

#90

October 20, 2019

Acts 13:13-52

The Gospel is Accepted and Rejected

¹³ Paul and his companions sailed from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia. John deserted them there and returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They went on from Perga and arrived at Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath, they entered and found seats in the synagogue there. ¹⁵ After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders invited them, “Brothers, if one of you has a sermon for the people, please speak.”

¹⁶ Standing up, Paul gestured with his hand and said, “Fellow Israelites and Gentile God-worshippers, please listen to me. ¹⁷ The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors. God made them a great people while they lived as strangers in the land of Egypt. With his great power, he led them out of that country.

²⁰ “After this, he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel.

²² After God removed him, he raised up David to be their king. God testified concerning him, ‘*I have found David, Jesse’s son, a man who shares my desires. Whatever my will is, he will do.*’

²³ From this man’s descendants, God brought to Israel a savior, Jesus, just as he promised.

²⁷ The people in Jerusalem and their leaders didn’t recognize Jesus. By condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.

³² “We proclaim to you the good news. What God promised to our ancestors, ³³ he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it was written in the second psalm, *You are my son; today I have become your father.*

³⁴ “God raised Jesus from the dead, never again to be subjected to death’s decay. Therefore, God said, *I will give to you the holy and firm promises I made to David.*^[a]

³⁸ “Therefore, brothers and sisters, know this: Through Jesus we proclaim forgiveness of sins to you. From all those sins from which you couldn’t be put in right relationship with God through Moses’ Law, ³⁹ through Jesus everyone who believes is put in right relationship with God.

⁴² As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people urged them to speak about these things again on the next Sabbath. ⁴³ When the people in the synagogue were dismissed, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism accompanied Paul and Barnabas, who urged them to remain faithful to the message of God’s grace.

⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath, almost everyone in the city gathered to hear the Lord’s word. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were overcome with jealousy. They argued against what Paul was saying by slandering him. ⁴⁶ Speaking courageously, Paul and Barnabas said, “We had to speak God’s word to you first. Since you reject it and show that you are unworthy to receive eternal life, we will turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ This is what the Lord commanded us:

*I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
so that you could bring salvation to the end of the earth.”*

⁴⁸When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and honored the Lord’s word. Everyone who was appointed for eternal life believed, ⁴⁹and the Lord’s word was broadcast throughout the entire region. ⁵⁰However, the Jews provoked the prominent women among the Gentile God-worshippers, as well as the city’s leaders. They instigated others to harass Paul and Barnabas, and threw them out of their district. ⁵¹Paul and Barnabas shook the dust from their feet and went to Iconium. ⁵²Because of the abundant presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, the disciples were overflowing with happiness.

This Friday, October 25, my family will celebrate 2 years of living in the US and in Fairland. I have a blurry memory of who met us at the airport, but I do remember Chuck driving the bus to our new home. I remember, very well, how clean and prepared everything was when we arrived. We even had food in the refrigerator. There was spaghetti and meat sauce. Our rooms were not empty but nicely furnished.

Six days later was the Church’s Halloween party. Our kids had a great time. As for me - I had to think a lot. Halloween was just coming to Lithuania. It is not as massive but it is embraced by many young people. People like to be somebody they are not in real life. People like to experience some craziness and fear. I still do not understand. Why would you want to be somebody or something else? Why would you like to have an adrenaline rush that way? After three Halloweens I am still puzzled.



1. Paul departed from Antioch on his first missionary journey, which lasted from about A.D. 46 to 49.

2. Apostles and elders met at the Jerusalem conference in about A.D. 49.

Today we read that the missionary team sailed from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia. John Mark deserted them there and returned to Jerusalem.

Why did John desert the team? Could it be that Mark did not appreciate that Paul became the leader and not Barnabas, his cousin? This chapter begins with Barnabas and Saul. From now on it is Paul and Barnabas.

A famous orchestra conductor once said, "The most difficult part is finding someone to play second fiddle with enthusiasm." Without the second chair we do not have harmony. Barnabas, the encourager, was OK with providing the harmony on this team as long as the Good News of Jesus Christ was being told to everyone in every circumstance.

Was Mark afraid, homesick, ill? We do not know. We do know that, like most of us, Paul did not have much patience with a quitter. We call them losers or drop outs or failures. We have trouble seeing their potential.

A young teenager was cut from the high school basketball team. He went home and cried. His name is Michael Jordan.

A student could not talk until he was in the 4th grade. His teachers said he would never amount to anything. His name is Albert Einstein.

He was fired from his newspaper job because he lacked imagination and original ideas. His name is Walt Disney.

Paul wanted nothing more to do with John Mark. In Acts 15, as they were planning their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to include Mark. Paul refused. They argued. Paul ended up traveling with Silas and Barnabas took Mark.

Mark would later write the very first Gospel which we know as the Gospel of Mark. According to tradition, he started the church in Alexandria in Egypt.

What if Barnabas had not given Mark a second chance.

God does not give up on any of us and we should not give up on ourselves or anyone else.

It is actually good to know that sometimes even good leaders do not do very well together. That is ok. The Gospel will continue to grow and maybe it is better for leaders to work in separate places.

It has been said that preachers are like manure. If you spread them out they do a lot good like fertilizer. If you pile them up on top of each other they stink.

Many years later Paul would write to Timothy, "Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry" (2Timothy 4:11). By the grace of God, the deserter had redeemed himself and now was considered dependable. That same grace is offered to you in the name of Jesus, the Christ.

Barnabas and Paul arrived at Antioch in Pisidia after going over extremely difficult mountain trails and avoiding robbers. We know from later writings that Paul was also very sick at the time.

On the Sabbath they went to the synagogue.

After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders invited them, "Brothers, if one of you has a word of exhortation for the people, please speak."

Exhortation means encouragement or motivation. In the 1800's Methodists offered exhorter's licenses. Some denominations still have designated exhorters. We all need motivators and encouragers and we all are expected to exhort one another in growing in the Lord.

So the fiery Paul, not Barnabas the encourager, stood up to preach. It is the only full sermon by Paul which is recorded. It is similar to the sermons of Stephen and Peter:

1. All of Israel's history, all of the law, all of the prophets, point to the coming of Jesus Christ.

2. Men and women did not recognize God's fulfillment of purpose when it came in the person of Jesus.
3. Although people, in their blindness, rejected and crucified Jesus, God's purpose and power could not be defeated and the resurrection is the proof of the power of God.
4. Promises made to David were not fulfilled until Jesus, the Son of David, came.
5. This is good news for anyone trying to live a righteous life because we cannot fulfill the Law on our own strength. We are aware of our failure and guilt. In Jesus Christ we find the forgiving power which sets us free from the condemnation of sin and are restored to friendship with God.
6. This is bad news for those who reject the call to belief in Jesus Christ.

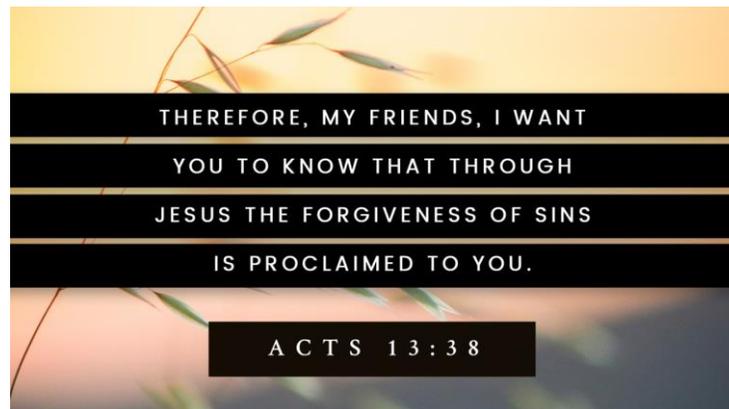
Paul emphasizes God's grace as he summarizes Israel's history. God is the subject of nearly every verb. God "led them out", God "gave them Saul, gave them land, gave them judges." All that happened in their history is not random. God accomplished His purpose in history. Why would Paul always point out that it is God who did and is doing, instead of just telling them facts from past?

Every evening our family shares our good and bad of the day. I always encourage everyone to say, "I am grateful to God for ..." instead of just "my good today was..." is. It did not just happen. God has a plan. God is active and provides.

There is no doubt in my mind that God knows I am Lithuanian. God knows my struggles with language and culture but God still had a plan for me to be serving in Fairland. I did not just happen to end up here. God has a plan for you to be in at New Life, too. You did not just happen to be here today. God is at work. Yes, there are rough transitions, trying times and painful experiences. God is still at work your life.

I have a challenge for you this week. Every time you want to share something about your life with a friend or acquaintance give glory to God. For example: instead of saying, "What beautiful day" say, "What a gift of God for us today to have such beautiful weather." Instead of saying, "I am doing great" say, "I am improving by God's grace."

Paul was giving the glory due to God. We, too, must be diligent in giving glory to God for all that is happening around us and to us.



The climax of Paul's sermon is Jesus. Paul exalts Jesus with great boldness. He says: "Here is a good news of the gospel: You can have the forgiveness of sins through Christ."

When was the last time I thought, I recognized, admitted and confessed my sins? Not just in general, not just in the ritual before Communion, but intentionally dealt with my junk? Sometimes I wonder if we keep so busy and preoccupied because we do not want to deal with the reality of our sin and guilt. We keep the noise bombarding our minds. We prefer to ignore, to cover up or to not deal what is in our minds and souls.

Could it be that we have lost the joy and the power of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus? Paul announced the good news: through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Is true for you? Are you just in general ok with what Jesus did on the cross, but not truly experiencing the cleansing of your soul?

What would it look like to be able to get rid of all that brings heaviness, brokenness, guilt, shame and fear? Can you really have peace and rest for your soul? Is it possible to enjoy your time alone with God and not be constantly running away?

The Bible says emphatically, "Yes!" By confessing our sin and accepting the forgiveness offered through Jesus our relationship with God is restored.

There also with a warning. Reject Jesus at your own peril.

After Paul's sermon people were very excited. Some begged them to come again. So, guess what? The next Sabbath day, almost the whole city came together to hear the word of Lord. When the Jews saw the crowd, they were filled with righteous indignation and spoke blasphemous words against Paul.

What happened over the week? Seriously! They were asked to come back. I think their message was just the same. The Jews were jealous of how many people

came. They themselves liked the message a week ago. Why would you be excited one Sunday and another Sunday you cannot it take anymore? Paul is the same. Barnabas is the same. The place is the same. So what happened? Did he wear a wrong shirt or have a bad hair day?

I think the real problem was not Paul. It was all these Gentiles. They were listening and the message that Paul was proclaiming was for Gentiles, too. All these years the Jews had been maintaining their Jewish distinctness, keeping themselves clean from the impure pagan lifestyle. They have been true to the commandments which marked them out from the world full of idols and immorality which surrounded them. Now, all these pagans were going to come flooding into their world? This was blasphemous nonsense.

I think it is always dangerous for us who have been in church and read the Bible all our lives. It can be harder to see, to receive and to rejoice. It is so easy to take Jesus Christ for granted.



Just last week I was filled with a grateful heart for how easy and how nice it is to turn the heat on. When I was a child we had an old style furnace. It meant that you have to bring your wood or your coal into the basement. You have to start the fire early every single morning. Before the house gets warm you have to go to school. When you get back the furnace is cold. So you start it again. Before it is warm you have to go to bed. In the morning it is cold and you start again.

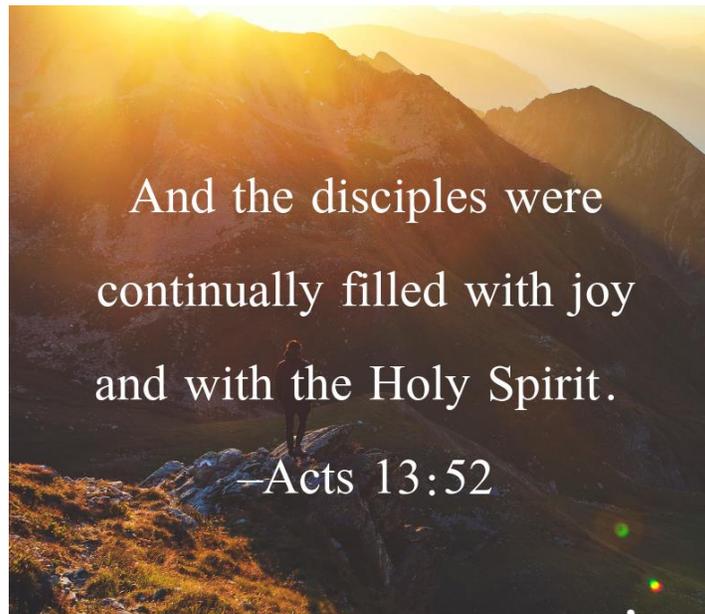
Half of my life I lived in soviet style apartments with centralized heating. The government decides when they will provide the heat. It has to be really cold for a certain number of days before for they will turn on the heat.

I am overwhelmed with a joy when I can just turn on the heat and the house is warm and stays warm. I praise God for such nice and convenient things.

How much joy it must have been for the Gentiles to hear that God, through Jesus, welcomes them and forgives and gives eternal life. Once they were lost but now they have been found. They have hope where there was not hope.

Why was it so hard to see God's love and goodness even for these people? The best example I have heard is that we treat God's love like a pie. If somebody gets a slice it means less for me. If all these people get a slice, then what is left for me? If God is good to that person, does that mean less goodness, love, mercy and grace for me? Why do we find it so difficult to rejoice with those who rejoice?

"When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and honored the Lord's word. Everyone who was appointed for eternal life believed, ⁴⁹ and the Lord's word was broadcast throughout the entire region."



The Jews rallied the city to persecute Paul and Barnabas. They drove the two out of the city and the district. Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet in protest and left for Iconium.

I love the way chapter 13 ends. Their troubles and persecution did not stop them from knowing the joy of the Holy Spirit. It says they were continually filled with joy. Can you say the same of your life? God wants to pour His joy, courage, love, hope and peace into your life – continuously.

The Jews were filled with jealousy, anger, hatred and blasphemy instigating persecution and setting people against each other. They were filled with self-

righteousness. It is impossible to be filled with Holy Spirit at the same time. What is your heart filled with today?

Paul began his sermon that day by saying, "Listen!" I end to today with the same word, listen – Listen to these last three sentences of exhortation: God, in His love, is calling you today to confess your sins and receive His forgiveness. Tell others of what God is doing in your life and the victory that is offered through the resurrected Christ. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you.

Amen.