

Title: A Glorious Inconvenience
Text: Acts 13:1-3
Theme: The glory of Christ as the goal of the gospel
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: The glory of Christ is the goal of the gospel, therefore anything that I do to pursue that goal is worth it.

Read Text:

I am looking at a number of people right now who have worked for years to accomplish a particular goal. One of you has set your sights on being a firefighter for Detroit. Others of you have worked for years to pass your CPA exam, or the bar to being an attorney. Some of you have worked to get your electrical license, teacher certificate, nursing license or passing medical boards. Last Sunday, Gary Woodland won the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach after a number of years as a pro and never winning a major tournament. When you set your sights on a difficult and yet noble goal and you give your life to the pursuit of that goal, there is an incredible sweetness that comes from fulfilling that dream.

Now, there is a difference between merely existing and living. Here is what I want you to chew on. God is Sovereign. Everything he does is for a purpose. Your life is not an accident. You are here for a God-ordained purpose. Do you know that and do you know what that purpose is?

So, what is your dream? What are you doing to pursue that dream? Is your dream big enough? Is your dream the same as God's purpose for your life? If your dream is not the same as God's purpose for your life, your dream is not big enough.

What if you pursued a dream that when fulfilled would be more glorious than anything you could ever imagine? Earlier in the service we read from Revelation 4. The vision that John has there continues into chapter 5. (read)

- 1) God's dream (pre-determined plan) is the installation of his Son as King and the glad worship of Christ by the Redeemed Creation.

This event is the apex of history. This is the moment that all of creation has been waiting for. This is when the world (universe) recognizes the true King as The King. Where are we in this vision? We are part of the myriads of happy worshippers who are around the throne. We are not in the center of the vision. Jesus is. We are not the one being worshipped, Jesus is. We are not the one who was worthy to open the scroll, Jesus is because Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David who by his life, death and resurrection has conquered sin and death. (gospel) This event is the purpose of history. The purpose of history centers upon the glory of Jesus. Jesus is worth a beautiful bride. Jesus is worth a people who love him more than anything else. Jesus is worth a people who love one another more than themselves. Jesus is worth a beautiful, a unified, a happy, a pure, a holy, kind, loving, gracious and thoughtful people because a beautiful, unified, happy, pure, holy, kind, loving, gracious and thoughtful people are a reflection of Jesus and Jesus is worth reflecting. He is worth imitating. He is worth imaging. That is why God created us. He created us in his image because he is worth imaging. Only Jesus can

save. Only Jesus can forgive. Only Jesus can justify. Only through Jesus can we be adopted, sanctified, and glorified. We can't do any of that. Therefore, everything that we do should be done in order to put the attention on Jesus. (because)

2) Jesus is the Center of the Universe (not you).

But, that goal, that vision of one people around the throne of God, has been neglected and even lost because the church has had a misplaced emphasis upon certain aspects of the story in Acts that has obscured the actual point of this book. I want to explain that. And this is a good time in our study of Acts to stop and do that.

The message and mission of the church is centered upon the work and glory of Jesus. Jesus accomplished our salvation and Jesus will be crowned King and will receive glory. Therefore, our lives now together as the people of God are to be centered upon Jesus. Your life is not about you, it is about Jesus. Your life now, and our lives now are to be a dress rehearsal for the life to come. The church is supposed to prepare people for eternity. Eternity centers upon Jesus, not on you or me. But, something has happened. Contemporary Christianity has turned the message of the gospel into a method for self-improvement, or how to overcome problems and get power and how the church is supposed to help me achieve my goals in life. "What is in it for me" has subtly replaced "how do we make much of Christ".

A friend of mine decided to take a trip for his 40th birthday and go on a two-week trek to the Mount Everest Base Camp. From the base camp you could go on some other hikes, one being to Kala Patthar which is said to give the hiker the most magnificent views of Mt. Everest in the world. Kala Patthar is Nepalese for "black rock" because that particular foothill is made up of billions of black pebbles. My friend was hiking with his guide, Samdan and was driving him crazy with his questions. "Where did these black rocks come from?" "I don't know." "Well, what do you think they are made of?" "I don't know." "How many of them are there? Why are they black anyway?" Samdan finally swept his arm across the mountain peaks and said, "Mister Greg, all this, . . . why do you keep looking at the pebbles?"

3) Our dream has to align with God's dream.

Therefore, our pursuit of joy, our pursuit of meaning, our pursuit of our purpose has to be centered upon Jesus and upon what matters to him. Anything else is not going to be big enough nor secure enough to hold the weight of your happiness.

This is what has tended to happen in our era when people study the book of Acts. They get fixated on speaking in tongues, which turns into a hot mess. Now, to my Pentecostal and charismatic friends, I want to say, I am grateful for their sincerity and devotion. But look at the mountain range! Instead, here is how they have tended to read the book of Acts. In Acts 2, the believers spoke in tongues and great power was displayed so that thousands of people came to faith in Jesus. In Acts 9, the believers were baptized by the Holy Spirit (and presumably spoke in tongues, though the text does not state it explicitly, I believe it is implied) and many people came to faith in Christ. In Acts 10, the people in Cornelius' home heard the gospel, believed, spoke in tongues and there was a great event obviously orchestrated and empowered by the Spirit of God.

People read this. People who love Jesus and trust Jesus and want other people to love and trust Jesus read this and they conclude that if they could experience speaking in tongues, then power would be poured out and people would get saved and the church would become awesome, just like the book of Acts. And the reason why the church is not experiencing Pentecost power is because people do not have enough faith to believe that God is still the same miracle-working God now that he was then. And the reason why you are not experiencing power in your life over sickness, or finances or over a lousy marriage, or a faulty emission sensor in your car is because you do not have enough faith to believe that God is the still miracle working God now that he was then. If only you could speak in tongues, then power would come upon you and you could rise above the defeat that is in your life and put it back in its place. Hold the phone! That perspective on the book of Acts, misses the point. Yes, 3,000 people were saved on the day of Pentecost. But did that happen every day after that? No. Did they speak in tongues? Well, they did, the text doesn't say that this continued. And initially, the church experienced some wonderful growth, but then conflicts arose within and persecution from without and the life of the church in Jerusalem settled into a more normal routine, punctuated by persecution (Stephen, then James) and then a major famine. That doesn't sound too appealing.

When the gospel hit Samaria, there was an initial public display of the Spirit's power and the conversion of many people. This happened at Cornelius' house and now in Antioch (Acts 11). It is not that every new location had such a visible demonstration of the Spirit's power. In the weeks to come when we read of the gospel going to Athens, Berea, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica and Lystra, there is nothing said about tongues, why not? The gift of tongues is poured out when a new people group is reached with the gospel to show everyone else that they this people group is to be accepted into the body, just like everyone else. In some cases, like Samaria and Antioch, there is an initial impact of the gospel on a larger scale but those churches, like the church in Jerusalem settled into a new norm. Every day was not Pentecost. The normal means of God growing his church and reaching people is through the faithful witness of the Word by the preaching of the church, discipling of believers, church membership, observing the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table and the ongoing testimony, holiness, unity and joy of her people.

This is very similar to what happened in Eastern Europe when the grip of Communism was broken. In one of the most famous moments of his presidency, President Ronald Reagan, challenged Mikhail Gorbachev (leader of Russia) to tear down the Berlin wall which separated the democracy of West Germany from the Communism of East Germany. When that wall came down, and communism started collapsing in East Germany, Romania, Russia and the other soviet bloc countries, people started to flood the churches. It looked like Pentecost. Hundreds and thousands of people were coming to Christ, and the churches were overrun with new believers and the few leaders were swamped. They appealed to the west and we responded. But, after a bit, things settled down, and a new norm was established and those wild days of growth and glory have now given way to days of ministry like the rest of us, where we plant, water, weed, fertilize, water, weed, water, weed, and along the way enjoy some harvest.

Beloved, we do not come to the book of Acts looking for some kind of a formula, secret sauce, or high-octane ingredient that will launch our church into an awesome mega-church that is the

envy of the nation. That dream has been tried and has been found wanting and in the pursuit of that dream, there have been plenty of people chewed up and spit out in the process. That dream is not big enough and is not worth dying for. Jesus is. Jesus is worth people who are natural born enemies living in love and devotion with one another.

Some of you are tempted to pursue the retirement dream, the American dream, the fitness dream, the education dream, the healthy dream, the success dream, the career dream, the travel dream or the family dream. And you are giving so much of your life to that dream and I am trying to tell you that it is the wrong dream. That dream cannot hold the weight of your happiness. And if you are pursuing that dream then your perception on life is based on how well you are getting along with your dream. If what I really care is about running or golf, then if my times are good and my drives are straight, then I am doing okay, even though there are unreached people groups in this world that I do not give any thought or prayer to. If what I really care about is my 401k or a new truck, then if the stock market is going up, interest rates are going down and my salary is increasing, then I am doing okay, even though there are unreached people groups in this world right now that I do not even worry about informing myself of.

If my goal is comfort, then Acts 13.1-3 may sound interesting, but not be compelling. But, if you understand the story, the real story and if you understand and embrace your part in the real story, then Acts 13.1-3 is fascinating, exciting and resonating. When you see that your life is to be part of our life together as the people of God and that we, together are centered around Jesus, then the fame of Jesus is what matters to us. The fame of Jesus is more important to us than anything.

When the fame of Jesus is more important than anything else then:

I. We will be a church that reflects the plan of God. (1)

Look at the leadership in the church at Antioch. These five men are the prophets (preachers) and teachers. Barnabas was a Jew, native of Cyprus who was recently from Jerusalem and was sent to Antioch to help. Simeon was from Africa. Lucius had a Roman name, and was from Libya. Manaen, which is the Greek form of a Hebrew name, was probably a Jew who had been raised in a Hellenistic culture. That makes sense because he is described as being a member of the court of Herod, the tetrarch. Manaen was raised like a foster brother to Herod. Last week I said that the NT is full of Herods who are always ruling and killing people. This Herod was the Herod who killed John the Baptist and who participated rather indifferently in the trial of Jesus. He was the son of Herod the Great who was king when Christ was born and he was the uncle of the Herod who in chapter 12 killed James and attempted to kill Peter. Then you have Saul, a full-blooded Jew from the tribe of Benjamin. So, you have Jew, African, European ethnicities, Jewish, Nigerian, Cyrenian, Cyprian and Hellenistic cultures all reflected in the leadership of the church.

Back in chapter 11 we were told that this church was making such an impact upon the city of Antioch that people in the city called them Christians. There were many people in this church and they were being discipled. The diversity of leadership makes it evident that there was a serious commitment to fellowship. These brothers were together for the gospel. They had to work through cultural differences by spending a lot of time learning from one another, listening to one another, deferring to one another, preferring one another, loving one another and serving

one another. This is not automatic. Finding men who work well together is a big deal, and finding them from all of these different backgrounds who function well together is supernatural. But that is what the church is called to be. What language did they speak? What did the songs sound like? What did they eat and drink? Did the women sit on one side and the men on the other? What did they wear? Did the women have to have a head covering? Was it offensive to wear your sandals into the meeting? When did they meet? They had to work through all of these issues, which meant that there were many things that were inconvenient. But, there was something that held them together. They understood the plan for the church. Jesus was more important to them than their culture and preferences.

If you are under 40, are you happy to sing old hymns because the 80-year old next to you is well blessed by them? If you are over 70 are you happy to sing some new hymns because the 20-year old next to you is well blessed by them? If you were raised singing choruses and lite rock Christian ditties, are you happy to sing some serious gospel because your black brother or sister is well blessed by it? Those kind of questions do not even enter your mind if you only know and hang out with people who are just like you. Is Jesus and his church so important to you that you will hang out with people in this church beyond your family and already established friend group? When Jesus is really important to us...

II. We will be a church that is serious about God. (2a)

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting.” I take the “they” in v.2 to refer to the church and not just the leaders. Luke describes the life of the church as one where there is extended time and serious devotion given to the Lord. They were worshiping the Lord and fasting. The means that they had set aside significant time to focus on the Lord and to ask him to show them what they ought to do. Based on this, we can assume that they had made it a priority to gather together. This is what a church does. We gather together on the first day of the week. And when they gathered together, they prayed. They sang. They heard God’s Word. They confessed their sin and prayed for the spread of the gospel. “God, we want to see the fame of Jesus spread to all the nations. We know that we are commanded to get the gospel to the ends of the earth, show us how we are to do this. We will follow your lead. We want to be obedient to you and your plan. We are going to wait upon you. Instead of eating, today we are going to take that time and pray and seek your face.” Does that sound like anything that you have ever heard in church before?

We are more likely to hear and we are more likely to say, “I don’t think that we will be at church today. I just don’t see how. Hunter has a baseball game at 12.30 or my niece’s shower is at noon or we’re getting back late Saturday night from a concert or, it’s been a long week, and I just like some me time, or we’re trying to get this remodeling project finished or there is a great sale going on today.” And you know what? I can understand that. I can understand why people think of the church as being a convenience rather than a conviction because when the church feels more like entertainment and therapy that is centered around me, instead of being crushed with concern about others not knowing about Christ, then why wouldn’t it be optional? When Jesus is important to us, we will be serious about worship and giving up food because we want to pray because Jesus is more important to us than eating. I would seriously be thrilled if I could get you to read your Bible and pray five times a week.

III. We will be a church that loves others more than our selves. (2b-3)

The Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then they fasted and prayed some more and sent them off. They sent off Barnabas and Saul! They sent off their best. That was a sacrifice! Why would they send their best? They cared more about others than they did themselves. And sending them meant that they had to fund them, right? But, for Barnabas and Saul to go and for this church to send them, wasn’t that radical. It sounds radical to us, but it wasn’t to them because the worship of God, fasting in order to hunger for God, giving up stuff that doesn’t matter for the sake of others was all part of their life together as a church. Being a member of the church in Antioch was not convenient.

Beloved, what kind of a church do we want to be? I know that we could do a number of things in order to make it more convenient and easier. I could skip some of the tough stuff, soften some of the edges, but what kind of a church do we want to be? How important is Jesus? Sure, we can make it convenient, but then don’t expect the Spirit of God to call any of us as missionaries, because that is a message and a ministry that is not worth reproducing. Let’s be a church that really is worth Jesus dying for.

Universal Studios in Orlando just opened the new Harry Potter ride. On the opening day the line to ride the ride extended over a mile. People waited for 10 hours (some reports say 13) in order to ride the 3-minute ride. You can sacrifice your life what matters or waste it on little dreams that don’t.

Fasting – Longing for the fame of Jesus

Loving – unity for the fame of Jesus

Witnessing – a big choir for the fame of Jesus