

Acts 13:13-52 “Paul’s First Sermon” 2024-08-11

Intro & Review:

You’ll remember that last week, we started section three of the book of Acts. Chapter 13 starts with the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas and the start of their first missionary journey. The gospel has gone to the gentiles and that is becoming the focus of the Christian mission.

In addition to giving our normal running commentary, let us highlight four things:

- 1) The gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone (13:13-41)
- 2) The beautiful doctrine of election (verse 48)
- 3) Joy in the Holy Spirit (verse 52).

The text says in v13 that John (Mark) left them. Paul considers this abandonment a betrayal and rejects Mark later on another opportunity, whereas Barnabas continues to work on and with Mark. He also advocates on his behalf with Paul so much so that he prevails upon Paul and John Mark is restored. He eventually becomes such an important part of the ministry that he writes down the firsthand accounts of Peter about the life and teachings of Jesus. This will be called the gospel according to Mark and it is almost certainly, the earliest of the four gospels that we have in our Bible’s today.

There is a glorious lesson about longsuffering, patience and perseverance with people, especially in the household of God. It’s fascinating to think that the apostle Paul was wrong about John Mark. The text does not come right out and say that, but it does document what happens, and Mark is restored and becomes a bulwark of faithfulness.

Questions:

1. (V14) Where is Pisidian Antioch? How is it different from the other Antioch?

It is north and west in what is later considered the Galatian region of what is now modern-day Turkey.

2. Who is Paul’s audience (v16)?

Jews and God-fearing gentile proselytes (converts). See also v43.

3. What is Paul doing in verses 17-25?

The short answer is that he's preaching the gospel. The long answer is that he's explaining from the history of the Jewish nation as recorded in the Old Testament. In 16b-25 he reviews a large part of Jewish history and mentions the promises given to people. Paul highlights Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Saul, David, and comes back to Abraham. Verses 26-37, Paul outlines, how Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, and David and all the law. In other words, Jesus is the Messiah or Christ. They killed Him but God (v30) raised Him from the dead. Paul quotes Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:11, and Psalm 16:10 to say that Jesus is the Son of God. Three times Paul says that God raised Jesus from the dead (v30, v34, v37). The last part, 38-41 is an invitation to them to embrace (believe v39), lest they be judged (40-41). He quotes Habakkuk 1:5 in v41. That same call is for today in our time as well. If you haven't trusted the risen Christ as Lord, today is the day. He calls you to repent and believe the gospel. Bend the knee. Surrender your life to the King of kings.

Please note the benefits of salvation in verses 38 and 39. The first one is forgiveness of sins in v38. We would categorize this as mercy. In other words, God doesn't judge us in hell forever because of our sins. The second thing Paul mentions twice in v39 is justification. We would call this grace. It is God considering what Jesus did on the cross not only as payment for sin but also in his resurrection, we are made new and made right with God the Father having an advocate or lawyer at his court.

This term justification has come under investigation in the last thirty years or so. Much has been made by Dr. N.T. (Tom) Wright about what is called the "new perspective on Paul." Lest we get bogged down in a very nuanced and extended discussion of this issue, let me summarize it this way: TNPP redefines justification in terms of family instead of a judicial or legal framework. In doing so, it causes much confusion about the person and work of Christ. Additionally, it is a novel concept that on its face is to be scrutinized. It is called "the NEW perspective on Paul" and as is any "new" understanding, is highly suspect. I do not mean to misrepresent these folk as they believe that this is what the Bible teaches. However, and once again, this is where having a confession of faith is helpful. It gives us guardrails to understanding Scripture. We do not blindly follow it but understand it to be a true and helpful tool protecting God's church from error.

Additionally, it has by me personal observation that although Tom Wright is a jolly kind of fellow whose intellectual acuity is first rate, he tends to attract a certain kind of following. The guys who embrace TNPP tend to be primarily academics. Furthermore, he attracts the kind of ilk who also embrace feminism, denying Biblical roles for men and women. Many who follow him are also adherents to the Openness of God heresy, annihilationism (the view that there is no literal hell) and subsequent universalism. Pastor Greg Boyd in St. Paul, MN and Tim Mackie, cofounder of the very popular YouTube The Bible Project.

You can probably see how all these things are serious problems. We judge them by their fruits and the fruit of TNPP is heresy on at least two accounts, Openness and Universalism. They deny the doctrine of election and essentially believe in libertarian free will that makes God unknowing about the future. They also tend to believe that everyone either goes to heaven or is annihilated and there is no hell. These are all rational outworkings and the fruit of TNPP. At a minimum TNPP gives rebirth to the ancient heresy of Arminianism that was condemned by the Synod of Dort in 1619. This is where we get our fivefold acronym TULIP that has been used to summarize Calvinism. It doesn't come from Calvin but from Dort. Let us come back to this idea in a bit but to suffice it for now, TNNP gives ammunition to heresy on two counts.

But that doesn't get at the root of the problem. What does "justification" actually mean? Paul uses this term most in Romans. The textbook definition is that justification means "God declares us righteous through Christ." It is a legal term, not a familial term. While it is true and wonderful that God includes us in His New Covenant family and makes us brothers and sisters, that is not what is meant here. It means that we are, as Paul says in verse 38, forgiven. Our sins have been laid upon the only righteous One and He paid the price for our sin. The wrath of God struck Him, and our penalty has been paid. Through faith in Jesus, we become justified. Through Jesus, we are declared and made righteous before a Holy God who must judge sin. Without Jesus we stand no chance. But in Him, we have forgiveness and new life.

4. What change in the narrative happens in v42?

The narrative goes from talking about what Paul was saying to focusing on how the people respond. In large part, the people were excited to hear the gospel and asked for Paul to preach again the next sabbath. In verse 43, we see how the people followed them out and encouraged them.

Another interesting change happens in v43 also. Earlier whenever Luke describes the two, it's always Barnabas and Paul. This was mentioned last week. It is probably because Barnabas was

older than Paul. Now, and for the rest of the book of Acts, it's "Paul and Barnabas." Or Paul and whoever his traveling companions are. He is the preeminent one.

5. How did the Jews respond to the number of people who showed up in v45?

They were filled with jealousy as the Jewish Sanhedrin were in Acts 5:17

6. What is significant about v46?

Paul makes an executive decision to stop pleading with the Jews and turn to the gentiles. This is reminiscent of Jesus' words to "knock the dust off your feet" and "not cast your pearls before swine." Once the gospel has been presented, explained and rejected, MOVE ON. This will become more apparent in a few verses.

7. Who believed in v48? What theological concept do we associate with this phenomenon?

"As many as had been appointed to eternal life." Not, those who decided to follow Jesus. Not as many as were stirred in their heart and gave their lives to Jesus. Luke is reflecting the rest of the Biblical teaching on election that those who responded to the gospel were those whom God had chosen. God gets the credit.

This theme of God's sovereign choosing and calling out his people is a common theme in Acts. It has been demonstrated in no less than six other passages:

Acts 2:23 "Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."

Acts 2:29 "the promise is to... everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself."

Acts 2:47 "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Acts 3:18 "What God foretold by the mouth of the prophets that His Christ would suffer he thus fulfilled."

Acts 4:27-28 "there were gathered together... Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever Your hand... had predestined to take place."

Acts 11:18 "to the gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

We will see in Acts 16:35 that God opens Lydia's heart to believe the gospel.

Let's rejoin the old debate now from the 17th century about Arminianism and Calvinism.

Arminianism said that 1. The sinner is able to respond to God. 2. Calvin taught that he is unable and "dead in his trespasses and sins." Eph 2:1. Arminius said that God elects based on his foreseen faith. Calvin again followed Ephesians 1:4-6, God elects according to His good pleasure. 3. Arminius said that Christ died equally for every person who has ever lived. Calvin, believed in the particular atonement of Christ for His church. 4. Arminius believed man can resist God. Calvin did not. He believed in irresistible election and Acts 13:48 is one of the proof texts for that idea. Lastly, Arminius, being consistent with himself, believed that people could lose their salvation whereas divine election necessarily concludes that salvation is permanent.

This passage reminds us of the great doctrine of election that holds us in the hand of our Father.

8. Where does Jesus talk about the same behavior as in v51?

Luke 9:5

9. What was the result in v52?

Election and predestination makes for happy people who are not focused on themselves. They glory in what God has done in spite of them. They love God and each other. They know that He alone is to credit for their salvation and any goodness. They are humble servant of the King knowing that unless He called them, they would never hear. They know that unless the Holy Spirit opened their eyes and ears, they would never see and hear. They are happy that there is no contradiction between the election of God and the responsibility of man.

We need more joy, less stodginess. We are not the frozen chosen. We are not Stoics, unemotionally trudging through life. We are Spirit filled people. We will not let the Charismatics steal and redefine that term. We are New Side Presbyterians. If you don't know what that means, it means that we believe that the Spirit of the living God is still moving and convicting the elect of their sin and calling them to Himself. We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives. We are Spirit filled and full of joy in Jesus.

"The disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:46 "received their ate with gladness in their hearts."

Nehemiah 8:10 says the Joy of the Lord is my strength.

Salvation by grace through faith in Christ, Election, and Continual joy and filling of the Holy Spirit. These are the main themes of today's passage.

Application:

What has the Spirit impressed on you today?

What are you going to do about it?

Closing Prayer: Lord God in heaven and our Father, thank you for this text that informs us of what You've done in the sending of Your Son. Help us to believe correctly. Grant us, by Your Holy Spirit, faith and repentance to trust Christ and Him alone for our justification. Let our lives be filled with joy in the Holy Spirit and now, grant us spiritual food and drink as we obey Jesus' command to partake in His supper. Open our hearts and minds. Fill them with Your truth as we remember the death of the Lord Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.