

LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS, PART 2

Acts 13:15-39

In Acts we've started talking about being lights in the darkness. Biblically, witnesses are like lights in a dark world. Philippians 2:15 says we appear as lights in the world, among a crooked and perverse generation. So what does it look like to be an *effective* light in the darkness? A bright and *winsome* light? As witnesses, we cannot save anyone but we can be part of winning them to Christ as we point them to Him (Prov. 11:30). That's what we'll continue discussing – some key witnessing principles from Acts 13.

This is a **pivotal chapter** in the book of Acts and the entire Luke-Acts narrative. Luke and Acts are like 2 volumes of 1 story by 1 author recording the **gospel advancement to all nations**. We did a lot of this background work last week that I won't keep repeating in depth, but I do want to note how Luke 2 begins with a man named **Simeon** quoting a prophecy from **Isaiah** that Jesus would be a **Light to the Gentiles**. This child would bring about the rise and fall of many in Israel. He would be a stumbling block. Well, fast forward to Acts 13 and what do we see? Many of the Jews starting to reject and oppose their own Messiah and the gospel message. Instead, the Gentiles become more receptive. **Paul** too, quotes **Isaiah** at the end of chapter 13 about how the Lord has commanded us to be **lights to the Gentiles**, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

This Jew & Gentile reception was highlighted in the first few verses of the chapter by the way Saul, a Hebrew name, starts to go by Paul, a **Roman** name, signifying his becoming the **leading apostle to the Gentiles** (Rom. 11:13). Remember, **Sergius Paulus** a **Roman** governor, believes and a **Jewish** sorcerer named **Bar-Jesus**, opposes the gospel and is blinded in his unbelief. Luke records this because it was just a taste of what is going to happen throughout Paul's ministry and the reaction that will happen in greater portion among the crowds respond to his gospel message that we study today: **Gentiles rejoice & the Jews persecute**. And this is quite the privilege we have today of studying **Paul's first recorded sermon** in detail. Luke recorded more sermons than anyone. And this one is in the **first missionary journey at Pisidian Antioch** in south central **Asia Minor (Turkey/Galatia)**.

*15 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." 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God [God fearers might be non-Jewish attenders who respect or believe in Israel's God], listen: 17 **The God of this people Israel chose our fathers** and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. 18 For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. 19 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 and fifty years. 20 After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 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. 22 After He had removed*

him, 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.' 23 From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, 24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 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.'

The outline for today is just a brief, 2 part outline of Paul's sermon.

I. **GOD'S PROMISE TO SEND THE SAVIOR. (VV. 15-25)**

In a typical fashion, like Peter's message and Stephen's message, Paul **traces Jesus through Jewish history** and his guidance of that nation, **connecting Jesus with the promise to their forefathers** like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If anyone claimed to be the Messiah, they had to be connected to them and **David**. The Messiah had to come through their posterity because that was God's promise (v. 23). Paul demonstrates Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise, supported by the ministry of **John** who preceded Him.

Because they were a chosen and unique nation for God, Israelites understood the importance of repetitively teaching their history and passing it on. In the *Shema*, the basic Jewish confession of faith from **Deuteronomy 6:4-8** which they recited daily, they reminded themselves of **who God is** (there is one God), **how they should love Him** (with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength), and **how they should teach His ways and their story to their children**. "*You shall teach them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.*" The children needed to hear their history and calling so that they would be faithful to the God who would one day send the Messiah. The recitation of history like this in Paul's speech or Stephen's speech in Acts 7 shows us they understood **history is important to faith**. In order to exercise faith intelligently today, we need to know what He has done in the past. This is an excellent witnessing principle for us because many use history to discredit the gospel/truth.

Lights connect Jesus with biblical history.

In refuting false arguments and teaching, we need to connect Jesus with true history. What I don't mean by that is that we have to go through a complete Jewish history lesson with everyone when we witness – great approach in the synagogue but probably not with your neighbor. What I mean is that we should go back to Genesis more often and explain **why we need a Savior**. Without God's historical works and promises, the faith makes no sense. Why should I trust in Jesus as my Savior if I don't see my need for one? If I don't understand man is fell in sin in the garden?

Most people believe in evolution and that there is no God. Because they've forgotten God, they've forgotten who man is. When you lose sight of God, you lose sight of man – you don't understand anthropology. It's so bad now we don't even know what a man or woman is anymore. Not understanding our origins keeps us from operating correctly in the present. More and more we're

dealing with an unchurched culture who has zero basic understanding of God or Christianity or the Bible or creation. More and more we have to start from scratch and that means returning to the beginning and tracing the promise of the Savior. Satan knows that men are less likely to look for a Redeemer if they don't believe they have a Creator. So it's incredibly helpful to take people back to Genesis 1-2 and show them God's ideal: He longs for a relationship with them in paradise. But then show them Genesis 3: Man sinned and creation fell with it.

In my B.C. days of as a seeker, I read a book called "*Creation vs. Evolution*" which I think laid the foundation for my heart's reception to the gospel. When I started to look at the world and myself through the lens of a Creator God rather than an evolutionary accident, I began to see what's really wrong with the world and why my plans were frustrated. But also I began to appreciate creation and thank God for little things like rain or the animals I harvested hunting. I began to sense the love and charity and goodness of God with His continual provisions for us. I began to think if God created me, He probably wants a relationship with me. It made His work of coming into this world as a man to die for man's sins more logical. *He would do that for me?*

When I go to share the gospel in some straightforward matter, I usually tell people about how God created us for a relationship with Him but that we've been separated from Him because of sin. But **God made a promise right there in Genesis 3:15, as soon as man sinned, that He would send a redeemer to fix the sin problem. That promise is reaffirmed throughout the OT** and His coming is what we celebrate at **Christmas** – God took on flesh, becoming a sinless man. At just the right time, He died for our sins and rose again from the dead – what we celebrate at **Easter** – to save us and justify us. **God kept His promise.**

By the way, I was reminded of how disappointing it is when a promise is broken. I've been remodeling our bathroom some and I order a brad nailer/air compressor combo from Ace. Now I really like Ace and it's really out of their hands, but I was told the tools would be there the next week. So I go back the next week and nothing. So I gave it 2 weeks. When I went back, they said, "*We checked the statues and it will be here next Wednesday.*" I go in a week later to nothing but apologies. Again, not their fault but broken promises can be very disappointing. The good news is God cannot not keep His promises. There are some things God can't do: like break promises.

As Paul continues his message, he seems to anticipate their questioning their questioning God's fulfillment of His promise: "*If Jesus is the Messiah, why did He die and where is His kingdom?*" I think you have to remember many of the Jews were expecting the Rome-conquering Messiah of the 2nd coming but didn't understand or desire the prophecies about the Messiah's 1st coming to suffer. So Paul helps them understand the Messiah's crucifixion was part of the promise! (Is. 53).

II. GOD'S PROMISE KEPT IN THE SAVIOR. (VV. 26-39)

26 "*Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent.* 27 *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. 28 And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 But God raised Him from the dead; 31 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. 32 And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.' 34 As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' 35 Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.' 36 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; 37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. 38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

So Paul demonstrates through Scripture that it is unmistakably clear that Jesus is the fulfillment. Three times he quotes Scripture and shows them prophecies like **Psalm 16:10 couldn't have been fulfilled in David**. David is in a tomb down the road, but Jesus isn't. He rose from the dead! Paul knows that the way to the Jewish heart is through the Scriptures. He talks about how Jesus has **fulfilled the Scriptures** and that **they carried out what was written of Him** without knowing it, giving further credence to the fact that God did this! His crucifixion wasn't an accident, it was actually a fulfillment. These prophecies were written so that they would know Jesus is the One they've been expecting. But this leads us to another principle:

Lights reason and persuade from Scripture.

Using Scripture is **thee most effective way to witness**. Why? Because for one, the Spirit of God inspired it. It's His Word that He works through. **2 Peter 1:21** says, "*For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*" We call this the doctrine of **inspiration**. Like a ship filled the wind and carried along, men moved by the Holy Spirit wrote down the words of God without error and without destroying their personality or literary style. Paul commends the Thessalonians in **1 Thessalonians 2:13** for their proper reception of this: "*we constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.*"

Another reason to persuade from Scripture is because it is **powerful**. It performs. It penetrate the darkest heart. **Hebrews 4:12** says, "*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*" In other words, this book has a quality unlike any other. It's alive and active. It does something in people, bringing them to faith and transforming them. It convicts people of their sin and their need for a Savior. The Word of

God is what people need. That's why Paul charged young pastor Timothy to **preach the word** because there is so much nonsense and false teaching out there ruining peoples' lives but God has communicated with us to restore us from bondage and to a relationship with Himself.

In **2 Timothy 3:16-17** says to Timothy, *"All Scripture is inspired by God [God-breathed] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work... Preach the word."* Whenever I read think I can't help but think of all the psychology and secular counselors out there trying to help people – I mean really trying to help. But *how can you really help people if you don't know the Word of God?* If you don't know the Word, you don't understand truth to operate by. If you don't know the Bible's teachings, you don't understand anthropology. You don't understand who man is and what he is made of and what's wrong with him and how to properly diagnose him and point him to hope and peace and life in Christ or set him on the path to eternal purpose and flourishing. **If we want to be people who can really help people and be a useful for God – we've got to give ourselves to study of the Word. Scripture is sufficient to fully equip you.**

Another reason why you reason with people from Scripture is because when you do, they understand that it's not just you trying to force your beliefs on them. If anyone forces their belief system down our throats constantly, it's evolutionary atheists with their belief system. But we should witness in such a way that people **see what the Bible has to say and not just what you have to say.** I would even take your Bible and turn it around and let them read it when you witness. Let them read it out loud. Say, *"What does this verse say?"* Two reasons for that: 1) the Spirit convicts them more when they read and process it in their mind (don't do all the thinking for them). 2) When you are relying on Scripture to communicate the truth, they aren't arguing with you, but with the authoritative Word of God – which is really difficult to do because it doesn't apologize.

Let's also take note Paul's repetition of central truths. Did you notice any repeated content? *"put Him to death"; "took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb"; "God raised Him from the dead"; "He appeared"; "He raised up Jesus"; "He raised Him up from the dead"*.

Lights proclaim key gospel truths: death, burial and resurrection.

Based on observations from all of the witnessing accounts and sermons in the New Testament (Acts 2:22-24; 3:11-15, 18; 4:5-12, 33; 5:30-31; 1-:39-40, 43; 13:28-30, 33; 17:30-31; 26:22-23; Romans 1:3, 4; 1 Cor. 15:1-6), it can be said that **we cooperate fully or cooperate the most with the Holy Spirit when the key gospel truths are presented.** People need to know Jesus died for their sins, He was buried, and He rose again from the dead 3 days later so that those who believe are justified. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation/justification. That word **justification** that is the heart of the gospel. It's the **same word twice used for "freed" in verse 39.**

The question, *"How is a sinner justified before God?"* is the most important question there is. *"How can I be made right with a holy God? How can I have a perfect position before God? Restored to Him?"* That question sparks the first Church council in Acts 15. That question caused

the Reformation 500 years ago. That question is the greatest debate in the Church today. That question is the single greatest issue when you witness and the single greatest issue relating to your eternal destiny. How you answer that question determines where you end up – eternity with God or separated from Him forever in eternal punishment in hell. ***How are we justified?***

Many people out there teach it is **by works**: “If I’m good enough, God will let me into heaven.” Some teach salvation **by grace and works**: “I’m saved by grace, but I’ve also got to do my part – my religious works and good works. I earn or merit more grace through my works.” What does the Bible teach? But what does Paul teach? What does Jesus’ true witnesses teach?

Lights teach that justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

It is by **grace alone**, meaning it’s free. Jesus paid it all. But that free gift is received by faith. **Through faith** meaning we’re trusting something or believing in something... what are we trusting in? who are we believing in? Ourselves and our goodness and our good works? No. We trust, or depend on, or believe in **Christ alone** who died for our sins and rose again. Christ who offers us salvation as a gift because of what He has done for us. The one condition to receive it is not works but faith: *“Faith is not merely believing certain truths about Him; it means you are depending upon Him to do what He has promised to do, to give eternal life to those who believe.”*

Romans 3:21-26 is the hallmark of pure gospel teaching: *“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus... He is the just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of Law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law.”*

Romans 4:4-5 says, *“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”*

If you’re here today and you’ve never trusted in Christ as your Savior, because I care about you I want you to know that you stand before Him condemned. Your eternal destiny is eternal punishment in hell. John 3:17-18 says *“He who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”* But it also says, “God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” God loves you so much He sent His Son to die for your sins so that He could offer you eternal life as a free gift. If you would like to receive that gift, you might express that to God in prayer right where you sit right now and say, *“Lord, I’m a sinner and I know it. My sin has broken my relationship with you but I want that relationship to be restored and I trust in Jesus alone as my Savior, the One who paid for my sin. I want to know You more and learn to walk with you in Christ.”* Remember it’s not the prayer that saves you but faith in Christ’s work for you.