

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

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Text

Acts 13:13-41

Topic

Paul is invited to present the sermon as he attends Sabbath services at the local synagogue

Title

Saturday’s Alright for Preachin’

Acts 13:13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

Acts 13:14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.

Acts 13:15 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."

Acts 13:16 Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:

Introduction

You and I are not likely to attend a synagogue service where we will be invited as guest rabbi’s to share about Jesus. But our text got me thinking: Am I seeking out situations where I might be invited to share?

It can be shown statistically that a Christian’s meaningful contact with nonbelievers gradually declines the longer they walk with the Lord. If that is true, and we want to reach people, we’re going to have to take the initiative to be around them.

Paul and Barnabas were on a mission. In every city they attended the Sabbath day services at the synagogue. They knew that they'd be invited to share.

You and I are commissioned. We're to go into all the world sharing Jesus Christ. We may have to actively seek out people or groups of people to associate with so that we are in a position to share with them.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Seek Out People Who May Ask You To Share, and #2 Speak Out To People When They Ask You To Share.

#1 Seek Out People Who May Ask You to Share (v13-15)

Synagogue means a *gathering* or an *assembly*. Although not mentioned in the Old Testament synagogues probably originated during the exile in Bablyon when Jews could not attend their Temple at Jerusalem. By the first century when our story occurs each community of Jews, anywhere in the Roman world, had its synagogue. The building was rectangular and its doorway faced Jerusalem. Along the walls on the inside were benches. A board of elders supervised each synagogue and there were other officers, such as the ruler. The services in a synagogue consisted of Scripture readings, a talk that we might call a sermon, and prayers.

Visiting rabbi's would always be invited to deliver the sermon. Paul was a rabbi and a former student of the revered rabbi, Gamaliel. Thus he knew that there was a good chance he would be invited to share whenever he attended synagogue. He had an open door with an audience familiar with the Scriptures.

Acts 13:13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

After a successful and eventful ministry tour on the island of Cyprus, the missionaries returned to the mainland. Young John-Mark,

Barnabas' cousin, went home. Luke called it a **departing**. Later in the Book of Acts we'll see Paul considered it a desertion. When Barnabas wanted to take John-Mark along with them on a subsequent mission's trip, Paul said "*No way!*" and the two split company and went in opposite directions.

Paul certainly cared about John-Mark; but he had a 'big-picture' mentality that put priority on the mission. Barnabas certainly cared about the bigger mission; but he had a sensitivity to individuals that superseded the mission. Who was right?

Neither! There are all kinds of leaders with their various styles. The exhortation here is, *Don't be a John-Mark!* There is no doubt that he flaked-out on his commitment.

Acts 13:14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.

Paul and Barnabas had been sent-out by the Church at Antioch. This is a different **Antioch**. There were about seven 'Antioch's' in the first century.

Acts 13:15 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."

- being changed to bring change -
Paul's mission was to the Gentile world; but he always started in the local synagogue. In verse forty-six he will say that it was God's desire that the Jews get saved and take the Word to the Gentiles. God was not, and is not, through with His chosen nation.

Two years is the amount of time statisticians say that it takes for us as Christians to substantially reduce our relationships with nonbelievers. Some of that is natural and even necessary. After all, we are called to separate ourselves from the world. But separation doesn't mean a policy of no contact.

Let's get practical. Most of us work or go to school. It's easy to begin to think of co-workers or fellow students as a terrible trial we can barely endure. Instead let's think of them as our synagogue – as a

group we sit amongst. Think of ways you can be invited to share with them. Or at least be ready if they one day ask you about the Lord. We may need to actively associate ourselves with some service club or organization or group that is not specifically Christian. They become another synagogue – another place to shine and share.

I'm not suggesting anyone return to the world where you will become stumbled and fall back into sin. I am pointing out that many times we lose our sense of outreach. We have a tendency to become in-grown. When considering new ministries we have a tendency to concentrate on things we can do *as* Christians *with* Christians. That's OK as long as we are also concentrating on reaching the lost.

Develop a strategy for reaching the lost you already sit among. If you have little contact with nonbelievers, try to identify a group you might associate with to sit among. "Think outside the Body!"

#2 Speak Out to People When They Ask You to Share (v16-41)

When asked what is the most difficult thing about being a Christian by far most believers will answer "Sharing my faith." Yet it is something we want to do and find exhilarating when we do.

Paul stood up and gave a sermon. It was the appropriate method for the situation he was in. *You probably won't be asked to give a half-hour sermon!* The appropriate method for you will be more conversational. It will be more natural. But it should contain the same elements that we find in this synagogue sermon. Let's read and study it in its context but with an eye towards gleaning from it the basics we need when asked to share Jesus.

Acts 13:16 Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:

Paul used the 'Italian-method' and preached with gestures! Paul began by highlighting the history of God's dealings with the nation of Israel:

Acts 13:17 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.

Acts 13:18 Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness.

Acts 13:19 And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment.

Acts 13:20 "After that He gave *them* judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

Acts 13:21 And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.

Acts 13:22 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.'

Paul summarized the call of Abraham and the time of the patriarchs by saying **God... chose our fathers**. Then he highlighted approximately four-hundred fifty years of their history from their slavery in Egypt to their deliverance by Moses to their conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua. The times of the judges followed; then they chose a king. He failed and they received David as king.

It was more than a history lesson. The emphasis was on God working in and through history to accomplish His eternal purposes. God chose them... God exalted them... God brought them out... God put up with [them]... God destroyed their enemies... God distributed land to them... God gave them leaders... God raised-up David.

God is still working with Israel in and through history to accomplish His eternal purposes! I was asked the other day to give one example of God fulfilling biblical prophecy. I simply said, "Israel." People know something is going on in the Middle East; they just don't know it is all unfolding just as God predicted thousands of years ago. Bible prophecy shows God at work in history.

The Jews of Paul's day knew that God had promised their Messiah would be a descendant of King David. They knew that their Messiah would be preceded by and announced by a notable prophet. Paul boldly declared,

Acts 13:23 From this man's seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior – Jesus -

Acts 13:24 after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

Acts 13:25 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.'

Paul got right to the point. In the opening minutes of his talk he mentioned Jesus by name. Then he told them they needed salvation:

Acts 13:26 "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.

People we share with need to understand that they are sinners who cannot enter Heaven except by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

We've let people know they are sinners. We've told them Jesus saves. But how can He save since He was put to death?

Acts 13:27 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*.

Acts 13:28 And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.

Acts 13:29 Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb.

Acts 13:30 But God raised Him from the dead.

Acts 13:31 He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.

Paul's audience might have thought Jesus was dead. The same is true today. **He's not!** He was put to death but has risen from the dead.

Acts 13:32 And we declare to you glad tidings - that promise which was made to the fathers.

Jesus came, died, and rose just as it was written about Him from the earliest times. In fact the first mention of His coming to save us is in the opening chapters of the first book of the Bible. Christianity is nothing new. It has always been God's only way of salvation.

Paul backed everything he said with Scripture. So can we.

Acts 13:33 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.'

This quote is about the resurrection of Jesus, *not* His birth. It implies that the Savior would be God in human flesh, die, and be raised from the dead. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is an eternal plan – **not** a human religion.

Acts 13:34 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.'

Acts 13:35 Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*: 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION.'

Acts 13:36 "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption;

Acts 13:37 but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.

Paul quoted Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10. God promised salvation – what he calls **the sure mercies** - through a descendant of King David. He promised David that his descendant would not be left in the grave. Paul applied all this to Jesus.

Paul knew his audience. As I previously mentioned, they believed a descendant of David would be their Messiah. So Paul piles on the biblical proof that David's descendant would die and be raised from the dead.

Our audience will be different – probably not Jews and devout Gentiles in a synagogue. If we know our audience God will direct us to share Scripture appropriate to their expectations and experiences.

Paul closed strong. First he told them the blessings that awaited them by believing in Jesus.

Acts 13:38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;

Acts 13:39 and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

The **forgiveness of sins** and justification are through Jesus. Both are huge topics so let me briefly summarize.

You are born a sinner. Because you are descended from Adam and Eve, sin is both imputed to you and inherited by you. You also commit individual sins. The penalty for sin is death – spiritual death, physical death, and (ultimately) eternal death which is damnation in Hell. You deserve to die. If you are to be saved, someone must die in your place. The only Someone who can is God in human flesh. Jesus died on the Cross, in your place, to offer you the forgiveness of your sins. You either receive Him and His work on the Cross on your behalf and are saved; or you reject Him and His work on the Cross on your behalf and remain as you are – a lost sinner who is thrice dead.

The sacrifices and offerings prescribed by the Law of Moses could only temporarily cover your sins. They did not offer lasting forgiveness. That's why they had to be repeated. When Jesus came and died for your sins He provided the once-for-all final sacrifice by which your sins were forgiven.

Justification is the act of God by which He declares a believing sinner righteous. When you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior you remain a sinner. You're still in a mortal body subject to sin. But you are declared right with God because Jesus has taken your sin upon Himself and given you His righteousness.

Obedience to the Law of Moses could not justify you. You could never be righteous by keeping the Law since righteousness is a matter of the heart. The only way you could be right with God is by being declared righteous. When you believe in Jesus God declares you righteous.

Paul's close included a warning:

Acts 13:40 Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:

Acts 13:41 '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.' "

Paul quoted Habakkuk 1:5. The prophet Habakkuk was told God was doing a work they would find almost unbelievable. He was going to

use Gentiles to judge His own chosen people on account of their sin. Similarly, if the Jews after the resurrection of Jesus did not believe He was their Savior God would save the Gentiles who did believe. In a sense the believing Gentiles would judge the Jews by putting into perspective their rejection of the Lord.

Paul's sermon was brilliant. Our speaking may not seem brilliant but it can have all the same elements:

1. God is working in and through human history to accomplish His eternal purposes.
2. Human beings are lost in their sins and need to be saved.
3. God came in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ in order to save any and all who would believe in Him.
4. He died but rose again according to the plan of God prophesied beforehand in the Bible.
5. He offers forgiveness of sin and justification by grace through faith to all who will believe in Him.
6. The alternative is to reject God's gracious offer of salvation, to remain a sinner, and spend eternity separated from God in Hell.

My desire is that all of us have a renewed understanding of our commission to go into all the world sharing Jesus.

- We all have certain nonbelievers we must deal with, like co-workers and fellow students. Let's see them *not* as enemies or adversaries but as eternal souls in need of salvation.
- Some of us have other little synagogues where we sit as believers waiting to be asked to share. Pray that God will give you more opportunities in them.
- And some of us need to quit being so in-grown. We might need to find some synagogue to associate with so that we are in a place where nonbelievers can call upon us to share.

