

Christmas and Mission **Acts 13:1-3, 13-52; 14:21-28**

During the month of December and January, we have several different guys preaching. We were blessed last week by Duce (I've been working on my "bounce" that Duce preaches with! I told him that I wrote a book called *Faithful Preaching* but he should write one called *Swag Preaching*! In all seriousness, it was such an edifying weekend personally. I love those brothers). Our elders are finishing out the month, and in January we have two more guests preaching from Psalms (Keith Whitefield and Jon Akin). Today, we have a guest too – sort of. The Apostle **Paul is preaching!** I'm going to actually **preach his sermon!** But I'm giving him credit for it; this is not plagiarism. It's what we basically do every week – try to say what has been said.

Acts 13:16-41 contains Paul's first recorded sermon. This *isn't his first time to preach*, but this is his first recorded sermon. It is also the **longest** sermon that we have. (Remember, Paul preached so long one time, that a boy fell asleep and fell out the window!).

A large portion of Acts is sermons. Paul's is similar to Stephen's sermon, and very similar to Peter's sermon. Luke may want us to see how similar Paul and Peter's sermons are.

I. WHY THIS TEXT AT ADVENT?

Two Reasons:

#1: To Know the Biblical Story. Paul's sermon traces the history of the Old Testament that leads to the coming of Christ, and then reflects on Christ's life, death and resurrection. **Christmas is part of this grand story.**

Advent means "coming." Paul shows us how the coming of Christ is one part of this big story. The Bible **contains 66**

books, but it is one story, that reaches its apex in Jesus – who is the **hero** of the Bible's story.

- Last week, Duce started with *before creation* to talk about Christ's coming in the flesh. Paul starts with the Patriarchs in the OT.
- There is a tract called **The Story**, which is very helpful. Our G3 group shared this story with folks at the mall recently. I was so encouraged by their leaders and them.

#2: To Embrace the Mission. This month we are taking up an offering that will go to reach unreached people groups, and that will go to help fund church planting.

This is a great text to talk about mission, since this is not only Paul's first recorded sermon, but it is also Paul's "first mission trip!" Paul and Barnabas are sent out by the church in Antioch, and along the way, we get Paul's recorded sermon.

In Acts 13-14, Dr. Luke described Paul's ministry in **six different cities, beginning and ending at Antioch**. You see chapter **13:1-3**, the church in Antioch sends them, and then in chapter **14:26**, they return. (Bookends)

A Few notes in passing about this missionary journey... before we look at Paul's sermon and then make some application for mission...

A few reasons why the church of Antioch should be imitated.

- **Conversions** – "A great number of people believed" (Acts 11:21, 24)
- **Teaching** – Paul and Barnabas taught them for a whole year (11:26)
- **Mercy Ministry** – They cared for the poor saints in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30, 12:25)
- **Diversity** – It was a multi-ethnic congregation (Acts 13:1)

- **Spiritual Vitality** – They sought the Lord in fasting and worship, being sensitive to Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2)
- **Multiplication** – They sent out their best on mission (Acts 13:3).
 - Paul never operated in isolation to the church. And the church never ceased to support him.
 - This is what we want to do this Christmas with our offerings.

Cause: grace. “Barnabas saw the grace of God and was glad.” (11:23)

Summary: “Christians.” They called them Christians in Antioch because they were extending the ministry of Jesus. (Jesus embodied each of the above).

13:4-14:28 -Flexibility and Durability

What is amazing is how Paul can engage different people groups with the gospel. What is also amazing is how he endured hardship!

- **13: 4-12** – They begin in Barnabas’ native land. Paul evangelizes the proconsul, Sergius Paulus (governor of a Roman Province) and confronts the sorcerer in Paphos, the provincial capitol of Cyprus. An influential and intelligent man, Sergius Paulus becomes the first noted Gentile convert on this mission trip. The gospel is advancing in the upper level of influence. The reason they go from Cyprus and soon make the arduous journey over the mountains to Pisidian Antioch (Not to be confused with the Antioch in Syria – the location of the church we are referencing), is because Sergius had connections there – family, property and influence.
 - “astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (12), not the power encounter Paul had with Elymus.
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- **13:13** – they go to Paul’s native land in Asia Minor. They probably landed and then walked 12 miles to Perga (Stott).

- **13:13b** – John Mark left them for some reason and went back to Jerusalem (homesick, illness, leadership conflict, mountains?)
- **13:14a** – Pisidian Antioch, It was a Roman colony that politically that belonged to Galatia. Keep in mind that Paul wrote the book of Galatians to churches in this area.
- **13:14-52** We will come back to this in a second, as we unpack Paul's sermon...
- **14:1-7** – Paul preaches in the synagogue in Iconium, some believe, and he gets ran out of town.
- **14:8-18** – Paul preaches in the open air to pagans in Lystra.
- **14:19** – Guys travel all the way from Syrian Antioch and Iconium to Lystra to stone Paul, leaving him for dead!
 - “struck down but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 5)
 - “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (Gal. 6:17)
 - Paul could retrace his steps because he left a blood trail through the snow!
- **14:20** – He gets up and preaches to those in Derbe!
- **14:21**- He retraces his step to the three Galatian cities: Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch!
- **14:22-23** – Paul encourages them, appoints elders, and commends them to the Lord.
- **14:24-28** – They eventually get back to the original place, reporting all that God had done through them.

I'm going to come back to this in a minute, after we walk through this sermon, and make some application for church planting.

II. PAUL'S SERMON

Let's walk through this sermon in four parts.

The Preparation for the Sermon (14-b16a)

Worship: The synagogue service would have begun with the recitation of (1) the Shema, and (2) some prayers, continued

with (3) two lessons, one from the Pentateuch and one from the Prophets, (4) followed by an exposition or homily, and (5) concluded with a blessing (Stott, 222 also Witherington, 406).

- It has been suggested that it was **Deut. 1 and Isaiah 1** were read this day because of Paul's quotations.

We some similar acts of worship that has its roots in the synagogues, and then continued in the early church (1 Tim 4:13). God's people have a rich history of reading God's Word aloud, as seen in the book from Exodus (ch 24, 31), to Nehemiah (ch 8), Joshua (8:30-35), Kings (Josiah, 23:2), to Jesus in the synagogue (Luke 4), to Paul saying to Timothy, "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13) and to the Colossians "read this letter among you, and see that is read to other churches." Based on the pastoral epistles, and other epistles, there is also a rich heritage of creeds or statements of faith that the church used to confess their faith and teach others (Eph 4:4-6; 1 Tim 1:15, 3:16; 2 Tim 2:11;

App: In the New Year, we've transferred this responsibility to Donnie, who will lead us in our Scripture reading, prayers, and whatever he thinks is good for us. We will continue to use the creeds, but maybe not every week. We may read other ancient documents, or even use our church covenant and statement of faith. Our goal is to do things that focuses our attention on the gospel, but to do it in a way that it doesn't become mindless.

Sermon: They ask him to give a "word of encouragement" or a "word of exhortation" (see Heb. 13:22). Witherington notes, "[I]t is possible that the phrase had a somewhat technical meaning in the context of the synagogue to refer to a homily based on the interpretation of Scripture. This description would suit not only this speech quite well but also the homily we call Hebrews" (f., 406-407).

- It was not unusual to have guests speak, and so Paul gets the call.
- Paul probably had a previous conversation w/them.
- Notice a missional principle – Paul is beginning at location where people were gathered to hear religious teaching. This fits within God’s plan of “to the Jew first” but it is also a practical matter for us; don’t neglect places that are conducive for teaching.
- Notice also Paul’s civility and respect. He addresses them with grace, even though his message is confrontational.

Comparison: This synagogue sermon is worth comparing to the pagans in Athens (Acts 17:16-ff), and the sermon to the Christians in Miletus (20:17-ff.). Paul had amazing versatility, able to communicate the gospel to different audiences.

#1: The Sermon’s Introduction: God’s Work in Redemptive History (16-25)

From the Patriarchs to the Monarchy, Paul emphasizes the grace of God. **God is the “subject”** of nearly all the verbs (Stott). Notice all that God does in redemptive history to prepare the way for the coming Savior.

- “God *chose* our fathers [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob], he *made* the people great ... in the land of Egypt, and then with uplifted arm he *led* them out” (17).
- In the wilderness, “for forty years, he *put up with* [*carried or endured*] them” (18). This is an echo of Deut. 1:31.
- In Canaan, “after destroying seven nations ... he *gave* them their land” (19)
- This took place over a period of “about 450 years” (400 in exile, 40 in the wilderness, and 10 conquering the land). (20a)
- After settling in the land, “he [God] *gave* them judges until Samuel the prophet.” (20b)

- “God *gave* them Saul” for a king (21)
- “When he [God] *removed* him, he *raised* up David to be their king” (22b). He called him a “a man after my own heart, who will do all my will” (a blending of OT texts). The action here is like God’s action of raising up Christ.

Then he jumps over a bunch of kings to get to Jesus, “Of this man’s offspring [the central, pivotal point in history] *God has brought* to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised” (23).

- Paul speaks of Jesus’ “great, great, great, etc grandpa.” (Do you have any famous people in your family tree? **My dad told me that Patrick Henry is my eighth great uncle! My eighth great grandpa married his sister**). Jesus’ family tree was significant – he was the Son of David, and the Son of God. (**Rom 1:3-4**; see also Luke 1:32, 69; 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:8). Jesus is the better David. He is the perfect King. The better Shepherd. The one who did the Father’s will perfectly.

Paul then mentions Jesus’ immediate forerunner, who pointed others to Jesus, using that appropriate expression “I am not worthy to untie his sandals” (25b).

- “I’m just the guy singing the national anthem.”

This is like Stephen’s sermon. God did this, and God did that. Look back over this. You see the promises of God fulfilled. Again, notice the seamless transition from the OT to the NT. One story, culminating in the hero, Jesus, with Almighty God behind it all. This is the “message of salvation” (26).

If Paul wanted to, he could have went from OT history that points to Christ, to OT prophecy like:

- Jesus was the Seed of the Woman who crushed the serpent’s head (**Gen. 3:15**)

- Jesus was the virgin born Son whose name was “God with us” (**Isaiah 7:14**)
- He was the Messiah from Bethlehem (**Micah 5:2**)

God was at work preparing the way for Christ. That’s Paul’s introduction.

#2: The Sermon's Focus: Christ (26-37)

After telling the story of Israel, and alluding to the birth of Jesus, now Paul tells the story of Jesus. "Band w/ one song"

- Perhaps this is new to you. Recently at Thanksgiving, Joshua and Jana were watching the Jesus movie... **Did he feed them Turkey? How do you know what happens? Have you seen this movie?**

He already mentioned his birth (offspring of David). Now he emphasizes that Christ’s life death and resurrection were the fulfillments of Scripture.

A. Christ's Life (27-28)

Paul says that the people did not recognize him (27). But ironically, they fulfilled Scripture by condemning him.

He says that they read the Scriptures every week, but missed Jesus! (See Luke 24; John 5). This still happens!

Jesus was **guiltless** but sentenced to death (28). They asked Pilate to execute him.

- “I can’t believe in Christianity because of the evil and suffering that exists.” What about human suffering? Other religions offer no help. They dismiss suffering, or ascribe to some purposeless reason for suffering. Only Christianity has God entering human suffering.

- Jesus, *the perfectly innocent one*, suffers. He can identify with the suffering and god-forsaken person. And because he suffered and died and rose, he will one day eliminate suffering.

B. Christ's Death (29)

Christ's death was foretold ("they carried out all that was written of him").

Chris said we should replace our Christmas tree with a cross – since Jesus was born to die.

- They would wag their heads at him (Ps. 109:25; Matt 27:39)
- They would stare at him (Ps. 22:17; Luke 23:35)
- They would divide his clothing among themselves (Ps 22:17; Luke 23:35)
- He would be given vinegar and gall for his thirst (Ps. 69:21; Matt 27:34)
- He cried out Psalm 22:1 (My God, my God – Matt 27:46), and Ps. 31:5 "Father into your hands, I commit my spirit"
- His executioners didn't break any of his bones (Psalm 34:20; John 19:33).
- His side was pierced (Zech 12:10; John 19:34).

- we may get an occasional prediction right, but these are breathtaking - email!

He was on the "**tree**" ("Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" – Gal 3:13)

- A lot of people object to the Christian message, saying it's too violent and bloody. But it is not God demanding our blood, but giving his own.

He was placed in the "**tomb**"

- This seemingly insignificant detail was prophesied in Isaiah 53:9. “His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet he was with a rich man in his death.”

C. Christ’s Resurrection (30-31)

This is the climactic part of Paul’s exposition. This is at the heart of Apostolic proclamation – See Acts 2:24, 32, 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 17:3, 31.

- “God raised him from the dead” (30). Notice the same language in v. 22 – “raised up” David, and now “raised up Christ.”
- “for many days he appeared to those who accompanied him from Jerusalem to Galilee” (31, cf. 1 Cor. 15:8)

Paul then includes himself and us saying, “we bring you good news!” (32). Unlike atheism.

Baptism pictures this.

He substantiates his resurrection claims, by citing three OT Scriptures – Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3, Ps. 16:10.

V 33: Psalm 2:7 – This text speaks about God’s son. It predicts Christ’s incarnation. “Kiss the Son”

V. 34: Isaiah 55:3 – This promise from Isaiah (‘holy and sure blessings of David’) came true when Christ rose from the dead. A dead king can’t bring the holy and sure blessings, but an alive one can!

V. 35: Psalm 16:10 – This text speaks of God’s holy one not seeing decay, but David died, was buried, and decayed (36). But not the ultimate son of David – he did not see decay (37).

I've visited David's tomb on three occasions. You can visit other religious leaders' tombs, as well. But they are dead. Christ, however is alive. This is the foundation of our faith – apart from the resurrection, our faith and preaching is futile (1 Cor 15).

#3: The Sermon's Application: You Can Have Freedom and Forgiveness in Christ (38-41).

Perhaps you've been thinking, so what do I do with this truth? Paul tells you.

This is "**the word of exhortation**" in verses 38-41. Notice "to you." You have a choice between death and life.

A. Life

Through "this man" (the only mediator!) **forgiveness** of sins of proclaimed to you (38). Forgiveness is in Jesus.

Every person in the Bible previously mentioned failed, just as every person fails. So will you. Through "Christ's blood, we have the forgiveness of sins" (Eph 1:7)

- This is why Jesus came. He was "**face to face with God, and went face to face with sinners.**" (Duce)
- **Luke 7:36-ff** – Even the worst of sinners can be forgiven – "Those who have been forgiven much, love much."
- "If you kept a record of wrong, who could stand, but with you there is forgiveness" (**Ps 130:3-4**)

"Everyone who believes is **freed** [or justified] from everything from which Moses could not be freed [or justified] by the law of Moses" (39).

- Remember Paul is addressing the Galatians, and in a few months, he will be writing his letter to them, and what is

Galatians about – justification by faith. We can't be justified (saved, declared righteous) by works of the law. We need someone else's righteousness.

- **Jesus frees us from condemnation!**

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Paul Zahl writes: “The fundamental problem is the same everywhere. You hear the law and not the gospel. What you hear, if you distill the many words, is always the same: **Here is what you should do, you are not doing it, so get out there and try harder**. This is the “three-point sermon” of the churches. I sometimes suggest to clergy that they carve over the main door to the church the following words: ‘**Abandon all hope, all ye who enter here**.’ If you are looking for comfort and release, you had better hold that hope until you leave the church. From the pulpit, what you are likely to get is the law.” (*Grace in Practice*, ch. 5, my emphasis)

Sadly, that is often true. **But I want our door to say:**
“Here's hope, all you who enter here: It is Finished!”

You can't earn salvation; you don't deserve salvation – but Christ has done the work for you, and offers life to you!

Come to him for freedom from condemnation, and the forgiveness of sins!

What do you call this? **GRACE**. Drop down to **v 43**, “He urged them to continue in the grace of God.” Witherington, “Luke knows the basic themes of Paul's message.”

It is a message of grace, and God by his grace, draws people to Christ.

B. Death (40)

Paul issues a warning, quoting Habakkuk, who predicted the rise of the Babylonians in being used as an instrument of judgment. Paul urges them to avoid disaster by trusting in Christ. Failure to embrace what God is doing leads to judgment. They look, they see, but they do not believe.

- It's sort of like **hurricanes in NO**. You've been shown the radar of what's coming. Now flee.... Flee to Jesus.
- Or, last year, **Bob Knight** refused to acknowledge UK as one of the top five teams in the country, even though they were clearly a top team – who won the national title, and he refused to acknowledge Anthony Davis as a top player – who went on to win player of the year and was the first pick. Scoffer. I don't mean to liken UK to Jesus, but I do mean to liken those who hear the truth of Jesus, and reject it, to Bob Knight. Look at God's work and believe.

As you look back over Paul's sermon, you see what is referred to as the apostolic **Kerygma**, the essential truths of the gospel, as noted by Paul in 1 Cor 15:3-4. There, Paul says that "Christ died, was buried, was raised and was seen – all according to the [Old Testament] Scriptures."

It is also like Peter's in content and appeal.

Transition v. 42: Now, we move to what is like another week of sermons, though not recorded, we may keep the same outline.

#4: The Sermon's Consequences: A Mixed Reaction (42-52)

- A. **Hunger** – Some "begged to hear more" (42) They wanted further instruction.

App: Maybe that's you. Maybe you aren't a Christian, but you are open. You are what I refer to as a "seeker." We are glad you are here. We want you to believe what we believe, but if you don't believe it now, keep coming back, keep studying these things for yourself.

The next phrase in v 43, "continue in the grace of God," may not mean that they were fully converted, but that God was at work in their hearts.

B. Hostility – There was opposition (44-47).

Paul says that they have "thrust aside this message" (46). Therefore, they are accountable for rejecting the message.

It was God's will to declare the message to the Jew, and then to the Gentiles. Paul's ministry was patterned after this. He cites an OT text validating the mission to the Gentiles. (47)

- Interestingly, he sees this text applying to him and Barnabas, "to us." Missionary work in the extension of the work of the Servant in Isaiah.

C. Belief – Paul says that some believed, having been appointed for eternal life. This as strong a phrase in the NT regarding God's sovereignty in salvation, which is only intensified in Greek (See Stott and Witherington).

- Salvation is a gift.
- After Peter's report to the church about the Gentiles coming to faith, they say, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted [a gift!] repentance that leads to life." (Acts 11:18)
- When Paul reports to the church in Antioch, he reported how God "opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27).

13:49-52

Later developments in Pisidian Antioch shows these same reactions – acceptance and rejection.

- **Gospel Spreads (49).** Nothing could stop it! It goes through the whole region.
 -
- **Suffering is Experienced (50).** They drove them out of the district, perhaps violently (Stott).
 - Paul wrote to Timothy, “You now of my persecutions and sufferings in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra” (2 Tim. 3:10-11).
- **Joy is Experienced (51-52)**

51: The missionaries dust “shake the dust off their feet,” which was a public protest against those who rejected the gospel – like Jesus (Luke 9:5; 10:11).

52: Despite the opposition, they are filled with **joy** and the Holy Spirit. Paul would soon write to these very Galatians, that the fruit of the Spirit is “joy.” (**Gal. 5:22**).

Joy is not the absence of trials, it is found in the enjoyment of doing God’s will.

Questions:

1. Do you marvel at the promises of God in bringing forth the Messiah?
2. Have you come to Jesus for freedom and forgiveness? Do you have this joy?
3. Are you eager to spread this gospel, even if it cost you?

III. MISSION (14:21-28)

John Stott, speaks of Paul's missionary policy. If you flip over to Acts 13:21-23, we read these words:

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to 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 ESV)

Before returning home to the sending church (26), Paul can leave the churches to exist and run on their own. How?

App: Why was he confident in church planting? How can we be confident in church planting?

There are three foundations for church planting worth noting in these verses (thanks to Stott for this outline):

#1: Apostolic Instruction (22)

He urges them to “remain true to the faith” (22, NIV) which they received from Paul.

Other similar expressions to “the faith” indicates that there was a recognizable body of doctrine, a “cluster of central beliefs,” which the apostles taught. It is called “the faith” (Jude), “the deposit” (Tim), “the teaching,” and “the truth” (Titus).

Stott adds that many of the foundational truths were probably in some form of structure, and “later became the Apostles’ Creed” (236).

This is the first part of planting. Ensure that sound doctrine is being taught.

#2: Pastoral Oversight (23a)

“they had appointed elders for them in every church” (23).

Stott says, “This arrangement was made from the first missionary journey onwards, and became universal” (Ibid).

Although there is some flexibility in church leadership with regard to number and needs, a pattern in Acts emerges: “[I]t was both local and plural – local in that the elders were chosen from within the congregation, not imposed from without, and plural in that the modern pattern of “one pastor one church” was simply unknown. Instead, there was a pastoral team, which is likely to have included (depending on the size of the church) full-time and part-time ministers, paid and voluntary workers, elders, deacons and deaconesses.” (Ibid). Stott has described our view perfectly here.

The qualifications are set forth later.

Paul preached the gospel, planted a church, by leaving it in the hands of local elders, who would shepherd and care for the sheep.

The church had apostles to teach them (now in the NT letters), and elders to care for them.

#3: God's Faithfulness (23b)

“they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed”

Since God is faithful, and since the church belongs to God, Paul could trust that God would care for his church by the Holy Spirit.

Paul leaves the churches with the gospel, sound doctrine (including the sacraments), elders, and then entrust it into God's hands.

Conclusion

Missions Offering

This is why we are taking up an offering. We want to plant effective churches, who proclaim and teach the gospel, who are led by qualified elders, and who rely upon God's faithfulness and power.

Let's be an Antioch church! Proclaiming the gospel (the whole Christmas story!) and Planting Churches.