

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #29

Acts 13:13-43

Jesus gave a simple formula for missions; “go into the entire world and preach the Gospel.” The problem is many who are on the mission field do not even know the Gospel and many who are on the mission field are not even preaching it accurately. I have heard some say things like people need to believe and be baptized; they need to repent and believe; they need to believe and publicly confess Christ; they need to believe and surrender to God. These are people on the mission field who just don’t seem to grasp the doctrine of grace. Some are so confused that they don’t know the difference between the “Gospel of the kingdom” and “the Gospel of grace”.

For example, in Matthew 24:14 there is mention of the “gospel of the kingdom”, which many who own Bibles know nothing about. They use the signs of Matthew 24 to suggest that these are signs that the Church Age is winding down and signs that the Gospel of the kingdom needs to be preached to the whole world. At one missions conference this was the very verse that was used. But right in the context of this “gospel of the kingdom” is a command of Jesus Christ that says “pray that your flight may not be in the winter or on the Sabbath” (24:20). Now I ask you this question. In 2000 years of history of the church, do you remember either hearing of a church that actually prayed that prayer or have you ever prayed it yourself? This is a command of Jesus Christ, imperative mood in Greek. Are we to assume that the entire church has refused to obey a command to pray that our flight not be in winter or the Sabbath day? The fact is, the Gospel of the kingdom is not the Gospel of grace and thank God the Apostle Paul understood that.

In this passage from the book of Acts, we have the beginning of true Holy Spirit led mission work. Paul does not go to various places to teach children in schools so maybe he can witness. Paul does not go to these various places to put on concerts or work at a youth camp. He does not go to these places to get a job helping people at a hospital, which Luke could have done. He goes straight to these places with the idea of **preaching the Gospel of the grace of God, and this grace message most people know little about.**

PAUL PREACHED THE WORD OF GOD AND SHOWED HOW IT ALL CONNECTED TO THE GOSPEL OF GOD’S PURE GRACE AND MANY PEOPLE, INCLUDING MANY JEWS, BELIEVED IN JESUS CHRIST AND WERE SAVED.

The most important question of any person’s life is the question of eternity. Now unfortunately, most people are sidetracked by this question because we live in a world that promotes other things as more important. But when you leave this world you are leaving it forever, and we had better know how to assure ourselves that we are heading to heaven. Paul clearly taught how any sinner may know he has everlasting life. He took the grace message all over the known world and we get a look at that message right here.

Now this section of Scripture is important because not only do we get to see the second place Paul went on his first missionary journey, but we get to clearly see the message he was preaching. There are six key missionary journey facts revealed to us by God:

MISSIONARY JOURNEY FACT #1 - Paul and company leave Cyprus for Perga. 13:13a

Perga was located about 160-170 miles northwest of Paphos. Perga was the chief port city of Pamphylia and there are still some ruins today of walls and columns and towers that show where the city was located. This part of the world featured self-righteous Jews, pagan heathens, secular philosophers and even some criminal types. We may observe from verse 13 that Paul is mentioned first and he takes the lead for the rest of the book of Acts. He is the key apostle God wants us to track.

MISSIONARY JOURNEY FACT #2 - John Mark leaves Paul and returns to Jerusalem. 13:13b

We don't know why John Mark left. Some have suggested that:

- 1) Maybe he was upset because Paul, and not his cousin Barnabas, was now in charge.
- 2) Maybe he was intimidated by where Paul had planned to travel. Asia Minor was no place for the faint of heart. He would have to go right over the Taurus mountains and it is tough going and there are some tough people in those mountains.
- 3) Some have suggested he was homesick. John Mark was from Jerusalem (12:25) and as one commentator said, he may have missed his mama.

What we do not know is why he left Paul and Barnabas, but we do know that Paul considered this to be a major defection and desertion (Acts 15:38).

MISSIONARY JOURNEY FACT #3 - Paul goes to a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. 13:14

Paul didn't spend a lot of time in Perga, but he headed toward his mission target which was Pisidian Antioch. Pisidian Antioch is a different Antioch than the one 300 miles north of Jerusalem. This Antioch was located about sixty-seventy miles straight north of Perga. It was a key Roman city in this part of the world inhabited by Greeks, Romans and Jews. One thing we see about Paul's mission philosophy is that he targets big cities. You do not find him targeting remote jungle areas. He apparently assumed if God establishes a church in a specific big city that church can reach out to the indigenous areas. To get to this Antioch they had to travel up a river and cross the tough, rugged Taurus mountains, which was known to be a hideout for robbers and thieves. But this was a big city and Paul wanted to take the grace Gospel there.

When they got to Antioch, they went to the service that was being held at the synagogue. They apparently walked in and sat down. Now the format for a synagogue meeting was different than our church service. A leading Rabbi would read from the O.T. Law and prophets and then open it up for people to share. After all, we pretty much know that no leader of a synagogue was carefully studying God's Word to expound it, so they would just open it up for anyone to share some word of encouragement.

We see something very interesting here about Paul. He waits for God to open the doors. He does not push his way into the synagogue and demand to speak. He does not hand out tracts on the street. He simply goes to the synagogue and sits down and waits for an opportunity to speak.

MISSIONARY JOURNEY FACT #4 - Synagogue officials invite Paul to speak to the Jews.
13:15

It is possible that the leaders realized that Paul and Barnabas were teachers, but in typical synagogue fashion, they gave an invitation for someone to give “exhortation” (παρακλήσεως) which is a word that means some comforting encouragement. I am sure they expected that when Paul started to talk, they were expecting him to say keep trying to keep the Law and do the best you can and things will be okay. But that is not what Paul will say. They are about to hear the grace Gospel.

MISSIONARY JOURNEY FACT #5 - Paul stands up and preaches grace to the Jews.
13:16-41

Notice this address is to the “men of Israel” and to those who “fear God”. This tells us there were Jews and non-Jews in that synagogue. Paul is addressing national Israel, but also the international people. Paul decides to weave together a lot of biblical truth in order to bring it straight to Jesus Christ and the grace of God. It is a five part message:

Message Part #1 - Paul teaches the history of Israel from Egypt to David. **13:17-22**

Notice how Paul begins his message in **verse 17**, with the doctrine of election - God chose Israel. This is something Paul will stress over and over again - all blessings of God and every deliverance of God and any salvation that any experience is by God’s election. This is true for Israel and it is true for individuals (Eph. 1:4).

God chose Israel and He made them great. When they were mistreated in Egypt, He got them and he led them out of Egypt (**13:17**). They wandered in the wilderness for forty years and then He brought them to the Promised Land, and He removed seven nations (Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites – Deut. 7:1) and put them in the Promised Land (**Acts 13:19**).

This whole time frame from Egyptian captivity to Promised Land living took 450 years. Israel was oppressed by Egypt for 400 years (Gen. 15:13); she was in the wilderness for forty years (Num. 14:34) and the conquest of the land under Joshua took ten years (Josh. 14:10). Paul then tells how Israel went through the time of the judges and into the time of the kings, with the goal of bringing this history straight to King David (**Acts 13:20-22**).

Now to this point, everyone in the synagogue would have agreed and pretty much knew this history. However, what Paul would present next would be revolutionary. It would be shocking because his message was about to take a real turn:

Message Part #2 - Paul teaches that Jesus Christ is Israel’s Savior . **13:23-25**

If you are going to present the grace Gospel you must zero in on one Person – Jesus Christ! Paul brings out two key facts here.

(Fact #1) - Jesus Christ was Davidic. **13:23**

These Jews knew the prediction that One would come from the Davidic line who would be a King who would sit on His throne forever (II Samuel 7:12-13). Paul is pointing out that Jesus Christ is this Person.

(Fact #2) - Jesus Christ was preceded and predicted and preached by John. **13:24-25**

These Jews knew the prediction that a forerunner would come to announce the Savior and Messiah to Israel, because it was predicted by Isaiah (40:3) and by Malachi (3:1). John was that forerunner, and he preached a repentance baptism to the nation Israel with the goal of pointing the nation to One whose shoes he was not worthy to even touch (**Acts 13:25**). His baptism was designed to get Israel to see that she needed to believe in a Savior who could give her the kingdom.

Message Part #3 - Paul informs them why they must go preach the salvation message.
13:26-37

Paul says the main reason why we have been selected to go from place to place to preach Jesus Christ is because the rulers of Jerusalem did not recognize Jesus Christ or prophetic Scriptures that predicted His work (**13:27**). Those religious leaders should have immediately recognized that Jesus was the fulfillment of Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9.

But they were so in the dark that those religious leaders asked Pilate to kill Jesus Christ (**13:28**). Paul, like Peter and Stephen, does not shy away from putting direct blame on the religious Jews for killing Jesus Christ. Those religious leaders read those prophecies year after year but did not know truth. **Don't kid yourself, religion can blind you from seeing the truth. The truth is we are all sinners and we need to personally believe on Jesus Christ as our Savior.** What those blind religious leaders did not realize is that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of all prophetic Scripture. So they killed Him and put Him in a tomb (**13:29**). Even that was a fulfillment of prophecy.

But those leaders were in for a shock. When they put Him in a tomb God raised Him up from the dead. What this resurrection proved is that His sacrifice for our sins was acceptable in the sight of God the Father (Romans 4:25). He was killed because of our sins, but He was raised proving that God accepted His sacrifice as sufficient to forgive us our sins. Then, He appeared alive to the very people who are now witnessing for Him (**13:30-31**). There were many eyewitnesses to this historical reality. There were many who saw the resurrected Savior.

In **verses 33-37**, Paul stresses the fact that God raised up Jesus from the dead in perfect conformity to the prophetic Scriptures.

In **Acts 13:33**, he quotes Psalm 2:7 which proves that the resurrection declared Jesus to be God's only begotten Son. Jesus looked like an average Jew, but the resurrection proved He wasn't.

In **Acts 13:34**, he quotes Isaiah 55:3 which proves the resurrection means He is the Davidic King who will sit on His eternal throne.

In **Acts 13:35-37**, he quotes Psalm 16:10 which proves that the Savior/Messiah would not be in a grave long enough for his body to decay.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a critical historical and theological moment because it proves that Jesus Christ is the only Savior.

Message Part #4 - Paul teaches the grace Gospel of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.
13:38-39

Here are two of the most important verses in the book of Acts. Here is the Gospel of grace in full detail and you need to know the truth of these verses just as the text says, “Let it be known to you.”

Notice how **verse 38** opens with an inferential conjunction “therefore”. In view of the fact that Jesus Christ is the Savior and fulfillment of all prophetic Scripture and in view of the fact He is the only one raised from the dead there are three theological facts you all need to know and believe:

(Grace Fact #1) - Anyone may have the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ.
13:38

All of your sins which you have ever committed in thought, word or action may be forgiven you through faith in Jesus Christ. Notice forgiveness of sins is found “through Him”, not through you.

(Grace Fact #2) - Everyone may be justified from all things by believing on Jesus Christ.
13:39a

The word “freed” (δικαιωθῆναι) is the Greek word to free in the sense of justification. What this means is that you will be judicially declared righteous by God from all sinful things you have ever done by faith in Jesus Christ.

There is a famous civil rights quote that says “free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty I am free at last.” The fact is, we are all slaves to sin and there is only one way to freedom and that is by faith in Jesus Christ. When you believe on Jesus Christ you are “free at last”.

May I ask you a personal question? Have you personally experienced this liberation from all your sins? Do you know about this personally, first hand? Can you look at a moment when you believed on Jesus Christ and you knew you were “free at last”?

(Grace Fact #3) - No one will have forgiveness of sins or justification through the Law of Moses. **13:39b**

The O.T. Law cannot and will not ever justify you or forgive you of your sins. The Mosaic Law is a series of strict legal codes that condemns every person as being a sinner guilty before God.

Do you understand this? The Law of Moses cannot take care of your sin problem. The Ten Commandments will never make you right with God because you cannot keep them. The Law of Moses cannot earn you the forgiveness of God; it will earn you the condemnation of God.

The Law of Moses will never cause God to declare you to be righteous; it will declare you to be guilty. Your works will never make you right with God. Do you grasp what Paul is saying here? You will not have forgiveness of sins by keeping the O.T. Law. You will not have forgiveness of sins by water baptism. You will not have forgiveness of sins by telling God you are sorry and asking for forgiveness and promising Him you'll try harder and try to do better next time. You will not have forgiveness of sins by going forward in a church or by raising your hand in a service. You will not have forgiveness of sins by any work you can ever do. **You will have forgiveness of sins by believing totally, completely and only in Jesus Christ as your Savior.**

Message Part #5 - Paul warns the Jews not to reject the grace Gospel. **13:40-41**

Paul quotes an appropriate warning from Habakkuk 1:5. In that text, the Jews were warned about the pending judgment of the Babylonians and they didn't do anything about it. They never responded. Paul warns of the same thing here. His warning is you either believe on Jesus Christ or be judged. Justification is by believing on Jesus Christ and if you don't do that you will face the condemnation of God.

MISSIONARY JOURNEY FACT #6 - The people responded to the message of God's grace. **13:42-43**

They wanted to hear more. It is interesting that Paul does not have them repeat some words after him. He doesn't ask them to come forward at the synagogue or raise their hands if they want to do serious business with God. He simply urges them to understand "grace". Keep your focus on grace, not law, not works. You are only justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Not law, not works, but faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught exactly the same thing. In Luke 18:9-14, two men went into the Temple to pray and get right with God. One was a rigid legalistic Pharisee and the other was a terrible sinner. The Pharisee was so pious and so religious and he prayed and thanked God that he wasn't a terrible sinner. The terrible sinner wouldn't even look up toward heaven but said "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus said the one who was justified was the sinner, not the Pharisee.

It doesn't matter how religious you are or how sinful you are; all need justification and all need forgiveness of sins and there is only once place where you can get that. Complete forgiveness is found in Jesus Christ. Believe on Him and you shall be saved.