

Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark, having travelled through the length of the island of Cyprus, Barnabas' homeland, proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ who has authority over all things, and who came to rescue us from the Great Suffering because of our Great Rebellion, now turn their sights north, across the sea to the region of Pamphylia.

Pamphylia is the region on the northern coast of the Mediterranean, in modern southern Turkey. It is a coastal lowland region to the southwest of Galatia and to the east of Lycia, where Ephesus was located. They travelled to the town of Perga, an original city of the Hittite people, mentioned in the Old Testament as a kingdom who were enemies of Israel. So, **we have the gospel continuing to go out to the world, offering reconciliation with God and uniting enemies, making them into one new nation**, which is the theme of the book of Ephesians and the emphasis of Paul's later letter to these Galatian churches.

Luke doesn't mention much of what happened in Perga, other than that John Mark departed from them and went back to Jerusalem. Now, we know that this became an issue between Paul and Barnabas later when John Mark wanted to join them again, as recorded in Acts 15. However, what we do not know is why John Mark thought it best to return to Jerusalem, nor do we know why it bothered Paul but didn't bother Barnabas. We will cover this more when we arrive in Acts 15, but for now it is to be noted that John Mark, and his assistance, has departed and Paul and Barnabas continue on without him.

What is interesting in this journey is that Luke says that Paul and Barnabas "passed through" Perga. Thus, they did not seem to stay and visit the synagogues, but rather merely that they went through the city and headed up north to Antioch in Pisidia.

Now, in case there is confusion regarding cities called Antioch. There were at least twelve Greek cities called Antioch, a bit like Springfield in that regard. This particular Antioch is in the region of Pisidia, on the western edge of Galatia, in the modern province of Isparta, Turkey. Antioch was located approximately 105 miles north of Perge, and at an elevation of 3,600 feet. Which means that travelling from Perge to Antioch was a bit like travelling from Eugene to Bend. One had to climb over the Taurus mountains to get there. According to archeologist William Ramsey, Pisidian Antioch was “the governing and military center of the southern half of the vast province of Galatia.” In fact, you can still find the base of towers which defended the city. Josephus mentions that there was a large Jewish population in Antioch. This shows, again, that Paul favored going to influential cities with Jewish synagogues. What is an interesting side note is that Luke only mentions a singular synagogue in Antioch, but it had a plurality of leaders in it. It was very uncommon for a synagogue to have a plurality of leaders, they usually only had one. So, what we appear to have in Antioch is a large synagogue with a large congregation. A mega-synagogue.

Yet, why did they head to that particular city and skip Perge, which was an influential city as well?

Well, an inscription found in Pisidian Antioch mentions a government official named Lucius Sergius Paulus, and there exists a long line of influential leaders, even Roman senators, from this area all bearing the name Sergius Paulus for the following 150 years. It appears that Paul and Barnabas moved quickly and with difficulty to arrive in Antioch because the Sergius Paulus who govern Cyprus had family in Antioch!

This so compelled Paul that he appeared to be travelling under duress. He mentions in his letter to the Galatian churches that he came to them in bad

health (Galatians 4:13-14) and that they cared for him with gentleness and love.

The normal pattern of gospel proclamation is through natural relationships.

First, they went to Barnabas' homeland, then they follow the presumed request of Sergius Paulus to visit his family and tell them the good news of the Christ, Jesus.

Now, when they arrive in Antioch, Luke doesn't tell us about Sergius' family, but rather that they followed their usual custom to go to the Jews first and share that the Messiah has arrived and that His death and resurrection brought in the kingdom of God, the fulfillment of what God promised to their fathers.

So, they go to the synagogue on the Sabbath and sit down for the worship service, prepared to join the liturgy in worship of the LORD with the knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah and the fulfillment of all which the Law and Prophets and Writings, that is the Old Testament, foretold.

A typical synagogue liturgy consisted of the following elements. First, there was the reading of the Shema, which means "Listen!" taken from the first word in Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4-9:

Listen, Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ You must love the LORD your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and all your strength. ⁶ These words I am commanding you today must be kept in mind, ⁷ and you must teach them to your children and speak of them as you sit in your house, as you walk along the road, as you lie down, and as you get up. ⁸ You should tie them as a reminder on your forearm and fasten them as symbols on your forehead. ⁹ Inscribe them on the doorframes of your houses and gates. (Deut. 6:4-9 NET)

Then, there would be prayers of benediction and responses, the public readings from the Law, which was based upon a three-year cycle, then a reading from the Prophets, of which there was no set pattern, then it would be translated into Aramaic. Following all of this, there was an exposition related to the Scripture readings, if someone competent to expound the Word was present. The selection of a competent expositor was the responsibility of the leader of the synagogue. So, it is the leaders of the synagogue who invite Paul and Barnabas, through a messenger (a large synagogue!), to share “a word of encouragement”. Now, this word “encouragement” in the ESV, is the word “paraclete”, the word which Jesus gave to describe the Holy Spirit. It means to exhort, encourage, comfort, and strengthen with the truth, so that the hearer might be encouraged to walk rightly and fulfill the life of righteousness which God has set forth for us.

Therefore, Paul and Barnabas’ reputation as expositors of God’s Word has preceded them to the synagogue. And they have just been asked to do what the Holy Spirit was sent to do! Wow! Talk about hope! **And that is all that we’re ever asked to do, and the Holy Spirit is with us for this very purpose.**

The Jewish leaders address them as “Brothers.” This is important, because it shows that at this time, there was no animosity towards them. They were fully accepted, as circumcised Jewish men, into the community of the synagogue and entrusted with teaching as those competent to teach. Yet, Paul will also experience his most **violent persecution from those from this very synagogue (Acts 14:19; 2 Tim 3:11) when the gospel makes a clear distinction that Jesus is the only means by which one is made right with God, not the Law of Moses.**

So, Paul stands up and motions with his hand, either to get people’s attention because it’s a large congregation or he is short, or simply as a rhetorical reinforcement of the severity of the message. The fact that he stands and does this is telling, because it was normal for the synagogue expositors to sit and

teach, except on special occasions where they would stand up. Thus, Paul is reinforcing the significance of this exposition in his body language.

He addresses two groups together: Men of Israel and “God-fearers”. That is, Jewish believers (which would include both men and women, by the way), and God-fearing Gentiles, like Cornelius, who sat in the back and were not allowed to participate in the expositions. **This address of two peoples as one audience sets the structure for the gospel preaching.**

Paul recounts God’s dealing with Israel, beginning with the patriarchs, “our fathers”, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the nation which came from them. He recounts the history of God’s redemptive promises and works. He chose them by covenant. He exalted his people in the land of Egypt, where they were enslaved, making them numerous and great. He rescued them from slavery with an uplifted arm, a strong arm, showing his strength by overthrowing Pharaoh via plagues upon the land and the watery grave of the Red Sea. He endured the sin and faithlessness and grumbling of his people in the wilderness, when they rejected his ways and longed for the slavery of Egypt again, where they crafted a golden calf and worshipped it deviously in their impatience. God patiently endured their idolatry and their wandering. He destroyed their enemies and dispossessed the nations in Canaan, giving them their inheritance which he had promised to Abraham. He gave them judges to oversee them, to rescue them from their enemies and to lead them, from Joshua to Samuel.

Now, up to this point, **Paul’s sermon has one singular subject. God.** He recounted God’s actions. God chose, God rescued, God gave, etc. But here, he breaks from the pattern. **THEY** asked. The people asked for a king. In this simple change Paul is reminding his Jewish audience that his people had rejected God as their king and wanted to be like the nations, so their desire for a king needs to be evaluated now, too. God becomes the actor again. He gave.

He gave them the king that they wanted, Saul. Then, God took away their king, and raised up a different king, David. And God testified to David. He testified that he was a man after his own heart who does his will.

This whole sermon, covering the redemptive history of Israel by God culminates in the great hope of the Jewish people at this time. **They wanted another warrior David who would serve their needs.** Isn't this also what most of us want today? A power to be on our side against our enemies? They wanted a king on a throne with a sword in his fist who would rid them of their foreign oppressors and return their inheritance, the land, to them.

So, when Paul gets to David, he immediately connects Jesus to their great hope. Jesus is the promised seed of David, the great King promised to rule the kingdom of God for eternity, **JUST AS HE HAD PROMISED. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises of God.** Everything in Israel's history was leading up to Him.

Now, who is this Jesus, then? Well, **there are certain elements of the gospel that are core to the apostolic preaching in Acts**, to the narrative presentation of the gospel in the Gospels, and in the summaries of the gospel presented in the letters of the New Testament regarding Jesus.

First, there is the preaching of the necessity of repentance in the ministry of John the Baptist and of announcement of one following him who would be greater, Jesus the Messiah. This is the prophetic voice, expressing the need of all people for salvation from sin and death, the connecting vocal strand between the promises given to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and the fulfillment of these promises in Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus calls John the Baptist the greatest one ever born.

Secondly, there is always the trial and execution of Jesus by the Jewish and the Gentile leadership, the heart of the gospel. Now, this was not the type of king

which they were looking for, so this is offensive to most Jews. Yet, it is the heart of what matters, the means by which we are granted “the forgiveness of sins” and are “justified before God”.

Thirdly, there is the announcement of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the eyewitness testimony of it by the apostles and others.

Look at how Paul does this:

V23 – “From David’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, just as He promised” – That is the OT message, the great promise to the Fathers fulfilled in Jesus.

V24 – The ministry of John the Baptist – “John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.” This shows the necessity of repentance EVEN for faithful Jews.

V27-28 – The trial and crucifixion of Jesus – “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. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed.” This is the righteous one being executed, but in his unjust execution is the fulfillment of the Scriptures, what God promised, of the prophets read every Sabbath. “He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the punishment which brought us peace was put upon him, and by his wounds we are made whole” (Isa 53:5)

V29 – The burial of Jesus – “When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.” He was truly dead.

V30-31 – The resurrection and its witnesses – “But God raised him from the dead, 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.”

Then, he defends the claim that Jesus is the promised Messiah and God's fulfillment of all His promises from the Scriptures, concerning the promise to David, its lack of fulfillment in David, and its fulfillment in Jesus.

He refers to Jesus as the Son of God, testified to by God Himself from Psalm 2. He refers to Jesus as the receiver of the promises made to David, the receiver of the everlasting covenant from Isaiah 55:3. And he refers to Jesus as the one who did not decay, but David did. Thus, David was not the receiver of the promise, but Jesus, having been raised from the dead by God, **MUST BE** the receiver of the David promises from Psalm 16:10.

This is the "good news" announced to the synagogue there, and is also announced to us! God has done ALL that is necessary to make things right. You see, the good news is just that, news. It is an historical event, a narrative fact, a reportable happening of what God has done. The gospel is not an ethical system or a set of values, though the implications of the historical events surely include these. Look at the sermon again. The entire thing is about what God has done:

God chose. God made great. God led out. God patiently endured. God destroyed. God gave land. God gave judges. God gave Saul. God took Saul away. God raised up David. God testified to David. God spoke. God brought a Savior. God raised up Jesus. God promised. God fulfilled.

Thus, the gospel isn't something that you do. It's something that you respond to. It simply is. Your life only changes because you believe it or you don't.

Therefore, Paul pleads with his hearers to respond to the great implications of the gospel as he reaches the crux of the sermon: "Therefore, my brothers, let it be known to you, that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything which you could not be justified from through the law of Moses." Here is the point!

There are two elements regarding forgiveness of sins and justification, or being made right before God, here: Its comprehensiveness and its means.

It's comprehensiveness includes anyone who believes. "Everyone" who believes receives forgiveness of all their sins. "Everyone who believes" is justified from "everything" that you cannot be justified from via your own obedience. It is absolutely comprehensive, and there is nobody too far gone who cannot be justified through Christ Jesus.

And that is the means: only through Jesus. "Through Him." There is no other means of making us acceptable to God. The law can't do it. Your intentionality can't do it. Your heart can't do it. Nothing can justify you before God, but Jesus. Nothing can grant you mercy, the forgiveness of your sins, but Jesus. He is the means of our forgiveness. He is the means of our reconciliation, our friendship with God. And this is for all who believe that He is who the gospel proclaims that He is.

You may say, "God loves everybody! Aren't we all His friends?" Ah, God does love everyone, but not in the same way. The Scriptures are clear that those who seek to justify themselves or justify doing things their own way for their own reasons are not friends of God, but enemies. The word "through" clearly exemplifies this. **We need a way through because there is a barrier, an obstacle, something in the way, and that thing is God's justice.**

It is critical that we understand this. During this past century especially, it has been commonly taught that because God is love, he forgives everybody automatically. On this theory, Jesus only comes into the world to tell us that God loves us, and that his death on the cross is merely an example of sacrificial love that is intended to inspire us to love.

But Paul tells us what the obstacle is to our friendship with God – God's justice. We *need* to be justified before God. **The death of Christ is necessary**

to satisfy God's justice. The death of Christ is necessary to satisfy God's love. God is not only our Creator, the Father who loves us. He is also the Judge who always loves and delights and does what is right. We would never want a judge who lets crime just slide, and the greater the crime the greater we want him to act. If you don't want violent self-exalting racial supremacists to roam free, then what about self-exalting human supremacists raging against God? How great is the crime of coolly subverting, demeaning, and seeking to destroy the work and character of the most beautiful, perfect, and glorious uncreated God?

The wonder of the cross of Jesus, then, is that through it He satisfies, in the very same stroke, the love of God, that aspect of His being that desires our justification, and the justice of God, that aspect of His being that demands righteousness and the scales of justice be balanced, are satisfied. Therefore, God is just and can justify us because, having punished our crimes through Jesus as our representative, he can forgive us freely.

In the words of Tim Keller, "The cross does not represent a compromise between God's wrath and love; it does not satisfy each one 'half-way.' Rather, it satisfies each fully and in the very same action. On the cross the wrath and love of God are both vindicated, they are both demonstrated, they are both expressed completely, they both shine out and are utterly fulfilled."

And this is all the work of God. You may think that God's justice makes Him unlikable, but the reality is that, in the words of Dorothy Sayers, he "took His own medicine." That is, he satisfied His own justice by becoming a man, living as a man, suffering as a man, and dying like a man. Through Him, our only righteous Advocate, we are granted absolution, clear and simple, in ways which the law cannot do. He obeyed the law perfectly, and we are granted His righteous record, like union leader who negotiates for the whole group – **Jesus negotiated our benefit at His own expense, and we gain the blessing.**

Our moral performance has no power, it cannot justify us because we have failed. And neither does our moral failure leave us hopeless, because through Him, the Law-keeper, vindicated by the resurrection, **we are justified according to His perfections.**

And there is warning for refusing to believe. Paul quotes the prophet Habakkuk (1:5), that if you do not believe what God has done in Christ Jesus, you are a scoffer, and scoffers perish in their wonder. In other words, God has done something in their day, raised this Jesus from the dead, having fulfilled all the promises that he made to their fathers, and they should not scoff at it, but believe it!

If you do not believe that God did all of this and that through Jesus is our only justification with God, then you will perish. If you believe this work of God, this message, then you will be justified.

This shows that God is not a universalist. Not everyone will be justified, some will perish. Those who do not believe the message, who do not entrust themselves to Jesus to make them right before God, will perish. They will not receive forgiveness of their sins, nor will they be justified, but they will be condemned by the laws which they trust to make them somebody. Paul notes that this is what happened to him – the very law which had entrusted to make him righteous was found to be that which enslaved and killed him when recalled to the Romans:

For by works of the law no human being¹ will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in

Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:20-26)

And later in chapter 10: “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

The end of the law for righteousness comes by faith, and faith alone.

That is, by faith in Jesus Christ alone, through Him, not by faith “in general”. Supposedly, President Eisenhower once said that America was “founded on a deeply felt religious faith — and I don’t care what it is.” That is a typical response today; any other is seen as undemocratic, narrow, hateful, bigoted, etc. But Paul says it is not faith in general or faith in God in general, but faith “in Jesus Christ” (v22) that brings the righteousness.

It is by faith in Christ’s work on the cross and his resurrection to reign over all, *not* by general admiration of him. Paul is even more specific to the Romans in v24 and v25. We are made right with God “through faith in his blood.” Some people say, “I believe in Jesus,” but they mean a general admiration of him, and belief in him as an *example to follow*, or even belief in him as a *help* in time of need. But that is not faith which justifies. The faith that brings this righteousness is a *specific trust in the work of Christ as being the perfect obedience for us, the means that merits the righteousness we receive from God.*

It is by faith as only a receptor, not by faith as a kind of moral merit itself. It is possible to think of faith as a kind of “work,” a calling up of some psychological state of feeling toward God. (Some people think of faith as a kind of intense attitude of surrender or a state of certainty or confidence.) But

Paul shows us here that we receive this righteousness “freely” (v24). It is interesting to notice that this word is also used when Jesus Christ says, “They hated me *without a cause*.” In John 15:25. The word “freely” means “without a cause — wholly and totally unwarranted.” Therefore we must not fall prey to the subtle mistake of thinking that our faith actually saves us. Some say, “In the Old Testament, the works of the Law saved people, but now God has changed the requirements. Now all you have to do is put your heart in a state of faith, and that is all God wants.” But no, in both the OT and now, it is the work of Christ that merits our salvation, and faith is merely the way I receive it.

If you come to think that your belief is the cause of your salvation, it will get you to look at the quality of your faith, and when you see doubts it will rattle you. What has happened? You’ve turned your faith into a “work!” Faith is only the instrument by which you receive your salvation, not the *cause* of your salvation. If you don’t see this, you will have something to boast of — you can say, “The reason I am saved is because I produced a heart of faith,” but 3:31 says there is no basis for boasting.

And who can receive this justification? — Anyone who believes! He says categorically that not only *can* anyone receive it, “To all who believe — there is no difference” (v22) and “everyone who believes” regardless of how bad or good their record is because it is through Jesus, not through our moral performance or failures.

“We can put it this way: the man who has faith is the man who is no longer looking at himself, and no longer looking to himself. He no longer looks at anything he once was. He does not look at what he is now. He does not [even] look at what he hopes to be as the result of his own efforts. He looks entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work, and he rests on that alone. He has ceased to say, ‘Ah yes, I have

committed terrible sins but I have done this and that...’ He stops saying that. If he goes on saying that, he has not got faith... Faith speaks in an entirely different manner and makes a man say, ‘Yes, I have sinned grievously, I have lived a life of sin... yet I know that I am a child of God because I am not resting on any righteousness of my own; my righteousness is in Jesus Christ, and God has put that to my account.’

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones

The Lord’s Supper:

This accounting is what we remember in Communion, or the Lord’s Supper. We recall, through the tactile means of bread and wine, that we are united to Christ Jesus by faith in Him, that His death became our death and His life became our life through this union. And even this faith is God’s giving. All by God’s work. God’s doing. And we respond to it in humble submission to Him.

Therefore, this ritual, this remembrance, is only for those who have repented of their own self-dependence and entrusted themselves to Jesus. Those who are united to Christ Jesus by faith in Him. If you are not a believer in Jesus, if you have not believed this message of God’s doing as that which is the true and controlling reality, then don’t eat with us, for you are not yet united to Christ. My plea to you is, along with Paul, to believe what it proclaims! Receive Jesus as your Savior and Authority! Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God is offered to you through Him alone. Receive it and walk anew in the light of this great news.

And if you are a believer and have forgotten the truth that you were in desperate need of salvation and that Jesus is the only means by which you are justified, and you are therefore belittling another brother or sister in your heart, words, or actions, as if your own works have made you OK, and their works have made them worse, then repent now of such self-righteousness,

and remember the great mercy of God towards you through Jesus. Don't remain in such sin! This table proclaims our unity in Christ Jesus, as one loaf of bread. Don't turn it into an opportunity to sanctify selfishness and disunity. To do so is to trample on the blood of Christ. So, soften your heart towards your brother, and immediately go to him in a humble state of repentance, glorifying Christ for your righteousness and for your brothers.

And for now, let the ushers come forward to distribute the elements of this remembrance, and let us recall together the great news of God's fulfillment of all His promises through Christ Jesus, and that we are the receivers of such works of grace and He is the worker of them. And let us be Eucharistic. That is grateful.

Prayer

We are going to hand out both elements as we sing and mediate and pray. Please hold onto them and we will eat and drink together to express our unity together in Christ Jesus. When we are finished, please place your cups in the rings underneath the chair in front of you.