

Paul: Missionary to the Gentiles

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Paul: Missionary to the Gentiles

Acts 13:1-52

Today we come to the 3rd sermon in this series on this extraordinary man, the Apostle Paul. The first sermon was about his background: his family, his education, his religious upbringing. The second sermon dealt with his Damascus Road conversion and I asked you to consider your own conversion. All these sermons on are on website at yateschurch.org. Today we come to his missionary journey to the Gentiles begun in Acts 13.

I. What happened to Paul after conversion? (Acts 9-11)

Before we read about that, let's briefly note what happened to Paul immediately after his conversion. He didn't become a missionary to the Gentiles right away. What happened to him?

A. Baptized by Ananias (Acts 9:17-18)

First, he was baptized by Ananias. Before Paul ever met the Lord there was a man of commitment and maturity that would be used by the Lord to strengthen the body of Christ. While Paul was having his vision on the road to Damascus, Ananias was having a vision in his home in Damascus. Ananias went to Paul, laid hands on him, blessed him, and was God's agent of healing for Paul's blindness. Then Ananias baptized Paul.

This is simple reminder that no one lives and acts alone as a Christian. As soon as Paul encountered Christ he had to receive the help of others to get to Damascus. Then he sat helpless until Ananias showed up, healed him, and baptized him. None of us live as Christians alone. We are in need of instruction from others. We need to submit to the teaching and guidance of older, more mature Christians. There is far too much "doing your own thing" in the Christian community today, especially among younger Christians. If we're

going to follow Christ, then we need to show humility in the presence of the Ananiases God has put in the church.

B. Damascus, Jerusalem, Tarsus (9:19-30)

After Paul was baptized, he stayed in Damascus and shared his testimony to the citizens of the city. He preached in the Jewish synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel. The Jews conspired to kill him there so he escaped to Jerusalem. But we learn from Paul's letter to the Galatians that he spent 3 years in Arabia between his time in Damascus and Jerusalem. We don't know what he did in those 3 years but many scholars believe he spent time studying the Scriptures with his new vision, with the lens of Jesus Christ. He began to read the Hebrew Scriptures as a Christian.

He stayed in Jerusalem for a while, debating with the Jews about Jesus being the Messiah and Son of God. Once again his life was threatened and he escaped to Tarsus, his home town. I wonder if he went to his parents' home or if his parents were still living at the time. We're not told.

C. Found in Tarsus by Barnabas (11:25-26)

All we know is that at some point, Barnabas showed up at his door. Acts 11:25-26 says, "*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*" Barnabas, whose name meant, "son of encouragement" recruited Paul because the church was growing at a tremendous pace in Antioch. Barnabas believed Paul could be a great teacher for the church there. So Paul went to Antioch. It would be from Antioch, a city in modern day Lebanon, that Paul would call home for his missionary expeditions.

II. Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14)

Chapters 13 and 14 of Acts tell of the first of three of Paul's missionary journeys. Acts 13:2 reads, "*While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'* So after they fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and set them off."

Well, where did they go? They went on a 1000 mile journey, that would be like traveling from here to New York City and back to Durham without car or plane. They traveled by ship, camel, horseback, and foot for years to the following places. I want to direct your attention to the screen so you can get a brief glimpse of the scope of this journey.

Paul and Barnabas set out from Antioch. Antioch was 15 miles up the River Orontes so they actually sailed from Seleucia, its port. From there they went across the sea to Cyprus where they preached at Salamis and Paphos. From Paphos they sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. Pamphylia was a low-lying coastal province and they didn't stay there long, possibly because it didn't suit Paul's health. They struck inland and came to Antioch in Pisidia. When things grew too dangerous there they went 90 miles further to Iconium. Once again their lives were threatened and they moved on to Lystra, about 20 miles away. After suffering a very serious and dangerous attack they passed on to Derbe. From Derbe they set out home, going back to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidia Antioch. Having preached in Perga in Pamphylia, they took ship from Attalia, the principal port of Pamphylia, and sailed via Seleucia to Antioch. The whole journey occupied about 3 years.

That was Paul's first missionary journey. He would take two others that would be even farther than that and over the course of his life traveled by foot, ship, or beast 13,400 miles. What could possibly motivate someone to do that

through danger of robbers, attempted assassinations, incredible altitude changes, and few companions? The simple yet most convincing answer is that the resurrected Lord had revealed himself to Paul and called him to do this. Paul was convinced that Jesus was alive again and was the fulfillment of all the promises God made to the Jews. It was good news for Jew and Gentile, and Paul was called to carry the Gospel to both. Whatever the cost, no matter how long it took, whatever obstacles he had to face, he would face them.

We may not all be called to travel 1000 miles through rapid rivers, steep mountains, malaria-plagued lowlands, and bandit-ridden passages. But we are called to be just as obedient as Paul and Barnabas. We're called to go where God wants us to go. Do what God wants us to do. Risk the comfort of our finely crafted world, for the uncertain challenges of God's future. We may not be called to trace Paul's steps across Asia Minor, but we are called to have his obedient heart in Durham, NC.

III. Paul's First Sermon (Acts 13:16-41)

When Paul did arrive in Pisidian Antioch in the region of Galatia, he went to the local synagogue. When the leading elder of the worship service asked Paul and Barnabas if they had anything to say, Paul stood up and preached his first sermon. It was almost identical to the sermon Stephen preached before his martyrdom in Jerusalem years earlier

A. The History of Israel (13:16-22)

The sermon that Paul preached here is the only full length sermon we have of Paul recorded in all the Bible. His sermon begins with an outline of the history of Israel to show how it culminates in Christ. The Stoics believed that history simply kept repeating itself. Many modern people think that as well. Others believe things are getting worse and worse with each passing year. The

Christian view of history is optimistic. It is certain that history is always going somewhere according to the purposes of God. Paul is showing how God, beginning with slaves in Egypt brought Israel up, gave it a land, allowed it to have kings, culminating in David.

B. The Story of Jesus (13:23-31)

Then Paul moved from Israel to Jesus. He explained how Jesus is the fulfillment of all God had done through Israel. He focused on the twin events of Christ's death and resurrection, and how now, the Gentiles have been invited into the loop. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is first for the Jews, but then for the Gentiles.

C. Evidence from the Scriptures (13:32-41)

Finally, Paul showed from the Hebrew Scriptures how this had been prophesied in earlier days. He takes quotes from Isaiah and the Psalms to offer evidence that what happened to Jesus was predicted by God's prophets.

In this sermon Paul gives us a model for all-time in presenting the Gospel to others. You make a connection with the people. Paul was connecting with the Jews when he recalled their history. You tell the basic story of Jesus, his death and resurrection. And you provide some biblical evidence for your presentation. It's not something you made up. It's revealed in the unique written revelation of Holy Scripture. There is, as Paul and others would come to see, power in the basic presentation of the Gospel.

IV. Responses to Sermon (Acts 13:42-52)

How is that power revealed?

A. Many followed; the whole city came (13:42-44)

One way is that people either believe or come to listen to the Gospel again. That's how some responded to Paul's first sermon. Luke tells us on the

next Sabbath almost the whole city showed up to hear Paul preach the Gospel again. I've been told the greatest compliment a preacher can hear after a sermon is not, "That was a great sermon," or "That spoke to my need today," or "You spoke the truth in a beautiful way." No, the greatest compliment a preacher can hear is, "I would like to talk to you more about this later." When people are motivated to delve deeper or challenge or stand under conviction of a sermon, then Spirit has been active and the heart has been receptive. The whole city came to hear Paul preach the next Sunday.

B. Many Jews were jealous (13:45)

As with any sermon there are multiple responses. One sermon is preached but hundreds are heard. Many of the Jews were jealous in Pisidium Antioch. They saw the positive response to the Gospel and felt just like Paul did before Jesus got hold of him. They began to undermine Paul and spread rumors about him. They did everything they could to undermine his credibility. That is what always happens when there is a battle of ideas in the public arena. If your side is losing, you don't oppose the idea, you oppose the proponent of the idea. You go negative. We see that in political campaigns today. Paul experienced it in his preaching career.

C. Gentiles are honored (13:48)

Yet, many Gentiles were honored that they were now included in the promises of God. This was always God's plan. God has never been exclusively the God of the Jews, although some Jews considered God their exclusive property. And today, God is not just the God of the Christians. There is only one God and this God is the God of all people. The Christian understanding of God is not that God is our property, but that God is for all people, that Jesus Christ died for all people, and it is our duty and honor to share that good news with the world.

D. Paul is expelled (13:49-50)

Because the Jews stirred up the people, Paul was expelled from the city of Pisidium Antioch. This was a common experience for Paul. He was preaching a radical message, a message of God's grace overpowering man's attempt at righteousness. Paul was showing how the Jews were the recipients of God's grace in Jesus, but this grace was also extended to the Gentiles. Many Jews were infuriated that the privileges of being God's people could be for the uncircumcised Gentiles as well. The Jews considered these privileges something to be kept to themselves. The Christians saw them as something to be shared. That's one way to assess our faith in Christ. Is it something we simply want to enjoy for ourselves in our little religious community here, or is it something we want to share with others. If our faith is just for us, we have a very immature understanding of the faith. If it's for the benefit of others, those outside the church walls, we are walking in the pathway of Paul.

E. Disciples rejoice (13:52)

The end of this chapter recounting Paul's 1st missionary journey ends with a word that they rejoiced, after being expelled. Now why would you rejoice because you've just been kicked out of town? First, because there were many in the town that came to faith in Jesus Christ. It wasn't a total failure. Second, because they were considered worthy to suffer like Christ. They were rejected like Christ was rejected. For that they rejoiced.

Sometimes we think the only time we can rejoice is when things are going well. But the Christian faith provides a means to rejoice in failure, because God's grace can be evident then. We can rejoice in death, because that is the gateway to eternal life with God. We can rejoice in our sufferings because Christ also suffered on our behalf. We can rejoice when our Christian message and lifestyle is rejected by the world, because that is evidence we have been

faithful despite what the world thinks. Christian disciples can rejoice at the oddest times.

IV. Where is your mission?

Now that we've learned about Paul's first missionary journey, we ought to ask ourselves, "Where is our missionary journey?" Where is God calling you? Is God calling you to serve as a missionary in a foreign mission field? Is God calling you to step out in faith and go into something totally new? How are you going to spend the rest of your life? Will it be worthy of the great story of Jesus and his hold on your life? Are you willing to take a risk? To step out of your comfort zone and do something where success is not guaranteed, perhaps even your safety is not guaranteed? Will you have the courage to go where you have never gone before? Haiti? Hawaii? New Orleans? East Durham? Or to your own home with a new purpose, a new attitude, a fresh spirit? Where is your mission? If God is calling, don't hold back. You will be restless until you submit to his call. Follow him wherever he leads.