

Faithful God of History

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Acts 13:13-52

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Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Pisidia

[13] Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, [14] but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. [15] After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” [16] So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:

“Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. [17] The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. [18] And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. [19] And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. [20] All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. [21] 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. [22] And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ [23] Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. [24] Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. [25] And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

[26] “Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. [27] For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. [28] And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. [29] And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. [30] But God raised him from the dead, [31] and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. [32] And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, [33] this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

“‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’

[34] And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

“‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ [35] Therefore he says also in another psalm, “‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’”

[36] For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, [37] but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. [38] Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, [39] and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. [40] Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

[41] “‘Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’”

[42] As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. [43] 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.

[44] The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. [45] But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. [46] 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. [47] 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.’”

[48] And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. [49] And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. [50] But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. [51] But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. [52] And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (ESV)

I. God Acts on Behalf of His People (verses 16-25)

- In his sermon, Paul evidently wants the hearers to know that God Himself stands at the helm of all of history.
- And to this audience, in particular Paul wants to show God’s action that He takes on behalf of His people.

- So beginning with Abraham, Paul reaches back to the very beginning of God’s choice of a people to call His own people.
- Listen to all the ways he recounts God’s activity – 13x’s
 - God chose the people of Israel – v.17
 - God made the people great – v.17
 - God led them out of Egypt – v.17
 - God endured the people in wilderness – v.18
 - God overthrew seven nations - v.19
 - God gave them the Promised Land – v.19
 - God gave them judges – v.21
 - God gave them Saul – v.21
 - God removed Saul – v.22
 - God raised up David – v.22
 - God testified about David – v.22
 - God promised a Savior – v.23
 - God brought that Savior to Israel – v. 23
- God stands at the center of Israel’s history. God acts on behalf of His people.
- Paul is seeking to convey that to those listening that to live under God’s rule and reign, as He acts for us, is blessing.

“To live under God’s rule means to enjoy God’s blessing; the two go together. That is what we see at the creation in the Garden of Eden until the fall. But then human beings disobey God and forego His blessing. The consequences are devastating not just for humanity but for the whole creation; everything is spoiled. But in His great love, God promises to put everything right again and reestablish His kingdom on earth. The rest of the Bible tells the story of the fulfillment of that promise; partially in Israel’s history in the OT period, and then perfectly through Jesus Christ. So the Bible is about God’s plan of salvation; His promise to restore His kingdom, and then the fulfillment of that promise through His Son, Jesus.” – Vaughan Roberts

II. God Fulfills His Promise of a Redeemer (verses 17-37)

- Paul continues on to describe the message of salvation provided by God.

- He shares how that though they were near to the Word of God all the time, “they did not recognize Him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath.” – v.27
- You can be near the Word of God but still be blind to it. We need God’s help to see!
- And in their blindness, though He had done nothing guilty of death, they still “asked Pilate to have Him executed.” – vv.28
- In their ignorance, they were unknowingly carrying out all that had been written of Christ, and His rejection by them.
- So after they had crucified Him, they removed Him from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.
- And this is the crescendo of this section – “But God raised Him from the dead!” – v.30
- For many days He appeared to many people, who are now His witnesses.
- “And we bring you the good news that God promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus.” – v.32-33
- Paul is a bearer of this GOOD NEWS! What God had promised to Abraham is now fulfilled in Jesus being raised from the dead.
- He promised to bless the whole world through Abraham’s seed, and God fulfilled His promise to do just that by RAISING JESUS FROM THE DEAD!
- God keeps His promises. Even though it came at great cost to Himself, God keeps His promises!
- Why do we struggle to believe God’s promises? Why do we fight with fear and anxiety and even hopelessness at times, neglecting the promises of God? If God keeps His big promise to redeem people at such great cost, why do we think that He won’t fulfill His every promise to us?
- God is faithful to every one of His promises!

III. God Offers Life To All Who Believe (verses 38-41)

- David’s rule served as a pointer to the deliverer to come.
- God has offered, through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins.
- Through Christ everyone who believes is justified – declared righteous. We cannot earn our salvation through law-keeping.

- The Jewish people sought to earn their righteousness through law-keeping. The law could never free anyone from sin, because it wasn't designed for that. It was given to reveal sin, and make us aware of our need for a Savior.
- Galatians 3:10-14; Heb. 10:1-14
- Those who put their faith and trust in Christ have their sins forgiven.
- The wrath of God against sin is real. The love of God for sinners is real.

“Do you wish to see God’s love? Look at the cross. Do you wish to see God’s wrath? Look at the cross.” DA Carson

- When we come to Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us. We now experience a restored relationship to God.
- The law was not given as a means of salvation, but rather to help us recognize our need of salvation, because no one can keep it!
- “Look you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.” – Referencing Habakkuk 1:5
- It’s a warning for those who will not believe. If we turn away from the free gift of life in Jesus Christ, we’ll be lost! Turning away from Jesus is turning away from all life. Choosing to reject Jesus’ offer of salvation is like willingly choosing death.

“If you can’t see the sun you’ll be impressed with a street light. If you’ve never felt lightning and thunder you’ll be impressed with fireworks. And if you turn your back on the greatness and majesty of God you’ll fall in love with a world of shadows and short-lived pleasures.” John Piper

IV. The Response to the Gospel (verses 42-52)

- As they heard the Word of God preached, some begged for more.
- They had never heard teaching like this, teaching with power and hope.
- This wasn’t a message that said “keep every last detail of the law, and in so doing receive salvation from God.”
- This was a message of hope! That Jesus Christ, God’s promised Redeemer, had come to fulfill the law on their behalf, living a perfect life, doing what we could never do. And by substituting Himself on the cross, in the place of sinners like us, He absorbed the wrath of God for our sins.
- By repentance and faith in Jesus, we have forgiveness of our sins. Our torn relationship with God is restored. By faith we are granted the righteousness of Christ. We are given the robe of His righteousness. We now have the standing as sons and daughters of God!

- Verse 43 tells us that “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.”
- If they were urging them to continue in the grace of God, it means that they had begun to believe the grace of God.
- Not all responded so favorably to the Good News.
- Some saw the Good News as bad news, and reacted negatively to it.

“But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.” – v.45

- And so seeing the rejection of the Jews to this Good News, Paul and Barnabas spoke out all the more boldly, saying

“It was necessary that the Word of God be spoken to you first. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.” – v.46

- Then Paul goes on to appeal to them by quoting from Isaiah 49:6, declaring the ongoing mission of God to spread to the ends of the earth.
- The response continues...the Gentiles rejoiced – v.48-- “And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” This points to the sovereignty of God in salvation. God is the One who opens eyes.
- Salvation had come to their house. They rejoiced in the hope of eternal life by faith in Jesus. They responded and believed!
- And note the unstoppable power of the gospel – though the Jews were “reviling” the message of the gospel, it spread through “the whole region” – v.49
- The disciples, though persecuted and driven away from the city, were filled with joy. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. They had been faithful to do what the Lord had commanded. They were faithfully proclaiming the gospel in Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth.
- God’s gospel was spreading. It was building hope everywhere it went.

“The gospel is not only the most important message in all of history, it is the only essential message in all of history.” Jerry Bridges
- The disciples were filled with Joy and the Holy Spirit. We go in the power of the Spirit!

Questions for Discussion/Application:

- Re-read the text, Acts 13:13–52. What initial observations and insights do you have from reading this text?
- Look at the sermon notes under point #1 above – “God Acts on Behalf of His People.” The Apostle Paul recounted specific ways God was active among His people in redemptive history. How does this reminder of how God was at work then, encourage you regarding how God is at work today—in His church and in our own lives?
- In his second point, Jeremy asked - “Why do we struggle to believe God’s promises? Why do we fight with fear and anxiety and even hopelessness at times, neglecting the promises of God? If God keeps His big promise to redeem people at such great cost, why do we think that He won’t fulfill His every promise to us?” How would you respond to those questions?
- How can we grow in our trust and confidence in the promises of God?
- Jeremy quoted DA Carson who said – “Do you wish to see God’s love? Look at the cross. Do you wish to see God’s wrath? Look at the cross.” How does the cross reveal both the wrath of God and the love of God? Why is it important that we regularly review and meditate on what Christ has done for us?
- How does seeing the gospel advance in this story in spite of opposition and persecution encourage you regarding the mission of the gospel in our world today?
- Consider taking time to pray that God would help us to trust in a greater way in His promises. Pray also that God would help us to have increased faith for how God is at work in our world today through His people and His church.