

Sermon Title: Forgiveness Of Sins Is Proclaimed
Scripture Text: Acts 13:13-43 (Acts #31)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 12-3-23

As we have been singing, our wonderful Savior has arrived (Matt. 1:18-25; Lk. 2:10-11), and we have been studying the aftermath of that: the Book of Acts, the history of the first thirty years or so of the ministry of the "Church" of Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:18) after He "ascended to the Father" (Jn. 20:17; cf. Acts 1:9) and sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower His people (Acts 1:8a; 2:1-4).

Today, we arrive at a significant milestone in the Book of Acts, and in the New Testament in general: We are about to see the written summary of the first sermon of the Apostle Paul that is recorded in Scripture.

It is *far* from the first sermon that he preached, because by now, it has been eight or nine years since his conversion. We know—we are told in the text—that he preached in Damascus *immediately* after his conversion: Acts Chapter 9, Verse 20; from Galatians 1:15-18, we know he preached during his "three years" in "Arabia"; we know that he preached while he was serving as one of the pastors in the city of Antioch before he was sent out. And I cannot imagine that for those years that he was in Tarsus—remember, after he was run out of Jerusalem, his Christian friends put him on a ship and sent him up north to Tarsus, his hometown, and he spent time there, in part to be instructed by the Lord Himself (Gal. 1:11-12)—I am *sure* he preached during that time, but we'll have to ask him what he preached on, in those days.

Last week, we saw Saul and Barnabas commissioned and sent out from that church in Antioch, in Syria—the first-ever Gentile church to send missionaries.

And just four verses ago, toward the end of last week's message, we saw "Saul" now referred to as "Paul"—and henceforth, we will know him in the Book of Acts as "Paul the Apostle"; and that has been his name ever since he and Barnabas were at the western end of the island of Cyprus. That was where Barnabas was from; that was where they first ministered. They went from Antioch down to the seaport; across about a hundred and thirty miles of the sea; and then about a hundred miles across the island of Cyprus, where they stopped synagogue by synagogue, city by city, finished up in the capital city of Paphos, and that is where we left them last time.

Looking at this sermon by the Apostle Paul, you will see that I chose as a title for this: "Forgiveness Of Sins Is Proclaimed"—and that is accurate. But then I was thinking, "That's not *all* that is here, not all that is in this text." And if I was going to act like a cross between an alliteration-addicted Baptist and the Puritans, who left four-line titles of their books, I would title this: "Preaching In Perilous Places Like Paphos, Perga, Pamphylia, and Pisidian Antioch"—there you go! Well, that's what this is all about.

To let you get a full summary of Paul's first recorded sermon, we are going to bite off another significant chunk. I have already outdone myself by doing a couple of *whole chapters* in one sermon apiece. That doesn't fit for this case, but I want you to get this whole sermon of the Apostle Paul, and see this incident in this setting.

So, buckle up: We are going from Verse 13 through Verse 43 in Acts Chapter 13.

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And it will go like this:

1. We Assembled In The Synagogue (vss. 13-15)
2. God Arranged It All (vss. 16-23)
3. John Annunciated It (vss. 24-25)
4. We Announce To You (vss. 26-37)
5. Therefore, Appreciate Forgiveness (vss. 38-39)
6. Therefore, Avoid Judgment (vss. 40-43)

So, let's pick it up where we left off, in Chapter 13 and Verse 13. This is the prelude to the situation in which the Apostle Paul preached this famous sermon. Acts 13:13—"Now Paul and his companions..." And would you notice that phrase "and his *companions*," plural. It was not just Paul and Barnabas, it was not just Paul and Barnabas and John; there was a team; and that was *always* the way that the Apostle Paul ministered (e.g., Phil. 4:3; Philem. 24); it should always be the way that we minister: that we build as much of a team as possible to serve in evangelistic settings. "Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos..." You might want to look at a map and notice Cyprus at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, and "Paphos" on the southwest corner. They sailed again northward; they "put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

So you can get a picture of where this is: They are now north of the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. The region is called "Pamphylia"; and to the north of that is the region called "Pisidia"; and you will be hearing about these things as we go along.

They would have arrived at the seaport which is called "Attalia" (Acts 14:25), and they went a few miles inland there to the city of "Perga." *That* is the point at which "John," also known as "Mark" (Acts 12:12, 25)—sometimes called by both names: "John Mark"—that is where he "left them and returned to Jerusalem." We mentioned that last time.

We are never told precisely *why* John turned back, why he abandoned the team. And so, of course, Bible commentators spend *gallons* of ink on *pages* of paper to speculate about what we don't know. We are going to see quite a bit about Mark later, but there *is* a theory that stands out to me. I mentioned last time that we are not told that he fell into moral troubles; we are not told that he renounced the faith; we are not told that he was angry with Paul or Barnabas, or anything like that; we are not told that he did anything sinful. But let me see if I can paint the picture for you:

You can trace two possible routes from the city of Perga to the city of Antioch of Pisidia. By the way: If you are getting your "Antiochs" confused, there are more than one; I think there are something like twenty-two states in this country that have a city called "Danville"; I don't know who "Dan" was, but *boy*, he founded a lot of places! A lot of these places are named "Antioch" because of the shenanigans [during the] rule of Antiochus Epiphanes between the Old Testament and New Testament; and power-hungry Romans like to have things named after themselves, so: "Antioch," "Antioch," "Antioch." Okay—this is a *different* Antioch. They *went* from Antioch and they *arrived* at Antioch.

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To get there from "Perga," there are two possible ways: One of them is a very difficult route through and around the Taurus mountain range—"Taurus," like the word for "bull." The other route is more direct, and it is *even more* difficult; and it seems that is probably the one that they chose to take. It required crossing two dangerous rivers, and going over these rugged mountains; and besides the terrain and the rivers, the region was also known to be infested by outlaws.

It was a dangerous place to travel; so it was *probably* this that Paul was referring to when he wrote Second Corinthians 11:26, where he said, "I have been...in dangers from rivers" and "dangers from robbers." That could have been a lot of places, but *this* place we *know* fits both parts of that description.

Now, from other passages—and we will piece things together as we work through Acts—we surmise that it is possible that Paul became ill when they were in Perga—or maybe he was ill when they arrived in Perga—and maybe he had malaria. Now, here is how we preach definitively: "Thus *doesn't* saith the Lord." Maybe, probably, could be, possibly, likely—he *may* have had malaria, but he probably was ill. And it is possible that he chose the most difficult route to get up into the mountains as soon as possible, in order to get away from the tropical coastal weather—the humidity and all of that, and the heat—and have a better chance for recovery...maybe; we don't know.

Add to that the difficulty of the travel, and *perhaps* you have the reason why John Mark turned back. It would be easy to become homesick in light of facing that arduous of a journey. And he had already figured out: It is just not a piece of cake to sail on these little ships, and then walk across Cyprus from one end to the other. The luster of the idea of travel maybe wore off suddenly for him, and he gave in to the crushing temptation to not be in such difficult times. We will leave it at that for now.

But we know the trip through the Taurus Mountains was neither quick nor easy, and we are not told anything about that trip. When you study what it was like, you can imagine that there could easily be two whole pages in your Bible devoted to getting from "Perga" to "Pisidian Antioch," and maybe dealing with the illness of your team leader, and dealing with the difficulty of your beloved "helper" turning and heading back home. We don't know exactly what happened.

It is another reasonable likelihood that they may have joined a caravan for that part of the journey; and that way, they would have maximum protection from robbers, they would have maximum help with the difficulty of getting across those rivers and through the difficult terrain.

Okay—those are all the things that might have, could have, possibly did happen. But we get them to "Pisidian Antioch." So, pick it up at Verse 14 of Chapter 13—"But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.' " (vss. 14-15)

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"They went into the synagogue..." It was the typical synagogue setting; we know pretty much what happened there. A *very* significant portion of the service was the reading of the Scriptures: "the reading of the Law and the Prophets"—one of those collective ways to describe the Old Testament (e.g., Matt. 7:12; 22:40; Lk. 16:16). That occupied a significant portion of the order of service in the synagogue.

You see, people did not have their own copies of Scripture—not even on their phones or their tablets, let alone having their fancy leather-bound personal Study Bibles with commentary on everything; so the public reading was very, very significant. It was very significant when Jesus read Scripture in the synagogue; that was always a big, big deal.

"The synagogue officials"—and if *that* sounds familiar, we heard of a "synagogue official" recently in our daily studies in Mark, a guy named "Jairus" (5:22); and Jesus came and performed a healing at the home of Jairus. "The synagogue officials" were responsible for what was read, who read it, and whatever teaching was presented. And it was customary to invite visiting teachers or visiting rabbis to speak. So, the opportunity—the door was open, and Paul seized the moment.

So that is the prelude to this: how they came to Assemble together In The Synagogue.

And then, secondly: God Arranged It All. This is the beginning of the written summary of this sermon. I'm sure the sermon was a lot longer than it would take you to read the verses that we are looking at this morning.

Verse 16—"Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand"—even first-century preachers used gestures—"said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen.' "

This greeting follows the standard customs. When you would stand up in a synagogue, you would address "Men of Israel"—as you think, that refers to Jews—"and you who fear God"—we have already run across this category of people earlier in the Book of Acts: "You who fear God" refers to Gentiles who had turned away from their pagan, idolatrous upbringing, and they had turned to the one "true God" (1 Thess. 1:9)—the God of Israel, Yahweh (see Ps. 115:9-11). They attended the synagogue; they hung out with the Jews; they had become monotheists—they had rejected idolatry. But they had not necessarily taken all the steps to become full proselytes, officially confirmed as Jews (cf. Est. 8:17b).

Now, there *is* some overlap in the description of them: Some of them may be called "proselytes" (Acts 2:11; 6:5; 13:43); some of them may just be called "men who fear God"—so, "God-fearer" *may* apply to full proselytes, and it may not; don't get hung up on that. But that is the distinction: There were Gentiles among them who were wanting to worship the true God.

And so Paul said, "Listen"—good thing to do at the beginning of a sermon: "Listen." Then he did something *absolutely masterful*. I would encourage *you* to figure out *your version* of something like this: He essentially summarized the Old Testament in *seven sentences*. Are you ready for this?

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Follow along as I read Verse 17 through Verse 23—"The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan..." Israel coming into Canaan was not only God fulfilling His promise to give them the land; it was also judgment on the people there for their horrible wickedness. If you ever read about that, it will curl your hair (e.g., Deut. 12:31). "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance"—it was not because they earned it—"He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. After these things 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 forty years. After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.' From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus..."

That's only *seven sentences*! And the subject is crystal-clear. He starts out: "The God of this people"—*that* is what this is all about! (Rom. 11:36) The Gospel is about *God*—what *God did*! (see Mk. 1:14b; Acts 20:24b; Rom. 1:1c; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2, 8-9; 1 Tim. 1:11) *God* is the Creator! (Eph. 3:9; Rev. 4:11) God is *our* Creator! (Ps. 100:3) God is "King of kings"! (1 Tim. 6:15) God "rules" everything! (Ps. 103:19) *He* is the center of *all of it*! The Gospel—sorry to disappoint you—is not, fundamentally, about *you*! Now, we love the Gospel. We receive *indescribably* blessed benefits from the message of the Gospel—but the message is about *God*!

Notice, he did not begin his sermon by spending two weeks ahead of time in Antioch of Pisidia, going around to find out what people's "felt needs" were! He did not begin with a touching personal anecdote. He did not say, "You should have seen what my dog did this week—this will just make you cry." No, he was there to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is *all about "God"* (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Cor. 4:6).

As I read those verses, you may have noticed—unless you are only listening to a recording of this sometime later—I highlighted 11 verbs that are used in those seven sentences to describe God. This, too, is astounding. Take a look at this:

First, it says: "God...*chose* our fathers." That refers to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. That phrase takes you all the way to the end of Genesis.

Then: "God...*made* the people great." That refers to the 40-plus years that Israel flourished and grew, even while they were slaves in Egypt.

Then, it says: "God...*led* them out with an uplifted arm." That is, by His strength. And in other words: His great power freed His people from Egypt.

Then, it says: "He *put up with* them for forty years in the wilderness." And *that* whole portion of Scripture—part of Exodus, all of Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy—that is "written for our instruction," we are told in First Corinthians Chapter 10 (vs. 11).

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He "put up with them for forty years in the wilderness." Then, it says: "He...*destroyed* seven nations in the land of Canaan" as He brought Israel into this land that He promised to her, beginning way back with Abraham.

And then, it says: "He *distributed* their land as an inheritance." An "inheritance" is not something you earn; [it is] given to you freely (see Acts 26:18; Gal. 3:18; Eph. 1:11; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4). They were given the Promised Land by the hand of God.

That whole thing, so far, covered "about four hundred and fifty years."

Then: "He *gave* them judges" after the time of Moses and Joshua. The next book in your Bible after "Joshua" is "Judges." That was a tumultuous time for the nation, but not because of anything to do with any fault on God's part; they "did what was right" in their "own eyes" (Jdg. 21:25; cf. Deut. 12:8), and they had to learn some very painful lessons.

Then, it says: "God *gave* them Saul." "They asked for a king" so they could be like the other nations; "God gave them Saul"; that lasted "forty years."

The next thing it says: God "*removed*" Saul.

Then, it says God "*raised up* David," to whom He gave that *spectacular* covenant—which is brilliantly titled "The Davidic Covenant"—the covenant that God made with David, promising that a descendant of "David" would reign on his "throne" forever (Lk. 1:32).

And all of that leads to the final of those verbs that describe what God did: He "*brought* to Israel a Savior, Jesus."

Do you want to summarize the sermon, so far? "God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus"—that is what I am going to tell you about. That was how he began this. That takes us from Genesis 11 through the birth of Jesus; it was a *brilliant* way to introduce: "God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus."

Next, he moves on to Verses 24 and 25: John Annunciated It.

There is your fancy word for the day. This is your freebie; this is the bonus to this entire sermon—the word "annunciate." "Annunciate" is a perfectly good word; it is an archaic word for "announcing something."

And when you are trying to alliterate an outline and you have all "A's" in every point and you need one more, Saint Thesaurus comes to your rescue. I did not want to repeat the same word "announce" twice, so—"Annunciate." That means "to make an announcement."

And by the way: Do not confuse it with *enunciate*. *Enunciate* means "to pronounce clearly." I am sure that John the Baptist "enunciated" clearly when he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2), because he was "annunciating" the Savior.

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John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament "prophets" (Matt. 11:13-14; cf. Mal. 3:1; 4:5; Lk. 1:17; 7:26-27). He was sent by God after 400 years of there being no prophets in Israel. One of our songs today began with that period of silence, broken by the arrival of John the Baptist.

His purpose was to announce the soon-to-come arrival of the "Savior, Jesus." As we read in our Scripture reading: "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel" came to visit Mary (Lk. 1:26)—"the sixth month" of *what*? The "sixth month" of her relative Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. John and Jesus were related, and John was about six months older than Jesus.

So, here we go: Verses 24 and 25—"God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus" (vs. 23), and then he says: "after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' "

John the Baptist called people to repent in preparation for the arrival of their Savior, and he made it very clear that *he* was only the annunciator (Jn. 1:19-27). He was not the Savior, he was the herald that said, "The King is coming."

So, here we come to the body of Paul's sermon: We Announce To You.

It was *promised* throughout the Old Testament; it was *announced* by John the Baptist; and *now*, it is *history*. And just as Paul so brilliantly summarized the Old Testament in seven sentences, *now* he is going to boil down the Gospels and explain how Jesus is the *fulfillment* of the promises of a Savior.

This was an *expository sermon*! His text was—well, Genesis through the Gospels. But he picked key things to say: "This is what God said; this is what God promised; this is what God *did*—all to send 'a Savior, Jesus.' "

So, here he goes. He doesn't give all the details of what Jesus did; you can read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to get those details, if you'd like. Paul clearly had not read John; it had not been written yet. You can check on the dates of the writing of Matthew and Mark and Luke, but he knew about the Gospels; he knew what was going on.

But Paul majors on how the leaders of the Jews rejected their Savior and convinced the Romans to crucify Him. So look at Verses 26 through 29—"Brethren"—speaking to Jews—"sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent." What *was* a promise—it's now *done*. Verse 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." He says, not only did they mess up the understanding of the promises, they also crucified the Savior! So, Verse 28—"And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb."

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Remember the Gospel, as summarized in First Corinthians 15? He "died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (vs. 3). Paul was now saying to this group of Jews: "It was *our* people who did *just* what God said was going to happen: They *crucified* the Savior that He sent!" (see Acts 26:22)

Now, that is part of the Gospel: He "died for our sins according to the Scriptures," but it is also "that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (vs. 4), and the Resurrection is the *crucial* exclamation point on the Gospel, and Paul quite rightly emphasizes that. Look at Verses 30 and 31—"But God raised Him from the dead; 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."

Notice the same thing that we saw during the days of preaching in and around Jerusalem in the early chapters of Acts. They still clung to that same thing: There is an *empty tomb*! And there were *hundreds* of witnesses who saw Jesus *after* He was resurrected (see 1 Cor. 15:5-8).

So, Paul is bringing it all full circle: It started with what *God did* through all the centuries leading up to Jesus. He was the fulfillment of the promises that God had made about His Son, who is the Savior. So, look at Verse 32—"And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers..."

"The synagogue officials" said, "If you have anything to say, come on up!" And Paul says, "Listen! We preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 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.' " (vs. 33).

Now, if you are following in the New American Standard, you see all caps; that means: a quotation from the Old Testament. This is straight from Psalm 2:7. That is the only place in the Old Testament that uses the imagery of "Son" in relation to "Father" to describe God the Father and God the Son, the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. And it speaks *prophetically* of the Incarnation.

Psalm 2 is one of the famous "Messianic Psalms" predicting the Messiah. And Psalm 2:7 as it is stated there, and this quotation here, and then it is quoted again in Hebrews 1:5-6 and also in Hebrews 5:5—those all together form crucial links in the chain of the unity of the message of the Bible.

What is the message of the Bible? God gave us "a Savior, Jesus." That is the summary of the whole thing (cf. Gen. 3:15; Is. 19:20; Lk. 24:44; Acts 5:31; Rev. 5:9; 22:16-17). Psalm 2:7 looks back to Second Samuel 7:8-16, where God announced His covenant with David, promising that a descendant would reign on his throne forever. And He says, "Today I have begotten You." That is one of those techniques of prophecy where you can use a past tense in a predictive prophecy because it is a done deal—it is absolutely guaranteed (e.g., Ps. 119:119; Rom. 8:30). "Today I have begotten You," and that is the quote that is quoted in the New Testament.

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That introduces the full realization of this *indefinably glorious* relationship between the Father and the Son, which came in the Incarnation. "Incarnation" means "embodiment"; it means "putting on flesh." "Chili Con Carne"—I hate to ruin it for you; it means "Chili With Flesh," "Chili With Meat." Jesus took on a physical body (1 Jn. 4:2)—He took on humanity (Jn. 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7-8; Col. 2:9; Heb. 2:14). The Davidic Covenant was a promise; Psalm 2 was a prophecy of the fulfillment; Jesus *was* the fulfillment.

Paul is not done with showing us all of how God brought to Israel a Savior. He wants to major on how, "Not only did the Savior come; not only did He *do* all the things that God said the Savior would do; not only did He *die*, as God said the Savior would; not only was it *at your hands*, the way God said it would be; but He raised Him from the dead."

Look at Verse 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"—and notice, again, the quotations from the Old Testament—"I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.' For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep"—he died—"and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; but He whom God raised *did not* undergo decay" (vss. 34-37). Paul was presenting this case to his very Jewish audience that *everything* that he was proclaiming about Jesus Christ is *exactly* what was promised in the Scriptures, because *God arranged* all of this to send Israel "a Savior, Jesus"! (see Acts 2:23; 4:27-28)

He quotes "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David"—that is from Isaiah Chapter 55, Verse 3. He says: "You will not allow Your Holy one to undergo decay"—that's from "another Psalm": that one is Psalm 16, Verse 10. And he makes the connection and the contrast that is very, very clear: This was *promised* to David's descendant; it was *fulfilled* in Jesus. Now, David died; he was buried. You can go visit his "tomb" (Acts 2:29), but Jesus, the "Holy One" of God, died and was buried, *and rose again!* This sermon is the *bold* and very clear announcement: "The 'Savior, Jesus' has come. He *is* the promised Messiah!"

So, what next? Therefore, Appreciate Forgiveness.

Look at Verses 38 and 39. What are you supposed to do when you hear all of that? Look at this first command: "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren..." You have to *know* something! Why is this significant? "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses."

When you hear this message, you need to come to the *full* realization that God has provided the *only* way for your sins to be forgiven (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). Now, to the Jews, he is adding on what they already knew in their hearts: the *burden* of keeping the Law! The whole purpose of the Law is to *drive you* to a Savior (Gal. 3:24; cf. Rom. 3:19-20), because those sacrifices that had to be repeated day after day, week after week, year after year, generation after generation—they just keep showing you: You're

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not good enough! You're not good enough! You're not good enough! You can't make it! You need a righteousness which is *not* your own (Ps. 143:2b; Matt. 5:20, 48)—and God gives it to you in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).

So he says, "Therefore, I am going to tell you, now, what the message is all about: God"—oh, remember, He is the *subject*! He is the first word in this sermon! "God has provided the answer to your sin problem, in the form of 'a Savior, Jesus,' who died and rose again so that you can have *complete* forgiveness!" And so, he *begs* his Jewish brethren: "*Let it be known to you, brethren*"—grasp this! This is not just a moralistic story, this is not just a feel-good anecdote; *this is the message of God!*

So, finally: Therefore, Avoid Judgment.

Do you realize: Every person who is born on this planet will live eternally? Now, people who do not want to deal with their sin, who don't want to deal with the Savior, who don't want to deal with the Lord, who don't want to deal with God who is their Judge—they love to *wipe that out* (Ps. 10:4, 6, 11, 13; 14:1; 36:1-2; 73:11). "Oh, when you die, you're just worm food; you go back to dust. That's all there is to it! You make your Heaven or your Hell on Earth by how people remember you." The Greek word for that is "bunk"! No, *we all have* a sense of "eternity" in our "hearts" (Ecc. 3:11).

Now, understand: *We did not exist* prior to our conception, as did the Son of God (e.g., Mic. 5:2; Jn. 1:1; 17:5). That is what is so unique about Him! "*You are My Son*"—always have been—"*today* I have begotten You." The Father sent the Holy Spirit to Mary to conceive Jesus (Lk. 1:35). *We* came into existence at the moment of conception, we popped out into this Earth at the moment of our birth, but this life is not going to be the end. As Jesus said in John 5: Every person who is in the grave *will be resurrected* (vs. 28-29; cf. Acts 24:15). You *will live* after you die! You will be resurrected either to eternal life and joy in the presence of God (Rev. 20:6), or to eternal damnation in "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14-15), where there is *constant* "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42, 50) and "torment...forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). It is binary—one or the other (Matt. 25:46)—and the only way to make sure you wind up in the right place is through Jesus.

So, the final appeal from Paul in this sermon is to make sure you Avoid the Judgment of God. He uses another "therefore." He uses another Old Testament passage—this time from the Book of Habakkuk. Acts 13, Verses 40 and 41—"Therefore take heed..." What was his first "therefore"? "Therefore, let it be known to you..." Now that you *know* this, "take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you." And now he is referring to those things about how the people rejected the Savior, and he quotes from Habakkuk. He says: "Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; for I am accomplishing a work in your days, a work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you."

Now, go hunt that up in the Book of Habakkuk (Chapter 1, Verse 5), and you will find that in the context of Habakkuk, the message is: God was bringing judgment on *Israel*, just as He is bringing judgment on *all of us*; and in *that* case, it was going to be the *temporal*

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judgment of Israel being taken off into captivity for their disobedience to God for all those many years (see 2 Chr. 36:15-16), and God was going to bring that judgment upon Israel from a source *none* of them could ever have expected; in their case, they were going to be taken captive by "the Chaldeans" (vs. 17), who were *far more wicked than Israel!* And remember, Habakkuk asks that question: "How can that *be?*" (see Hab. 1:13)

And Habakkuk is the one through whom God gave us the message when he realized: "The righteous will live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). "I believe it because You said it. And I guess You *will* judge the Chaldeans, but first You are going to use *them* to judge *us.*" (see Hab. 2:6-20; cf. Jer. 25:8-14).

And so, what [Paul] is saying is: They were in danger of being judged by God, even though they did not think so. And he is saying, "Guys, did we learn anything by reading Habakkuk?" You see, at the hands of the leaders of the generation of Jews to whom Paul was preaching, they had been led *away from* understanding the Scriptures that led them to Jesus; they had been led *away from* the understanding that the whole purpose of "the Law" was to be a "tutor" to "lead" you to your Savior (Gal. 3:24). And remember: As he began this sermon, he said, "This is the same God who 'chose our fathers' and 'made' Israel a blessed and prosperous nation. He has fulfilled His promises to them, and brought to Israel 'a Savior.' "

Now, I have good news for you: There was a good response that day! The early response to this sermon in the synagogue *was* encouraging; and I am going to let you bask in how good this part sounds, and you can rest in the glow of that until next week—when it is going to be a little bit different.

But look at Verses 42 and 43—"As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God." There are a bunch of imperfect tenses there, which means: They kept talking, they kept talking, they kept talking; the people kept asking, the people kept begging, "Come back, come back, come back!" And what had been this wonderful public proclamation turned into a whole bunch of one-on-one conversations, and it was ongoing.

There are people—there were people there that day; there are people today—that God is drawing to Himself (Jer. 31:3; Jn. 6:44; Acts 2:39), and *they* will "respond" to the Gospel (Acts 16:14; cf. Jn. 6:37, 45; Acts 13:48; 18:27; 2 Tim. 2:25-26). They want to hear *more* (Job 23:12; Ps. 85:8a; 119:97; Jer. 15:16; Matt. 4:4; Jn. 8:47; 1 Thess. 2:13).

I trust that describes *you*. Most of you keep coming back! Good sign! You want to hear what God says. But if you never *have*, or if you don't quite understand—if you don't grasp what it means to "live by faith" (Gal. 2:20; cf. 2 Cor. 5:7), to put your full trust in Christ (Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:3, 9), to be an adopted child of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5)—then please, seek out someone here who can explain it to you. We would love to! *It is glorious!*

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Now, even if you *have* already placed your faith in Him, *never* stop seeking how to know Him better (Phil. 3:12-14; cf. Hos. 6:3), how to serve Him more fully (Phil. 1:9; 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Pet. 1:8).

So, they kept talking to people, kept "urging" them to be fully persuaded, and—I love this—"to continue in the grace of God." Understand: That is another way to summarize the Gospel? God sent His *grace* in the person of the "Savior, Jesus." The true message of "Christ" *is* "the grace of God" (1 Cor. 1:4).

I got to the end of Paul's sermon, and it led me to remember a passage—*he wrote it*—and it has actually always been our theme here at Heritage Bible Church; and excerpt of it is on the big poster out in the foyer there: Romans 5:1-2—"Therefore, having been justified by faith..." A "once for all" deal (Heb. 10:10). You *have been* "justified"—declared righteous. *Are you* righteous? Nah, you're not. You fail countless ways (Rom. 3:23; cf. Ecc. 7:20; Jas. 3:2a). But *God declares you righteous!* He takes *your* "sin," places it on *His* Son at the Cross—"He is the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 2:2)—and then God places upon *you* in your account, in His eyes, the perfect "righteousness" of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Is. 53:11; 61:10; Rom. 4:3, 5). That is what it means to be "justified": declared righteous (Rom. 3:24; Gal. 2:16; Titus 3:7). "Having been justified *by faith*"—you cannot do it on your own (Rom. 3:28; 4:16; 9:30)—"we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into"—here is Paul, 20 years or so later—"we have obtained our introduction by faith into *this grace in which we stand*; and we exult in hope of the glory of God."

My dear friends, are you "justified by faith"? Are you at "peace with God"? Are you *standing* in His "grace"? I *hope* that every time you hear that, you can say, "Yes! Yes, I am, and I am *so thankful!*" If you can't, today is the day to turn (2 Cor. 6:2). Is it your "settled hope" (Col. 1:23, KJV), your eternal confidence that you *will* "stand" in "glory" in the "presence" of God for *eternity*? (Jude 24)

My friends, "let it be known to you": Avoid the Judgment that is coming, because God sent "a Savior, Jesus."

Let's speak to Him:

Our Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus—"born to die, that man might live," as we sing. Thank You for His life, for His death, for His resurrection. Thank You for the eternal life that is ours, completely as Your free gift. So Father, ingrain ever deeper in us the fullness of the joy of understanding all that is ours in Christ, where we are "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies." Now, Father, we pray that today, and in the week to come: Make the most of our relationship with You through Your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.