

On the Mission Field II- Antioch in Pisidia

Text: Acts 13:13-41

Introduction:

Last time, we followed Paul and Barnabas to and through the island of Cyprus, which was their first stop, on their missionary journey. This morning, they sail off of the west coast of Cyprus (out of Paphos), up north, to the mainland of Asia Minor, into Perga of Pamphylia. And from there, they travel up to Antioch in Pisidia (not the original Antioch, from which they were sent). And Luke dedicates the rest of chapter 13, to reflecting upon that which happens at Antioch in Pisidia.

I. John Mark Leaves Paul and Barnabas at Pamphylia

"Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem" (vs. 13).

Later on, in chapter 15 (vs. 36ff), the relevance of this verse will be especially evident. For, this is the root of the contention, which ultimately separates Paul and Barnabas. Here, we find that John Mark, who was assisting Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey, has decided to pull out, and return to Jerusalem. In chapter 5, it becomes clear that his departure was not an "agreeable departure," so much so, that Paul refused to take him along on the second journey. Obviously, he did not see John Mark as reliable and stable. Barnabas however, will push to give John another chance. All that said, although Paul and Barnabas later part ways, after having a sharp argument over this matter, later on, John Mark proves to have matured, so much so, that Paul sends for him, declaring him to be useful to Paul for ministry (2 Tim. 4:9-11; note context of Paul having been abandoned by others).

At the least, brethren, we can see that there are times, when very useful Christians, may show signs of weakness and/or immaturity. We ought to be gracious in such cases, never underestimating what God can do, in and by, any man. Mark will later be used greatly by God, even to the extent of penning one of the four Gospels! Certainly, God had done great things in Mark, even at this time, which would later embolden him, to do the work, for which God has

called him. No doubt, some significant step of sanctification, had come about, in part, by his retreat here.

II. Antioch in Pisidia

"But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down" (vs. 14).

And so, when they enter Antioch in Pisidia, in accordance with their custom, they head for the local synagogue, on the Sabbath day, and sit down, awaiting the opportunity to present the Gospel. Note: For the sake of reaching the Jews, and during a transitional period, they would have still celebrated the Saturday Sabbath, along with the Lord's Day.

"And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, 'Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on' (vs. 15).

Traditionally, in the synagogues, after reading the Scriptures (the Law and the Prophets), reciting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ("Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is One!...etc) along with the prescribed prayers, a man in the congregation or a visiting rabbi, would be called upon to provide an exposition of the Scriptures. Our Lord was given a similar opportunity at Nazareth, in Luke 4:16ff. More than likely, the Apostle Paul was here recognized for his Pharisaical status, leading the presiding elder to invite him and Barnabas to come up and expound the Scriptures for them. Needless to say, Paul used this opportunity to preach Christ, showing how the Old Testament, spoke of His coming, His death and His resurrection. Again, we have another confirmation in Acts, showing the appropriateness of using the Old Testament as a means of preaching the Gospel (especially, when dealing with Jews).

"Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:" (vs. 16).

Taking the opportunity then, Paul stands up and motions with his hand, so as to call everyone's attention to himself. And then, he addresses the people, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen." Here, we find that among those who were present, were Jews, proselytes (Gentiles, who converted to Judaism; being circumcised and adopting the Jewish customs/dietary laws...etc), and God-fearing gentiles (like Cornelius, who fearing God, kept the Jewish moral compass, but were uncircumcised, and did not observe the dietary laws). And so, here we find

that the Apostle is speaking to a mixed audience, but all of whom, would have been very familiar with the Jewish God, religion and customs. Indeed, the Apostle invites; rather, he calls, all who are present, to listen to his message, which is relevant for all peoples! And from here, the Apostle preaches a message, which we can divide into three primary sections; The Biblical/Historical Premise (vs. 17-25), the Present Relevance (vs. 26-37), and the Imperative Call to Respond (vs. 38-41).

1) The Biblical/Historical Premise: (vs. 17-25)

"The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment. "After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.' From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus—after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.'" (vs. 17-25)

You will notice that, the Apostle Paul's sermon here, has some similarities with the earlier sermons of Peter and Stephen. We will see a similar emphasis placed on the resurrection of Christ, as spoken of by David, which Peter used in his sermon, and we will see an historical emphasis, working up to the life and ministry of Christ, akin to that which Stephen had preached. Only, in the case of Paul, in this context, not speaking to the direct murderers of Christ, he emphasizes the goodness of God toward Israel, in fulfilling His gracious promises all along (right up to the present events surrounding Christ), whereas, Stephen, addressing many, who were directly involved in the murder of Christ, emphasized the disobedience and rebellion of

Israel, throughout all of history. Again brethren, knowing the audience, and addressing the audience most relevantly, is a critical advantage, when preaching the Gospel to a people. Had Paul and Stephen swapped sermons, they would have had good sermons, preached to the wrong audiences. Context, culture, background...etc, are all helpful tools, which can aid us, when seeking to present the Gospel to others, at the level of the individual or the gathered assembly.

Notice the ways, in which, the Apostle emphasizes the goodness of God toward Israel, as a means of leading into the present, glorious blessing of the Savior Christ, of whom this audience is quite ignorant (at least with respect to what He has accomplished, by way of His death and resurrection).

a- He chose their fathers (out of all the world); graciously gave them His covenants.

b- Exalted them in Egypt (a foreign land) via Joseph, multiplied them, and brought them out with an outstretched arm (10 plagues, Passover...etc).

c- He "put up with them" in the wilderness for about forty years; better perhaps, "He carried them gently" (diff. manuscripts; one single letter makes the difference between both phrases).

d- He destroyed seven, more powerful nations, in the land of Canaan, and distributed their land to the Israelites. [Who really fights our battles!?!]

e- He gave them judges for about 450 years, up to Samuel the prophet. God's gift of leadership, to deliver them and guide them back into the way of truth, as they had repeatedly gone astray. God did not do this for the other nations.

f- When they asked for a king, He gave them Saul (from Benjamin), for 40 years.

g- When Saul was removed because of his sin, God did not leave them to themselves. He graciously raised up David for them, a man after God's own heart, who would do all of the will of God, and lead the people in His ways.

Carrying the people then, to David, tracing God's grace to them, the whole way through, Paul then brings up the promise given to David, so that he can lead them to the present, most gracious act of all, namely, the giving of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ! Here is the Grand Finale, which Paul is highlighting for them!

Verse 23- "From this man [David's] seed, according to the promise [given David, concerning His seed], God raised up for Israel a Savior--Jesus!" Here it is! The ultimate focal

point of all of history; the main event; God has fulfilled His promise to David, and has revealed His most gracious act of all, in sending Israel the Messiah; the Savior, Jesus!

"After John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel" (vs. 24). Indeed, John the Baptist, that well known prophet, in accordance with the Scriptures, prepared the way for this Jesus, by preaching a baptism of repentance.

"And as John was finishing his course [as John was transitioning to Jesus], he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose'" (vs. 25).

John, the great prophet, confirmed not only that he was not the Coming One, but that the Coming One would immediately follow. And he was not worthy of performing a slave's task on this Coming One. Indeed, John confirmed that the Messiah; that the One, who would fulfill the Davidic promise, was this Jesus.

Having brought history up to the time of Christ, attaching His Person and ministry to God's gracious acts toward Israel, Paul, then moves on to the second portion of his message, where he links all of this, to the present relevance, that this has for them.

2) The Present Relevance: (vs. 26-37)

"Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent" (vs. 26).

Here, Paul proclaims the present relevance of this gracious blessing, which has come in the Savior, Jesus Christ. And notice, he expands the reach of this blessing beyond the gates of Israel, and into the lives of ALL who fear God, in truth. The God-fearing Gentiles are likewise included in the blessed salvation, which has come in this Jesus! God has been thoroughly gracious to Israel all along, but that grace now widens to all peoples, in the bringing forth of David's promised Seed! And the affirmation of the guarantee of this great salvation, is brought forth in the resurrection of this Jesus, which is itself, a fulfillment of God's promise, through the prophetic voice of David!

"For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him" [Not only have they not frustrated His work in condemning Him, but in ignorance, they actually fulfilled the will of God concerning Him, which was written in the very words, which they read every Sabbath, without understanding them!]. (vs. 27).

"And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb" [After doing all that God had ordained and spoken of beforehand, they then took Him down, and put Him in the tomb---all of the precise details; the clothing, the sour wine, the piercing of his hands and feet...etc] (vs. 28-29).

"But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers" [salvation is offered to you now, in this risen Jesus! This is why we are here! We deliver the testimony of His resurrection to you, that by faith in Him, you might be saved]. (vs. 30-32).

"God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus [which was also prophesied in the Scriptures beforehand]. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'" [which speaks of the resurrection of the Christ]. (vs. 33).

"And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David.' Therefore He also says in another Psalm: 'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.' "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption" (vs. 34-37).

Putting forth the same proof that Peter brought forth at Pentecost, the Apostle confirms the resurrection of the Christ, which presumes His death. What David spoke, about not allowing God's Holy One to see corruption, could not have been a reference to himself. For, David died, was buried, and his body suffered decay and corruption. He had to be speaking of someone else. Someone else, who would die; a "Holy One," who would die, would be raised up, not experiencing the corruption of the body. Jesus died, but He was raised up, and many witnesses have seen Him, and spent much time with Him, following His resurrection. He is the fulfillment of this Davidic prophecy, giving hope to all who believe in Him! This was the pinnacle of the present relevance of all that Paul has stated, concerning God's grace and faithfulness to Israel! The greatest blessing has come, and is available for the taking, for any who desire His salvation!

And so, Paul then moves on to give the direct charge, followed by a warning, for all who refuse and neglect, so great a salvation.

3) The Imperative Call to Respond: (vs. 38-41)

"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (vs. 38-39).

David's Seed, the Savior has come...to save His people from their sins! And so, we proclaim this "forgiveness of sins" to you; indeed, the greatest of God's graces, amongst a history of His manifest graces! By simply believing into this Jesus; by faith in Him, you can find the justification, which the Law of Moses could never provide (indeed, was never intended to provide!). The price paid for sins was fulfilled in His death! And the assurance of the purchase is guaranteed by His resurrection! Here is the positive, profound hope of the Gospel! But, furthermore, to reject so great a salvation would be to the detriment of your own souls!

"Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: 'Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you'" (vs. 40-41).

"Indeed, this prophecy has a fulfillment as well. Don't be among those, about whom this speaks! Don't despise, reject, and turn away from the wondrous grace of God! Don't turn away in unbelief, and perish in your sins!"

Next time, Lord willing, we will continue on with verses 42ff, where we will consider the responses of those who are present (the Jews and the Gentiles).

AMEN!!!