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Acts 13:14-41 "Paul's Sermon from the Missionary Trail" June 6, 2018

Let's open our Bibles tonight to the book of Acts chapter 13, and we're going to start at verse 14. I hope you have your maps with you. If not, there's one up here on the wall. It'd be hard to see if you're a ways back. But we do have them at the counter. You can ask one of the ushers on your way out. You should have those in your Bible, especially for the rest of the book of Acts because we're going to use them quite a bit.

The birth of the church in a place called Antioch in Syria was the consequence of the gospel being taken by men who had gone to Jerusalem, especially those from a place called Cyrene and a place called Cyprus. And when they were in Jerusalem, you remember that Stephen was murdered, and the church fled. And everyone kind of went in different directions, but these men ended up in Antioch in Syria. It is on that map, kind of to the right there; it says Seleucia down below there. And they began to share the gospel, not just with the Jews but with Hellenists. And Hellenists, by definition, are Jews who live in Greek cultures. So their practices are non-Jewish, oftentimes, and the further away from Jerusalem you get, the looser, the laxer, if you will, the practices become. So these men left Jerusalem, the place of tremendous religion, and they ended up 300 miles to the north sharing their faith with others. At the same time, it was Peter who was being led by the Lord to Cornelius' house to officially present, if you will, the gospel to the Gentiles. Now that's going to cause some problems in the weeks and the months to come as the Jews now have to understand that God is going to save Gentiles. That wasn't in their agenda at all. So there's a learning curve here. There's a religious prejudice to overcome. And Peter ending up at Cornelius' house was certainly a move in the right direction, if you will.

But as this church in the north began to grow, Jerusalem got wind of it. They sent Barnabas there to check it out. He traveled the 300 miles from Jerusalem to the north. He spent quite a while just encouraging the saints, answering Bible questions. He was kind of an "OG" in the church - he was an original guy. So he was just sharing, and people were being blessed. The church began to grow. Barnabas didn't think he was a teacher. He went 100 miles or so up and around to Tarsus, where Paul had gone (might have been there seven, eight, ten years in obscurity). But he knew Paul, he had met Paul. He believed God would have Paul to come. He

talked Paul into coming to the church there in Antioch, and they began to teach every day for a year, and the place just exploded. And they became, really, the missions church for the 1st century, and the center of ministry for the church, young church, really moves from Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria. There is a church in Jerusalem; there will be for years. But most of the evangelism, if you will, took place far to the north, and it kind of came and went from there.

So, two weeks ago we started and looked at the calling (in chapter 13) and the commissioning of these two men - Paul and Barnabas - who, after some time, felt led of the Lord and moved by the Spirit to begin to go on what we now know as three missionary journeys. The first one would take about two years; the second one would last nearly six years (about four years after the first); the third one would last about two years, and it would be almost immediately after the second. So we'll try to kind of give you the span of travel, the time spent, because that kind of helps you to get, I think, a fuller picture of what's going on.

But last week we went out with them on their first missionary journey. It was Paul, it was Barnabas, and because they had gone to Jerusalem to donate some money for a famine that a prophet said would be coming, they brought back Barnabas' nephew John Mark from Jerusalem in tow, and they were sent out from this church in Antioch to go on what we now call their first missionary journey. They went down to Seleucia; it is the port city there in Syria. They got on a boat. They headed for Cyprus, 100 miles away, to the eastern coast of Cyprus - a place called Salamis. They landed. They went to the Jewish synagogue, which is a common practice that Paul would pick. He went to the Jews first. Not only is it the Jews first in terms of God's plan, it was the Jews first because if they could get a foothold amongst a people that had biblical backgrounds, that's a lot of ground you can cover fairly quickly. And these were folks that were waiting for a Messiah, and they had missed Him. So Paul would always go to the synagogue first, and he does it from the very beginning. There is no response (and we're not told of the response) at that Jewish synagogue in Salamis. It was 100 miles or so of sailing. It would be another 100 miles to go across Cyprus to the other side, to the political capital, if you will, in Paphos. And they arrived there to hear that there was a governor named Sergius Paulus, who really wanted to hear from God. He saw something, he heard something. He was excited. He was the proconsul or the governor. But there was a false prophet. And most of the guys in those days had advisors. This guy happened to be a demon-possessed guy who really didn't want anything to do with Jesus. His name was Bar-Jesus, son of Jesus. Can you

imagine? Or Elymas, as they called him. And he tried to interrupt the meeting. But God, through Paul, cursed this man who went blind (much like Paul did for a time). They were able to share with the governor who, as a result, gave his life to the Lord. But that was the extent of the fruit. In fact, we spent a lot of time talking last week about ministry - that sometimes you just have to be faithful, that the fruit follows, it comes later. You don't get to see it right away. It's not like working in a production company where you can say, "Look at all that we've built or everything that we've produced." You just have to be faithful, and God'll use you. Well, they got done with the island, so to speak, with very little fruit - one governor on the list of accomplishments. They get back in the boat, and they sail north to Perga. Perga was the capital of Pamphylia. It should be marked on your map as well. And then, when they landed there - about 175 miles or so to travel - they had a couple of decisions to make. They could go east along the coast, which would kind of wrap them up in Tarsus (and that's where Paul would be very familiar with the land), or they could head north. The problem is north was the Taurus Mountains - extremely dangerous. It was almost like one of those rough areas, only Rome hadn't completely taken it in as their own, if you will. It was a tough Galatia province. But it was where nothing had gone on, where nothing had happened. So Paul says, "Let's go north." John Mark, Barnabas' little nephew, goes, "Yeah, you're nuts. This is gonna kill us. We haven't had much fruit to begin with." And so Paul was extremely sick (Galatians 4:13). Galatia is where all of this is taking place. You can see on your map. Antioch and Galatia, Iconium, Lystra - those are all Galatian cities, if you will, or of the province of Galatia. And Paul may very well have had malaria. That's what most commentators think because of the symptoms that are mentioned in a couple of places. In any event, John Mark bails out, goes home and leaves Paul and Barnabas alone. We finished last week in verse 13, which says, "Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem."

This evening we'd like to start at verse 14, and we're going to stop at verse 41. And the reason we're going to stop there - it is the recording of Luke to give us the first sermon that Paul preaches on this first missionary journey. In Perga, all of Galatia, it seemed, was on Paul's heart. He didn't want to go west. He wanted to go north. The thing is, these Taurus Mountains, for him to travel to Antioch (on your map there) is about another 100 miles, and it's 3600 feet up and over. It is filled with extremely bad people, if you will. The Romans, like I said, had only partially tamed it. I'm sure that Paul heard stories about this place (as a kid) because he grew up east of there, if you will. But these guys, if nothing else, as missionaries

had a tremendous faith and adventure and fearlessness. Dan Finfrock, who is a man that we've supported for years - I've probably known him for thirty years or so - called me up last year and invited me to go to Iraq with him. And I said, "Where're you gonna go?" and he said, "Well, I'm gonna go teach some pastors in Iraq." I said, "How are you gonna get there?" He said, "We're gonna sneak across the border." And I said, "Let me just pray about that. NO." (Laughing) And I didn't even bat an eye. But before he hung up, I prayed for him. I thought you've got to be a guy that's called to do these kinds of things. And I think that's true of Paul and Barnabas. There was nothing that they were afraid of. It does seem, as you read through the account this evening, that Paul and Barnabas did not stay in Perga (where they landed) to evangelize the city. There's no mention made of it at all. When we get to chapter 14, maybe verse 25 or so, on the way back they'll stop there, and their ministry will continue. But for now, he had his sights on getting over the mountains and getting out into the wilderness and surviving the trip, being led of the Holy Spirit. And so they set out for the Galatian area without John Mark. The trip was apparently made without incident. We're not told of anything that took place. But they eventually, notice, come to this place Antioch - a different Antioch; this one is Antioch of Pisidia, and they head first, again, to the synagogues.

So we read, in verse 14, "But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. 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.' Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen.' " Again, notice that they went first to the synagogue. There was always that desire to get an open door to preach Jesus to people with biblical background. It's kind of like you going to share with somebody that doesn't know a Bible at all. For example, when Gerard and I, a couple years ago, were teaching a pastors' seminar in Japan, the Bible is not a Japanese book. To them, at least the unbelievers, it's just a Western book. So you can't start there. You have to start somewhere else. And Paul, with the Gentiles, couldn't start with the book of Isaiah or Moses or David or the Psalms. He had nothing to go on except, "You're broken-hearted, you're hopeless, you're guilty. You can't overcome sin." I mean, you go to the basics of experience. But if you can go to the Jews and say, "Look, the prophet Isaiah said, and Jesus fulfilled it; and the prophet Micah told us" and go through the Scriptures, and you can win some of them to Christ, now you've got a built-in work. And so wherever there were

synagogues, you find Paul in a local synagogue. And these were people that God had prepared for 2000 years - with prophets and with teachers and with types and with stories of God's faithfulness. They were the people that had been promised a Messiah. He hadn't come as far as they were concerned. Paul could tell them and show them otherwise. Now Paul, because he was a rabbi for years - from the most prestigious school in Jerusalem (a guy named Gamaliel taught this particular school that he was in), I am sure that if they knew about him at all, he'd be invited to speak. He was the celebrity of his generation, if you will. I don't know if here, off the beaten track, they were aware of him. But he, almost everywhere he went, got an initial invitation to speak. He oftentimes didn't get a second invitation to speak. He wasn't burning his bridges. He was just using them well. And Paul always hoped to get a quick harvest that could become the nucleus of a church that he could leave behind by talking to folks who had a working knowledge of the Scriptures.

So we start, here in verse 16, with Paul's first full sermon from the road - very similar to Peter's sermon, very similar to Stephen's sermon. And here're the similarities. Pastor Doug's teaching a class in one of our growth classes now on giving your testimony. I said to him today, "You better do good. You're supposed to be teaching others how to do this." But you find that the same approach is used by Paul and by Peter and by others. There was always a review of past history so that you could bring people in with you. There was always a focus on Jesus being the proof of His deity and His person by the promises and the prophecies of the Old Testament. There's always a talk about His death at the hands of wicked men, His resurrection. And always a call to those who are listening to receive Him by faith and be saved. History past, the fulfillment of Jesus' life to the prophecies that were given, His death and resurrection, and this invitation. Paul had stood in the crowd and listened when Stephen had spoken (you might remember). He had held the coats of those who had stoned Stephen to death. Stephen may have wondered, dying, if his life had done any good. I mean, he looked like he was losing or he had lost. What he didn't know, on this side of heaven, was the impact he was having on a man named Saul who was still very angry and caught up in his religious ways and what, eventually, his teaching would do to this man. Isaiah would write in chapter 55:11, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." Stephen didn't see that. And I only mention that to you because so often you can share the Word of God with people and think, "Gosh, they just kind of looked at me funny. I don't think we got anywhere." But God's Word doesn't go out worthlessly. It doesn't just lay on the table. The Word of God is

powerful and living and sharper than any two-edged sword, the Bible says (Hebrews 4:12). So, for us going out to share, sometimes I think about Stephen. Paul and his fruitful ministry - this whole entire book of Acts, the rest of it, and many of the epistles are the direct result, in some cases, of Stephen's faithful preaching. So don't give up sharing because you're not sharing an idea or an opinion; you're sharing God's Word, which He stands behind. You have the full authority of the Lord behind it. Right? The power of God.

So Paul and Barnabas make it through the difficult travel. They get to the synagogue on the Sabbath. They sit amongst those that are very steeped in tradition. I'm sure that, in the synagogue, there were people hungry to know God, but they were blinded by their religious, kind of, unbelief. They sat through the reading of the prophets, a typical practice on the Sabbath - the reading of the Law. And then they were invited to come and stand before the assembly to speak. I suspect that's exactly what they were praying for, and now they get their opportunity.

Because Acts is a narrative, you really do need to read through the narrative and say, "Lord, what am I supposed to learn here?" And here's something you can learn from Paul, watching him travel over these years - and that is God will use you if you're available. Now maybe that's overstating an obvious fact, but if you're not available, guess what? God can't use you. If you can position yourself in a place that someone might call upon you, you might be asked to say something, you're in a position to answer a question. You know, "Just call me if you need me." If you'll put yourself there, then God can begin to use you. But it's hard to be used if you're not around. I don't know if you've ever gone shopping for groceries, and before you start pushing the cart around the store, you said, "Hey, Lord, by the way, if there's anyone here that needs to be talked to, I'm willing," and then go shopping, and see what the Lord'll do. Or at the mall. Just, "Lord, if there's somebody I can" I guarantee you that more often than not God's going to use you. If you're willing, He's willing. "Show me what to do. I want to be available." And He's available. You can do it at the beach or at the gym or after church. God'll use you if you're willing. And the one thing I always like about Paul - he just went and sat and waited. "See if the Lord's going to use me." And more often than not, they called upon him. Well, they might have called upon him because he was well known. He might not, very well, have been well known here. That's a long way away. However, his hometown is just a little ways away, so maybe they knew about him. But whether they did or not, Paul didn't push his way in. He waited upon the Lord.

He starts his message, in verse 16, by saying hello to the Jews and to the God-fearers, those who fear God. Whenever a Gentile came to Judaism, but he didn't follow the full conversion route of baptism and circumcision, he was referred to by the Jews as a God-fearer. And so Paul gets up, he waves his hand, he takes control or takes command. I'm sure that everyone in the synagogue went, "Oh, this guy, this isn't his first rodeo." I'm sure he came across as a very accomplished speaker. He spoke with authority and with conviction, and he was extremely good at being ready to share what he knew when asked. I would say to you if, tonight, I was to say to you, "You've got ten minutes, come up and give your testimony," if you weren't ready to do that, you've got to be ready. Just write it out. I started working on my testimony when I was a young Christian, and then I would polish it after a while. I had verses that made sense to put in there, things I put in there that didn't make sense. And you get better at sharing it, as the Lord gives you opportunity. So, "Hey, you got a word for us, Paul? Come on up." Paul didn't go, "Oh, man. I don't. I hope Barnabas does." No. He was ready. "Put me in the pulpit." Now, great, he spoke from verse 16 to verse 41. I don't think this took long. But, man, was it organized and thought through. Three parts - the history of the people (because they loved talking about themselves, it would bring you in), the ministry of Jesus set on display, and thirdly and finally, if you will, the call to faith. That's really how this lines up.

Verse 17 through verse 22 - the history of the people. And he does it very generally and broadly. Verse 17, "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." It was a common practice in preaching, and it always assures good ground, when you speak to Jewish audiences to speak about Jewish history. Like I said, there were few subjects they would rather talk about than the fact they were God's chosen people. That's still true today, by the way. It is good to come to church as often as you can. I'm glad to see you here during the week with your Bible out. I wish we could sell that to the other 2000 people that show up on Sunday mornings. Maybe, eventually, we will - if you'll pray for them that God will show them. I know not everybody can make it, but, man, a lot more people could make it than do. But you have a great advantage being here because you can, if you stick with us long enough, be able to rightly, I think, divide the Bible. You'll be able to tell the Jewish history - how God raised up a people, how He delivered them from Egypt. You know the story. You should be able to communicate it in a way that would benefit others. Right? It helps you in your growth.

Paul begins with these words, "The God of Israel chose our fathers and then exalted us as a people." Notice that the work of God always starts there - "God chose." God chose Israel as His own. He would tell them (Deuteronomy 7:6-8), "It's not because you're the best, the smartest or the baddest or the greatest. But I've just set My love upon you." It was God's choice. Israel was in Egypt for 430 years - the first 30 years with Joseph, the last 400 as slaves making bricks, sometimes with spit. It was a horrible existence. How many bricks did they make? I saw an interesting study a couple years ago. I forget the TV show that I saw it on, but it was a reporting, and it said if you take all of the bricks out of the Sphinx and the Pyramids, you could build a wall 15' high and 10' thick from here to Brooklyn. So that Trump wall is nothin'. (Laughing) The Jews were building a lot more. No exaggeration. Can you imagine that? 15' high, 10' thick from here 3000 miles across the country. That's how many bricks are found just in the Pyramids and in the Sphinx. So, they were stuck for 430 years. Paul doesn't go into any of that. He just goes, "Yeah, God chose us, and for 430 years, we were in bondage. And then God, with His strong power, brought us out." So this quick review - not really detailed - a sermon outline, if you will. It is good to know that he's sharing the Scriptures but not having to get into all the minutiae. His point was this, "God chose us, and then when He wanted to, God delivered us with His uplifted arm" or "on His arm that was lifted high." God is, in other words, powerful. Right? The heavens were flung out by the fingers of God, we read in Isaiah 48:13. The Pharaoh saw hopeless slaves that he could control. He was very much mistaken. They served a God that was stronger than anyone or anything. So, he starts immediately with their history. "God chose us, God delivered us." And then thirdly, verse 18, "Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness." "We had been so faithless, but we had served a God who had chosen us, delivered us and had been so faithful." So, they had shown an offhanded kind of indifference to the LORD. You know the stories. Paul doesn't go into it except to say, "God was good to us even when we weren't good to the LORD. He tolerated our complaining, our murmuring, our unbelief, our rebellion. He put up with us!" That's exactly what he says here. A faithful God, with His unfaithful people, that He fed and led and protected because God, our God, puts up with a lot from us. Doesn't He? And so Paul's just saying, "He's a loving God. He chose us, brought us out. We weren't very faithful. He stuck with us." Everyone's on the same page now.

Verse 20, "After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet." Finally He brought them into the land. And by His power, He gave them victory.

I skipped a verse, didn't I? Did I? Or I did not? Don't yell at me. Verse 19? Is that where we skipped? Verse 19, "And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment." So he's just going in order. He brought them, finally, after forty years - they had to go wandering into the land. You remember the seven and a half years under Joshua. The seven major tribes are mentioned in chapter 7:1 of Deuteronomy - the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. There're seven there. God moved the resistance out of the way. He established His people. He reminded Israel, constantly, of the fact they could have never taken it on their own. "We were blessed by God. He was our strength. We shouldn't walk in pride but in faith."

Verse 20, which I've already read to you, for the next 450 years, the land over which God watched, God sent them judges. Now if you were with us when we went through Judges, you know that it was one of the worst times in Israel's history. The reason these judges came is because God kept sending enemies to overthrow His people so that they would get on their knees and cry out for God's help again and quit being so cocky. And the LORD would raise up a judge, and he'd get them off the hook for a while, and they'd go right back to it again. We called it syndrome. It was just over and over and over again, these waves of unfaithfulness. During that 450-year time, the people repented, and God continued to forgive. Every time He put the pressure on, they turned back. God was a patient God. In fact, if you read the last five chapters of the book of Judges, it'll serve as an appendix to the book. You can get the whole book's theme in those last five chapters - to see how bad it had gotten.

Well, at the end of those 450 years, here comes Samuel the prophet. By the way, Samuel was the last judge. He is also the first prophet to the nation in an official capacity. Moses was a prophet, but this was an official kind of place where God sent him to the people throughout the land - preaching and challenging and causing for reform. So, until that time.

"And afterward" (verse 21) "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.' " Up to this point, Israel had been a theocracy. The nation asked Samuel, and they said this to him (1 Samuel 8), "Could you give us a king like other nations? We want to be like the rest of the people." The sin wasn't in asking for a king. The sin was in wanting to be like everyone else. "I want to be like the world around us." That was the problem. And so they rejected the LORD. Samuel came to the LORD in tears and said, "They don't want me." And the LORD said, "No, no, no. They haven't rejected you, they've rejected Me. So I'm going to give them what they want. I'm going to give them Saul." The word "Saul" means requested one. "You want a big, tall, good-lookin' guy, a politician with wavy hair? You got it." Head and shoulders, good-lookin'. "That's the guy. We're all votin' for the guy that's good-lookin'." Turned out to be a horrible disappointment. Didn't walk with God, didn't serve the LORD, was eventually taken out of the way. And instead of Saul, God gave them who He had chosen. He gave them David. God was not impressed with Saul's size and good looks like the people were. He had a small soul. And God set him aside. But how tragic when you get what you want, and it isn't what God wants. So "God removed him," we read here. He had warned Saul for years. He finally removed him by sending him after the Amalekites. The Amalekites were a group of folks who had been a thorn in Israel's side for their entire existence, at least coming through the wilderness and all. He took 200,000 footmen and 10,000 soldiers from Judah (1 Samuel 15). He was supposed to wipe them all out - livestock, king, everything. He saved the best livestock, held the king for ransom, argued with God that he saved the best just to serve the LORD with and to use as a political pawn. And the LORD said (1 Samuel 15:22), "To obey is far better than sacrifice. I don't want that stuff. I want you to listen to Me." Twenty years later, Saul would be killed by an Amalekite. Never leave residue of your flesh laying around because it may catch up to you. I think that's why we read, "Reckon the old man dead, completely so" (Romans 6:11). Don't flirt with disaster.

In any event, look how fast Paul is covering thousands of years of history. He says He calls David. Though, like Saul, a sinner, David's heart was to serve the LORD, and he loved Him. He was God's choice. He was given to the people in God's love. He would be used by the LORD to raise the nation to its zenith. If anybody wanted to brag as a Jew, they would brag about the time of David being upon the throne. He was a shepherd, he was a soldier, he was a statesman, he was a saint. He found Israel torn in half, divided by their enemies. He reunites the tribes. He

conquers their foes. He gives Israel a national consciousness. He writes half of the book of Psalms, if you will, in worship. He prepares for the building of the Temple. He puts the archives of their history back in order. He brings order to the priesthood. He founded Israel's Messianic dynasty. Everybody was looking forward to the Messiah coming. In fact, every king after David is always measured by David's standard. "He wasn't like David," or, "He's almost like David," or, "He could have been sorta like.....he kinda looked like David." Sometimes that's all you got. But God used this man who had a heart towards Him. That was God's testimony. David wasn't perfect. We know that. But he had a sincerity of love for the LORD. That's it for the history, if you will. Now he's on equal footing. I think people are listening to him now. "Oh, yeah. Yeah, he's not saying anything wrong. That's exactly amen. We're all excited about that."

Beginning in verse 23, though, he then immediately jumps way ahead - 1000 years, if you will, right through space - and he goes to Jesus. He says, in verse 23, "From this man's seed," (David) "according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior - Jesus." From David, Paul makes this leap in history to the fulfillment of God's promises to David regarding the Messiah. You remember that David said (in 2 Samuel 7), "LORD, I just want to build you a house. I'm living in a palace, You're living in a tent." And the LORD said to David, "I appreciate that. You're a man of war. I'm not going to let you build it. I'm going to let your son build it. However, I'm going to do you a big favor. I'm going to build you a house. And of your kingdom, there's going to be no end." And David, hearing that, realized He was talking about the Messiah, the One that would last, and it just floored David. It just humbled him so tremendously. He understood it was the promise. It left him speechless. The guy writes a lot of songs. This guy had nothing to say. So Jesus is that long-awaited Messiah. He's the fulfillment of God's promises. And here, this trained rabbi, Paul, speaks to the congregation in Antioch, and I'm sure that they had never heard this before. I'm sure this was new information like, "You've got to be kidding me!" Right? That David had a throne that God established, and it would last. And so he presents Jesus. He just turns the corner from verse 22 to verse 23. He jumps 1000 years ahead. He talks about Jesus.

Verse 24, "After John" (John the Baptist) "had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel." (That was John's message). "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.' 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." John the Baptist had caused no small stir. As he came out, thousands of people followed him to the middle of nowhere. On our trip to Israel, we'll take you to where John baptized - almost surely where it is. It was in no-man's land between two countries. They opened it up, cleared the vines out, and you can drive out now and kind of see the place. You're close enough to where you could step over into Jordan. It's that close. If you dive in, I think you can get to Jordan. But in any event, it is a very remote place in terms of Jerusalem. Thousands of people went out there. The national conscience was stirred. He pointed beyond himself to Jesus. And Paul says, "You've known about John. I'm sure you've heard the stories. Well, now, that word that John preached - his call to repentance - the gospel is being brought to you by John himself. That's what I'm doing here. To bring you the word of this salvation, that this Man could bring you back into a relationship with a merciful God through your repentance. The Messiah has arrived." In fact, if you'll keep there for a minute, verse 26, flip ahead really quickly to verse 38 and verse 39 because this is what he's going to end with. "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." So, this word of salvation that he mentions (here in verse 26) - God offering pardon, inviting man to be restored, offering him His grace - that He has been offering to you since the days of Abraham, you can almost write in the margin, "Man's greatest need became God's greatest deed." Right? He came to save us. And God's forgiveness is different. Notice what we read here - that everything that you've ever done would be justified by your believing in Christ. The Law couldn't do it, but faith in Jesus could. His forgiveness is quite different than ours. We'll forgive, but we'll certainly remember. God forgives and won't remember. Now I know that you've got to take that on faith because, "Well, doesn't God know everything?" Oh, yeah. He chooses to forget. You can't do that. He can. You're justified. Just-as-if-I'd-never. Right? I'm seen by the Father, I'm accepted by the Father because He sees the Son in my life. And he's going to deliver me (notice verse 39) from all things which you couldn't be delivered by the Law or by your own works.

Well here's the thing. It is Satan who seeks to convince you that that's not true. I think some of the biggest struggles for Christians is to bathe in the grace of God. We somehow are convinced (and we see it all the time in counseling) that people will say, "Well, you don't know what I've done. You don't know where I've been. You don't know what I was thinking." And I'm thinkin', "Well, no, I don't. Nor

do I want to. But God knows." And the enemy wants to keep you from the grace of God - condemning you, defeating you, wanting to destroy your walk - taking away the blessings of knowing that. Here's a way you can always kind of keep track. Condemnation will always come from the pit of hell, and the result of condemnation is to drive you away from God. On the other hand, the conviction of the Holy Spirit will have you running towards Him for help. There's a big difference. One drives you away - the enemy. The other draws you back to the Lord. The source of condemnation is always the pit of hell.

Well, back to verse 27, here's the amazing statement. He says to them, "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. And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death." Amazing statement. Three and a half years Jesus walks amongst them - walks through the land (the breadth of it, the length of it), opens the eyes of the blind, raises the dead, multiplies food in somebody's hand. Miracles without number, according to John 21:25. And Paul says of the Jews in Jerusalem, "They were there. They missed it." What more credentials could Jesus have shown them? That's one of the arguments from the gospels. "What more do you want Me to do? I've done what no one else can do!" (John 15:24). Additionally, Paul adds here in verse 27, "Every week in the Sabbath, as God's Word is being read in the synagogues, no one is able to grab hold of the promises and the words of the Prophets that would have pointed to Jesus." Born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, suffered and died on a cross (Isaiah 53, Psalm 22), John the Baptist being the forerunner, Psalm 69 - the crucifixion. This was all being read in church, so to speak, while people sat and listened. And somebody would have had to say, "Who's that for? What's that about? What are they talking about here?" He would be sold out for a cheap price of thirty pieces of silver in Zechariah 11:12-13. You want to say, "Is anybody listening?" And that's Paul's point. "You have the evidence. You have the Word. You've read it yourself. You just need to act upon what you have heard." So, Jesus, I think, early on, as He sat with the disciples, said to the Jews, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39). Right? That's where the light shines and the arrow is found - pointing to Christ. So it should warn us, I think, that it's easy to sit in church every week, and you can sit here for years and never grow. The possibility exists that you just kind of roll in and out and yet, even if you're taught faithfully, it doesn't get in and change you at all. It happened for one synagogue after the other. Not heeding the

Word, not listening to the Spirit. Jesus kept saying, "If you have an ear to hear, listen to what the Lord is saying to the church" (Matthew 11, Mark 4, Revelation 2). So that we should be careful. So, may we not become dull of hearing and may we become doers of the Word and listen to God personally. But Paul points out, in verse 27, this has been out there in His work and His ministry, and that of John's and the Prophets. And they didn't understand that, in asking for Jesus to be killed, they were actually fulfilling the very Scriptures they were ignoring. Though they found no cause for death in Him, they talked Pilate into killing Him. They did that with political pressure. If you've been with us, we've gone through that. They forced his hand through all kinds of threats. They said (John 19:7), "We have a law. By our law, this Man should die. He thinks he's God." They said to Pilate one time, "If you stand with this Man, you're no longer friends of Caesar" (John 19:12). I mean, Pilate was just on the hook, and he voted for himself to be surviving this whole thing.

Verse 29, Paul goes on, and he says, "Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead." Unless things change and God tarries, verse 30 is going to be my Easter message next year. I'm going to do all of the "but Gods" in the Bible, and there're a bunch of them. When things look tragic and falling apart, "But God." When He was dead, "But God." Stepped up. Verse 31, "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. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.' " So, the Scriptures spoke of His death by crucifixion. They crucified Him. They needed Rome's help. They pressured Pilate to do so. And so, verses 29-31, Paul writes what man did and then what God did, what man did, what God did. And they had so many witnesses, it would have settled any court question. There were plenty of them.

But notice, in verse 32, that the tomb is not the end of the story. Death could not hold Him. And so there's good news, right? Glad tidings. The promise that God made, God has fulfilled in raising Jesus from the dead. And Paul begins to quote Scriptures here to speak about the power of God and the promises of God. He quotes out of chapter 2:7 of Psalms, applying it to the resurrection. To the children of the fathers, Jesus is the way of life that He provided. In verse 34, "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." So he quotes out of Isaiah 55, he quotes out of Psalm 16. He literally says this, "David died. Corruption. He rotted in the grave. The Son of God, the Messiah, died. But He rose. There was no corruption found in His life. God triumphed over death."

Verses 38-39, we just read it. "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man" (through Jesus, the One who rose from the dead) "is preached 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." So, God raised Him up. Through Him we find forgiveness. Paul is just kind of straightforward, tells the story, doesn't he, the history and then Jesus.

And then you get to verses 40 and 41, and he just calls everyone to believe. He says, verse 40, "Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you." And then he quotes out of Habakkuk 1:5, " '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.' " He ends with this warning that literally says "You know, our Prophets told us in Habakkuk that God could do a work, and we could miss it. And God is doing a work. He's saving us. He's come to save. It can just go right by you. He could be here in the synagogue tonight, and you could miss the whole thing." But he ends by saying, "Salvation is not to be spurned because its cost was too great and its benefits too glorious, and the terms were too simple, and the alternative is too dreadful. You can't ignore, now, what God has done. And like those in the days of Habakkuk, don't let God's work pass you by. God sent His Son. By Him, we preach to you forgiveness. He's the only One through which you can find eternal life. So depart from your sins, and come to Jesus."

A five-minute sermon that took me a half an hour to read. I know. But it was a five-minute sermon! It's about as quick and as clean, as succinct as you can find. Nothing left out. And I would say to you if you're looking on how you're going to share your faith with people, do this. Make an outline where you cover everything you need. Right? You want to talk about sin and rebellion and the goodness of God and our need for repentance and God's love in sending His Son. I mean,

everything's here in a five-minute sermon. And then Paul just leaves it there. The Word of God never goes out without effecting what He wants.

We're going to leave the result till next Wednesday. We want you to come back. This is the one way we can do it. Don't read ahead. We want to surprise you. (Laughing) But, man, what a glorious trip. Right? We've gone on your map all the way through Cyprus, up over the mountains. We're in Antioch. We're going to head next (after this, next week) to these three other cities that are another 100 miles back the other direction. Dangerous towns. It's going to get a lot more hairy than it is so far. But God is going to continue to do a work.

Here's what I hope you'll go away with tonight, just from the lesson tonight; and that is this - God's Word never goes out void. Know that. Isaiah 55:11. Paul and Barnabas would teach us that. Leave a place in your life to be available so God can use you. And when He does, share what you've learned. I think sometimes we write ourselves off because we just say, "Well I can't do that. I'm not a pastor, I'm not a preacher. I don't know how to talk very good." I've asked people to pray out loud, and they go, "I can't pray out loud!" Really? You just told me out loud you can't talk. How is that possible? Just do what you can. You don't have to impress anyone. But do what you can. God's Word won't go out void. He'll use those that are available to Him. And speak with boldness. God has been merciful even when we were very rude. His grace keeps us. But there's a danger in the church of sitting and hearing and not doing. But yet God has a work to do. So we can end with what Paul ended on - the words from Habakkuk. God is working today to save. But the work can go right around you. You can be in row 9, in the middle. Don't count. I have no idea. But it just gets by you. It comes, it goes, you live, you die, you never got involved, you never were touched, you weren't part of the whole process. Oh, you're goin' to heaven. You're gonna make it. Because Jesus' promises are sure. But Paul said of Habakkuk, "Be careful that God's work doesn't just get around you, and you miss it. That's be horrible." You want to be right in the thick of things. I want to be where God is. Don't you? So that we might see what He wants to do with us. And He can do far more than the cumulative effort of our abilities. He can use the likes of us. Look around. This should be a disaster. Don't you agree? Look up here. (Pastor Jack points to himself). Disaster. And yet, God is faithful.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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