


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
June 29 - July 5, 2008

Acts 13:14-52

The Gospel according to Paul

1 Word of encouragement

Read. Acts 13:14-20 NLT

Paul and Barnabas traveled inland to Antioch of Pisidia. On the Sabbath they went to the synagogue for the services. After the usual readings from the books of Moses and the prophets, those in charge of the service sent them this message: "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, come and give it." So Paul stood, lifted his hand to quiet them, and started speaking. "Men of Israel," he said, "and you God-fearing Gentiles, listen to me. The God of this nation of Israel chose our ancestors and made them multiply and grow strong during their stay in Egypt. Then with a powerful arm he led them out of their slavery. He put up with them through forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Then he destroyed seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to Israel as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years.

Think.

- It's about 350 miles from Cyprus to Antioch of Pisidia by land and sea. What does Paul and Barnabas traveling that far say about them and their commitment?
- What kind of reception did they initially receive in the synagogue in Antioch?
- As Paul begins sharing his "word of encouragement," where does he start in telling the gospel story? Why do you think he started here?
- To what lengths have you gone to share Jesus with others? To what lengths are you willing to go?
- Which do you find more challenging — walking across the street to share Jesus and his message or to travel across the world? Why? Where do you hear God calling you to go now?
- Where would you begin in telling someone about Jesus?

Pray.

Holy Spirit, give me fresh courage to break new ground with the good news of Jesus — whether it's across the street or on the far side of the world. Let my mouth be filled with words of encouragement for those who so desperately need Jesus.

Live.

Begin a dialogue about Jesus with a new (or old) neighbor, classmate, or co-worker. Show Jesus, then share Jesus.

It's news I'm most proud to proclaim, this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts him, starting with Jews and then right on to everyone else.

Romans 1:16 The Message

It was a diverse group.

The congregation on that Sabbath ran the gamut: religious Jews aligned with the Pharisees, zealous for the law; Hellenistic Jews of a more liberal bent; gentile converts and gentiles on the fringe — fearing God, but worshipping more or less from afar.

Now this rabbi from Tarsus stands before them, hands extended, heart wide open. Out pours the story known and loved by all. Their story. A story of Exodus, of deliverance promised and fulfilled. A salvation story unfolding step by step over centuries, all to the beat of a divine rhythm unheard by those living right in the middle of it. The salvation story crests in a foolish demand for a king — a demand ultimately met by a divine call upon a man who would serve as the pivot of God's purposes in his times. And so King David comes, the man after God's own heart...and immediately points beyond himself to One Greater who is yet to appear.

And then He comes. He doesn't slip in quietly, but is heralded by a shout in the wilderness that none can ignore. The salvation story crests again in a high tide of human folly and religious blindness that only serves to surface grace and forgiveness and resurrection in Jesus — David's sure mercies washed up all over the shore; touching our toes, accessible to all.

But this story is more than a curiosity to be discussed leisurely over tomorrow's breakfast. A warning is attached, an urgency highlighted. Cynicism and delay will prove deadly. Grace must be embraced, truth snatched up, digested, and lived.

This is the gospel according to Paul, preached in the synagogue of that other Antioch. It was a message that brought the entire city to the doorstep — a mass of gentiles drawn to the gospel melody Paul played so well. Ultimately all fell into three groups: those who heard the music, those who heard only noise, and the music makers who quickly shuffled off to the next town, leaving us to figure out into which group we fall.

2) God's promised Savior

Read. Acts 13:20-26 NLT

"After that, God gave them judges to rule until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people begged for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. But God removed Saul and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.' "And it is one of King David's descendants, Jesus, who is God's promised Savior of Israel! Before he came, John the Baptist preached that all the people of Israel needed to repent of their sins and turn to God and be baptized. As John was finishing his ministry he asked, 'Do you think I am the Messiah? No, I am not! But he is coming soon—and I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the sandals on his feet.' Brothers—you sons of Abraham, and also you God-fearing Gentiles—this message of salvation has been sent to us!"

Think.

- Having started with the Exodus story, Paul now visits the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. Why do you think he is dwelling on all this? What is its relevance to Jesus?
- How well do you know the facts of the Old Testament story? Would you describe the Old Testament as a close friend, a distant relative, or a total stranger? How can you go about getting to know the Old Testament better?
- When would it be useful to know and relate the facts of the Old Testament story when talking about Jesus?

Pray.

Lord, make your Word come alive to me and in me; make your story mine. Fill me with fresh appreciation of what you have done.

Live.

If it's been awhile, begin a new journey through the Old Testament.

4) Through this man there is forgiveness

Read. Acts 13:34-43 NLT

For God had promised to raise him from the dead, not leaving him to rot in the grave. He said, 'I will give you the sacred blessings I promised to David.' Another psalm explains it more fully: 'You will not allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.' This is not a reference to David, for after David had done the will of God in his own generation, he died and was buried with his ancestors, and his body decayed. No, it was a reference to someone else—someone whom God raised and whose body did not decay. Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins. Everyone who believes in him is declared right with God—something the law of Moses could never do. Be careful! Don't let the prophets' words apply to you. For they said, 'Look, you mockers, be amazed and die! For I am doing something in your own day, something you wouldn't believe even if someone told you about it.'" As Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue that day, the people begged them to speak about these things again the next week. Many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, and the two men urged them to continue to rely on the grace of God.

Think.

- What is Paul's "gospel" in a nutshell? What is the bottom line of his message in the synagogue?
- Why does he conclude his message with such a stern warning? What was the initial response? What further encouragement did they share with the people? What lessons do you see here?

Pray.

Lord, teach me to rely on your sustaining grace.

Live. Write down your own "gospel in a nutshell."

3) They did not recognize Jesus

Read. Acts 13:27-33 NLT

"The people in Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize Jesus as the one the prophets had spoken about. Instead, they condemned him, and in doing this they fulfilled the prophets' words that are read every Sabbath. They found no legal reason to execute him, but they asked Pilate to have him killed anyway. When they had done all that the prophecies said about him, they took him down from the cross and placed him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead! And over a period of many days he appeared to those who had gone with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to the people of Israel. And now we are here to bring you this Good News. The promise was made to our ancestors, and God has now fulfilled it for us, their descendants, by raising Jesus. This is what the second psalm says about Jesus: '*You are my Son. Today I have become your Father.*'"

Think.

- How could people who knew the Bible so well and heard it read to them so often miss the very one it was pointing to all those years — and in fact fulfill those very prophecies/promises by rejecting Jesus? What warning do you see here?
- When have you uncovered some significant blind spots in your own spiritual walk? What was your reaction when these blind spots were first pointed out to you?
- What is the best way to guard against future blind spots (or to uncover existing ones)?

Pray.

Holy Spirit, rescue me from blindness, from willful ignorance of what you are doing right before me. Help me to get it!

Live.

Pray for greater divine insight through the day.

5) All who were chosen became believers

Read. Acts 13:44-52 NLT

The following week almost the entire city turned out to hear them preach the word of the Lord. But when some of the Jews saw the crowds, they were jealous; so they slandered Paul and argued against whatever he said. Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and declared, "It was necessary that we first preach the word of God to you Jews. But since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we will offer it to the Gentiles. For the Lord gave us this command when he said, '*I have made you a light to the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the farthest corners of the earth.*'"

When the Gentiles heard this, they were very glad and thanked the Lord for his message; and all who were chosen for eternal life became believers. So the Lord's message spread throughout that region. Then the Jews stirred up the influential religious women and the leaders of the city, and they incited a mob against Paul and Barnabas and ran them out of town. So they shook the dust from their feet as a sign of rejection and went to the town of Iconium. And the believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Think.

- Why does opposition suddenly arise? How does Paul deal with it? What is the ultimate response of the Jewish crowd? The gentile crowd?
- "As many as were appointed to eternal life believed..." What does this mean? Does this statement trouble or comfort you?

Pray.

Lord, let me not fear rejection and misunderstanding as I live and speak for you. Give me Paul's boldness — and his perseverance to just keep moving on regardless.

Live. Meditate on the truths of Ephesians 1:3-5.