

Title: The Controversial Gospel
Text: Acts 13.13-52
Theme: How the gospel always creates controversy
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: The gospel that saves is the gospel that causes chaos

A new Ebola outbreak is taking place in the Democratic Republic of Congo near the borders of Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan. In the last few years a highly effective vaccine has been developed and funded so that outbreaks are no longer necessary. Ebola can be treated and it can be prevented. So, why is there an outbreak? Some of the people do not trust the government and anyone associated with them. Rumors about officials using Ebola as a ruse to steal bodily organs do not help. Others spread lies in order to create unrest and take advantage of the chaos to gain control. Health care workers have been attacked while attempting to save lives, including the highly publicized killing of a physician serving with Doctors without Borders.

This doctor, giving his time, giving up his comforts, motivated by compassion is shot to death by people fearing that he is part of some conspiracy. It is maddening and grievous when people are attacked when all they are trying to do is help. Not only are good people attacked, but the disease, that could be stopped, is allowed to spread. The cure is effective, but unnecessarily controversial.

A similar scene unfolds in the city of Antioch of Pisidia. This is not the same Antioch that we learned about at the beginning of this chapter which was located in Northwest Syria, but the Antioch that is located in the far western region of Galatia (map). After a promising time in Cyprus, where the gospel is seen to take root among the people, Paul, Barnabas and John Mark set sail north and west for the city of Perga. At this point, John Mark has apparently had enough leaves Barnabas and Paul and gets on a boat in order to go back home to Jerusalem.

I. **Be ready to share the gospel.** (13-41)

After Paul and Barnabas arrive in Antioch, they went into the local synagogue on the Sabbath and sat down. As was the custom the Scriptures were read with a text selected from the Law and a text from the Prophets. The rulers of the synagogue ask if Paul and Barnabas would like to say something. Ha! Would they like to say something? That is why they are there! Beloved, we need to think like that. The other day, one of our members went to see his dermatologist and when the doctor came into the room, he asked, “How are you doing?” Our member said, “Better than I deserve.” The doctor asked, “Why do you say that?” And our brother explained the gospel to this doctor. After all, the guy asked, right? Well, that is what happened here. The rulers of the synagogue sent word to Paul and Barnabas to see if they had any encouragement for the people and all we can say, “well you asked.”

What happens next is a wonderful little sermon that Paul preaches to his Jewish audience (and proselytes – “you who fear God” – 16b). Later in Acts, we will read addresses that Paul gives to other audiences, but this one is perfectly suited to the members of this synagogue. What he says takes about 3 minutes and 10 seconds. Paul is respectful of the time and covers the essentials of

the gospel. When I teach the Exploring Membership class, I repeatedly review the essentials of the gospel and they are: God, man, Christ, and response. (repeat)

GOD created this world and the human race for his glory, pleasure and our joy. But, **WE** rebelled. Every single one of us have rebelled against God. we have attempted to make up our own rules, follow our own way and do our own thing. And God would have been perfectly just to condemn us for our rebellion. But, instead of condemning us, God sent his own **SON**, to this earth in order to do for us, what we could not do for ourselves. Jesus lived a perfect life in our place and then he died a horrible death as the payment for our sin. When you understand that, and you **TURN** from your sin and you trust in Christ alone as your savior, your righteousness, and your king, you are forgiven of your sin. You are forgiven of all of your sin. You are declared righteous by God and adopted forever into his family, where you will live forever.

Look at how Paul covers the same four points but he explains them in a way that is helpful for his audience. And because his audience is either Jewish or sympathetic to and supportive of the Jewish faith, and therefore recognizes the authority of the OT scriptures Paul supports his points from the OT scriptures. This is like picking low-hanging fruit. They already believe in God. They already believe in the OT scriptures. They already believe in their sin and in their need for forgiveness. And they already believe in the coming of the Messiah. So, Paul is able to utilize this common ground. It is beautiful. He starts with God and he weaves these other points together so that by the end the message is clear. We are sinners who need a Savior and God has provided that Savior in Jesus whom we have to trust.

A. **God** (17ff.)

As Paul is reviewing the OT story line, he is ensuring the fact that the God he believes in the same God that they do. This is the God of our fathers. The God who called Abraham and who delivered our people from Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan. We all agree that Saul was the first king and that David was the next king and what is understood is that the Messiah was going to come from the line of David.

The next two aspects of the gospel (man's need and Christ's provision) are presented together since the provision of Christ's salvation was secured by his death on the cross and his rejection and execution was proof of their need for a Savior. The Jews killed the Messiah. That is shocking! Like the Ebola outbreak, they murdered the very one who came to rescue them.

B. **Man** (18 ff.)

Paul does not spend a lot of time initially talking about Israel's failure, but that line in verse 18, "*he put up with them in the wilderness*" is an understatement of Israel's failure.

C. **Christ** (23 ff.)

Christ is in the line of David. Christ was promised by John the Baptist. Christ was the fulfillment of the prophets that you listen to every Sabbath in the Synagogue. Paul then, quotes some of the Psalms and Prophets that point to Christ. He then points out a powerful fact. David, the greatest

king of Israel, the apparent hero of the OT said in Psalm 16, that “you (God) will not see your Holy One suffer corruption.” Paul points out the obvious. David could not have been speaking of himself because he died and his body decomposed in his tomb. David had to be talking about someone else, someone who was greater than David. That is Jesus. Jesus did what David could not do, therefore the followers of Jesus have benefits that David’s people never had. David died and his body saw corruption. Jesus died and he rose again. Therefore, (and beloved this is a huge therefore) all of this builds to this moment when Paul says...(v.38-39)

What had they believed up until now? They believed that forgiveness of sins was through their adherence to the OT law. This had to be a source of anxiety for them. They lived in Galatia. They were not in the land of Israel. They were not close to the Temple. How many of them were able to go back and offer sacrifices for their sins? What if they were not able to get back and they died? What hope did they have for their forgiveness? Probably, many of them were hoping that by being a faithful member of a synagogue, that this would count for something. But now, comes this. It is not through the law. It is not through participating in the OT sacrificial system. It is through Christ (through this man) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

“And by him everyone **who believes** (response)

D. **Response** (39)

is freed (justified – declared righteous) from everything from which you could not be freed (justified – declared righteous) by the law of Moses.” The word that is translated as freed is the word for justification. This is good news. This is great news! This is awesome news!! These people knew the law. The law cannot save you, it can condemn you. It is good in that it makes you aware of how much you need to be forgiven, but it cannot provide you with a lasting forgiveness. Jesus can!

Let me do a quick review of justification. Justification is a legal term that means to be declared righteous. When you repent of your sin and come to faith in Christ, that is believe in what Christ has accomplished (perfect life, substitutionary death, resurrection) in your place, then your sin (all of your sin – say it with me – all of your sin) is placed on Christ. He is credited with your sin. He is viewed as and treated as if he committed all of your sin. Your addictions, your faithlessness, your broken promises, your immorality, your self-righteousness, your hypocrisy, your pride, your gluttony, your deceit, etc. Christ takes it all upon himself and he died for it. He died in your place. His death paid for your sin. And because he offered up a perfect life, his payment was a perfect payment that paid for all of your sin. There is nothing left for you to pay. Therefore, when you come to faith in Christ, your sin is credited to Christ and his perfectly righteous life is credited to you. You are declared righteous and treated as if every good thing that Jesus did – you did. Now, you didn’t do it, but you get credit for it as if you did.

Reread v.39! This is huge!! There is nothing in all of this world that is more important than this. A few weeks ago Mike told us about a guilt that he carried for years that almost destroyed his life. But he understands the gospel. That weight is not his to carry. Jesus did that for him. He is freed! He is justified. He is cleansed. He is not guilty. In fact, he is righteous. Recently a gal was baptized and she told us how she came to faith in Christ. She used to wear black and only wear

black because she felt dark on the inside. But she has trusted in Jesus and for the first time in years she doesn't wear just black.

I love to share the gospel with Roman Catholics. Like Paul with the Jews, I have so much in common with Roman Catholics. There is so much that we believe that is in common. What they do not realize is the doctrine of justification. Those who take it seriously are bound. They are trapped. They are depressingly and anxiously, bound by the weight of works righteousness. They are trying to earn something that has already been paid for. I love to show them that it's done. It's already done. Jesus paid it all. You cannot add anything to it. For those who take it seriously and have no assurance that their good is good enough, they are thrilled to hear this. But, for those who want to pay for it themselves, who want to earn it on their own (which they cannot) who do not want to accept the seriousness of their sin, or who think that being Catholic is the ticket, the gospel is a threat. Paul warns his audience of that in verses 40-41. He quotes again from the OT to prove his point to them. This news is amazing, but it cannot be ignored. You will either love the gospel or you will hate the gospel. The glory of accepting the gospel is beyond words, but so is the judgment of rejecting it. Therefore,

II. **Be prepared for the response.** (42-48a, 50)

The gospel is polarizing. The gospel is polarizing because Jesus, properly understood is polarizing. Jesus never claimed to be merely a prophet as it is taught in Islam and Mormonism. Jesus never claimed to be created by God or a son of God, or Michael the Archangel as it is taught by the Jehovah's Witness. Jesus never claimed to merely be a spiritual guru, a philosopher, a spiritual eccentric or humanitarian lecturer as he is thought of. Jesus claimed to be God; the Creator, the ruling, divine, Sovereign, One and only Savior and Judge! If he simply claimed to be a way to nirvana, to enlightenment or to self-realization, he would be cool and trendy like Buddhism or Yoga. But, he claimed to be GOD! He claimed to be the ONLY WAY to life. He doesn't ask you to go to a temple here and there, burn a few things, say a chant and go on your empty way searching for meaning. He demands your worship. He demands your life. He lays claim to your heart and mind. And he is right to do it because as your Savior he paid for it. Some of these people understood this and some were understanding it. (42-43)

A. **Joyful acceptance**

Wow, this is preacher's dream, right? "Please sir, will you come back next week and tell us more?" They begged. They were hungry for the gospel. They heard something that resonated with them and made sense. Not only that but there were many who embraced what Paul and Barnabas were saying and Paul and Barnabas urged them to continue in the grace of God. So, here is the beginning of a new church that will be formed, but not everyone is excited. The gospel is polarizing.

B. **Violent rejection**

Why the anger? Some people, like Simon in chapter 8 and Elymas from last week get angry because the gospel threatens their influence. Some get angry like the fortune-teller owners in Philippi and the idol-makers in Ephesus because the gospel threatens their business model. Here

in Antioch of Pisidia some men get upset because they are jealous. Well, it did not intimidate Paul and Barnabas and in fact, they could see how God uses even the wrath of man to praise him. So, when these Jews refused to listen anymore to the gospel, Paul and Barnabas saw this as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

But wait! The Gentiles? Seriously?! Look the Jews have the history. They had the Law, the Tabernacle, the land and the Temple. They had the kings, the prophets and the prophecies. They had the sacrificial system and Jesus was a Jew. The Gentiles had none of that. The Gentiles worship stones, rocks, trees and stars. Does anyone seriously think that they will follow a Jewish Messiah? Look at 48a! When they hear Isaiah's prophecy, they rejoice and glorify the word of the Lord!! How do you explain that? You can only explain that because God has arranged it. Therefore, our response to all of this is to enjoy God.

III. **Enjoy God.** (48b-52)

Here is what I mean. Some of you are intimidated about sharing the gospel because you fear that people will reject you. Well, some will. But, you are being faithful. Some of you are concerned because you fear that people won't accept it. Well, some probably won't but that is not your job to convert anyone. Look at the end of v.48.

A. **He Sovereignly ordains faith.** (48b)

Do you see what God has done? God has appointed people to eternal life. Those he appointed to eternal life, believed. Did they believe because they heard the gospel or because they were appointed to believe? Yes! Not everyone who hears the gospel believes. But, no one believes without hearing the gospel. And God uses the preaching of the Word as the event whereby the Spirit flips the switch and causes faith. Look at these Gentiles! They were rejoicing that they were able to hear God's Word. At the same time...

B. **He Sovereignly oversees rejection.** (49-51)

God used Paul and Barnabas in Antioch and now, God was using the persecution to move them on to Iconium. The same God that had people in Antioch waiting to hear the gospel, had people in Iconium waiting for the same news.

C. **He Sovereignly carries out his plan.** (52)

The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit! What a beautiful summary. What a wonderful legacy. What a perfect tribute. What do you want the result of your life to be upon the lives of others? If after I have passed through this world and have moved on, if I leave disciples full of joy and the Holy Spirit, then my life will be well lived.

So, yea, the gospel is controversial. But so is the Ebola vaccine. In fact, can you think of anything in life that is of significance that is not controversial? We have what people are dying to hear. We have what some people will believe when they hear it. Your life is not so much a journey as it is a mission. You are not going to doctor's appointments this week to get better, but

to share the gospel and perhaps you will get better. You are not going to work this week to earn money, but to share the gospel and perhaps earn money. You are not going on vacation to have fun, but to share Christ and to have fun. Everything is a mission. We are not on a journey, we are on a mission.

From 1989 – 1997, Liberia was wracked by a civil war that took the lives of 250,000 people (out of 2 million). The devastation was overwhelming and the country has struggled to rebuild. One of the boys caught in that struggle was Eric Wowoh. He spent years in a refugee camp, but through it, he came to faith in Christ. Today, Eric has been instrumental in establishing Christian Schools to help rebuild the nation. Two years ago, a local church in Westland, pastored by a friend of ours, Dan McGhee went to Monrovia, Liberia on a mission's trip. While there, Dan's wife (a professional violinist) had an idea to teach these kids music and her idea caught on. The Shaw Music Company (Ann Arbor) provided the instruments, others caught the vision and for the last year, Julie has been teaching the kids in one school stringed instruments and for the first time in the history of this country, they have an orchestra. Tonight (1pm our time) is their first concert. The Vice-President of the country has sponsored this and the President and 1st Lady are attending as well. It is the nation's first orchestral concert. I am going to play a clip from a rehearsal yesterday. Keep in mind, two things: 1) These kids had never seen a violin or cello before October of last year. (8 months ago) 2) This is not about music, this is about the gospel. We're not on a journey, but on a mission.