introduces that section. Talking to his audience again, and he marks them out in this way. "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God."

That reconnects with verse 16, but then he adds this in verse 26, "to us has been sent the message of this salvation." "To us," Paul has included himself among those he identified as men of Israel as the sons of the family of Abraham, and most significantly, those among you who fear God, in that, in in other words, that is to say, not all the people in attendance that day. He's addressing those in their midst, who fear God just like he and Barnabas and the rest of their companions fear God.

Paul has delineated his audience here, he's speaking to those who fear God to those who have been prepared by God, to those who are ready to hear what he has to say. So after going through key points in Israel's history, Paul wants these Jewish people and these God fearers to know that it's not enough to be citizens of Israel. It's not enough to be descendants of Abraham, it's not enough to be physical members of Abraham's family, it's not enough to have inherited tradition, a religious background.

After outlining their shared history, he comes to the point of divergence, the line in the sand, in verse 23, a dividing line at the coming of Jesus, the one who was preceded by John the Baptist. Look at the text there in verse 23, instead of this man's offspring, though virgin born, Jesus traces his physical lineage back to David through Mary and his legal lineage back through to David through his supposed father, Joseph.

Physically, legally, he is the bona fide son of David, so verse 23, "Of David's offspring, God has brought to Israel a savior Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And 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.'"

"Brothers," Paul says "Sons of the family of Abraham, those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation." Listen, for those who fear God, that section of Scripture brings us to the vital, to the indispensable realization that we actually need forgiveness. That is the dividing line that separated the people attending the synagogue that day into two groups. Those who refuse to see and admit

their sin and those, on the other hand, who readily confess their sins.

Those who are broken and contrite over their sins, they are the ones with a true spiritual connection to Abraham, with all those who fear God, including the great Apostle Paul. Before we can seek forgiveness, we must first realize that we have sins against a holy God that indeed do need to be forgiven. Every conscience knows its own guilt before God. But not every heart is willing to admit it, to confess it, to forsake it.

What Paul says here makes personal recognition of sin and the need of forgiveness. It makes it an indispensable part of gospel preaching. In verse 23 we read that, "God has sent a savior, He has brought a Savior Jesus." A name that means Jehovah saves or Yahweh saves. Just slowing down and thinking about that, reflecting on it, unpacking a bit, think about the implications of what was just said that God has brought a Savior, Jesus. God has brought the Savior, God himself. We're talking here about the eternal, all knowing, creator, God. He is infinite, He is timeless, He is everlasting, unchanging, all powerful, immeasurable, that God. You think Facebook or Google or even the NSA knows a lot about you? Think again, we all live

beneath the watchful eye of the God who knows all things, sees all things, every detail of our lives.

He has observed all our actions and our inactions. He's heard all of our words, whether voiced or thought. He has listened to all of our thoughts. He discerns all of our motives. He perceives all of our imaginations. This is the one who looks down from heaven on our lives and says, These people need a savior. David writes in Psalm 14:2-3, "The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God."

You know what he finds? "They've all turned aside, together they have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one." Why is that? Why are there none among mankind who understand, none who seek the true and living God? Why have all turned aside to pursue corruption, that which defiles, that which degrades? Why is there no one who does good, not even one?

The Bible says all through from cover to cover that we are corrupt people. Even the best of our deeds, what we might call our righteousness, the Bible says, No those are filthy rags before God, because when we are measured against the perfect standard of the goodness of God, it is clear and it is obvious, as corrupt transgressors, we are a people who do no good thing.

So how are we, people like this, people like us, like you and like me, how are we to recognize a Savior when God sends him?

But the dead, must first have life. That is God's doing by his grace, that's called being born again. We must be born again, and when God gives us life when he gives us eyes to see and ears to hear, when he gives us a heart that understands that soft and responsive and has life coursing through it. The very first sign of spiritual life, is Spiritual self-awareness. We become aware that we are not what we ought to be. We become aware that we are fallen, that were corrupt, and that by ourselves were without hope, and that is why God, in his compassion, in his mercy, he sent his son and he sent before sending his son, he sent his messenger, a messenger to come before the savior to get the people ready.

Look at verse 24, before his coming, it says "John proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel." We know even in reading about that testimony from the Gospels, that not only did the people of Israel listen, but Gentiles heard as well; Tax collectors, soldiers came, they all heard. They responded many of them as John was finishing his course verse 25. He said, "What do you suppose that I am? I'm not he.

No, but behold, after me is one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie."

We've been studying through Luke's Gospel Sunday mornings. Our churches recently learned about the significance, the great significance of John the Baptist. His profound significance has been, we might say, sort of diminished over many centuries of, of church history. That's understandable in light of the glory of Christ. And that's exactly how John would have it. In fact, he said, "He must increase," speaking of Christ, "and I must decrease."

But in the First Century, in many places, and among many people, especially among unbelieving Jews, John the Baptist was more popularly celebrated than Jesus Christ. He had a much bigger fan base, much bigger following. John's ministry had nothing to do, though, with establishing his own brand. Had nothing to do with building his own following, rather his entire life's work, his entire course was to point people to God's salvation. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." That's what he said. Salvation of God is found in the savior that God sent, who is Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. That's why Paul says in verse 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.”

Folks, all of this, as you can see from the text, is what God has done. Notice, how the verbs highlight God's action and the subject of those verbs, is God. All this points to his incredible mercy toward us in Christ, God has brought a savior. God is the one who gave the promise, verse 23. God sent John the Baptist to prepare hearts, verse 24. He sent John to point the people to the coming one, verse 25. And God is the one who sent us, verse 26 the message of the salvation.

All that history, all that preparation, all that care, concern, mercy and compassion, all that forbearance with unholy rebels, transgressing his holy command. We need to pay very careful attention to what comes next, don't we? For those who listen to Paul that day, who didn't fear God? All those words of grace and mercy would fall on deaf ears. But for the true recipients of God's salvation, that is, those who truly fear God. They would recognize that they are sinners before a holy God and in need of his forgiveness. Is that you today? Do you fear God? If you do, pay close attention to what comes next because it is the full message of God's salvation.