

Paul's Prototype Preaching

Acts 13:13-52

Introduction

Growing up, I must admit, I was not a great student when it came to history

And when they would tell me, "Those who don't learn history are doomed to repeat it" I figured that was fine

I would just catch it the next time around

Any of you feel that way?

I think maybe I struggled to learn or even be much interested in history because of the way it was taught

In my educational experience history was taught in a compartmentalized manner and I was never shown the entire sweep of history and all the things that were happening at the same time in different places

There was no unifying character or theme to pull everything together

All I remember is that they wanted me to memorize and regurgitate a bunch of disconnected dates

So my concept of historical events has always been a bit fragmented and I'm always amazed when I come to understand different events that happened in parallel

Having never had much interest in history, I sometimes have to marvel at God's sense of humor since I now spend a good portion of my time dealing with history as I seek to understand the events found in Scripture and relate them in a meaningful way to our present day

Last week we looked at the first section of Acts 13 and we saw the beginning of the "official" ministry of the apostle Paul as Saul became known as Paul and the mantle of authority was transferred from Barnabas to Paul

We also saw that Luke has now changed his emphasis from Peter and the church in Jerusalem and their ministry in that region to Paul and his missionary journeys to the Gentiles to the "end of the earth" the fourth field of witness described by Jesus in Acts 1:8

We saw how Barnabas and Saul were set apart for this purpose as the Holy Spirit directed the leaders of the church in Syrian Antioch to release them for this ministry

And how the Holy Spirit spoke to them while they were busily engaged in their current ministry in Antioch

We saw how Barnabas and Saul combined human logic with divine guidance to embark on their mission trip across Cyprus which was where Barnabas was originally from

And how they had won a significant convert in Paphos in spite of serious opposition

And we ended with a quick look at the first part of verse 13 where we read that they set sail from Paphos bound for the city of Perga in Pamphylia located Paul's home region of Asia Minor or modern day Turkey

This morning, we are going to take on the remainder of Acts 13 as we look at Paul's first recorded sermon

And just as we saw last week how the actions of Barnabas and Saul demonstrate for us how we should proceed when God lays a ministry on our hearts

This week we will see what I refer to as Paul's "prototype" for presenting the gospel

I believe Luke included this particular sermon to show us Paul's usual method of sharing the gospel message

In this sermon we are going to see methodology that we can and must apply to our gospel presentations today

Even if we never give a full-blown evangelistic sermon these steps are tools we can use to present the gospel in an effective way to folks we know well or folks we've just met

Our note sheet this morning has three main points but I want to warn you that points two and three are each broken up into three sub-points so that you will be prepared to listen for them

Roman numeral one is the **circumstances** which we will see in **verses 13-15**

Roman numeral two is the **sermon** and it covers the largest section found in **verses 16-41**

Roman numeral three is the **reactions** and it finishes out the chapter in **verses 42-52**

I. The Circumstances (13-15)

If you haven't done so already, please join me in Acts 13 and follow along as I read verses 13-15 where we will see the **circumstances** surrounding the sermon

[Read **Acts 13:13-15**]

Again, we see that Paul and his companions, Barnabas and John Mark, set sail from the western end of Cyprus headed for Perga in Pamphylia which was a journey of roughly 175 miles

We don't know whether they first landed at the port city of Attalia and then travelled some 16 miles overland to Perga or whether they travelled 7 miles up the Cestrus River and then travelled 5 miles overland to Perga

In either event, it seems that they didn't stop to witness in Perga but only passed through on the way to Antioch in Pisidia

John Mark's departure

The only event of note that Luke records happening in Perga is that John Mark left Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem

Luke doesn't tell us why John Mark left and many have offered theories over the years since – but all of them are mere speculations and there is no point in spending time trying to discover what God has chosen to conceal

We do know that Paul considered his leaving to be a very serious matter that disqualified John Mark from future missionary travels and that Luke refers to his leaving as a kind of revolt against the mission and a desertion

We will look into the matter more deeply when we get to Luke's reporting on it in Acts 15:38

Antioch in Pisidia

The trek from Perga to Antioch was about 100 miles over treacherous, mountainous terrain during which the travelers would have climbed to about 3,600 feet above sea level so the trip would have been somewhat difficult just because of the geography and distance

Then when we consider the area was infested with bands of robbers who preyed on those who travelled that way we might be prone to wonder why they chose this route when there was an easier, though longer, route that they could have taken over established Roman roads that circled around to the west

However, archeologists have discovered evidence of several Jewish populations on the route they likely travelled so it seems they would have been able to find friendly accommodations on the way and Paul was always eager to go to places with Jewish population

Luke, in his reporting though, transports them to Antioch without detailing any difficulties or hardships they might have encountered on the trip and we see them proceed with their typical practice of heading to the local synagogue on the Sabbath once they are there in order to take the gospel to the Jews in the area first

Then in verses 14 and 15 Luke gives us a brief though informative look at a first-century synagogue service

We see that the attendees went in and were seated and that one or more of the rulers of the synagogue read passages from the Law and the Prophets

The typical pattern was to read a set passage from the Pentateuch on a three-year lectionary cycle and then the ruler would have been free to read a passage of his choice from one of the prophets

Then someone would get up to give a message and it was the regular practice to allow any visiting rabbi the opportunity to address those gathered with a word of encouragement or enlightenment or exhortation

Paul, who was a Pharisee of some renown, may well have been wearing the garb of a rabbi when he visited the synagogue on this occasion and thereby was afforded the chance to speak

So the rulers of the synagogue had him approached and offered him the traditional opportunity to address those who were gathered together

Those who spoke were free to speak on any topic they wished but typically would weave in references to the passages that had just been read

Application

Whenever Kathy and I travel and are gone over a Sunday we try to find a local church to attend

Over the years we have travelled often to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan we have been frequent visitors at Calvary Baptist Church in Negaunee, MI where we have always received a warm welcome

They always seem happy to have us even though we have just come from our campsite and have a faint smell of smoke about us

But, you know I have never been asked to get up and preach!

How would you like to walk into a church service as an out-of-town visitor and have the elders ask you to get up and share a word of encouragement?

Thankfully, churches don't typically operate that way these days so we don't need to fear being put on the spot when we visit a church

But opportunities for presenting the gospel will often come at us just as unexpectedly

I'm sure you've had it happen to you and if not it likely will happen soon or it will happen again

There you'll be, minding your own business when all of a sudden you know the opportunity to share God's Word is standing right in front of you

And if you're like most believers you will swallow hard as your mind goes into panic mode and you promptly forget everything you ever knew about the gospel and you'll wind up talking about the weather

Anyone ever had that happen?

Our mission is to be Christ's witnesses to the world around us – that's our job as believers

Being a witness is what will get us the commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant"

So we need to be prepared so that we aren't caught off guard

And Paul's sermon before us provides us with a sort of template as to how we can effectively present the gospel to anyone and everyone we meet

As we look at the sermon we will see that Paul's message is tailored specifically to a Jewish audience

Sure, there were also some Gentile proselytes and God-fearers present in the synagogue but Paul's message is directed to people who were knowledgeable about Judaism –still we are going to see that there are universal principles in evidence that we can use today no matter who we are talking with

II. The Sermon (16-41)

And as we look at Paul's sermon we will notice that it reminds us of Stephen's speech that so enraged the religious authorities in Jerusalem that their response was to shriek, plug their ears, drag him out of the city and then stone him to death

And Paul, who was at that time known as Saul, was there giving his enthusiastic approval to Stephen's death

It's possible that Paul never forgot what Stephen said on that day just as he never forgot how he had once treated God's church

The sermon, as Luke records it, is relatively short and it divides rather neatly into three sections which will make up the sub-points under Roman numeral two

A. The Promise of History (16-25)

The first section I am calling **the promise of history** and it is found in verses 16-25

Follow along as I read through them [Read **Acts 13:16-25**]

Paul begins his sermon by giving a Cliff Notes version of Jewish history from the patriarchs to John the Baptist

And unlike the way that I was taught history, Paul shows the unity of history by revealing that the main character and the focus of history is God and the grace that he continually demonstrates to his children

Notice all the things that Paul says that God had done in Israel's history:

God chose the patriarchs of Israel; he blessed them and made the nation increase while they were in Egypt before leading them out of Egypt; God "put up with them" and sustained them in the desert for forty years before destroying seven nations and giving them their land as an inheritance

So God was faithful to Israel through 400 years in Egypt, 40 years of wandering, and then 10 years of conquest

Then we see that God gave them judges until they begged him for a king at which time he gave them Saul; then God removed Saul and gave them David; and finally God brought to Israel a Savior from the line of David – he sent Jesus just as he promised he would

God is the God of Israel and Paul reviewed for his audience how God had repeatedly been faithful to them over the centuries culminating in his sending his Son, Jesus, to be Israel's Savior

Paul doesn't even try to cover all of Israel's history in this brief sermon either but focuses on what many Jews would consider Israel's golden days

And in his historical review Paul makes it clear that the reason God was faithful to Israel is not because they were deserving of his love but because he is gracious and he gave it in spite of their unworthiness

But here's the point that we need to recognize – Paul started his gospel presentation by reviewing and building on what his audience already knew

We must build a bridge to our audience by relating the gospel to what they know or where they are

As a fellow Jew and a Pharisee, Paul obviously knew how to begin to relate to his Jewish audience

And that may largely be so with folks to whom we want to witness

With others we will need to determine from a brief conversation or observation just how to find the common ground that will allow us to relate to those we meet

Even if we have to fish around a bit it's possible to figure out the right angle to begin to work toward the gospel through discovering a person's history, their interest, their need, whatever we can use to creatively form a bridge between them and Jesus Christ – which must be our goal – **we need to steer the conversation to Jesus**

B. The Fulfillment in Jesus (26-37)

That brings us to the second point of Paul's sermon as he moves on in verses 26-37 from the promise of history to **the fulfillment in Jesus**

[Read **Acts 13:26-37**]

The gospel

As we approach the Easter season we see that Paul in verses **26-31** gives a very clear presentation of the gospel
God sent his Son into the world and the world didn't recognize him

And since the Jewish leaders didn't grasp that he was the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies of the long awaited Messiah, they unintentionally fulfilled the prophecies that said the Messiah must die for the people

Paul then continued with a brief account of the execution, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus along with the fact that Jesus had appeared afterward to his disciples

And just as Peter did in all of his sermons, Paul emphasizes that those disciples are now serving as living witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus

Prophetic support

Then Paul turned to familiar passages from the Old Testament and showed his audience how they spoke of Jesus Christ

First he quoted from **Psalms 2:7** to show that Jesus was the Father's begotten Son

Then he quoted from **Isaiah 55:3** and **Psalms 16:10** to show that the Father had promised to not allow his Son to remain in the grave and see corruption

And in **verses 36-37** he showed them how logic demands that these words be applied beyond David because they all knew where the tomb of David was and that David's remains were there

We must present Jesus as the necessary figure in salvation

There are some 350 Old Testament prophecies that point to Jesus as the Messiah

Some of them are very familiar to us like **Isaiah 52-53** which tell us of the suffering servant;

Isaiah 7:14 which speaks of the virgin birth;

Psalms 22 which tells us the Messiah will be forsaken and pierced but vindicated;

Micah 5 which tells us the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem;

Just to name a few of them

Then we need to have enough familiarity with the gospels to show how Jesus perfectly fulfilled every one of those prophecies –

And really just a few key prophecies will suffice; we don't need to memorize all 350; that would just be annoying

So, having built a bridge and shown them Jesus we come to the third section of Paul's sermon where **he asked for a decision**

C. The Call for a Decision (38-41)

In **verses 38-39** Paul states the central reason for his entire sermon

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the Law of Moses.

Paul's point in these verses would have been earth-shattering to his audience

The men in attendance in the synagogue that Sabbath revered the Law of Moses

For them, living by the Ten Commandments was the way to God and even though they knew that they were failing in keeping God's Law they were like many people still are today trying their best to be good enough

Now here comes this stranger who proclaims that the way to be put into a right relationship with God, to be justified, is through Jesus Christ and not the Law

Then in **verses 40-41** he gave his audience a warning against rejecting Christ which he also backed up with a prophetic Scripture from **Habakkuk 1:5**

We have to close each presentation with a request for a decision and a warning against rejection

Ask most people today if they think they will be in heaven when they die and they will say "Yes"

Ask them why they think they will be in heaven and they will usually answer with some form of, "I think I've been good enough" or that they didn't do anything really bad like murder someone or at least they're better than most people

In that way they aren't that much different from the folks listening to Paul except maybe Paul's audience was actually trying to follow the Ten Commandments and not just hoping that everything will work out in the end

We've already noted that Paul's message as Luke records it is rather short

Some scholars think that maybe Luke just presented the highlights while others think that Luke preserved it exactly as Paul gave it as a way to get those who were interested to come and ask further questions

Either way, it seems that more explanation is needed to show how the Law cannot save but only show the need for a Savior as Paul does in Romans

But just like Paul did by going to the Old Testament passages he cites in this sermon we too must be prepared to make use of Scripture to show the inadequacy of the Law and the necessity of Christ

And we must ask for a decision

If the person to whom we are witnessing balks at making a decision we need to be gracious but let them know the consequences of dying without having accepted Christ

Giving that warning to someone only to have them continue to resist is one of the saddest things a believer has to do but we can rest in the realization that we aren't responsible for their acceptance

The choice of whether to accept or reject Christ is a decision that every person has to make for themselves

We are only required to be faithful in the presentation, to plant the seed or to water the seed planted by another

It's God who is responsible for whether or not that seed takes root and bears fruit

Summary

Though Paul's sermon was given to a specific audience and according to their specific circumstances we have seen that there are universal tools that we can and should use when we present the gospel

We need to meet the person where they are and build upon what we know of them

We need to show them from God's Word who Jesus is and his supreme place in God's purposes for his creation

And we need to show them how they can be saved and ask for a decision

The whole process is first about having the willingness to witness and then making some effort to prepare while asking God to give us wisdom as to how to approach the people we come into contact with

III. The Reactions (42-52)

Luke closes out this account by reporting the reactions to Paul's message in verses 42-52

The reactions come in three waves: **immediately after the sermon**, the **next week**, and **some time later**

There were those who reacted favorably and those who did not and

We must be prepared for any and all of these reactions as they are all possible

A. Immediately After the Sermon

First let's look at the reaction immediately after the sermon in **verses 42-43**

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

The first reaction by the people was quite positive

Many of them begged to hear more of what Paul had to say on the next Sabbath

But it seems that others readily believed what Paul told them and were saved as a result of the sermon

We can make that case because Paul and Barnabas encouraged them to "continue in the grace of God" which only seems appropriate to tell a believer – one must first be *in* the grace of God to **continue** in the grace of God

So we see that the immediate reactions across the board were positive

B. The Next Week

When the next Sabbath rolled around things started off very well indeed

In **verse 44** we read that "the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord"

Clearly people had been talking all week and everyone turned out to hear what Paul had to say

But notice **the second reaction**:

The crowd made the Jewish leaders jealous

They just couldn't abide Paul and Barnabas drawing a bigger crowd – especially a crowd of unworthy Gentiles – into their synagogue so they began to speak against, to contradict, what Paul was saying in a mean-spirited way

It seems that they were even saying personally derogatory things about Paul with the intention of impugning Paul's character with personal attacks – that's the meaning behind the word "reviling"

So Paul and Barnabas responded boldly to the attacks as we see in **verses 46-47** just as they did when opposed by Elymas in Pathos

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

Talk about dropping the hammer!

They told the Jewish leaders who stood against them that now their responsibility to them was complete and having fulfilled God's mandate to take the gospel first to the Jews they could now turn their attention to the Gentiles because the Jews themselves had shown themselves to be unworthy of the gospel

And they backed up their contention by quoting **Isaiah 49:6**

Contrast the reaction of the Gentiles to the Jewish leaders when they heard Paul say this

Verse 48 tells us that the Gentiles began **rejoicing and glorifying** the word of the Lord and that those who could be saved were saved

Having previously been told that the only way a Gentile could please God was to become a Jew, now they see that God's Word says they can be saved through belief in Jesus Christ without first converting to the rules and regulations of Judaism and they were thrilled and responsive to it

C. Some Time Later

It's unclear when the events of the remaining verses took place but it seems like some amount of time had passed between verses 48 and 49

Because **verse 49** says that "the word of the Lord was spreading *throughout the whole region*" which would seem to indicate at least a couple of weeks had passed in order to have had time for that to happen

Eventually, the Jewish leaders grew tired of having Paul and Barnabas around

They were undoubtedly continuing to preach the gospel and teach the converts and the slurs that the Jewish leaders were hurling weren't having the desired effect

So they turned to other means – and I find their means kind of humorous

In **verse 50** we read that they brought out the big guns and turned on the political pressure

Only they couldn't even do that in a direct manner so they somehow convinced the leading Gentile women to lean on their powerful husbands

And they were able to get the women to badger their husbands into driving Paul and Barnabas out of the district

Just picture these Jewish religious leaders condescending to even speak to a woman, let alone a Gentile woman, and needing her to do their dirty work for them – oh, how that must have stung!

Paul and Barnabas didn't react badly about being driven out as we might think they would

Rather, they followed the command Jesus gave his disciples in **Luke 9:5** and they shook the dust off their feet as a sign that the people who were driving them out, including the Jews behind them, were unworthy of the gospel

And they left Pisidian Antioch and headed on toward Iconium some 85 miles to the ESE

Notice also the reaction of the believers, our passage calls them "disciples" that they left behind

They weren't upset either even though they were losing Paul and Barnabas who had led them to the Lord

They were filled with joy that they had gained Jesus and that they had the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide them

Conclusion

Acts 13 then provides us with a sort of template or prototype that shows us how we should carry out our mission of being witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ

No **army** would take the field of battle; no **sports team** would enter the arena without having developed a strategy, a game plan by which they would expect to be successful

And that's what we have modeled for us here in Acts 13

First we saw **last week** how the leaders of the church at Antioch of Syria were laboring in ministry and how they were serious about doing their part to maintain a daily, ongoing relationship with the Lord

We saw how the Holy Spirit gave them clear direction, probably through a sense of consensus as to what God would have them do

From that we deduced that the Holy Spirit directs those who are already being obedient to what they know; that God gives further direction where present direction is being heeded

We saw how Barnabas and Saul then combined human logic with divine guidance to determine where they would begin, how they would proceed, and who they would take with them

So we saw that we should get busy doing what God has given us to do in the way that seems best and trust that God will bless our direction or re-direct us according to his will

In Luke's narrative we also saw how we should expect to encounter opposition when we are about God's business and how to handle that opposition

And **today** we have Paul's method of carrying out evangelistic work – it's a pattern that we will see repeated throughout the remainder of the book of Acts

First, Paul put himself in a position where he might be called upon to share the gospel by going to the synagogue where he knew he would likely find an audience

When he began to address the audience he started where they were as he recited a condensed history of the nation of Israel that led up to God's promise of the Messiah

Then he showed them clearly that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah and he supported his claim with Scripture

And he closed his brief sermon by asking for a decision and giving a warning from Scripture as to what would happen if they rejected Jesus

The reaction was mixed as some accepted Christ straight away, some wanted to hear more, and some opposed the message

And we saw how Paul and Barnabas remained faithful to their mission as long as possible and then moved on to other fields of service without rancor or animosity against their opponents

Rarely does success happen in any venture without proper planning and sincere effort and that's true of sharing the gospel

I encourage you to think through how you might approach unsaved folks you know, how would you approach them to win a hearing by speaking to their particular situation

How would you lead up to sharing Jesus as the answer they may not even know they need?

How would you ask for a decision?

You know, opportunities appear before us all the time and often when we least expect it

On Tuesday, Kathy and I went to Rockford to visit Rex in the hospital

When we got on the elevator there was a younger couple already in the elevator and we rode up together

It just so happened that when we were leaving the same couple was also on the elevator going down with us

We were alone so I spoke to them and the young man said how tired he was of coming to the hospital and mentioned that his dad had been there for a month and wasn't likely to leave the hospital alive

I was able to ask him his dad's name, it was Jerry by the way, and told him I would pray for his dad

That last was said as we reached the first floor and he thanked me before quickly exiting the elevator and he immediately headed through a door by the elevator and was gone

I didn't get the opportunity to actually present Christ but perhaps could have gotten there if the elevator ride had been a little longer or if we had been going the same way when we got off the elevator

But in just a short elevator ride from the third floor to the first floor I had a way of getting to the gospel – facing the end of life often makes people open to hearing the gospel

I share that story with you just to show you how you can strike up a conversation with most anyone and most anywhere if you are willing

And through observation and actively listening you can find a path to sharing Jesus Christ

But it takes willingness, commitment, and a bit of prior planning

We know we are witnesses and in Acts 13 we see a great pattern for witnessing

Let's pray