



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #5

B. Examples of New Testament Sermons

4. The Apostle Paul's Sermon in a Jewish Synagogue (Acts 13:14-52)

Jesus chose the apostle Paul to be His special missionary to the non-Jews or Gentiles. The book of Acts gives us several examples of the apostle Paul's preaching. Paul was brought up as a strict Pharisee. He thought that following God's law and the traditions of his people was the way to salvation. When the apostles of Jesus started teaching that the crucified Jesus was the promised Jewish Messiah, Paul (or Saul, as he was known as at first) did whatever he could to silence this talk about Jesus as the Messiah and as One who had risen from the dead. But the risen Jesus appeared personally to Paul on the road to Damascus. Jesus convinced him that He had indeed risen from the dead and was, in fact, the very Son of God and the Savior of the world. Immediately after his conversion, Paul **"preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God"** (Acts 9:20).

It was only after several years that the Christians in Antioch of Syria called Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to bring the Gospel of Christ to other towns and cities of the Roman Empire. Since Jesus was in fact the Messiah promised to the Jewish people, Paul and Barnabas usually began their work by going to the Jewish synagogues in the various cities. They informed the Jewish people that God's promises to His people had been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus was the One Moses and the prophets had written about. At the time of Paul, the Jewish people had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Most synagogue services were attended not only by the Jews but also by Gentiles who had become converts to Judaism, or at least they had become interested in the God of the Jews. These Gentiles were known as God-fearers.

Paul and Barnabas came to another city named Antioch. This was Antioch in Pisidia (now modern-day Turkey). They **"went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day"** (Acts 13:14). As fellow-Jews, Paul and Barnabas were permitted to address the worshipers. The book of Acts (Acts 13:16-41) gives us a summary of what the missionary Paul said on that historic day. No doubt it was the kind of sermon Paul preached in all of the Jewish synagogues in which he was permitted to speak.

He began by saying: **"Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen"** (Acts 13:16). He realized that his audience was made up of Jews (**"men of Israel"**) and Gentile God-fearers. In the first part of his address Paul retraced the history of the Jews from the days of Moses to King David. He recalled in particular the promise God gave to King David concerning the promised Son of David, a King who would save His people.

After reviewing Old Testament history, Paul said: **"Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent"** (Acts 13:26). Then Paul preached the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus, concerning His death by crucifixion and His resurrection from the dead. **"We declare to you glad tidings – that promise which was made to the fathers, God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus"** (Acts 13:33). After referring to several Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus, Paul arrived at the main point of his message: the meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus: **"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses"** (Acts

13: 38-39). Paul concluded by warning his audience against rejecting his message, as many of the Jews in the past had rejected their prophets.

Paul's message was appreciated more by the God-fearers than by the Jews. We read: **"The Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath"** (Acts 13:42). But many Jews also paid close attention. **"Many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas"** (Acts 13:43). **"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God"** (Acts 13:44). What a tremendous opportunity that was!

Instead of rejoicing that so many Gentiles were interested in learning more about the Jewish Messiah, the Jews **"were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul"** (Acts 13:45). This was a very typical reaction of the majority of the Jews to Paul's preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Just as many of the Jews in Palestine turned against Jesus and His message, so many of the scattered Jews in other areas turned against Paul's preaching concerning Jesus. **"Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles'"** (Acts 13:46). It was not long before the Jews stirred up some of the chief men and women of Antioch against the two missionaries and they were driven out of the city. But a Christian congregation had been formed. It was made up of some Jews and even more Gentiles. They rejoiced in the forgiveness of sins won for them by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Yes, **"the disciples (in Antioch of Pisidia) were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit"** (Acts 13:52). Glory be to God!

What can we learn about preaching the Word of God from Paul's example? First of all, we recognize that the core of the Gospel is Jesus' death for the sin of the world, His resurrection from the dead, and the forgiveness of sins. This message can be resisted, and then the forgiveness is forfeited. The Gospel will benefit only those who accept the message. Paul said: **"By Him everyone who believes is justified"** (Acts 13:39) or forgiven. Our Lord wants everyone to receive the message and be saved, but there are those who do not receive it and, therefore, lose it for themselves. In the words of Paul and Barnabas, those who rejected their message judge themselves **"unworthy of everlasting life"** (Acts 13:46). In other words, the Gospel we preach separates its listeners into two groups: those headed for eternal life by faith in Jesus, and those who reject eternal life by their rejection of the Gospel. But remember, many who reject the Gospel at first are later brought to the truth, as was the case with Paul himself.

Another thing that we can learn from Paul's sermon is that he recognized his audience and directed his words specifically towards them. Since he was addressing Jews and persons interested in Judaism, he began by talking about Jewish history. It is generally a good idea to go from the known to the unknown, to begin with something the audience is familiar with, and proceed from there to the main point. Since he was speaking to people who were acquainted with the Old Testament, he quoted the Old Testament to confirm the points he was making.

No doubt Paul was disappointed that so many of his fellow Jews refused to listen to him and even tried to prevent others from hearing him. But he was happy that so many Gentiles received the Gospel with joy. It often happens that the people that we think will listen to the Gospel reject it, while others unexpectedly become strong believers and supporters of the Gospel. We have to follow where God leads; we cannot predict in advance where He will take us.

Questions

1. What was Paul's special assignment from the risen Lord?
2. In what place did Paul usually preach when he came to a town or city?
3. Who were Paul's listeners in Antioch of Pisidia?
4. What was the subject matter of the first part of Paul's sermon?
5. Why was this especially fitting for his audience?
6. What is meant by a God-fearer?
7. What did Paul tell his audience about Jesus?
8. What is the great gift Paul offered to his listeners?
9. What happened as a result of Paul's first sermon?
10. What happened on the following Saturday?
11. What is the only way listeners can receive the benefit of the Gospel?
12. Why were Paul and his message rejected by many of his listeners?

Read Acts 17:16-34