

ACTS
Paul's First Recorded Sermon
Acts 13:14-41

We will look today at the first recorded sermon of the Apostle Paul. Surely, Paul preached many times since he was converted and quite a few times on his first missionary journey. However, the Holy Spirit chose to record this message for us, and therefore, it must be very significant.

Our goal today will be to analyze Paul's sermon from the standpoint of the content he thought necessary to adequately communicate the gospel to the Jews of his day. We want to examine this sermon to discover what he said that made such an impact upon his audience and what elements of it, when preached today, will make a radical and revolutionary impact. Our aim, then, is to discover what Paul preached, how he preached it and then apply this same message over into the twentieth century.

Before we begin an analysis of Paul's sermon, several points should be brought out which are relevant to us today. First, Paul, when preaching evangelistically, taught doctrine. A quick scan of his message will show that the terms "Chose, savior, promise, repentance, purpose, forgiveness, justified, believe and perish" are all found in this sermon. Paul's message had biblical, doctrinal and theological content. His message was not some weak, emaciated evangelical appeal to come to Christ as one in need of a joy-giver, as we find so much of in the twentieth century. Paul does not present God as loving everybody and trying to save everybody but stymied because of man's unbelief. No, he preached a sovereign God who saves men through faith in Christ Jesus the Lord. Second, Paul did not adapt the gospel message to his age. All the doctrinal terms used in this message were terms found in the Old Testament. He did not use new terminology to meet the first century Greek and Roman mind but used biblical terminology which had been used for centuries by the Jews. There was no attempt to present the old message in new terms. Paul was quite unlike many evangelicals today, who refuse to use Old and New Testament terms like sin, justification, repentance, condemnation, election, and redemption, because they seem to have no meaning to the average person. The result is that a person may have changed his mind about Christ but not know he has repented, which means "to change one's mind." When that person then goes to his Bible, he cannot understand it. Third, Paul did not dilute his message in any way. He was direct, right to the point and was honest with his audience. He confronted his age with sin, rebellion, guilt and condemnation. Paul's goal was to preach to man's conscience and bring a sense of guilt so the sinner would repent and believe in Christ. Arousing guilt is an important part of preaching the gospel, and we must never allow modern day psychology to take guilt away from our vocabulary. There is guilt, and there is forgiveness for man's guilt. Paul's preaching was so different from the modern day evangelical who preaches to a man's emotions and will, neglecting almost totally his mind and conscience.

THE AUDIENCE (Acts 13:14-15)

"But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down." -- On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas came to Pisidian Antioch (this is not Antioch in Syria where they had their local church home base for this first missionary journey). This is another Antioch in the region of Pisidia which was part of the ancient Roman province of Galatia. This city was the chief civil and military center of that part of Galatia. As was the pattern, the missionaries went to the synagogue first to declare their message of Christ, because the Jews believed the Old Testament and many Gentile Jewish proselytes were sympathetic to the gospel of Christ.

"And 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.'" -- In the synagogue there was a certain pattern of worship. After prayers, a reading from a portion of the Pentateuch (Law) and a portion from the Prophets, and after someone gave a sermon, the floor was opened up to the congregation so the people could give an exhortation, based on the

sermon or the Scripture reading. Paul seized upon this opportunity to preach Christ to these Jews. He took advantage of a natural opportunity to express his views about the Messiah.

THE ADDRESS (Acts 13:16-27)

God's History of Israel (13:16-21)

There are three things to notice about this section of Scripture. First, Paul's message is very closely related to Peter's message in Acts 2, which shows that the Apostles preached the same message. Second, Paul's message, in content, greatly parallels the sage of Stephen in Acts 7. When Stephen preached his great sermon, Saul of Tarsus, the zealous, young Pharisee, undoubtedly heard it and never forgot it. As Stephen preached the history of Israel and accused the Jews of putting Messiah to death and also challenged them to repent, Saul was touched because this message cut through all his bigotry and egotism as a Jew. It was because of Stephen's message that Paul was finally converted to Christ. Third, this message is about God's working in history. It is not about some great personality like Hitler, Alexander the Great or Napoleon, but about God and His mighty workings in history through the nation of Israel. History is "HIS-story." It is God working out His plan in this world to bring about the return of His Son Jesus Christ.

"And Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand he said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God (proselytes), listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, . . .'" It is interesting to note that Paul began this message with God's sovereignty. He "chose our fathers." God sovereignly chose Abraham, saved him and made him a great nation. God chose Israel and passed by the other nations. "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6). This is commonly known as the doctrine of election. Some call it predestination. Call it what you like, but it is the truth that God rules and reigns in this earth and does what He pleases, even in the salvation of souls. The doctrine of election is a very unpopular message today, even among evangelicals. Most Bible schools and seminaries tell their graduates not to preach this doctrine for it causes too much division. However, it is truth and is the one doctrine that puts the Bible together in a unique way. Spurgeon said, "Men love God everywhere but on the throne."

There was a Puritan who was presenting his views on strict predestination in old Puritan New England. He had a friend who was not convinced of that doctrine, so as they walked through the woods on their way to church one Sunday morning, his friend, sort of baiting him a little said, "Say, do you really believe that business about everything in the world being predestined by God and God being in sovereign control of every little detail?" The Puritan answered, "That's correct." "You mean you believe that nothing could happen to you unless God willed it to happen?" said the friend. "That's right," said the Puritan. The friend went on to say, "You mean, as we are walking through this forest towards Church, that if God did not want an Indian to shoot us, no Indian could shoot us?" The Puritan replied, "I believe that." "Well, then," the friend said, "why is it then you are carrying that gun over your shoulder?" The old Puritan thought about it a moment and said, "Well, my brother, you never know when you may meet an Indian whose appointed time has come."

"... and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. And for about a period of forty years, He put up with them in the wilderness. And 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 fifty years. And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. And 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.'" -- Paul knew the Old Testament and, because he knew the Old Testament, he understood that God is in charge of human history, that human history has a beginning and ending. Because of his knowledge of Israel's history, Paul was able to gain the respect of the Jews he was addressing so they would listen to what he said.

Paul did not jump right into the truth that "Jesus Christ is your Messiah" with the Jews. He was very tactful and scholarly and established rapport with his audience before he hit them squarely between the eyes with Christ.

God's Promise of a Savior (13:22, 23)

“And after He had removed him (Saul), 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.” -- Paul followed Israel’s Old Testament history up to King David, who was a king who had a genuine heart for God and God loved him. David had his faults, but he was a man essentially devoted to God, and because of this God made certain promises (a covenant) to King David.

Who is the man or woman God will bless? The person whose heart beats for God and who will gladly do the will of God. God wants obedient hearts above everything else from His people.

“From the offspring of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, . . .” -- God promised to David a kingdom forever.

“When your days are complete and you lie down with your father, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (II Samuel 7:12-16).

“My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall be confirmed to him. So I will establish his descendants forever, and his throne as the days of heaven” (Psalm 89:28-29).

In order for there to be a Davidic Throne, one had to reign who was a descendant of David, and Jesus Christ was the only man in His day who had the qualifications to fulfill the throne. Both the lineage of Mary and Joseph could be traced back to David. When Christ came, He was the one to sit upon this throne. “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:32, 33). As the reigning King (He reigns spiritually today and will reign on earth after the second advent), He is the Messiah and is the one who brings salvation.

What an impact this must have made upon these Jews. Paul said to them that the long awaited Messiah had come. What a thrill! What excitement must have gone through that audience! I can imagine that the room began to buzz when this amazing announcement was made by Paul. Messiah has come and He brings salvation because He is the Savior!

God’s Preparation for Messiah (13:24, 25)

“ . . . after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.” -- Paul skipped right over Jewish history from Solomon to Malachi, which was, generally, a period of backsliding for Israel. He also says nothing about the four hundred years between the Old and New Testaments. He picks up the history of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus Christ. He preached repentance and got a remnant of people ready to accept Messiah when He came.

“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” -- While John was preaching repentance, he also was pointing to his great successor, Jesus Christ, whose shoes he was unworthy to unleash. And John was a famous man.

God’s Promise Fulfilled in Christ (13:26-37)

“Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the word of salvation is sent out.” -- Messiah came in the first century to bring salvation to the Jews. God planned it that Messiah should come to that generation of Jews to whom Paul was speaking.

“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.” -- When Christ came to Israel as the heir to the Davidic Throne and the Messiah to save His people, the Jews rejected Him. First, they rejected Him because they did not recognize Him. He had no money, no influence: no standing in the community. He was not formally educated in the university and was only a carpenter’s son. The Jews were looking for a great political deliverer as Messiah, and Christ did not meet their requirements. Even when he performed miracles and spoke great words never seen or heard before in Israel, they would not recognize Him. They had a moral problem and they hated the truth of Christ. Sin blinded their eyes to the truth of Messiah. Second, they rejected Christ because they did not understand the Scriptures. Every Sabbath they heard the Scriptures taught from the Old Testament but did not grasp the spiritual meaning of them. The reading and listening to the Bible had become mere ritual for these people; there was no heart in it at all. Had the Jews understood the Bible, they would have accepted Christ as Messiah.

There are people like this in the church today. Bible reading and listening to a sermon are just perfunctory performances and men are not hearing. Quite likely, many in the church will never discern the times and the nearness of Christ’s second coming because they have no spiritual understanding of the Bible. Notice that, in their rejection, the Jews were only fulfilling biblical prophecy.

“And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.” -- For no cause at all, the Jews took the perfect man of the universe, the best man who ever lived, and nailed Him to a cross. Messiah was hung on a tree, the cross, for He was made a curse (Deut. 21:23).

We know that Christ had to die in order to save sinners. His death was an atoning death, a substitutionary sacrifice, a death under the curse of God for our sins. He was innocent, yet God cursed Him and punished Him in our place, laying our guilt upon Him so we could be forgiven of all our sins.

They laid Christ in a tomb. They buried Him. Did God lose His grip on the universe? Did God have no control over the death of the most perfect man who ever lived? Did God leave Christ in the grave to rot and corrupt? What appeared to be defeat and failure would turn out to be victory and success for God, for God had a plan in it all.

“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.” -- But God! God raised Jesus. He did not lose control of the universe. God raised Christ through a supernatural act of resurrection.

Christians today must preach the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the only message that can challenge, confront, counter, defeat and destroy the humanistic, antisupernaturalistic spirit of this age. The resurrection is the key to Christianity and those who study it objectively fall down and worship Jesus Christ.

An English lawyer, named Frank Morrison, set out to disprove the resurrection of Christ. He was convinced that Christianity was false and that Jesus was an imposter. He realized that the whole truth of Christianity hinged on the resurrection of Christ, so he set out to write a book to disprove the resurrection of Christ. As a lawyer would, he began to do research. He analyzed the documents and testimonies of the eyewitnesses. The more he studied, the more doubts began to come into his mind. Finally, he accepted the resurrection of Christ as a fact and bowed his will to Christ as Lord and Savior. He then wrote the book, Who Moved the Stone? which is a strong defense of the resurrection of Christ.

“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, “THOU ART MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE.” And as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: “I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY AND SURE BLESSINGS OF DAVID.” -- God made a promise to King David. God's promise to David was kept through the Messiah Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead. All the promise made to David is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. “I will give you the holy and sure blessings

(mercies) of David,” is a quote from Isaiah 55:3. It is in Messiah the King, the Savior that men can find forgiveness of sins. This Messiah “abundantly pardons.” “Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6, 7). The resurrected Christ pardons men abundantly. There is no sin too great that He will not forgive and no sin too small that escapes His pardon. This is “good news.” As the poet put it: “Who is a pardoning God like Thee? Who has grace so rich and free?”

“Therefore He also says in another Psalm, “THOU WILT NOT ALLOW THY 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.” -- This is a quote from Psalm 16:10 which was written by David, but it did not refer to David, for he died and corrupted. This refers to a greater than David, even Jesus Christ, the Messiah who was raised from the dead. He did not corrupt and was raised to fulfill all the promises made to King David.

THE APPEAL (Acts 13:38, 39)

“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, . . .” -- Christ, the Messiah, is the Savior. He saves men and forgives men for the sins they have committed. Christ is the only way to get one’s sins forgiven. “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Christ not only forgives, but he blots our record clean.

“. . . and through Him everyone who believes is freed (justified) from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.” -- These Jews, because of the corruption of their sinful hearts, had perverted the Old Testament revelation which taught salvation by grace through faith on the basis of shed blood of the Messiah to come. They twisted Old Testament revelation and made salvation a works system. They felt if they tried to keep the Ten Commandments they would be saved and accepted by God. They thought the way to be saved was to try their best to be good. Yet Paul made it clear that they could never make it to heaven this way. They could never find acceptance with God by a good works system because all men are sinners. What man needs is justification. Through faith in Christ, a person can be justified, that is, declared righteous before God with a perfect standing and acceptance before God. Christ not only negatively removes sin, but positively imparts perfect righteousness to all who believe. He forgives sin and grants perfect righteousness to all who accept, by faith, Christ as Lord.

What this is saying is that God has solved the problem of guilt which plagues every human being. Christ will not only remove guilt, He will make one perfectly righteous in the sight of God.

Ray Stedman, pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, relates an interesting story that happened to him a few years ago. Sitting in his study one weekday morning, he suddenly heard, out in the auditorium, a woman’s voice shouting and crying out. He came out to see what was wrong. He found a young married woman whom he recognized, for she had been in his study just a week before for counseling. The woman was walking up and down in front of the cross in the auditorium. She was looking up at the cross and crying, “Yes, there is a God; yes, there is a God, and he will forgive me -- I know he will! I know he will” She was in torment of spirit.

He did not know what to make of it for a moment. He listened and then moved to speak to her. When she saw him, she just crumpled and fell on her face to the floor. He picked her up and helped her to a pew and they talked. She told him that she was married and professed to be a Christian but was having an affair with an older man. She had justified the affair, thinking it was something that would contribute to her happiness. That day, however, the man had called her and told her he was through. It shattered her, and she came that day to the church crushed with guilt, trying to find release. Suddenly it dawned on her what she had done to her family, her husband, and what she had done to herself. She had hurt everyone. Ray said he went through the Scriptures with her trying to help her understand that there is forgiveness in Christ. The woman kept thinking she had to do something. She had to atone for her sin. She would not believe that forgiveness is in Christ, available by faith. She wanted to work for forgiveness.

Finally she calmed down. She called her husband. Ray talked with them both and he took her home. But she was still distressed, so her husband took her to the hospital. Two days later Ray got a phone call -- in her distress of mind she had thrown herself from the tenth floor of the hospital and her body was crushed on the pavement below. She had guilt and wanted to atone for it herself, refusing to believe that if she would receive Christ that Christ already atoned for that guilt.

THE ACCUSATION (Acts 13:40, 41)

“Take heed therefore, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: . . .” -- Paul concluded this message with a strong warning that, unless they trusted in Christ, they would perish. A basic part of proclaiming the gospel is to warn men of the certain judgment to come if one does not have a Savior. We have not really preached a full gospel until we have preached judgment.

“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.” -- Paul quotes from Habakkuk 1:5 where the context is about the impending judgment of Nebuchadnezzar on Israel, but no one would believe it. Paul applies this verse to the situation of Christ and speaks of spiritual disaster in eternal judgment for all those who do not accept Jesus Christ.

The prophets predicted physical doom and Paul predicted spiritual doom for all his audience if they did not trust Christ.

CONCLUSION

The message is clear. Christ is the King, the Messiah, the Savior. He forgives sin and declares righteous all who believe in Him as personal Lord and Savior. If you reject Christ, then you must pay the consequences for this rejection which is doom.

Man's rejection of Christ is also somehow in God's plan. “. . . for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed” (I Peter 2:8). God will not be defeated if men reject Him. You do not have to be appointed to doom. You must accept Jesus Christ as King, Messiah and Savior if you are to be saved and go to heaven. Won't you say, “Thank you, Lord Jesus, for dying for my sin. I bow before you as my Messiah, Savior and King.”