

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Acts 13:26-39

The church was given a commission by Jesus to take the Good News to all the world. What initially happened was that these early followers of Jesus took the message to Jerusalem. After the persecution intensity started (marked by the murder of Stephen), they took the message to wherever they were forced to go, usually, sharing it only with other Jews. Unlike the two early messages of Peter in the Temple area in Jerusalem the sharing of the Gospel in other areas was on a fairly casual basis in most cases. The early spread of the Gospel was mainly a "reactive" response to the circumstances in which they found themselves and that is great way to spread the message if we take advantage of the many opportunities that God gives us to share the good news.

Stephen was martyred in the year 32 (two years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ). It was about two years after this that Paul had his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul then spent three years in Arabia and then returned to Damascus and visited Jerusalem but then went to his hometown of Tarsus for security reasons. He remained there for approximately eight years before he was contacted by Barnabas to join him in Antioch which was fifteen years after we had first read about Paul when Stephen was killed.

During this fifteen years many believing Jews had fled from Jerusalem and went to other areas such as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews who already lived there. There were several cities named Antioch and this one was in Syria. It was likely the third largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria. Luke recorded that some believers from Cyrene (Libya, North Africa) and Cypress traveled to Antioch (Syria) and began sharing the gospel with Gentiles who lived there. Word got back to Jerusalem about this and Barnabas was sent to find out what was going on there.

In the church at Antioch, things began to change. This group of Christians began to take some action. Under the leadership of Barnabas, they brought in some help to teach those that had become Christians. Barnabas traveled to Tarsus and brought Paul back with him. Not only did this group study the Word of God, but they also prayed and fasted. They wanted God's specific direction regarding what they should be doing as a church so that they would be doing His will. In response to their seeking to know the will of God, they were given an answer.

So many times, we are uncertain as to what we should do in specific matters related to the will of God and how we will impact the Kingdom of God. All too often we do something in spite of our uncertainty without spending the time to seek the will of God. When we have not received a clear word from God, we should continue to "wait upon the Lord" rather than act out of our own limited wisdom. Eventually, a message was given for the church to set Barnabas and Paul apart for special service which was to take the gospel message to other cities in the Asia minor area.

Barnabas and Paul left the church at Antioch in Syria on what is commonly called the First Missionary Journey of Paul. One of their stops on this journey was the city of Antioch of Pisidia. They visited the synagogue on the Sabbath and Paul was given an opportunity to speak to those who came to worship. He started with the story of the exodus from Egypt and covered the highlight of the Jewish history relating things that pointed to the coming of the Messiah and showed how Jesus of Nazareth was clearly God's Messiah.

Crucified – 13:26-29

²⁶ "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has

been sent.²⁷ “For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him.²⁸ “And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed.²⁹ “When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. Acts 13:26–29 (NASB95)

There were both Jews and Gentiles gathered in the synagogue when Paul spoke that day. As part of Paul's concluding remarks, he tied in the events that occurred in the life of Jesus, especially His trial and crucifixion with the prophecies of the Old Testament. There are so many points of fulfillment of specific prophecies associated with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that no reasonable person would think that it was just coincidence.

Few (perhaps none) of those who were listening to Paul that day were in Judah or Jerusalem during the ministry of Jesus or when He was crucified. Apparently, Paul was making a distinction between those present in Antioch (us) and the Jews in Jerusalem during that time (they). The message of salvation was sent to “us” which was contrasted with the fact that “they” had rejected the message of salvation. Although Paul’s message to these Jews was similar to Peter’s messages to the Jews in Jerusalem, it differed in that Peter pricked the consciences of those to whom he spoke with the guilt of their blatant rejection of God’s salvation in Jesus the Christ. At this point, the Antioch Jews’ hands were clean from that crime; they now needed now to choose what they would do with this information. Even though the Jews who were in Jerusalem had heard the reading of the Scriptures every Sabbath, they could not or would not connect the message in the Scripture with the message that was evident in the life of Jesus and they had rejected him in direct fulfillment of the very prophecies they had been reading.

The Jewish leaders were presented with the ultimate revelation of the fulfillment of prophecies that stretched more than a two thousand-year period of time (from Abraham to Jesus). They then totally rejected the truth and formally pledged allegiance to a pagan system which was the antithesis of the Kingdom of God. They rejected YHWH as the foundation of power and authority (the meaning of the word “basileus” translated as “king” in John 19:15) and embraced Caesar, instead. This declaration was a formal rejection of the covenant that God had established with Israel at Mount Sinai in that it denied agreement of the foundational provision of that covenant stated in what we call the first of the Ten Commandments: You shall have no other gods before Me.

We are not likely to ever make such a formal declaration regarding our relationship with Christ; however, we may be practically rejecting the Lordship of Christ when we behave in ways that are contrary to “whatsoever things he has commanded us to do.” The lesson for is that we need to guard ourselves from just hearing the Word of God and not asking ourselves how it applies directly to our lives and then actually putting it into practice.

Even though the Jews in Jerusalem had rejected Jesus they could not overrule what God was doing in bringing salvation to mankind.

Resurrected – 13:30-37

³⁰ “But God raised Him from the dead; ³¹ and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. ³² “And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, ³³ that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.’ ³⁴ “As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.’ ³⁵ “Therefore He also says in another Psalm, ‘YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.’ ³⁶ “For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; ³⁷ but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. Acts 13:30–37 (NASB95)

Jesus was not the first person to have a following of disciples and to teach truths about

spiritual realities. He was not the first person to be rejected by the civil and religious authorities as just a trouble maker. He was not the first person to be unjustly crucified by Roman authorities. However, Jesus was the first (and only) person to be raised from death in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. There were people who had revived after having died and they lived and interacted with other people in the same way they had done before they died. The resurrected body of Jesus was unlike the body he had prior to the crucifixion in that He was able to appear to people and to vanish from their sight. He was able to have people touch Him and He was capable of eating food and, yet He ascended into the heavens as His disciples watched.

According to Maclaren, “The Resurrection is established by the only evidence for a historical fact, the testimony of competent eyewitnesses. Their competence is established by their familiar companionship with Jesus during His whole career; their opportunities for testing the reality of the fact, by the ‘many days’ of His appearances.” The resurrection was the “point in time validation” of the prophecies of the past and the miraculous events in the life of Jesus. The proof of the resurrection was provided by the witnesses.

In addition to the eyewitnesses of the resurrection, there were (and are) the prophetic witnesses that are thousands of years old. Paul continued to present convincing arguments regarding the resurrection of Jesus relative to the Old Testament prophecies. Using scripture references from the Psalms and Isaiah, Paul tied these passages to their fulfillment in Jesus.

The first reference Paul mentioned regarding Jesus being raised up was from Psalm 2:7 which stated, “the Lord said to me, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee.” Most of us think about this quote as related to the birth of Jesus; however, Paul tied it to the resurrection. Arguments could be made (*Bible Exposition Commentary* by Wiersbe) that Jesus being “brought forth” (literal meaning of the word begotten) with a physical/spiritual body from the never-before-used (virgin) tomb was like a “womb” that gave birth to Jesus Christ in resurrection glory.

Some may have thought that David was writing about himself when he said in Psalm 16, “Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” Paul pointed out that David died and was buried, and his body decayed just like everyone else. But Jesus was resurrected with a new body that was not subject to deterioration.

One of the significant truths about the life of Jesus that Paul did NOT mention was the miracles and good works that He did during the three (plus) years of His ministry. Paul’s focus was on Christ and Him crucified followed by the resurrection.

Proclaimed – 13:38-39

³⁸ “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹ and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. Acts 13:38–39 (NASB95)

The conclusion of Paul's arguments was a direct outcome of the alignment of the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus with the Old Testament prophecies. God's promise of salvation was through Jesus. Our justification before God which could not be achieved by the keeping of the Law of Moses was accomplished in our accepting, by faith, what God has provided for us in Christ.

The response of those who heard the message was that they wanted to hear more, and they urged Paul and Barnabas to return the next Sabbath. When they met the next week, the whole town turned out to hear the message. The word had gotten around, and people wanted to know more about this Good News.

The availability of the salvation of God to ALL who will believe was certainly good news to the people. There was also a realization by the people that they had responsibility in this

matter to make a choice. The logic of Someone paying the penalty for our sins was reasonable to those that heard the message. The sufficiency of Jesus to be the One to pay the price was validated in His resurrection from death. These events that Paul presented were directly related to promises that had been recorded thousands of years before and showed the grand design and significance of what had occurred. The natural outcome of all these things is to respond to God's provision for the forgiveness of our sins and to accept His promise of New Life in Christ.