

Acts 13

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- [0 : 0 0] Now, I'd like to think about what we have in these different passages. Paul is a very important figure in the history of the Gospel, in the history of the Christian Church.
- He was the one chosen by the Lord Jesus Christ to take the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles. To the non-Jews. And that's important for us, because that's what we are.
- Unless we're Jews, we're Gentiles. The Jews were the chosen people of God, as you know. The Gentiles were not in such a relationship with God.
- And we find them described in the New Testament as being without hope and without God in the world. But when Christ rose from the dead and returned to heaven, he told his disciples to go out with the Gospel, to proclaim it in Jerusalem where they were, in Jewish territory, in Judea, and then working towards the Gentile world, to proclaim it in Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.
- And Paul was the one particularly commissioned by Christ to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul was also the first Christian missionary sent by the Church to Europe.
- [1 : 4 8] You remember how when he and his companions were in Troas, on the west coast of Asia Minor, he had that vision of a man from Macedonia saying, come over and help us.
- And on the basis of that, Paul crossed to Europe. It wasn't called Europe then, but it is now. And he began proclaiming the truth about Jesus Christ in Macedonia and Bacchaeia, what we would call a modern Greece.
- So that's important for us too, because from those beginnings, the Gospel made its way westwards, and it crossed the English Channel, and it crossed to Ireland, and it came up eventually to Scotland.
- And the reason why we are sitting here, understanding the truth about Jesus Christ, trusting in him, if we do, seeking to follow him, and hoping in the promises of God, is because Jesus Christ sent his chosen messenger, Paul, with the Gospel.
- Now supposing you'd come to church this morning, and it wasn't any visiting preacher from Scotland, but the Apostle Paul in the pulpit.
- [3 : 1 4] What do you think he would have to say? This is the man who was entrusted with the Gospel to the Gentile world.
- What would he say? How would he go about things? Sometimes when we speculate about things, it's idle speculation.
- We know absolutely nothing that we can use to think about whatever it is, so whatever ideas we come up with, they might be interesting, but they're baseless.
- But in this case, we know how Paul went about proclaiming the Gospel. He tells us himself.
- He mentions things in his letters to the different churches. We have a record of what he said before the Roman governor and before King Agrippa towards the end of the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

[4 : 19] And Luke, who was Paul's companion at different times, also tells us how Paul went about it. Although Paul was sent as a messenger to the Gentiles, he didn't forget his fellow Jews.

And whenever he went to some new town or city, he looked for the local synagogue. And that's where he usually started, making known the truth about Jesus.

There usually were synagogues in these centres, because the Jews were a people very much involved in commerce and trade, and so were to be found all throughout the Roman Empire, and indeed beyond it.

Along with Jews who worshipped God in their synagogues, each Jewish Sabbath, there were also Gentiles. Sometimes they're called Greeks, sometimes they're called Gentiles.

These people were usually referred to as God-feeders. They weren't fully members of the people of God because they probably hadn't undergone circumcision.

[5 : 40] But they had come to realise that the God of the Jews was the true God, the creator of heaven and earth, the one who had made man and to whom man was accountable.

And they had been drawn to the God of Israel. And they had dumped their own gods and their own beliefs because they realised that these were false, and they had associated themselves with the Jews in their synagogue worship for their desire was to worship and to serve God also.

So Paul usually went to the synagogue and he proclaimed the gospel first to the Jews and to the God-feeding non-Jews that were there with them.

Both these groups had a background in the word of God, for them the Old Testament. And so that's where Paul started.

And we can see that in what we read there in chapter 13, what Paul did in the synagogue in a Pisidian Antioch.

[6 : 59] First of all, he did a very rapid and very brief summary of Jewish history. God called their forefathers and then there comes bits of history until we come to David, whom God gave them as a king in place of Saul.

And then we come to the descendant of David. And God in Old Testament times had promised that a saviour would come who would be a descendant of David, who would be a king, the king of God's people.

And unlike David and his other successors, this person's kingdom would never come to an end. And Paul identifies that descendant with Jesus, the saviour.

And then he went on to say something about the circumstances of Jesus' death in particular and the fact that God raised him from the dead.

and on the basis of that, he said, through a Jesus, God is proclaiming to you the forgiveness of sins.

[8 : 42] Through him and through faith in him, you can be put right with God, a thing that you never can be through the law of Moses.

When we read of other instances when he proclaimed the gospel in synagogues, we see that it can be summarised as repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

later on, when he was returning from one of his journeys in Asia Minor and Greece, he met with the elders of the church in Ephesus.

They came to the coast and he met with them and they talked together and played together on the beach. And in the course of his encouraging them and giving them advice and warning them of difficulties that lay ahead, he summarises his message.

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Good News Bible puts it to Jews and Gentiles alike, I gave solemn turn from their sins to God and believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 17] So there was the proclamation of the facts about Jesus, having been sent by God the Father, the facts of his life to some degree, his death on the cross and what that meant, the fact of his resurrection from the dead, and the fact of his ascension to heaven.

So Paul used the facts about Jesus, and he related these facts to what the Old Testament prophets had said about the Saviour who would come.

And by doing that, and by putting the two things as it were side by side, he said to them, this Jesus, whom I'm telling you about, is the Saviour.

He is the Messiah. He is the promised one. He is the one in whom God has fulfilled the promises that he made. And his desire in making this known to them was that they would believe it, that they would say, yes, that is true, and then would turn from their own way of thinking and living and turn to God to find forgiveness and to begin a new life in Christ.

God had sent him, said Paul, to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles. And that's what that is.

[12 : 01] Hearing and understanding the truth about Jesus Christ, turning and committing oneself to him, learning from and following him, and in that, receiving the forgiveness of sins and being brought into a new relationship with God.

Now, sometimes when the gospel is preached, manipulative methods are used to try and persuade people to become Christians.

Well, Paul never did that. Never. What he did do was he reasoned with those who were listening to him from the scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, this Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.

That's with reference to what he said in Thessalonica. Now, it's interesting, and obviously very significant, that when Jesus met up with his disciples after his resurrection, when they were all utterly desolate, because Jesus, whom they thought was the Savior, had been crucified and killed, and therefore couldn't be the Savior.

It's as his followers thought that, and as he met with them, that he explained to them how this had to happen, because that is what was written in the Old Testament scriptures.

[14 : 00] Here's his words to Cleopas and his companion, who were traveling from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. Jesus said to them, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

And Paul proclaimed the gospel in the same way. later on that evening, Jesus said to his disciples, this is what I told you while I was still with you.

Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, this is what is written, that Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.

And he sent them to be witnesses of that. And he also sent Paul with the same task. Paul didn't use manipulative methods.

[15 : 29] He reasoned. And that word comes from a Greek word that gives us our word dialogue. Paul reasoned with those to whom he spoke.

He explained. He told them what it all meant. And he gave evidence by placing Old Testament alongside the truth about Jesus.

And that clearly set out the truth that this Jesus whom he was proclaiming was the Messiah. In Corinth, and we read about that in chapter 18, we read that Paul was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.

In Ephesus, he reasoned and persuaded them about the kingdom of God. He sought to convince them by the truth that he was telling them and pressing on them to accept.

He sought to convince them that this message that he had was from God, that it was the truth, and that it was a saving truth.

[17 : 08] Now, why did Paul do it in this way? Why did he not go about with a choir and a praise band and work them up until they were sufficiently emotionally stirred and then pressed them to make a decision for Jesus Christ?

Why did he do it the way he did it? Well, I think basically because he was the messenger. It's what God sent him to do.

why did he just leave it at speaking words however clearly and trying to persuade people to respond to those words.

Well, he did it that way because he knew that he could persuade no one. It's God who alone can persuade because it takes the same power to bring a person to rebirth as it took to raise Jesus Christ from the dead.

And you'll find that in the first chapter of the letter to the Ephesians. Paul plants Apollos waters. Different people are involved in making the gospel known.

[18 : 43] Formally in this sort of way. Informally talking to people in different situations. And it's as people do that that God makes his truth active and effective in giving understanding and bringing people to repentance and to faith.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians we find exactly this and it will be helpful I think to read it.

He said we know brothers loved by God that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

you turned to God from idols as a consequence of that to serve the living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath.

that is what Paul knew a God alone could do but Paul was to take the message because that's the way God works through human messengers and he makes that message effective.

[20 : 07] Now why does God go about it this way? Well it's because God made us in his own image as rational beings with a mind with which to receive communication from God and to communicate with God.

A mind to reflect on information and come to a decision as a result and with a will to act upon what we decide.

That's the way we go about the business of life. That's the way we go about the business of our salvation. Taking in the truth about Jesus Christ, reading about it in the scriptures, thinking about it, coming to understand what it means as God gives us this understanding, seeing how we should respond, wanting to belong to Jesus Christ and not to go our own way any longer, seeing the wrongness of the way we have related to God, turning to him, seeking his forgiveness forgiveness for this and asking Jesus Christ to be our Savior and the Lord of our life.

Believing the gospel and trusting in Jesus Christ is not a matter of a blind, irrational leap in the dark. That has got nothing to do with faith.

faith. It's a matter of receiving truth, understanding the truth, and deciding to believe it and to follow the one about whom it speaks.

[22 : 06] things. Whenever we hear the gospel, whenever we read the gospel, although we may not realize it, something important is happening.

God is speaking to us. Now, you may think that that's a very silly thing to say, but that's what we read in God's own word.

This has not just been done as an exercise in public speaking, whenever it's done. Things don't come into your hands that talk about the gospel by accident.

Nobody is in a place where the gospel is to be heard by accident. That doesn't mean to say you believe the gospel, but it means that God is presenting you with the truth about his Son, and that's the most important truth you will ever hear.

And God is presenting it to you because he wants you to believe it and to turn to him through Jesus Christ as a consequence.

[23 : 34] Paul said that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. That's what the cross was all about. And as a consequence of that, he has sent messengers into the world, the apostles first of all, to say to people who hear the gospel from them.

Be reconciled to God. That's really what God says when the gospel comes to us. Be reconciled to me.

And to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, that is life eternal. Well, may God bless to us what we've seen here from his word.

Let's join in prayer. We thank you, Lord, for your word, for the wonder of the message, that you were reconciling yourself to this rebellious, defiant, contemptuous, disobedient world.

He bore the guilt and he bore the punishment. And in this way you did justice with regard to man's sin. And it is also through him that you offer to us the forgiveness of sins and call us to be reconciled to you through Jesus Christ, your son, that we may come aligned to you in him.

[25 : 10] So bless your word to us and to all who hear it today throughout the world. And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.