

The Message

Acts 13:13-52

Introduction

Preaching seems to be falling in the polls lately. More and more voices are calling for an end to the preaching of doctrine and truth, and to put in its place a myriad of less dogmatic, less confrontational things.

I read an article a few months ago, about one pastor who inaugurated a twenty minute service. He told the interviewer, "This way you get the regular prayers, a few hymns, communion, the benediction, and you're on your merry way."

One pastor of a mega church out west, went on record recently, saying, "Nobody wants to hear a preacher anymore get up and say 'Open your Bibles to such and such a passage,' and then bore them to death as he works his way through it."

So, replace the "kerugma," or preaching, with other more interesting things; such as, multi media, panel discussion, and open forums. Turn church into something "lite" and comforting; do not convict or challenge, and certainly do not stand and speak as if you represent absolute truth. The secularists have identified this growing number of churches and refer to them as "McChurch" – fast food for the soul – and you can have it your way.

Yet the pattern of scripture is quite the opposite. The word "preach" and the activity of preaching is mandated in scripture. Scriptural examples include:

- in Matthew, chapter 4, our Lord Jesus began to preach, and said, in verse 17,
... Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- in Mark, chapter 16, verse 15, Christ told His disciples to,

... Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

- in I Timothy, chapter 2, verse 7, Paul says,
For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle, . . . as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.
- in I Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 23, we read,
. . . we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness
- in Romans, chapter 10, verses 13 through 15, we are told,
for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring [preach] good news of good things!"

Imagine that – at the very time that many in the religious world are calling "old fashioned" the preaching of the gospel, the scriptures are upholding and honoring the method and practice of preaching.

Why would it be important to uphold the preaching and teaching of God's word as a timeless method of the church?

Turn to II Timothy, chapter 4, verse 2, where we are warned about what will happen when preaching is replaced with something less declarative; less authoritative. Paul solemnly charges Timothy, a young pastor to,

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; . . .

He is literally saying, “Stay at your post.”

Now, what does it mean, Timothy, to preach? Continue in verse 2 of II Timothy, chapter 4 – it means to,

. . . reprove, . . .

According to Trench, Kittle, and others, this Greek word means to so prove with evidence the truth of scripture that the hearer will be brought, if not to a point of confession, at least to a point of conviction of sin.

Preaching also means to,

. . . rebuke, . . .

This word carries the idea of sharp censure. The same word was used when Jesus rebuked the demons.

And, preaching means to,

. . . exhort with great patience and instruction.

The word “exhort,” or “parakaleo,” is the same Greek word that explains the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is the “paraklete”; that is, He comes alongside us and encourages us and urges us forward. The work of the preacher is to complement the work of the Spirit of God – the same ministry.

What happens in a generation that lacks the ministry of preaching? Continue to verses 3 and 4 of II Timothy, chapter 4.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

If there is a passage that describes our own generation, it is this one. For example:

- Life on other planets? A myth.
- Space ships waiting to take you away? A myth.
- Truth channeled from spirit guides? A myth.
- You have the answers within your own spark of divinity? A myth.

Newsweek magazine carried an advertisement that introduced its product with the words: “Inside each of us is an inner child yearning to reconnect with nature.”

That is a myth. The truth is, each person yearns for the truth of God and will come up empty with any other pursuit – including mother nature.

So, what is the solution?

The solution is to teach and preach the word of God. The truth is, when that is done, there rarely lacks an audience of hungry hearts and minds for, as Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 12a, says,

. . . the word of God [which] is alive and active and sharper than any two-edged sword . . .

Now, turn back to Acts. I find it interesting that in the book of Acts, the inspired author, Luke, gives us verbatim, several sermons. There is:

- Peter’s sermon – Acts, chapter 2;
- Stephen’s sermon – Acts, chapter 7;
- Paul’s first sermon – Acts, chapter 13.

In Acts, chapter 13, Luke also gives us several firsts. Let me give them to you and discuss each one.

The First Missionary Journey

Acts, chapter 13, tells us of the first missionary journey. Look at verses 13 through 14.

Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Paul, Barnabas, and Mark are traveling in and around cities in the Roman province of Galatia. It will be to these new churches and villages that Paul will eventually send an epistle or letter, called the epistle to the Galatians.

The First Missionary Defection

We are also told of the first missionary defection in the little phrase in Acts, chapter 13, verse 13b,

. . . but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

This is the beginning of a conflict that will later erupt in Acts, chapter 15, causing the division of Paul and Barnabas. I will reserve comments on John Mark’s defection until we reach Acts, chapter 15.

I will mention, however, that some believe he left because he was upset that Paul had become the leader and his uncle Barnabas had taken a back seat.

Notice, in fact, the subtle, yet interesting shift in the placement of names in Acts. In:

- chapter 11, verse 30 – Barnabas and Saul;
- chapter 12, verse 25 – Barnabas and Saul;
- chapter 13, verse 2 – Barnabas and Saul.

After this point, however, for the rest of their relationship, it is:

- chapter 13, verse 13 – Paul and his companions;
- chapter 13, verse 42 – Paul and Barnabas;
- chapter 13, verse 50 – Paul and Barnabas.

Perhaps John Mark was upset that his uncle was no longer the leader, the spokesman, so he left.

Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas continue pressing forward.

The First Missionary Sermon

Continue in Acts, chapter 13, to read of what becomes, the setting for the first missionary sermon. Begin at verse 14 again.

But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Notice that Paul did not barge into the synagogue with his gospel guns blazing, saying, “Hey, all of you, this synagogue is now a relic of the past. It’s time to convert this thing into a church . . .”.

No! Paul made himself available to God, then allowed God to ultimately open the door for ministry. Look at verse 15.

After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.”

Perhaps someone had slipped the synagogue leader a note that said, “We’ve got a rabbi from Jerusalem with us today. I believe he attended seminary under the great teacher Gamaliel.”

It was not uncommon for visiting men to address the congregation. But can you imagine what went through Paul and Barnabas’ hearts as they heard, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.”

I could not help but laugh, “Brethren, *IF* you have any word . . .”.

Make no mistake, Paul had not gone to this synagogue on the Sabbath in hopes that someone would invite him home for dinner afterward. He did

not go to attempt to discuss the issues related to the current debates between the Hillel and the Shammai factions within Pharisaism. Paul went to preach Jesus Christ.

Now remember, Paul did not have even one book of the New Testament books in his hand when he began. So, he began with the Old Testament scriptures.

The sermon of Paul – two points

I have divided Paul’s sermon into two points.

The history of Israel as a nation

1. First, Paul points out the history of Israel as a nation.

Look at verses 16 through 18.

Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.”

Imagine – God put up with them for forty years. The Israelites did nothing but complain; they were never satisfied. Because of His covenant and faithfulness to His word, God did not cast them off. However, this verse provides an alarming perspective from heaven’s vantage point, “For a period of about forty years He put up with them . . .”.

Could God be saying that of you or me today? Could it be said of you that all you ever do is complain, complain, complain? You are not happy with how God runs your universe, so you respond toward him with anything but gratitude and thanksgiving?

The One before whose throne at this moment, cherubim are singing their endless refrain, “Holy, Holy, Holy”; the One who is surrounded by winged creatures declaring His majesty; the One who sovereignly maintains order in the universe and brings all things to pass according to His will; the One who has seated beside Him our resurrected Redeemer, this is the One we complain to; this is the One we dare question.

When I get to heaven, I do not want Him to say, “This man is one I had to put up with – but that man I partnered with through life.”

Which would God say of you – put up with . . . or partnered together with?

Continue to verses 19 through 22.

When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.”

So far, Paul has been singing a song that those in the synagogue loved to hear – the history of the people and of their beloved King David.

God’s redemption through a Savior

2. Now, however, Paul makes a turn in his preaching that introduces the Son of David, their Redeemer/Messiah.

Notice verse 23.

From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,

Having just delivered the shocking statement that Jesus is the Messiah, Paul immediately calls to the witness stand, for evidence, the ministry of an Old Testament prophet; that is, John the Baptist. Continue to verses 24 through 27.

after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, “What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.” Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation is sent out. For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him.

Did you catch that? Paul is telling them, “You’re reading the Bible every day, yet you don’t know Him. You have the prophets declaring everything

about Him – that He was a descendant of David; born in the town of Bethlehem; crucified on a cross; raised from the dead; given the throne of David, etc., etc., etc. Every Sabbath you’ve heard the reading, but you weren’t really listening . . .”

A large part of Stephen Davey’s problem – and your problem – is that we have the same ability to hear the word, but not apply it; that is, we read the word, but apply it to someone else. We hear the word; we are surrounded by the truth, but we’re not really listening to the truth, so we’re not reformed by the truth. You could call it “selective hearing”.

My wonderful wife complains every once in a while of that problem. She will be talking to me and she knows when my eyes glaze over that I am no longer listening; I am somewhere else. She says, “Honey, what did I just say to you?”

“To me? Uh, well, you were talking about uh, you know, the subject at hand.”

My daughter Charity, who is only three years old, was riding with me the other day. It was just the two of us. I could remember vaguely hearing somewhere in the background, “Daddy . . . Daddy . . . Daddy . . .” – then she leaned over toward me and said, “Daddy – heIIllo!”

Where did she learn that from?!

One of the few television shows I will watch is the funny home video show. This is human life captured on film. I was watching one the other day, of a wedding scene. It was a very formal affair with a huge wedding party and a packed sanctuary. The reverend was up front and the bride and groom were a few feet away on a lower level in front of him. You could tell by looking closely at the groom, that he was daydreaming – he was not even there. He was looking at the floor as the pastor sort of droned on. Finally, the pastor said, “If there is anyone in the audience who knows just cause as to why this couple should not wed, let him now speak or forever hold his peace.”

There was a long pause, during which the groom snapped out of it. Thinking he had missed his cue, he said, “I do.”

They are not even married yet and he is not listening. That poor woman!

When it comes to biblical instruction that personally convicts and challenges, we naturally tend to close our ears in proud self-defense and miss the application of truth to our own lives.

Think about it – Paul’s generation missed, because they did not want to listen to the word, their Messiah.

The question is, “What are you missing today . . . because you are not listening?”

Look at verses 28 through 37.

And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed.

When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

But God raised Him from the dead;

and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.

And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers,

that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, “You are My Son; today I have begotten You.”

As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.”

Therefore He also says in another Psalm, “You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.”

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay;

but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

Paul has preached things they have never heard. They have heard him apply Old Testament scripture so clearly that they sit, spellbound by the truth.

Two key words

Now Paul personally applies his message to them with two key words.

Look at verse 38.

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,

Forgiveness

- The first key word is “forgiveness”! That is a new proclamation.

I witnessed some time ago, to a Hindu man. Eventually, I was able to tell him, “Sir, one of the primary things that separates your religion from mine, is that you do not have forgiveness of sin; there is nothing in your faith that takes care of even one of your sins. In fact, your next life on earth will be payment for the sins of your present life, yet all my sins have been paid for by Jesus Christ who can offer me forgiveness!”

He somberly shook his head and said, “What you say is true.”

Paul declared,

. . . forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you

The next key word appears in verse 39.

and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

Freed

- The second key word is “freed”. This word in the original Greek, is “dikaiothune,” which can be translated “justified”.

What does it mean to be justified? It is a legal term that means, “to be declared righteous”.

Several years ago, I drove on a nearby speedway. Well, it was actually the nearby highway. You need to know that I was driving a borrowed vehicle and the wheels were larger than the original size which caused the calibration to be off. I was actually going six miles faster than I thought, so I was going 76 miles per hour instead of 70, in a 65 mile per hour zone. Okay, the speed limit had just been changed to 55 miles per hour. Would you keep quiet, this is my story?! I was definitely speeding. Fortunately, the blue lights of a police car pulled me over and I got a ticket. That helped preserve my safety.

In order to minimize the penalty, I chose to appear in court. As I stood in line with all the other race car drivers, I was hoping the judge would charge me the fine. By paying a fine, my crime would not be entered in the books, which would have caused my insurance cost go up.

When it was my turn, I stepped toward the desk. The judge was writing something and he said to me, “I’m doing you a big favor!”

I said, "Thank you."

Without any explanation, he said, "You can leave now – and sir, I hope you know I am doing you a big favor!"

I did not know what he was talking about, but it sounded good to me. I said, "Thank you, sir."

As I was walking out of the courtroom, just as I reached the door, he loudly said, "I'm doing you a big favor!"

You will not stand before God one day, and hear Him say, "Oh just look at this list of sins! I'll tell you what, I'll do you a big favor and let you in – but remember, I'm doing you a big favor."

Doing me a favor and declaring me righteous or justifying me are two vastly different things. Let me put it this way. In order for the judge in that courtroom to justify me, guilty of speeding, he would have had to say to me, "Listen, I'm going to take this police report and erase your name and write my name in your place. In so doing, your crime is imputed to me and my innocence is imputed to you."

That is justification.

Turn over to Colossians, chapter 2, verses 13 and 14.

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

In other words, God switched the names on the criminal report. Christ's name is written at the top of the volume of all your sins; Christ became, as it were, you and I, the criminal, and you and I became the innocent one.

Peter wrote, in I Peter, chapter 2, verse 24,

. . . He Himself bore our sin in His body on the cross . . .

Christ took our vileness and gave us His virtue; He took on Himself our perversion and gave us His purity. Now, we who believe in Him, stand, in Christ, justified; "just as if I had never sinned". That is incredible grace.

The First Missionary Persecution

Turn back to Acts, chapter 13, and we will see the first missionary persecution.

Look at verses 40 through 47.

Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you:

"Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; for I am accomplishing a work in your days, a work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you."

As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.

The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord.

But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.

Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

"For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'"

That is the end of the message – now, let the chips fall as they will!

The products of God's word

The products of this message were two-fold. Let me give them to you.

Acceptance and regeneration

1. The first product is acceptance and regeneration.

Look at verses 48 and 49..

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the

Lord was being spread through the whole region.

Opposition and rejection

2. The second product of this message is opposition and rejection.

Look at verse 50.

But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

“Driving them out” implies that they were beaten according to the custom of their day, and literally, dragged out of the city. Continue to verse 51.

But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.

The missionaries were symbolically declaring themselves cleared of any further responsibilities regarding the city’s unbelief. The city had heard. Continue to verse 52.

And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Paul and Barnabas might have had to leave their new converts, but the Holy Spirit did not. He filled them. John Phillips wrote, “The Jews might be able to drive out the servants of God, but they could not drive out the Spirit of God.”

Why? Because there were people in this town who had heard the message – the preaching of gospel – and they had believed.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 7/27/1997 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 1997 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.