

Armagh Baptist Church
Sunday 10th January 2010 - 11:00am

Acts 13:13-52 – ‘Preaching in the Synagogue in Pisidian Antioch’

Introduction

Last Sunday morning we began the New Year together with a sermon on Mission from Acts 13:1-13. We saw how God used the new church in Antioch to send out Barnabas and Saul on a missionary journey first of all to Cyprus. During the course of their visit to the island they faced opposition from a Jewish sorcerer called Elymas, but they also had the great encouragement of seeing the Proconsul of the island, Sergius Paulus, coming to faith in Christ. So having ministered throughout the island, it was now time to move on.

We take up the story this morning from v.13:

*‘From Paphos, **Paul and his companions** sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. From Perga they went on to **Pisidian Antioch**. On the Sabbath day they entered the synagogue and sat down.’ (Acts 13:13-14)*

So it was the leadership in the Antioch Church *in Syria* that sent Barnabas & Saul out to preach. And after going through Cyprus under the leadership of Barnabas, and seeing the proconsul on the island converted to Christ, they left Paphos and sailed to Perga on the North Mediterranean Coast. It’s here that John Mark leaves them to head back to Jerusalem, for some unknown reason.

By this time Paul has become the leader of the mission team. Now they are back on the mainland and back in territory more familiar to Paul, since he grew up just along the coast in Tarsus of Cilicia. Now they travel inland up into the Taurus Mountain range, where they come to another town called Antioch, this time it’s in the region of Pisidia. So it’s important not to mix these Antiochs up. There were in fact 15 Antiochs in the Roman World at that time! All names after Antiochus Epiphanes. It was the church in Syrian Antioch that sent them out on mission; they are now visiting Pisidian Antioch. The first thing they do is to find the local synagogue, and go in and sit down on the Sabbath day. N.B. They are still following the strategy of taking the Gospel *to the Jew first*.

After the usual two Bible readings from the Law (the first 5 books of the Bible – in this case probably Deuteronomy) and from the Prophets (possibly Isaiah or Habakkuk), the synagogue rulers send word to Paul & Barnabas, that they could now bring a message as visiting speakers to their meeting:

‘Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.’ (v.15)

This would not have been entirely unusual. Since Paul was a Rabbi (he had been brought up under the school of Gamaliel in Jerusalem) he would have been a respected travelling preacher or teacher within Judaism. Obviously news had not got as far as Pisidia that Saul of Tarsus was no longer in good standing with the Jewish hierarchy. But this gave him his opportunity, so he

took it, in good faith, and proceeded to give an overview of the Old Testament to all who were gathered in. Again this would have been quite normal – as a lot of preaching in the Jewish synagogues just went over the same old ground - rehearsing their privileged status as the chosen people of God.

So Paul begins. He stands up and motions with his hand for silence and says:

‘Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!’

So Paul makes it very clear who he is addressing. This message of encouragement that he has been asked to give, is for the Jews, the men of Israel, but it is not exclusively for them – it’s for Gentiles who worship God too. He believed firmly that the Gospel is for the Jew first, *but also for the Gentile*. So Paul was given a tremendous opportunity that day. He has just been asked

‘IF you have a message of encouragement for the people, then please speak.’

Let me ask each one of you who claim to be believers here this morning:

Do you have a message of encouragement for the people around you, that you meet each day? Do you? Well, if you do, then why don’t you speak up?

If you have a message of encouragement for the people – PLEASE speak up

If we don’t speak, then maybe it means we don’t really have a message at all!

Let me use v.15 as my text this morning, through which to look at this chapter.

1. We do have a message! (vs.16-29)

Paul believed with all his heart that he had a message of encouragement for these people before him that day – a message for the Jews, and for the Gentiles too. What was it?

(vs.16-22) – They’d heard this bit all before: he rehearses the History of Israel

(v.23) – But this bit was news to them – The promised Saviour for Israel has come – He is Jesus of Nazareth – a descendant of David, God’s Messiah!

(vs.24-25) – John the Baptist was his forerunner: He announced his coming.

(v.26) So the message of encouragement I have for you today is:

God’s message of Salvation for each one of us!

(vs.27-29) The fact that Jesus was condemned to death was actually:

A Fulfilment of Old Testament Prophecy (v.27).

There were no grounds for Jesus to be put to death – He was sinless! (v.28) And yet he was nailed **‘to a tree’** – this was Paul’s term for Roman Crucifixion. But he had chosen his words carefully, because back in Deuteronomy 21:23 it says that: ***‘anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse!’***

Paul didn't shy away from an OT text like that one. In fact he took it and he gloried in it, because it meant in effect that Jesus had borne the curse for us! (v.29). We were the ones who should have been hung on that tree. We are the ones who deserve to be cursed by God, because we are the sinners. But this man, Jesus, had done nothing wrong! So he must have been bearing the curse for people other than himself. He was hanging on that tree for us!

This was the Doctrine of Substitution that Paul would spell out later in his letter to the Galatians in ch.3:10-14. The region of Galatia actually lies just to the north of Pisidian Antioch. So Paul would write to these people to try again to convince them of the truth of the message he was now preaching to them in person. That's how much he wanted them 'to get the message!'

Do we have a message for the people around us? Of course we do!

So why then do we tend to keep it to ourselves!?

1. We have a message (vs.16-29)

2. It's an Encouraging Message (vs.30-37)

That word encouragement in v.15 could be translated 'exhortation' but it could also be translated 'comfort' – 'A Message of Comfort for the people.'

That's how Isaiah ch.40 begins (a passage that would have been very familiar to the Jewish people in that synagogue in Antioch). Isaiah 40:1-5 says:

'Comfort, comfort my people' says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for,

That she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.'

What comes next? (John the Baptist does):

'A voice of one calling:

'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord;

Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low;

The rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.'

And what next? (The Messiah would be revealed):

'And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

So what should Paul do? What should we do? (vs.9-11)

Do we have a message? A message of comfort for the people of the world?

Of course we do!

'You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain.

You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God!' (or 'Behold your God!')

See the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him.

See his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

He tends his flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.'

Our calling is exactly the same as Paul's calling – it is to point lost sheep to the Good Shepherd. It's to get them to see that Jesus can be their Saviour - that He is the only one who can forgive them for their sins. That's why it's a message of comfort, as well as a message of great encouragement!

And here is the real comfort in Acts 13:30 – not only did they take him down from the tree and lay him in a tomb – **'But God raised him from the dead!'** Paul wasn't proclaiming a dead Saviour, but one who is alive for evermore. A Saviour who has experienced death; and who has defeated death - for us! One who is now alive to be our Saviour, and one who is coming back for us! His resurrection from the dead is proof that his death for us on the cross has been sufficient to deal with all our sins – **'God raised him from the dead!'** If his death had not accomplished our salvation, then He would have left him dead!

But he was raised, and what's more he was seen too! (v.31)

'But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem.

They are now his witnesses to our people.'

He was seen alive, by the Apostles, who are now witnesses to us!

So this is Good News! (v.32)

'We tell you the good news:

What God promised our fathers 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.'

God's promises to the Old Testament people of God have been fulfilled for us!

- Christ has been raised – Prophecies have been fulfilled (v.34-35) (Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10)
- His death has been accepted by God. The proof of this is that God raised him from the dead! Death has been defeated. Death & decay have been conquered! (v.35). So Mankind's 3 enemies: sin, death and the devil, have now been dealt with once and for all!

Paul simply points out in vs.36-37 that these prophecies couldn't have referred to David (as some Jews thought) because he was buried and his body saw decay. But Jesus, though he died and was buried, has been raised to life again, so that verse has come true - in Jesus - from Psalm 16:10

'You will not let your Holy One see decay'

It referred to the Messiah – Jesus – who is now alive from the dead!

By the way, isn't that a great statement that is made of David in v.36?
'When David had served God's **purpose** in his own generation, he fell asleep.'
Wouldn't it be great if that could be said about us – about your life and mine?
'When we had served God's purpose in our generation, we fell asleep.'
We have heard a lot in recent years about the *Purpose Driven Church*, and the *Purpose Driven Life*, and a lot of the material contained in those two books by Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, California is very helpful indeed.

But what is our purpose in this life as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, if it is not to share this message, this encouraging message, this comforting message, to everyone that we possibly can - until the time comes for us to fall asleep down here, and waken up in the arms of Jesus?

I don't know about you, but I want to serve the purpose of God in 2010, I want to serve the purpose of God in my generation, I want to serve the purpose of God while I am alive, and until he calls me home. Is that your desire too?

But let's come back to our text in v.15:

1. Yes, we do have a message
2. Yes, it is an Encouraging message: A message of Comfort, but thirdly...

3. It's a Message for all the people! (vs.38-44)

Look at what Paul says in v.38:

*'Therefore, my brothers, I want **you** to know...'*

What did he want them to know?

Three things:

(i) *'That through Jesus **the forgiveness of sins** is proclaimed to you.'*

Your sins can be forgiven through Jesus Christ alone!

(ii) *'Through Him everyone who believes can **be justified from everything...**'*

...From everything that you could not be justified from by the law of Moses!

i.e. that includes deliberate sins. Things you did in a high-handed way.

The law could never deal with sins like that, but Jesus can!

So *everything* can be forgiven!

The Law of Moses was inadequate. It failed to truly justify anyone.

'By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified' (Romans 3:20, Gal 2:15-16)

This is Good News! Through believing in Jesus, through trusting in Jesus, by putting your faith in Jesus, you can be justified completely from **all** your sins!

(iii) The third thing Paul wanted these people to know was that this Good News came with a warning. A warning for all who would neglect this message:

'Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you.'

And then Paul quotes from the book of Habakkuk:

'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.'

In Habakkuk 1 vs.5-6 God was warning his people through his servant, that if they didn't repent then, he would have to send the Babylonians to over-run their land and to carry them off into exile.

Well they didn't listen then, and as a result they were taken away into exile, and the country of Israel was never the same again. As a people group the Jews had been scrabbling around for their identity ever since.

Well now, it was even more serious. Now that God had sent his Messiah, this really was their last chance. Either they accept him, and believe in Jesus as their Saviour and as their long-awaited Messiah, or they would forever be lost. As the writer to the Hebrews, writing to a Jewish audience puts it in Heb 2:1-3

'How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?'

So in other words Paul is finishing his message by telling his listeners not to scoff at this message: Don't mock this message or the messenger.

This is very serious indeed.

What will your reaction be?

What was the reaction back in Antioch?

Well at first the reaction was good in vs.42-44: The people wanted to hear more. They invited Paul & Barnabas to preach again the next week (v.42).

But many wanted to find out more there and then, they couldn't wait until next week (v.43). They were so eager to find out more about this salvation, there and then, so they grabbed Paul & Barnabas afterwards to ask them more.

Let me just say to you here this morning, that if ever you feel God is speaking to you through this or any other service in this church, don't be afraid to ask me at the door to wait behind and talk to you further about these things.

Your salvation is so important, I'd be glad to, anytime. Other things can wait!

But on the next Sabbath, nearly the whole city turned out to hear them (v.44)

In the course of that week in Pisidian Antioch, a lot of talking had gone on about this new message that Paul had brought to them last weekend in the synagogue. I'm sure they were all gossiping about his message all week.

So much so that by the following weekend the whole city had turned up at Synagogue wanting to find out more – not just the Jews, but the Gentiles had come too, because they had heard that this message was for them also!

But the Jewish synagogue leaders weren't so pleased. Look at v.45. They became jealous! They'd never been able to attract a crowd like that with their preaching!! They weren't too pleased at all with what was going on. So they

began to talk abusively against what Paul was saying. In other words they began to do exactly what that passage in Habakkuk had warned them not to do: They began to scoff at the sermon; they began to mock the messengers! And yet again, these were the Jewish religious leaders, the ones who should have known better; the ones who read and studied God's Word every week in their synagogues. But now that the fulfilment had come, they couldn't see it!

Conclusion:

Sadly some rejected the Message (v.46) – Mainly the Jews.

Paul and Barnabas answered the mockery of the Jewish leaders with this:

'We had to speak the word of God to you first. (Strategy: To the Jew First).

But since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 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!' (Isaiah 49:6)

So sadly many of the Jews that day in Pisidian Antioch rejected the message.

But others accepted the Message (v.48) – Mainly the Gentiles.

Just look at what it says there in v.48:

'When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.'

Isn't that a great verse?

The Jews may have rejected the Gospel, but the Gentiles were just ready and waiting for it, and as soon as Paul turns to them, they welcome it with open arms! The Truth of God's Word wasn't just for the Jewish people anymore; it was for anybody, from any background, literally under heaven, who was ready to respond. *'They were glad and honoured the word of the Lord.'*

But don't miss the second part of that verse 48:

'All who were appointed for eternal life believed.'

Do you know what that means? According to F.F.Bruce (p.283 TNLCNT):

'All who had been enrolled for eternal life in the records of heaven.'

In other words God hadn't just chosen Jewish people in eternity past to be saved, God had chosen Gentile people too! There and then, that day, in Pisidian Antioch they did so in great numbers, and throughout the ages since Gentile people just like you and me have discovered that we have been chosen by God, and have gladly and willingly accepted the Gospel by faith.

This is a great encouragement for World Mission. It means that out there in the nations of the world there are people who have been *'marked out by God'* for eternal life, for salvation. It's a matter of us going and finding them. And when we do, they *will* gladly respond, honouring the word of the Lord, and they *will* believe the Gospel and they *will* receive eternal life!

But it wasn't just in Antioch itself that people believed and were saved.

In v.49 we're told that *'the word of the Lord spread through the whole region.'*

This is probably when the region of Galatia heard the Gospel, and not long afterwards Paul would write one of his first letters to these people – the Letter to the Galatians that is now contained in our New Testaments.

So God was at work through this first missionary team of Paul & Barnabas.

But they were about to face their first real opposition:

In v.50 the Jews in Antioch incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and they stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, so much so that they were soon expelled from that region.

And as the Lord had told them to do, in v.51 they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and headed off some 80 miles down the main road to the east to their next stop, Iconium. But the new disciples they left behind in the region around Antioch:

'Were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit!' (v.52).

So this morning you have seen, that like Paul & Barnabas:

1. We *do* have a message – It's the Message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It is a message of encouragement and comfort – your sins can be forgiven.
3. It is a message for *all* people - that includes you, no matter what background you come from.

The question is, what will your response be, this morning?

- Will you accept it, like the Gentile people of Antioch did?
- Or will you reject this message of Good News, like the Jews in Antioch did?

Wouldn't it be better if you stopped mocking and scoffing like the Jewish leaders, and starting honouring the Word of the Lord and being glad? (v.48).

Wouldn't it be great if you discovered that you were among those appointed for eternal life, and simply believed this Good News, and got saved?

Remember Hebrews 2:3

'How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?'