

## **“PUTTING THE PAST IN PERSPECTIVE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**October 18, 2020, 9 and 11 AM**

**Text for the Sermon: Acts 13:13-41**

**Prayer:** Holy Father, by your Holy Spirit speak to all our hearts the Words of Life, your truth, fresh manna, what will glorify you, magnify Jesus, exalt your Word and edify our eternal souls.

**Acts 13:13-15, Introduction, Antioch in Pisidia.**

Paul and his companions, at least Barnabas and John Mark, left the island of Cyprus and sailed to the southern coast of Turkey, then walked about 12 miles inland to Perga, the capital of Pamphylia. They have moved from Barnabas' native land to Paul's native land.

At Perga John Mark leaves them which will become significant later in Acts. It will be decades before John Mark overcomes the stigma of this desertion.

From Perga Paul and Barnabas walk another 100 miles up to Antioch in Pisidia. I say up because this is a mountainous region, 3,500 feet above sea level. It gives one pause to consider how they walked everywhere and how far and not just easy paths. And in his letter to the Galatians, which is what this region is called, Paul tells us he was sick during these travels.

Their first Sabbath there they go to worship at the local synagogue in a thoroughly pagan Roman city. Paul is invited to speak. What an invitation? Little did they know what they were setting in motion.

**Acts 13:16-29, Paul's first sermon, OT History Survey 101.**

This is the first recorded sermon of the apostle Paul. Paul calls it a message of salvation and good news. Paul is in a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath, he knows his audience, all Jews or God-fearing Gentiles, he proclaims the Word to them starting with where they are, given their knowledge of the OT.

Paul starts with an OT history lesson but one that is told in a very deliberate and specific way.

17a, God chooses Israel from all the people of the earth for his special purposes.

17b, God made the people great during their stay in Egypt. He increased their number.

17c, God led them out of Egypt with an uplifted arm. God displayed of his power.

18, God put up with Israel in the wilderness and provided everything for them in the wilderness.

19a, God destroyed the seven nations in the land of Canaan. Sure the people swung the sword, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

19b, God gave Israel the land of Canaan as an inheritance. It was His to give.

20, God gave them judges. This was not just the natural course of human events, God did it.

21, God gave to Israel her first king, Saul.

22a, God removed Saul. God decides who and how long, He raises up and He takes down.

22b, God raised up David the eighth and youngest son of Jesse. God chose him.

At this point in his sermon Paul jumps from the past one thousand years to the present, to the birth, death and resurrection of the promised Messiah, Jesus the Savior.

23, God brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, "as he promised." In other words, God wasn't just active in the moment Jesus entered the world. He had set things up for it. He had planned long ago, and spoken of it long ago, so that when it happened, we would know he was doing it.

24–25, John the Baptist makes sure the focus is not on him but on Jesus, the center of the story.

26, Paul says, "To us has been sent the message of this salvation." Who sent this message? God.

27, Paul says even those who did not know God or recognize Jesus or understand the Scriptures nevertheless did what God planned and prophesied. God's mission goes forward with those who cooperate with Him and with those who actively resist Him. God is the actor; He is the one who makes all things happen.

The Jews failed OT History 101 by failing to recognize the point and purpose of God even when they had been reading about it every week in the synagogue from the Law and the Prophets.

29, "And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb." What was happening in the arrest and trial and death of Jesus was not mainly the work of man. It was God's plan laid out in Scripture.

30, But God raised Jesus from the dead.

### **Acts 13:30-37, "But God."**

Two of the greatest words in Scripture. A few of you with really good memories might remember my Easter sermon four years ago, titled, "But God" on those two words that turned the world upside down. Two words that declare God has invaded our history.

Who is in control here, who is writing the script, who has the reins of history? Paul shows from history that it is God who is on the move, and is causing history to progress toward salvation, until it reaches its climax in Jesus Christ.

There is a trifecta in the movie making world that is hard to achieve, to be a writer, director, and actor in the same movie. God is the ultimate writer, director, producer and actor in His history. He deserves all the Oscars.

Paul proves the resurrection through eye-witnesses, and promises made and fulfilled. Jesus was the Messiah who was raised from the dead from the OT Psalm 2 and 16 and Isaiah 55.

All three of these texts were considered Messianic promise or prophecies. All three are connected to King David, from whom it was well known the Messiah would descend from, from the root of Jesse, the son of David. Remember the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday when the people cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”

### **Acts 13:38-39, Application, “therefore.”**

**Acts 13:38-39** Let it be known to you *therefore*, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Paul now moves to the application of the Gospel he has just proclaimed. This is the “so what” part of the sermon. This is the “what does this mean for me, what difference does this make,” “why history matters” part of his sermon, signaled by the word therefore.

**First**, through Jesus we have the forgiveness of our sin. This is the Gospel. Don’t just invite Jesus into your heart, rather acknowledge that you are a sinner, that your sins separate you from God, and repent of your sins, agree with God about them and receive your forgiveness not from anything you can do, but from Jesus. Sin is our greatest problem; forgiveness is our greatest need.

**Second**, everyone who believes in Jesus is freed (justified) from everything, which is something that the Law of Moses could not do for you.

The law cannot grant forgiveness of sins or make one right with God or in right standing with God. The law can only condemn us, can only expose how disobedient we are, because no one has ever perfectly kept the law. We are all law-breakers, we all continue to break the law, so we stand condemned under the law. The law shows no mercy, it holds out no grace.

Only the Gospel can save us from sin and death and justify us, make us right with God through faith alone in Jesus alone. The righteous demands of the law are only perfectly fulfilled by Jesus.

Notice Paul holds this Gospel out to everyone who believes, everyone, not just Jews, but also to Gentiles. There is only one way of salvation for all people in all history.

## **Acts 13:40-41, call for response, “beware.”**

Paul has just tied together all the loose ends of Biblical history up to that point. Therefore, he warns, don't make the same mistake so many in history have made, don't make the same mistake your ancestors made and your grandparents and parents.

Don't walk out of this history class saying, this is boring, irrelevant, do I have to know this stuff, or what does this have to do with me, why do I need to know this.

Don't be like the scoffers, the mockers, the naysayers, the rebellious and disobedient. Don't neglect God's mercy. See the hand of God and recognize Jesus and understand what has been written. Don't be like them, don't be on the wrong side of history.

### **Implications and application.**

By now you have a clear picture of what Paul is emphasizing. God is the subject of almost every verb and every clause of this sermon. This is the most God-saturated and Christ-centered sermon ever preached. God is the God of history, all history. God is directing all of history in a particular direction, there is nothing aimless or random or fatalistic about history.

From the patriarchs to the prophets, everything is moving toward to a redemptive goal, everything is pointing to Jesus. Jesus is the goal of history, Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish history, He is the only promised Messiah.

The Christ event is the central event. It always strikes me as amazing that human history is divided by Christ. BC and AD. I know they have changed it to BCE and CE, but they are still stuck with the dividing line being the birth of Jesus. Jesus forever marks history.

2020 is the year of our Lord. 2020 is God's writing. 2020 is part of God spreading the Gospel of His Son, part of God advancing His kingdom and building His church.

We live in a superficial and naïve and godless age. We live in a culture that thinks very little about God. No one on the news talks this way. Everything you hear on the news is godless, God has no part to play in our politics or business or science or Covid-19. God has nothing to do with it, He plays no part in it.

The reason people don't get this is the same reason the Jews didn't, they don't realize history is God's story, this is all His doing. Nobody writes history like this. The history we are taught and read is about men and women and the things they have done, some great and famous, some more infamous. It's about great discoveries made by man, or great wars or natural disasters.

I wonder if the history that is taught at our Christian school is more secular than spiritual. Is God the subject of every event, moving behind every life, directing everything toward the great climax of salvation history? Is it told as God's story or man's story? Are we teaching our children to see everything in life in relation to God?

Is God the central reality in, through, over, under, behind everything? If it doesn't connect to God then it is missing the point, it is superficial. The news, the history books, public education, entertainment, all the voices around us are like the Jews, superficial, totally missing the most important reality, the reason behind everything.

Paul sees everything in history connected to God and to what God is doing with His creation and His creatures, whether we know it or not, whether we care about Him or not. Paul saw history as telling theological truth, teaching us faith, teaching us trust in the sovereign God. It is easy today to fall into a kind of despair over where our world is heading. We hear bad news after bad news, especially news of moral degradation, war, terrorism, hate crimes, injustice, lies upon lies. Someone said this week that in 30 year there will be a climate catastrophe ending life as we know it. All of this kind of perspective just fuels cynicism and hopelessness. We want to just pull into our shells and try to live in denial.

Shakespeare's Macbeth sums up our secular worldview:

"Life's but ... a tale, Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing."

Paul proves Shakespeare's Macbeth is wrong. Do you know the value of this history lesson for your own life and for our own day?

Only Christians have an optimistic view of history. God has not abandoned us and our planet. God has not left history to just run its course until it goes off the cliff. God is actively at work; history is going somewhere. God is purposefully working His plan.

The resurrection is proof that God has never lost His grip on history and it is assurance that God will once more bring everything to a glorious conclusion and consummation at the end of history in another Christ event, the second coming and return of Jesus.

In all of life's ups and downs, twists and turns, fits and starts, failures and dead ends, triumphs and tragedies, there is a unifying, purposeful plan and direction. There is a flow, a harmony, it all fits together and makes sense.

God is hopeful, optimistic, joyful, delighted because everything is going exactly as He has ordained from before the foundation of the earth. Nothing can stop Him or stand in His way.

And this is all true not just at the macro level, at the world and nation level, it is true at the micro level, in the day to day details of your life. For every verse that applies to the nation

of Israel, there are an equal number of verses that apply to us personally. Go read Psalm 139 again.

God is moving through every detail of your life, which means there is purpose and meaning and significance to every detail of your life. Live your life with a clear sense of that, with confidence as you wake up each day with faith in Jesus, there is a Christ-centered reason for this day.

**Psalm 143:8** Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

God wants us to look back and see His hand in history, so that we will have confident assurance His hand is in our present. Think how often we read in Scripture, “I will remember your glorious deeds and recount the wonders you have done.”

Whose story are you in right now? Who are you living for? Yourself or God? What future, what destiny are you living for?

Don’t live your life in a God-ignoring way, in a God-disregarding way, in a “God only matters on Sunday” way, in a “my life doesn’t really matter to God” way. Don’t live in a superficial way. Live like Paul, bearing witness to the reality of God and the centrality of Jesus. Even if you can’t see it or figure it out, walk by faith that it is true. Ask God daily to open your eyes to His presence and power and purposes and plans.

**Colossians 1:9-11** We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, enable us, to live in the light and truth and promise of the resurrection. Reorder and reorient our lives around this one central truth, the reality of Jesus’ final and decisive triumph over death. Make this “but God” reality practical in all our daily lives, in all our daily interactions and relationships, to the glory of Jesus Christ, in whose mighty name we pray, Amen.