

October 10, 2021 by Steve Brandon



A Sermon in The Synagogue

Acts 13:13-25

- 1. The Arrival in Antioch (verses 13-14)**
- 2. The Invitation to Preach (verse 15)**
- 3. The Working of God (verses 16-25)**

Religious life for the Jews during the days of Jesus, was a bit different than religious life for us today. The central difference was the presence of the temple in Jerusalem. It was the place where the Jews were commanded to deal with their sins, by offering up sacrifices.

The Jews went often to the temple to worship. They were required by the law of Moses to travel three times each year to worship the LORD in the temple: the Feast of Unleavened Bread; the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:14-17). This worked out really well, as long as the Jews lived close to Jerusalem. But when the Jews were conquered by Babylon, and exiled almost a thousand miles away, this became impossible. When Ezra came back to the promised land from his captivity in Babylon, it took his caravan some four months to make the journey (Ezra 7:9). It was impossible for the Jews in Babylon to return to Jerusalem three times a year for worship.

It was probably during this exile period, that the Jews were compelled to rethink worship in the absence of access to the temple. Thus, the synagogue was born. That place where Jews could assemble for worship on a local level, rather than on a national level in Jerusalem. In fact, the word "synagogue" comes from two Greek words. "syn" which means "with." "agoge" which means "gathering." A "synagogue" is a place of gathering with others together.

After the exile, synagogues began to pop up all over the world, wherever there was a pocket of Jews living. enough to support a building and an organization. The synagogues, then, became the centerpiece of Jewish community. It became a place for Jews to gather. It became a place for religious instruction. Regular worship on the Sabbath took place. With the reading of Scripture. With prayers. With teachings from the Rabbis. The gatherings of the early church (and small churches today), feel much like ancient synagogues, where pockets of believers would gather regularly for worship.

Though instructions for the formation and regulation of the synagogues are nowhere to be found in the Old Testament, nowhere are they denounced as wrong or improper. They seem to be a helpful and proper asset to worship of the Lord. By the days of Jesus, we see synagogues all across Israel. Rather, Jesus frequently visited these synagogues. When Matthew summarized the ministry of Jesus, he said this: Matthew 4:23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. See also Matthew 9:35.

We have a few recorded instances of Jesus healing others in the synagogues. In the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus healed with an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21-28). He also healed a man with a withered hand in a synagogue (Mark 3:1-6). We have a bunch of statements in the New Testament that tell us that Jesus taught in the synagogues. But the only place where we have any detailed account of what Jesus actually taught in one of these synagogues is recorded in Luke, chapter 4. In that chapter, we see Jesus coming into the synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown synagogue. where he grew up. where he attended many, many services. On that day, Jesus took the scroll, and read from Isaiah 61:1, 2:

Luke 4:18-22

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, Luke 4:19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.

But soon, those saying those things were "filled with wrath" (Luke 4:28), as Jesus confronted their lack of belief. Luke 4:29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. Luke 4:30 But passing through their midst, he went away. Obviously, it didn't end well for Jesus in the synagogue that day. as the people of Nazareth refused to believe in him.

This day in Nazareth is the only day in which we know of exactly what Jesus taught in the synagogue. Initially, he was received well, but soon was rejected.

Well, this morning as we come to the book of Acts, we will encounter something similar. Paul will enter the synagogue in Psidian Antioch, and we will have the privilege of hearing the actual sermon that he preached in that synagogue. While he will initially be received well by the people, such a reception will soon turn to wrath, as the Jews will drive him out of their city, angry at the message that Paul was preaching.

My message this morning is entitled, "A Sermon in the Synagogue." It comes from Acts 13. Like with the ministry of Jesus, this is the only recorded sermon that we have of Paul actually preaching in a synagogue.

The book of Acts is filled with mentions of how many times Paul entered into the synagogues of the Jews with his message of the Messiah. We read about this last week, when Paul and Barnabas were crossing the island of Cyprus. We read in Acts 13:5, "They proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews." But we are lacking exactly what they "proclaimed." As we continue on in the book of Acts, we will read similar statements of how they went into the synagogue in Iconium (14:1) and Thessalonica (17:1) and Berea (17:10) and Athens (17:17) and Corinth (18:4) and Ephesus (18:19). But we are never told of the exact content of what Paul actually said in these synagogues. Oh, we are told that they "reasoned" with the Jews in the synagogues (Acts 17:17). and that every Sabbath they would try to "persuade" the Jews and Greeks in the synagogue with their message. But we are lacking any specifics on exactly what was ever said inside the synagogues, With the exception of our text this morning.

Paul's sermon begins in verse 16, but need to catch the context, beginning in Acts 13:3. It would be helpful to look at some maps, to get a bearing of where Paul and his companions were.^[1] Paul and Barnabas began their journey from Antioch in Syria. This is where that great church was, from which Paul and Barnabas (and John Mark) were sent out (Acts 13:3). They walked the 15 mile road to the Seleucia on the coast (Acts 13:4). From there, they sailed to set sail to Cyprus (Acts 13:4), arriving at the coastal city of Salamis, on the eastern end of the island.

Then, they embark upon their "preaching tour" across the island, "proclaiming the word of God in the synagogues" along the way (Acts 13:5). Luke expands upon their time in Paphos, which we looked at last week. The Proconsul, Sergius Paulus was warming to the gospel, But Bar-Jesus, the false prophet "opposed" Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:8). So, Paul rebuked him to his face (Acts 13:10-11), and Sergius Paulus believed, as "he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). Now, this morning, we see Paul and Barnabas setting sail once again.

Acts 13:13

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem,

Before we trace the travels of Paul and Barnabas, we must not first that John left Paul and Barnabas as they set sail for Perga in Pamphylia. Now, there is nothing here in these words that gives us any indication about why he left. But we will find out in chapter 15 that this was essentially a desertion of duty, and became the catalyst for some great conflict between Paul and Barnabas. (So, just tuck that into the back of your minds. We will address this more in detail when we come to chapter 15).

Anyway, it's Paul and Barnabas (and perhaps some others), who arrive in Perga of Pamphylia. It seems like they didn't spend much time there, but immediately headed north.

Acts 13:14

but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia.

Again, this is "Antioch in Pisidia," which is different than "Antioch in Syria" from which they were sent. In the ancient world, there were a bunch of cities named "Antioch," as they were named after a Roman ruler named "Antiochus." One ancient source made mention of 16 different "Antiochs."^[2]

It was a difficult journey from Perga by the sea, to Antioch in the mountains, some 3600 feet above sea level. It was 90 miles of ups and downs. The travel itself wasn't particularly safe, either. Thieves and bandits were known to line the road, waiting to pounce upon unsuspecting travelers. But Paul and Barnabas did arrive safely in Pisidian Antioch. Verse 14 speaks of what they did in Antioch.

Acts 13:14

And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

So, I want for you to catch what's going on. We are here in "Antioch of Pisidia" and Paul and Barnabas enter into the synagogue. It's the Sabbath days which means that the synagogue was gathered together for Scripture reading, and prayer, and teaching, and fellowship. I have no doubt that this synagogue in Antioch feels much like Rock Valley Bible Church. So, Paul and Barnabas come into this meeting. I picture them somewhat toward the back of the room, joining in the service. I can picture some announcements being made, about Aaron's Bar-Mitvah next month. about the social at Hannah's house. about the opportunity to serve the Cohen family as they move to a new home. about the midweek teaching of the Torah right back here on Sunday evening.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6

Then, I can picture the service beginning with a reading in unison together, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

At some point in the service, the Scriptures are read. and we pick it up in verse 15,

Acts 13:15-52

After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it." So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this

took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 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. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

"Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.

And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.' And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, "'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore he says also in another psalm, "'You will not let your Holy One see corruption.' For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: "Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you."

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

That's where chapter 13 ends. The disciples in Antioch filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Paul and Barnabas heading out to Iconium (which we will learn about when we come to chapter 14). But we will spend a few weeks looking at this sermon that Paul preaches from the pew. In fact, this is the subtitle of my message this morning: "Preaching from the Pew."

Now, we won't get through all of this chapter this morning. We will just deal with the first paragraph: verses 16-25. We have already looked at our first two points: In verses 13 and 14, we saw the ...

1. The Arrival in Antioch (verses 13-14)

Paul and Barnabas sailed to Perga in Pamphilia, Then across the land to Antioch in Pisidia. In verse 15, we saw the ...

2. The Invitation to Preach (verse 15)

Paul jumped at the chance. He stood up and spoke, probably longer than the leaders in the synagogue were expecting. I can relate.

I remember when I was a senior in college. I attended a small church, much smaller than our church here. (Maybe there were 40 people in attendance). Anyway, I was asked by the pastor of the church to give my testimony before the congregation. It was just before his sermon. I seized the opportunity in this church to full-on preach how the Lord was working in my life. I remember asking people to open their Bibles to Matthew 7. And I went through the text, verse by verse, to show that not everyone who claims to be a Christian really is a Christian. In fact, it's the minority of people who profess to be Christians who are genuine in their faith. Jesus said that "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, let me into your kingdom' (Matthew 7:21-22). Jesus will then declare to the many, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (Matthew 7:23). I remember challenging those in the church be one of the few, who Jesus will gather to himself on that final day.

I'm guessing that I spoke for 15 minutes. When I finally sat down, I remember the pastor of the church promising that his sermon would be shorter than normal that day.

That's a bit what Paul does with his message. He seized the opportunity to speak about his Savior. If you remember nothing else from my message this morning, this would be a good something to remember, that we should all be prepared to speak of Jesus.

Oh, you may not get a chance in a synagogue filled with unbelievers. But you never get a chance in front of crowd of people looking to hear a message about the Lord. But you have daily opportunities in your conversations. with your classmates or your customers or your cousins.

I would encourage you to seize the opportunities that God places before you. This is the application of the book of Acts! Jesus calls us to "Be My Witnesses." Be a witness for the Lord! Tell others of Jesus.

This is what Paul did on the Sabbath that day. He seized the opportunity in the synagogue in Antioch. He spoke of the working of God, down through history, And how he has now worked by giving us a Savior. So now, our third point this morning, is Paul's main point in his sermon:

3. The Working of God (verses 16-25)

This is Paul's point from verse 16-25, God has been working in Israel, from the start, to bring them a Savior. Through good times and bad times, God has been faithful. He begins with ...

Abraham

Abraham was the founding father of the people of Israel. Paul begins with Abraham and gives a general history of the people of Israel, ending with the statement in verse 23 of Jesus, "God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised."

How well do you know the history of Israel? Let's review:

Paul begins with Abraham Now, Paul doesn't mention him by name. But it is obvious who he is talking about.

Acts 13:17

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers

This is how God dealt with the people of Israel. He chose them. Abraham didn't choose God. God chose Abraham.

Abraham was minding his business in the land of the Chaldeans, and God appeared to him and said, ...

Genesis 12:1-2

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

This is what God did with Abraham. From him came a nation, of several million people! This was the working of God. This is exactly what Paul continues with in verse 17.

Acts 13:17

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt.

Their greatness wasn't because of their own goodness. It was because of God's electing hand.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you. For you were the fewest of all the peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you.

What was true of Israel is true of us as well. We aren't God's people because we are great. We are God's people because he has chosen us! It's not that we loved God, and that God responded to us by bringing us into his kingdom as a sort of reward. It's not like that at all. It's God's love for us that caused him to choose us. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

And this is where Paul begins, with God's working in the life of Abraham, choosing him and making him great. Then, Paul continues by talking about ...

Moses

Again, he didn't use his name. But he talked about the days of Moses at the end of verse 17,

Acts 13:17

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it.

"With uplifted arm he led them out [of Egypt]." That one sentence sums up 15 chapters of the book of Exodus.

I trust that you remember the story. Israel was enslaved by the Egyptians. They cried out to the LORD in their distress (Exodus 2:23). And God heard their cry and remembered the covenant he made with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob (Exodus 2:24).

God raised up Moses to lead the people of Israel out of slavery. He did this in a mighty way, showing off his power through then ten plagues, in which he afflicted the Egyptians. Again, this is the working of God in the life of his people. In verse 18, we see the patience of God.

Acts 13:18

And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness.

This describes the wanderings of the Jews in the wilderness. God had promised to give them the land of Canaan, if they would but enter into the land and fight for it. But in their unbelief, they refused. Yet, God was still faithful to Israel. He didn't give up on his promises. He remained faithful to them. Enduring them for 40 years.

Finally, when a new generation came around, God raised up a new leader, ...

Joshua

He led them into the promised land. Following the lead of the mighty hand of God. Again, though we don't hear Joshua's name, (As Paul worked quickly through the history of Israel). verse 19 is a summary of God's working through him. Listen to what God did.

Acts 13:19

And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, [God] gave them their land as an inheritance.

One would think that the people who saw the faithful working of God would remain faithful to him. But such was not the case. Instead, the Lord endured a rocky relationship with Israel for 450 years. Things would go well with Israel, so well that they would forget the Lord. Then, they would cry out to God for help and God would provide them a judge to deliver them. Then, things would go well for Israel. So well, in fact, that they would forget the Lord. Then, they would cry out to the Lord in their distress, and God would hear their cry and provide a judge for them to deliver them. This took place for 450 years!

Judges

This is what Paul alluded to in verse 20, the times of Judges.

Acts 13:20

All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.

Finally, God gave them ...

Samuel

Samuel was a genuine prophet of the Lord, who heard from the Lord, and who led the people of Israel. Again, one would think that that they would listen to him. But they didn't. They demanded a king!

Samuel told those in Israel that it wasn't good. He even warned them about all that the king would do to them. He will take your sons and appoint them into the military, where they could lose their lives. He will take your daughters and make them "to be perfumers and cooks and bakers" (1 Samuel 8:13). He will take the best of your fields for the government (1 Samuel 8:14). He will tax your harvests and take a portion of your flocks (1 Samuel 8:15-17). "And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day" (1 Samuel 8:18). Anyway, Israel refused to heed the warning of Samuel and asked for a king.

Acts 13:21

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.

Saul

Saul was a handsome man. He was strong man. He was a capable man. But he was an ungodly man, who refused to follow in obedience to the LORD. And after forty years, the LORD removed him. He removed the people's choice for a king, and replaced him with God's choice: David.

David

Acts 13:22

And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.'

For years, David walked in the ways of the LORD. He led Israel well. And God made a huge promise to him, In 2 Samuel 7, we read of that promise that God made to David. It's called, "The Davidic Covenant."

2 Samuel 7:8-16

'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your

house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

There it is! The Davidic covenant! Upon his throne, one would come to reign forever. Jesus was the one! This is what Paul said in verse 23!

Jesus

Acts 13:23

Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.

The bringing of Jesus as a Savior was "The Working of God." Through ups and downs of life and relationship, God was faithfully working in the lives of his people to bring them a Savior, Jesus! Just as he promised!

In many ways, this was the culmination of history for the Jewish people. It is what they had been expecting for years! They were expecting the scepter to come from the line of Judah! They were expecting the son of David to come and sit upon his throne! And now, Paul was telling them, that Jesus was this king. He was the king who had come as a Savior.

The message is really quite simple: Believe and trust in Jesus. trust in his sacrifice upon the cross for your sins! That's where Paul is going with his message: "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38).

You may have known this. You may have heard this for many years. But for those in Pisidian Antioch on that morning, it was all new to them! They were hearing of the message of salvation for the first time! All of history was lining up. In more recent days, John the Baptist had come.

John the Baptist

Acts 13:24-25

Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

John was the forerunner as prophesied in Malachi 3, who would come before the Messiah. He pointed the way to Jesus. He wasn't the one. Jesus was the one.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 10, 2021 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Here's a good online reference: <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/9-pauls-journey-to-cyprus-pamphylia-galatia-paul-starts-his-1st-missionary-journey/>.

[2] See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antioch>.