

Acts | The Incendiary Fellowship

God Raised Him

Acts 13.26-41

5.21.17

"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. 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.

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.

⁴⁰ **"Therefore** take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: ⁴¹ '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.'"

We're looking at the fifth book of the New Testament called The Book of Acts. It's a history and so we assume it will simply tell a story but NO ONE simply tells a story. Everyone has a bias.

And Luke, the writer of Acts and the writer of The Gospel According to Luke... Luke HAS a bias and by conceding that, I'm not saying that Luke fabricated this history or embellished the stories (if he was a liar then his whole history is self-defeating – because Luke's whole POINT is that THIS is TRUTH)... but Luke is selective, as every historian HAS to be.

The Wesleyan scholar Ben Witherington calls Luke a "rhetorical historian" i.e. he's recording history with a purpose. He's making a point. He's showing that this spread of the Christ-

message, the Good News, THIS IS GOD'S DOING... The Message has the Life of God in it...and it has power to change lives and eventually the whole Roman Empire and all of history.

And, as we saw last week, part of Luke's argument is to leave for future generations of believers in Jesus Christ a NORM...This is what you can expect to happen when this message is believed. It forms churches... groups of believers who live life together with this message at the center (like in the Church at Antioch – last week – a normative/ideal picture of a church).

And TODAY...we begin to see the Church in MISSION – this is how the earliest Christian churches engaged the world around them...go and do likewise (a norm).

Today we begin to notice a pattern ...NOT everything will be reproducible (and Christians continue to discuss that a little) but certain elements are meant to be duplicated wherever the Church is believing the Gospel and spreading the Gospel. That's what we're looking at today. What lessons can be learned from these earliest attempts to deliberately send the Good News where it has NOT YET BEEN believed/known?

1) Normal Impulse in the Church 2) Normal Explanation of History and 3) Normal Aftermath of Lessons Learned

The normal impulse is OUTWARD. That's the direction of this book; the outline/table of contents is "You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth" And we've noted that in almost every sermon on Acts but it bears repeating BECAUSE the Main Characters in the book, the Holy Spirit and the Good News are always moving the action OUTWARD.

We saw it last week after the prayer meeting in Antioch, "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit (13.4)."

The impulse of God's people before the time of Jesus Christ was always moving INWARD toward Jerusalem but NOW after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ when God the Spirit lives in and ANIMATES the Church, the impulse... HIS impulse is outward! From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth...OUT!

So these messengers are sent out by the Heart of God OUT into the world...a fire is spreading, thus the title of the series, "The Incendiary Fellowship" (the church ignited).

They go to Cyprus maybe because Barnabas is FROM Cyprus. Then they make it into Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and to the region of Galatia.

Along the way, their apprentice, John Mark (writer of the Second Gospel), John Mark sort of bails out. But they press on (the Spirit's IMPULSE is OUTWARD).

They look for people who know something about the Hebrew Bible so they go to the obvious place – to a synagogue and a Sabbath-day gathering. And they are recognized as distinguished guests and are asked to share some thoughts on the Scriptures.

Saul (now known by his other name, Paul, v.9) Paul has become the spokesman and he addresses the group (we skipped the start of his sermon because it's long) but he greets them with real respect and tact (the impulse of the Spirit is winsome), "Men of Israel, and you who fear God ..." (16) i.e. Jewish men and Gentiles who in some way believe in Israel's God. Paul is respectful and inclusive AND he's invited.

SECONDLY, there's something Luke wants us to see regarding this message...It's an explanation of the history of the Israelites. The Impulse is OUTWARD and the message is an explanation of (what we may call) the Old Testament.

Again we skipped the start of Paul's sermon but it's an interpretation of Abraham's people. He says that God chose them...God chose the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). God brought them to Egypt where they multiplied greatly and were eventually enslaved by the Pharaoh of Egypt.

Then God liberated them, brought them out of Egypt and led them through the desert... "He put up with" their disobedience/unbelief for 40 years. Then God gave them the Land, gave them Judges (to rescue them from themselves and from their enemies). They wanted a king and they got King Saul and then King David, not perfect but "a man after God's own heart".

And from the descendants of this King David came a Savior named Jesus (which means savior) and John the Baptist pointed to this Jesus.

The people SUPPOSED that John the Baptist WAS the Savior but John said, "NO! You suppose wrongly! The real Savior is infinitely above me (your suppositions are wrong...your expectations are far too small!)"

And then Paul...sort of moves toward his audience... "Brothers, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God (26)..." Again, the Spirit, the Heart of God is moving Paul and Barnabas and He (the Holy Spirit) is winsome/alluring. And Paul seems to feel genuine solidarity with his audience.

He makes it clear, "it's OUR generation that has been given the message of salvation that the Patriarchs and Prophets foretold...we have good news...BUT IT'S NOT WHAT YOU EXPECT...we always have too low expectations...we grossly underestimate God's grace... WE DON'T RECOGNIZE WHAT GOD IS DOING! It's always been our M.O. – humanity and even God's chosen people get it wrong!"

Then Paul illustrates that – the people in Jerusalem and their leaders (who, of ALL people, should know these things!) THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE the Savior when He came to them...They DID not even understand the Prophets which they read every Sabbath Day...and unwittingly they confirmed the writings of the prophets by unjustly handing over this Savior, Jesus, to Pilate to be executed!”

And the Savior of the Jews was killed...the One the Prophets foretold would be killed...WE actually killed Him and they put Him in a Tomb...because He was truly dead.

“But God raised Him from the dead...and there were plenty of witnesses...and they've gone out into the world with this message!”

Don't you see what's happening here? We preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has now fulfilled to our children in that He raised up Jesus... (32-33)

See FOUR separate times Paul directly refers to this great fact. He's saying, “Look! This is NOT what we supposed! It seems we always get it wrong BUT GOD HAS MADE IT CRYSTAL CLEAR by this historic event, the Innocent Sufferer who died and whom God raised from the dead! This is good news!”

And says Paul, “this makes sense of Israel's history – this is the interpretive key to the Hebrew Scriptures. It wasn't David who would NOT undergo decay (accd to 16th Psalm) – it was David's descendant! And now it's happened in our day!”

AND then...the Big So-What of Paul's sermon in that Galatian synagogue, TWO THEREFORES: FIRST, v. 38 “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 justified from all things, from which you could not be justified through the Law of Moses.”

Paul says, “There's forgiveness and freedom from guilt here...it's unimaginably great news – Moses can point out your sin but Jesus Christ, the Man God raised has PROVEN to us that all who trust Him are forgiven and made right with God... YOU NO LONGER HAVE TO WORRY IF YOU'RE GOOD ENOUGH – you're NOT! But Jesus Christ is the One Man who measures up...Moses condemns, Jesus Christ can declare you right with God (even though we are still sinners). The resurrection PROVES IT...so believe it...receive it!”

And then a final THEREFORE: “Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you” (40-41)

And to reinforce this warning Paul quotes the Hebrew Prophet Habakkuk who told Jerusalem (at that city's spiritual low-point) that God would use the evil Babylonians to destroy the city...and

get Israel's heart back to God...and NO ONE thought it would happen...it was sooooo unexpected ...it would be like the earth reversing its orbit and rotating in the other direction – no way!

And Paul is saying, “You know your history and you know it DID happen... Well as shocking as God's judgment was...even MORE shocking is God's salvation! It is unbelievably marvelous...it's terribly wonderful so that NO ONE could believe it...and... yet...you MUST BELIEVE IT!”

No wonder they begged Paul to tell them more and no wonder when they invited Paul back to give “part two” the next Sabbath – no wonder the whole town came out! Paul had explained the whole history of God's people and showed how everything in the Hebrew Scriptures pointed to the Innocent Sufferer whom God raised so that all who trust Him could be forgiven or past-present-future sins and be declared delightful in the sight of God! No wonder they all came back!

So, the NORMAL impulse of the Spirit moves the Church OUT with this message. Second, the message itself is the explanation of the whole Old Testament (that really doesn't make sense without Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of it all – who does what Moses can't).

And finally the normal aftermath lessons learned: what will be the normal results in/through the Church that is animated by the Spirit of Grace (Zech 12.10) believes this message and follows the Spirit's impulse to tell it as the great explanation of history that it is?

Well for one thing, leadership is gracious under these conditions. Barnabas was apparently older but he was able to dish to Paul so that Paul became the lead evangelist of the team. No jealousy, just going with how God distributed the gifts of the Spirit. (comp with v. 45 where the Spirit was absent).

Second, leadership is indeed gracious BUT it is also is far from perfect even under these conditions. Mark left the team. Later, it's described as a “desertion” (15.38)... Later, as we'll see, Paul sort of kicks Mark to the curb...Barnabas wants to keep on encouraging and including... but point is, we aint perfect...and that aint the norm.

Third, it's so critically important to see that whole flow of salvation history and how the Hebrew Scriptures point to Jesus Christ and are fulfilled in Him... That was their method/message at least with people who KNEW the Scriptures. It makes me feel good that we had Dr. Gage with us recently to show us even more of the depth that's there when we read the Bible this way. (Again! Get into a class at St Andrews – such riches!)

Fourth, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. It was the main point in the Apostles' preaching...and the turning point of history. As Dorothy Sayers put it so eloquently – there's always some genius who insists that church would do better by not emphasizing the

death of Jesus and His resurrection, that people find that dogma and doctrine boring today, but she reasoned, “This terrifying drama of which God is (both) the victim and (the) hero. If this is dull, then WHAT, in heaven’s name is worthy to be called exciting?”

Yes, the message has content and it involves real places and real events...the whole history of God’s work in His people and how David’s Greater Son, Jesus Christ came to justify the ungodly, simple believers like you and me!

You can’t experience it until you know it.

Last, a huge theme runs through Paul’s sermon: our expectations are messed up – it’s how we roll. And I will join ol’ St. Paul and urge YOU – if you are not believing the Gospel and joining IN with a Church that teaches the Gospel because...you're just not feeling it... if God becoming a Man, living obediently IN MY PLACE and then dying under the penalty that I deserve...and rising to show: Yes! This was the sacrifice that justifies those who believe it... IF THAT’S JUST NOT WHAT YOU EXPECTED – well, Paul wants you to doubt your doubts. Maybe it’s all very different from what You expected would be the purpose of life...and the ways of God. “Take heed!”

But those who DO believe this message.... Little by little we see: it’s way bigger, way better than we ever imagined... Ask God to open your eyes to it. You will not be disappointed.