

Title: God Determines the Message and the Mission
Text: Acts 28:23-31
Theme: God's glory and our faithfulness
Series: Acts
Prop Stmtnt: God's glory is worth our faithfulness regardless of the response

Read Text:

The gospel is the good news that though we are sinners who have rebelled against God and deserve to be punished for that rebellion, God in his amazing grace, sent his Son to this world to pay for our rebellion by suffering the consequences for our sin in our place. Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and rose again as proof that the payment for our sins was paid in full. The gospel, (good news) is that the death of Jesus paid in full for the sins of every single person who would ever trust in him, no matter who they are, where they are from, or what they have done.

The book of Acts, tells the story of the spread of the gospel and the spread of the church. They go together. The book ends with Paul in prison in Rome. He is bound, but the gospel isn't. We know that four of the books of the NT are written while he is in prison and that the gospel has been heard and embraced by people even in Caesar's house. And yet, Luke doesn't tell us about what happens to Paul. We have good reason to believe that no accusers from Jerusalem showed up and that after two years, Paul was released and most likely made it to Spain. It is also likely that when an empire-wide wave of persecution against Christians was launched several years later, that Paul was arrested and beheaded outside the city walls of Rome. Why didn't Luke include some of that here? His point in writing this book was not primarily biographical, but theological history. This book is more about the message of the gospel than it is about the messengers. The message has spread all the way to Rome and gains a foothold that outlasts the Roman empire. In fact, the gospel will outlast any power, ism, philosophy or movement. But, wherever the gospel goes, it elicits strong reactions. It is hated, or it is embraced. There isn't much middle ground. Historically, the gospel is hated by more than it is embraced. The rejection of the gospel is a deep grief, but, its acceptance creates a family, bound by an eternal bond that points to an eternal joy that will, one day, drown out all sorrow. God's glory is worth our faithfulness to the gospel and to the church (people of God) regardless of the response.

I. **These are the words of God.** (25-27)

You ought to know going into this, that this is a weighty text that puts us face to face with some hard truths that are difficult, if not impossible for us to fully understand. They are here because we need to be humbled, overwhelmed, and we need to specifically realize that there is so much more going on than we know or can imagine. God is so beyond us and here is an example of that.

A. **God spoke these words to Isaiah.**

Earlier in the service we read from Isaiah 6, where Isaiah records a vision that he has of God. Isaiah sees God. Later in John 12, we are told that Isaiah actually saw Jesus as he was in glory. Jesus, is the focal point and recipient of unbridled, unstoppable, and unending worship by the seraphim. When Isaiah sees God in his glorious holiness, he fears for his own life because he

instinctively realizes his humanness, his creatureliness, his sin and impurity. He has no standing in this scene. He has no defense and there is no bravado. He immediately feels dirty and polluted because he is. His guilt is so overwhelming that he fears for his life and by crying out “Woe is me!” he is bracing himself for a sudden and swift death. He knows that as he is, he cannot stand in the presence of this glorious and holy God.

What he anticipates does not happen. Instead of receiving what he is due, a seraphim flies to him with a burning coal and touches his mouth with it and tells him that this coal from the altar, from the place of sacrifice has been applied to him and now his guilt is removed and his sin is atone for. Isaiah’s vision of God’s holiness results in Isaiah’s realization and confession of his sin. This brings cleansing and now Isaiah is commissioned and sent. Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” Immediately Isaiah offers himself and asks to be sent. God tells him to go, meaning, Isaiah is going to “this people” and he is going to tell them what God tells him. That is his mission. Tell them what God has said.

Isaiah does not get to come up with the message nor adjust it to suit and please his audience. Isaiah has to repeat the message. He can only say what God says. What is that message? Isaiah is to tell the people of Judah (the Jews), “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” Then God tells Isaiah (v.10) that his preaching to them will make their hearts dull, their ears heavy and their eyes blind because they will not believe what he says. The more that Isaiah preaches, the more entrenched they will become in their rebellion. Isaiah’s ministry is a ministry of judgment. Isaiah asks the obvious question, “How long”? The answer is, until my judgment against their rebellion has been carried out and they are wiped from the land. In other words, Isaiah, your life and your life’s work is going to appear to be a complete failure. Not only will people NOT listen to you, but your preaching will have the opposite effect. Your preaching will result in more rebellion. I know this and I am sending you anyway. Is the glory of God worth your obedience to the message of God and the plan of God? Yes. 700 years later, Jesus repeated these words.

B. Jesus repeated these words to the Jews.

In Matthew 13 Jesus started speaking in parables. He did not start his public ministry speaking this way, but once the leaders of Israel rejected him and accused him of being Beelzebul, he started speaking in parables. He explained why to his disciples by telling them that he was deliberately veiling his teaching because they had already rejected what was plain. Rejection of the plain truth results in God’s judgment which was God veiling the plain truth. This is when Jesus quoted these words from Isaiah.

Isaiah warned the Jews that if they did not repent that the Babylonians were going to destroy them and take them into exile. God told Isaiah that the Jews were not going to listen and they didn’t listen and Babylon conquered them and nearly destroyed them. Now, God has become man. And the same God who told Isaiah to speak these words to the Jews is now speaking them to the Jews who are responding to him the way they responded to Isaiah. The message of the prophet was the same message of THE Prophet. This is what Paul quoted to the Jews in Rome. Paul is preaching like Isaiah and the Jews are responding to Paul now, the way that responded to Isaiah and to Jesus.

God said that you will not listen. In the original language, verse 26 has a double negative that is repeated. It is a linguistic device that emphasizes the emphatic nature of their rejection. So, what is going to happen? God raised up the nation of Israel to represent him to the rest of the world. They were supposed to show the world what the rest of the world could be like and should be like if they loved, worshiped and followed God. Now, what is going to happen? Hold that question for a second.

What happens on a national level is nothing more than describing a trend or a pattern. This trend is simply the result of individuals who hear God's Word and stuff their fingers of unbelief into their ears. Do you resent hearing God's Word? Do you resent your parents making you come to church? Do you resent your guilt? Do you chafe at being uncomfortable and do everything you can to dismiss this? You see, what these Jews did is not unique to the Jews. Their reaction illustrates the reaction of many. If you keep sticking your fingers of unbelief into your ears so that you will not hear, God will stop speaking which, when that happens, is a very dark and empty place to be. But, even though God may stop speaking to you, he won't stop speaking. His plan will not be stopped. God did not need Israel, Israel needed God. That holds true for every one of us. We do not do a God a favor by following him.

II. **God's plan will not be stopped.** (28)

Israel refuses to be the people of God, but God will not be denied a people. He will have a people for himself. He will have a people who want him as their God and love him and trust him.

A. **The hardening of Israel opens the door for the Gentiles.** (28a)

It's like this. Here is a couple from Germany. He is the owner of a major corporation and has homes and cars in 5 different countries along with a private jet to take him and his family wherever he wants, whenever he wants. He and his wife have one son, who inexplicably hates his parents. They love each other and they love him, but he hates them. All of his friends are from broken homes and have parents who abuse their kids and so, their son is ridiculed by his friends because he has such a privileged life. In an effort to be like all of his friends and be accepted, he turns on his parents. He refuses their love, counsel and help. One day, he makes it official. He leaves and changes his name and tells them to never contact him again.

The parents, of course are crushed. They love their son and will always love their son, but he does not love them. A few years later, these parents are visiting Haiti where they see a group of abandoned children living in a slum. Their lives are beyond sad. So, they adopt a boy, and then a girl, and then another boy and another girl and another boy and another girl. No one would have ever guessed that all of these kids would ever be rescued from that and placed in a family like this, but here they are. Looking back, these parents realize that the rebellion of their son became the occasion for the adoption of all of these others which made their family all that much bigger.

We are those kids. We are the kids abandoned by the idols of this world, left to die in our filth, but rescued by the wideness of God's mercy. The rebellion of the Jews opened the door for the adoption of the Gentiles. God will have a people. God will have a people who love him and

worship him and follow him. There is no logical reason why we, of all people, would be chosen by God to be adopted into his family, but here we are.

B. The Gentiles show the way for the Jews. (28b)

“they will listen.” This is our role. This is not just our responsibility, this is our loving opportunity. As the hopeless kids, who were rescued, we not only receive this love, but we reciprocate and love in return. Does our Father love us? Yes! Does our Father still love the Jews? Yes. Is there room in his heart to love them and us? Of course!! Loving the Father means that it would cause our hearts unspeakable joy to see the children of Israel finally embrace him. God has raised us up in part to show Israel what they could be like if they would follow God and accept His Messiah. Israel took the message and inverted it upon themselves and (as I said last week) did not want to share their toys. If God sidelined the Jews because of their unbelief, he will sideline us if we fail to embrace him from the heart.

III. The plan of God informs the mission of the church. (30-31)

The plan of God (to have a people from every tribe, language and nation) informs the mission of the church. God’s plan helps us understand our priorities.

A. The mission of the church is clear: Make disciples – everywhere

A friend is in the army and is deployed in another part of the world. But, there is no clearly defined mission or objective. At this point, part of our army is caught in the fog of politics. These things happen in armies. Right now, those soldiers are bored, distracted and driving the officers crazy because the officers are relegated to babysitting soldiers. Beloved, we have a mission and it is clearly defined, but in our case, we tend to forget about it and when we do, we get distracted with lesser things that are frankly boring and then we waste our lives. Our mission is clear:

Help people become followers of Jesus and help them follow Jesus faithfully. Help all kinds of people become followers of Jesus and help them follow Jesus faithfully. Help every kind of person become a follower of Jesus and help them follow Jesus faithfully. The plan of God gives us eyes to see all people the way we are supposed to see them, embrace them, love them, and grow together with them. I and the elders really want to impress this upon you. Our mission is to make and mature disciples. Who are you praying for to become a follower of Jesus? Who are seeking to share Christ with? How are you following Jesus? How are you growing as a follower of Jesus? Who is helping you follow Jesus? Who is involved in your life and praying with you and for you and speaking into your life? Who are you teaching to help follow Jesus? Are you living with intentionality? This is our mission. This fall, we are going to be helping you do that wherever you are. I want every member of this church being helped to follow Jesus and helping others follow Jesus better. This is an enormous part of what it means to follow Jesus. Does that mean that everything will go well? No. Not everyone will listen. This is where...

B. God’s plan guards us from discouragement.

God told Isaiah that the Jews would not listen. Jesus knew that his mission was to die on the cross and that he would die because even though he came to his own, his own would not receive him. Paul knew that his mission among the Jews would face a lot of rejection. Was the life and ministry of Isaiah successful? Was the life and ministry of Jesus successful? Was the life and ministry of Paul successful? Yes! But it wasn't because everyone liked them and voted them the most popular. They were successful because they were faithful. The question for us to ask is NOT, how many came? How was the turn out? Was there a good crowd? Wrong questions. The questions to ask, was the message clear? Was the messenger faithful to the gospel?

The plan of God cannot fail and will not fail. The plan of God to call a people unto himself happens as people hear and respond to the gospel. So, our mission is to share the gospel and live our lives in view of and driven by the gospel. This, unstoppable goal guards us from discouragement. When we keep our eyes on the mission, we will be guarded from discouragement, no matter how long or hard the trip.

I brought my 6-year old grandson, RJ, home with me for a few days. He lives in KY and fell asleep for the first part of the trip, but woke up about the time we hit Cincinnati. At mile marker 28 in Ohio it started. "Boompa, how long til we get to your house?" I said, "3 hours and 58 minutes." He said, "58 minutes?" No, 3 hours and 58 minutes. 58 minutes? No, 3 hours and 58 minutes. Each hour has 60 minutes, so that would be 3 times 60 which is 180 plus 58 which equal 238 minutes. (pause) Boompa, how long is it now til we get to your house? 3 hours and 57 minutes. 57 minutes? No, 3 hours and 57 minutes. You get the idea, though you were not driving the car. Finally, I said, how far can you count? He said, 109. Ok, you cannot ask me again until you count to 109 by ones, slowly. This was how we went through the over 200 miles on I-75 in Ohio. But, you know what I love? I loved the fact that he couldn't wait to get to our home. (Either that or he couldn't wait to get out of the car seat.) Beloved, don't lose sight of where we are going. Don't lose sight of the glorious fact that we will get there. But, let your arrival motivate you to be faithful to your mission.

IV. **The mission of the church is grounded in the glory of God.** (23-31)

Isaiah had a vision of God that helped him understand that everything he experienced in this world paled in comparison to what he knew to be true about God. The glory of God grounded and informed all of his life and ministry. John had a vision of God that helped him understand that everything that he experienced in this world not only paled in comparison to what he knew to be true about God, but everything that happens in this world is controlled by God. That reality (Revelation 4-5) informs this reality. That reality (Revelation 21-22) informs this reality. God's reality informs our reality. Paul had a vision of Christ on the Damascus road and another experience when he was taken up into the 3rd heaven, an experience he was not permitted to describe. But, he knew that everything here paled in comparison to that world that he knew was the ultimate reality. Our mission is grounded in the glory of God. All that God is, all that God does, all that God says, all that God is doing and will do is his glory. Our mission as a church is grounded in God. Therefore,

A. **We exist for the glory of God.**

We exist to make people know about him and to know him, so they will love him. Our life as a church is to make him known. Our efforts to spread the fame of Jesus all over the world is for his glory, not so that we will impress others. What is true for us together is true for you individually.

B. You exist for the glory of God.

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the purpose of putting God on display. How is your marriage displaying God? How does your schedule put God on display? How is your treatment of others, displaying God? Does your work, your attitude, your ethics, your efforts, your humility, your kindness put God on display?

C. God's glory is displayed through our faithfulness to his message.

We start with who God is and what he has said. That determines our message. We do not start with people and what they want to hear, or what they think they want to hear. You see that with Isaiah, Jesus and Paul. They did not start with what do the people want to hear. They started with the message that the people needed to hear which would be a message that many would reject and that would be a costly rejection. A vision of God's glory, an awareness of God's glory, a passion for God's glory causes us to be true to his message. We do not change the message to please people. We know that the message is hard to hear, but a true view of God's glory drives us, not how we are received.

D. God's glory is displayed through our commitment to his mission.

Whom shall I send and who will go for us? Isaiah's commitment to living as the representative of God amongst a people who did not want to listen to him is a reflection of the fact that he deemed the glory of God to be infinitely more important than the opinions of others. He stayed on message and on the mission because God is worth it. When you value God in a way that reflects his value, then you will see your life as being on a mission that is not done.

Why did Luke end the book this way? Because the story is not done. The Lord has left parts for you and me to contribute. Let's do our part.