



Sunday, April 14, 2024

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Acts 13:13-52

Sermon Title: Paul Preaching: Saved by Faith

Good morning! It's good to be here with you this morning as we come to celebrate and worship our Lord and to hear His Word. This morning, we are, after a long time away from the book of Acts, getting back to the book of Acts. We began this a while ago and we broke for Christmas and for Lent. Now, we are going to continue on in **Acts 13**.

The last time we read from Acts, Pastor Glenn did a sermon on the first few verses of Acts 13. There, we saw how Paul and Barnabas were set apart. In fact, in **Acts 13:2-3** it says, "**2** 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. **3** So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.'"

So Barnabas and Saul were sent off to do a mission trip. As they were sent, it was sent in prayer. We, through the time of Lent, have spent a time looking at the importance of prayer and the need for prayer, not just in times of desperate need, but prayer at all times throughout our lives. So today, we're going to see that again in the lives of Paul and Barnabas as they go. But we're also going to see how God is working through them and through His Word, to show people how God is in charge. And it is God who saves.

So I invite you to follow along as I read from **Acts 13-52**.

In Pisidian Antioch

13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. **14** From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. **15** After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak."

16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! **17** The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; **18** for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness; **19** and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. **20** All this took about 450 years.

“After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. **21** Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. **22** After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’

23 “From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. **24** Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. **25** As John was completing his work, he said: ‘Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’

26 “Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. **27** The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.

28 Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. **29** When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. **30** But God raised him from the dead, **31** and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. **32** “We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors **33** he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: “‘You are my son; today I have become your father.’

34 God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, “‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’ **35** So it is also stated elsewhere: “‘You will not let your holy one see decay.’ **36** “Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. **37** But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

38 “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. **39** Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. **40** Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

41 “‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.’” **42** As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.

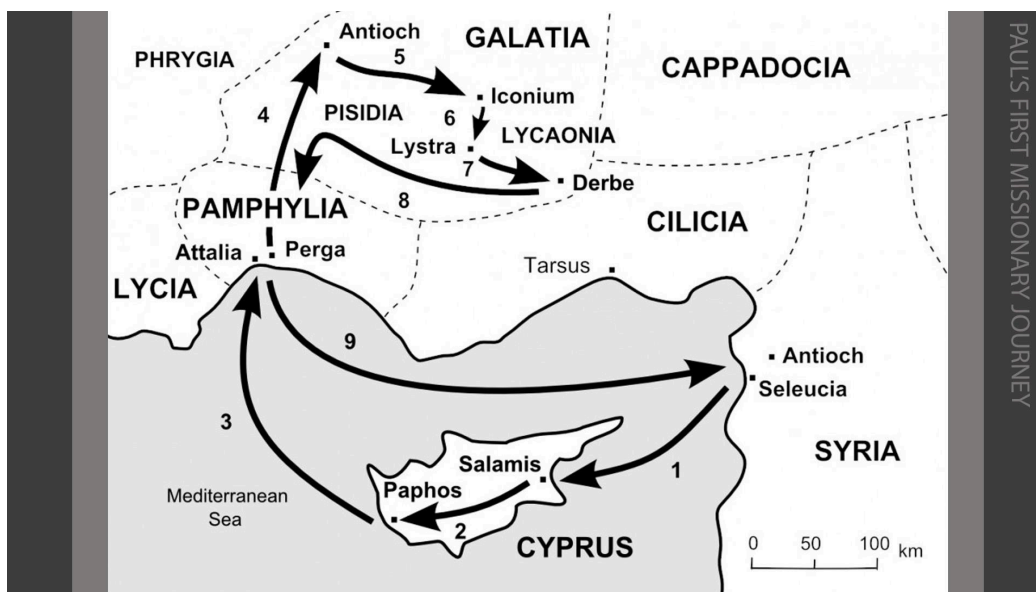
43 When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. **45** When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him. **46** Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. **47** For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.””

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. **49** The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. **50** But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. **51** So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. **52** And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You for who You are. Lord, we thank You for giving us Your Word. And, Lord, we thank You for the reminder that Your Word, from the beginning of the word to the end of the Word, is all from You. It all points to our Lord and Savior Jesus. Lord, we ask that You will open our ears and our hearts this morning, that we may hear from You. And Lord, may not my words come out but only Your words because Your words are healing in truth. And so, Lord, we give this time to You and we ask for You to work in us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This section of Acts is part of what we call Paul's first missionary journey. Just to get an idea of where we are traveling, I want to show you this map.



Here you'll see that he begins down in Antioch, Syria. And today we talk about Antioch as well but it is Antioch way in the top and that is in the region of Galatia. So Paul has left Antioch. He has gone and spent a little bit of time in Cyprus and he preached the Word in Cyprus, and he lands in Perga at the beginning of our story. And Perga, you can see, is right at the edge there. It's a coastal town right at sea level. And then he goes from Perga up to Antioch. And that trip raises up about 3,600 feet.

So Antioch is quite a bit higher. It is quite a dangerous trip at that time to go from Perga to Antioch because #1... you've got the travel issues of going through the rocks and the mountains and everything else, but #2... it was also known as an area in which, because of the difficult travel, there were lots of people who would also plunder the travelers and take from them.

At the beginning of this passage, we see that it says that John goes back to Jerusalem. This would be John Mark, a relative of Barnabas. It doesn't say why John went back. There are lots of speculations as to why he might have gone back. One may have been that he was a young guy and was kind of like, "You know what? I've had enough. I need to go home, too." It may have been that he was sick. We know that Paul also got sick. In **Galatians 4:13**, "**13** As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you..." So Galatians is written to the people of Antioch and Iconium and the other areas in that region. Paul was sick, so maybe John got sick. Maybe there's also a little bit of a leadership question.

As I read at the beginning of **Acts 13:2**, it says, "**2** Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul." Let's go to **Acts 13:13**. From Paphos, Paul and his companions. So sitting in this piece in Cyprus, there's this transfer of leadership. And you'll notice that in **Acts 13:2** it says Barnabas and Saul. And in **Acts 13:13** it says, Paul. Many people at that time had two names. They had a Hebrew name and a Greek name. When they were among the Hebrews, they would use their Hebrew name. When they were among the Greeks, they would use their Greek name. So here, Saul, which is his Hebrew name, is referred to. And for the rest of Acts, it is referred to Paul because he is now among Gentiles and Greeks.

But notice how Paul has now become a prominent person. Maybe John Mark was afraid of the journey because he knew about the journey from Perga to Antioch. Maybe John Mark was not quite so convinced yet that he needed to go out to all the Gentiles. Remember, way back ago, we talked about how they came to Jerusalem and gathered at the house of Mary, who is John Mark's mother. So there may be all kinds of reasons why he left. The fact is he left and now we have Paul and Barnabas together. They go to Antioch, and in Antioch, he meets the Jews. He then begins a pattern of preaching which we see now frequently, not only in the book of Acts, but also after the time of Christ.

Paul begins, by the historical basis of how God has set up in the Old Testament, the importance of Jesus coming. And this is why the Old Testament is so important to us. The Old Testament continues to show us how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise. In fact, Jesus did this on the way to Emmaus as he was meeting with the two disciples. **Luke 24:27**, it says this, "**27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

And then in **Luke 24:32**, it says, "**32** They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"

So Jesus starts with Moses and shows how, throughout the Old Testament. And then we get to Acts 2. In **Acts 2:29-32**, Peter begins his sermon this way, "**29** 'Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. **30** But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. **31** Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. **32** God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.'" Peter, in his sermon in Acts 2 begins with David and shows the connection of David to Jesus. And for all the Jews there, they got that. They got the piece about how God said there will be someone on David's throne forever. Then in Acts 7, when Stephen preaches, he starts with the glory of God came to our father Abraham. And then he goes on. So now we see Paul, when he is in Antioch, speaking to the Jews again, beginning in the Old Testament. He also begins with Moses. He is saying, "This is the nation of Israel that God has created."

So Paul comes to the Jews and says, "Fellow Jews, let me show you all the ways that God has prepared for Jesus to come. Let me show you all the ways in which he has said in His scriptures that Jesus is coming."

So he takes them from Moses to the land of Canaan, to the kings. And then he too stops at David. He refers back to this phenomenon that God has said to David about how, "You will be my son." And David knew that that too was a foreshadow of the Messiah who would be on the throne forever.

So Paul goes from David to Jesus. But he stops right there and he says, "You need to know that, even at the time of Christ, people were speaking about Jesus." But then he says, "It is, in fact, John the Baptist who told you that Jesus was coming. It says in **Acts 13:24-25**, "**24** Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. **25** As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'"

That is a familiar phrase. We've seen that before. In fact, if you go through the Gospels, you'll see it in **Matthew 3:11**. You'll see it in **Mark 1:7**. You'll see it in **Luke 3:16**. And you'll see it in **John 1:27**. All four of the Gospels talk about how John the Baptist says, "The one coming after me, I am not worthy to untie his shoes."

And you might be thinking, "Well, that makes sense because Paul had the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John." But Paul didn't have those gospels yet. Paul, right now, is preaching at a time when none of the New Testament had been written yet. In fact, we know that one of the earlier books in the New Testament is Paul's writing to the people of Galatia after he has completed his trip. So we know that, in the Jewish community and in the Christian community at that time, these words of John the Baptist had become so familiar that people knew them.

Just like the Jews knew the words of the prophets and all the prophecies of the Messiah, the people there also knew the prophets and the words of John the Baptist, saying that he was coming.

So Paul has set this whole piece up and the Jews do not respond favorably. Or at least some of them don't. After he has finished preaching, he goes through a sermon, and he refers to all the Old Testament pieces, including the part which was spoken about by Peter earlier on. About how Jesus did not decay and David's tomb is still there and his body did decay. And after Paul is all finished with that, he says to the people in **Acts 13:38-39**, "**38** Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. **39** Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses."

Jewish people lived by the law. In fact, I dare say there's a lot of people today who, when you ask them about whether or not they need to believe in Jesus, they will say, "Well, I'm a good person. So therefore, I ought to be able to go to heaven." The Jews lived in that same light. They lived in the light of, "If I follow the law, I'll be safe." And Paul is telling them here, "Folks, it's not about following the law. It is about believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is about believing that he died for your sins, that he was risen again and he now has come to claim his people."

It mentioned earlier that Paul wrote a letter after his journey to the Galatians. If you read the book of Galatians, you will see how, in many ways, it sets up this first journey. When he went there, he preached the gospel and then, as he preached the gospel, he came back and he found that the people in Galatia were still going back to what they used to do. In fact, in **Galatians 2:16**, he says, "**16** ... know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."

We need to understand that to be saved, it's not about being a good person. It's not about following all the rules. To be saved means that we believe that Jesus came and died and rose again. And when we put our faith in him, we will be saved. Sometimes we've heard people say, "You know, when you talk about the gospel and what is the gospel, we talk about the idea of, "Well, as long as you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you're good." That's not quite accurate. As R.C. Sproul says, "Everyone has a personal relationship with Jesus. It may be a negative one. But everyone alive today is in a personal relationship with Jesus, whether they want to be or not."

The gospel is not whether you're in a personal relationship with Jesus, but the gospel is, "Have you given your life to Jesus? Have you placed Jesus as the Lord of your life? Have you put your faith in him to free you from your sins?" Because you are not able to do it on your own. I am not able to do it on my own. We need to continue to hear that as God says in His word that we are justified not by our works, but by our faith in him.

And Paul is telling that to the Jews saying, "Jews, you have to understand. You have lived your life obeying the rules and the laws that God has given you. It's good to obey them. He's not saying to not obey them. But he is saying, "That won't save you. To be saved, you need to believe that Jesus died and rose again for your sins."

So he goes on and he says to them, "Be careful because the prophets before you had said this to you. You have to reject it." Let me use Habakkuk as an example. Habakkuk is in the land in which he realizes that the people are not believing. Habakkuk says this in **Habakkuk 1:2-4**, "**2** How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? **3** Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. **4** Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted." And then he says this in **Habakkuk 13:41**, "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you."

Do you remember last week when Bob was preaching about Thomas? Thomas had heard all the words of Christ but because of the witnesses, he wouldn't believe what they told him unless he saw it. And God is saying in this piece the same thing. "You have heard the gospel. You have heard the gospel of Jesus dying and being raised again for you." He's saying, "Take heed. Don't be like those who have heard and refuse to believe." As Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are those who believe and have not seen. Blessed are those who believe the eyewitnesses or the people who have witnessed life in Christ and tell others about it. Blessed are those who hear that and receive it."

And this morning, God is saying to us again, "The gospel is there. Share it with your neighbors." We are all witnesses for each other. But in our witness, we are here to show them that Jesus died and rose again. Jesus Himself said, "You know, it's not that I've come to abolish the law." In fact, in **Matthew 5:17**, he says, "**17** Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." And then he goes on, "You know, unless you are better than the Pharisees who keep all the rules, you will not be saved."

So Paul is talking to these Jews and saying, "Look, I beg of you. Hear the Word of the Lord and hear what God says in His Word as he goes. In fact, if you look at **Acts 13:44,46 and 48**, you will see that as they gathered the next week, that is what is drawing people to God. It says in **Acts 13:44**, "**44** On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord." And then in **Acts 13:46**, it says, "**46** Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first." And then in **Acts 13:48**, it says, "**48** When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord... " And in **Acts 13:49**, it says, "**49** The word of the Lord spread through the whole region."

We have the word of the Lord. If you want to grow in your faith, you need to be in the Word. But if you want to witness, you need to share the Word of the Lord as well. Because as it says in **Acts 13:47**, "**47** For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

It's a quote that is similar to what Simeon says about Jesus when he sees them in **Luke 2**. "I have come to be a light to the Gentiles."

So how do we witness? How do we preach that we are saved by faith? How do we share that with those around us? One of the things we need to understand is that, as we see in this story, the Jews rejected Paul's statement. Or at least some of them did. But many of them were very interested in what was going on and they said, "We want to hear more. We want to hear more of the word of the Lord." And they came back the following week and they heard. Then in **Acts 13:48**, it says, "**48** When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."

This comes back to what it means to be justified. It's not about our work. It is about God's work within me. But as we saw before, when Glenn talked about the beginning of Acts, it was called to people to go out and to be witnesses. And how is the word of the Lord shared with people? It is shared by me and you. We are the ones who share the Word of the Lord with people. It is not us who are responsible for whether or not they believe. And that's a good thing. It is God who works within them to believe. But God calls us to be faithful in sharing the truth of the gospel and in sharing the Word of the Lord.

So Paul and Barnabas are doing that. The question is, are we doing that? Are we sharing the Word of the Lord? We come here on Sundays, to praise God. To hear the word of the Lord. We gather in Connect groups to be strengthened in the Word of the Lord and to pray that God strengthens us to be able to witness. But then we ask, "How do I witness? How do I share the Word of the Lord with other people?" And we're going to see, as we go through Acts again, how that fits in and how Paul begins in areas that people know, and show how God has worked, and how God leads up to Jesus in their lives as well. And so the Word of the Lord is shared.

But it's interesting that the beginning of this passage has Paul going from Perga to Antioch, which was a difficult journey. And Paul was sick when he got there. And then in **Acts 13:49-50**, it says, "**49** The word of the Lord spread through the whole region." Which would be the region of Galatia. "**50** But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region."

We also have to understand that not everybody is going to be happy about hearing the truth of Scripture. There are people who are going to not like what the truth of Scripture says. But in that, God gives us strength as well. Because at the end, **Acts 13:52**, says this, "**52** And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." Even in those difficult times, what rises to the surface is the joy of knowing that Christ died and was risen again for the justification, for the payment, so that we may be in the presence of God. So that we may have our sins forgiven and that we may appear before God as righteous.

So as we go out today, may we go out with joy and may we go out filled with the Holy Spirit, knowing that we are saved and that God our Father has forgiven our sins. That he sees us in the righteousness of Christ. May that give you joy and peace today as we go forth to be His witnesses to share the Word of the Lord.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You, Lord, that You have invited us and privileged us to be ones to share that word with other people. Lord, we ask that the words that we say may be truth in Your Word, and Lord, we pray that the Holy Spirit may fill us to overflowing that we may share that with others, but Lord we also pray that Your spirit may work in the hearts of those around us, that they too may see Your goodness and Your greatness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Lisa Perry*