

Justified in Him
Acts 13:13-52

Romans 8:1-17

Ephesians 2:1-10

Responsive Psalm 119: 33-40

This week we are going to pick up where we left off in chapter 13 which is the continued account of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. In the first part last week, we pointed out God's sovereignty within his work of salvation, in the example of Elymas the apostate Jewish Sorcerer, and Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul. In that we see that God had used a judgment of one, to help to bring about the faith of another, with the entire point being that we, that is mankind, are all vessels created by God for his good pleasure and will. He is the potter, and mankind is the clay to which he formed into vessels that he prepared before hand, some for honor, and some for dishonor, as Paul wrote in Romans 9. And the point being, that even those in whom God has created to show forth his wrath are still a part of his plan. There is nothing that is outside of God's will, and nothing that can derail his purpose, for even those who seek to cause harm, or seek to deceive, or bear false witness are truly only playing that part which God has given them. Now of course they would deny such statements, but never the less, it is what the scripture tells us.

But I feel I must stress again, that though this is a reality, that God has made some for dishonor, so that he may make his power and wrath known, this does not mean that we are to judge who they may be, or that we can even know. For the ones who may seem to be the most hopeless, may very well be the ones whom God has prepared before hand for mercy. We have a great example of this in the Apostle Paul, a devout Jew who was persecuting and hunting Christians. IF there is any who would have seemed to be hopelessly lost, it is the one who was so full of rage toward God's people that he was having them beaten, imprisoned and killed. He even said so himself, in his letter to Timothy, verse 15 in the first chapter he wrote, "And I Thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because he counted me faithful putting me into the ministry. Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief. However for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long suffering as a pattern to those who are going to believe on him for everlasting life. Now to the king eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever."

Paul even recognized that his suffering for the gospel, and even the persecution that he experienced was to be an example of faithfulness for us, even today.....and he recognized that it was the purpose of his suffering, so that he first may set forth such an example for all of us who believe, and it is all to the glory and honor of the eternal, immortal invisible God who shows mercy. The reality is, that in our natural state, by our very nature, we are children of wrath, we are vessels of wrath, for we like Paul, reject and deny God...and even at the very least if we retain God in our knowledge, many refuse to give themselves over to God still holding on to their sin, rebellion and selfish ambitions. The Jews believed in God, and it wasn't as if they believed in a false God....yet they did not truly have saving faith, rejecting the Messiah, and seeing him, the son of God, who God sent to work redemption for his people, as a blasphemer worthy of death. Even those who may seem pious, and holy, may still very well be nothing more then pretty vessels still destined for destruction.

Yet, God is about the business of taking such vessels, breaking them down and rebuilding them into vessels of honor. And without his work, without him doing so we would have all been destined for destruction. For there is not a single vessel, a single person who is just, or holy enough to bring about their own salvation..but they first must be made into a vessel capable of being filled by the mercy and love of God.

In our passage this morning we see this very thing, and this solves the age old mystery as to why some believe, and some reject God....it has nothing to do with our natural ability to comprehend, or understand, but it has everything to do with the supernatural grace of God to change our hearts and minds so that we may believe. And God has simply chosen some for honor, and has allowed others to remain in their sin and rebellion. Keeping all this in mind this morning, let us read our passage, Acts 13, starting in verse 12 to the end of the chapter.

Luke records that Paul and Barnabas continue their journey, and here now arriving in Antioch in Pisidia. There were many towns in the ancient world which was called Antioch, having been founded by members of the family of Antiochus. This is not the same Antioch that was mentioned before, but a different one located in Phrygia, near the Pisidian border, which was a region of the Roman province of Galatia. This Antioch had been made a Roman colony by Caesar Augustus in 25 BC, and was the governing a military center of the southern half of the province Galatia. Politically it belonged to Galatia, but ethnically and culturally it was Phrygian which the historian Josephus claimed housed a large substantial population of Jews, which likely explains why Paul and Barnabas would travel the 100 or so miles there immediately after landing at Perga. Some scholars argue that Sergius Paulus, the Roman Proconsul from the first half to this chapter likely had family in this area and may have been an influence in suggesting that Paul and Barnabas go there.

As Luke writes, we see that Paul and Barnabas enter into the synagogue on the sabbath and sat down with the others who had gathered together to hear the scriptures being read, and to reflect and pray together. In this section of Acts, we see that Luke has given us a sample of Paul's preaching in the synagogues. Throughout this moment of teaching, we see Paul laying out for all those who had gathered at the synagogue a sort of history and overview of the faith, starting with God's calling of Israel, separating for himself a nation of people to be known as the children of God. But then he shifts, and shows that it really was all about Jesus, and that he is the one who has fulfilled God's promises to David and is the key to Israel's future, in fact he goes on to show that Jesus himself, his death and resurrection is the necessary fulfillment of Israel's entire scripture. Showing that the Law and the Prophets and even the psalms have all foretold of this Jesus, and in the end there is an appeal for them to not miss out on this salvation that God has given, being offered through his Son Jesus Christ.

It was common practice in the synagogue worship that the leaders of the synagogues would call upon those they deemed suitable to pray and preach. We saw this with Jesus ministry as well, as he would often address the multitudes that would gather at the temple and preach from the passages that was written. And in this case we see that they called upon Paul to give a lesson upon the reading of the Law and the Prophets, recognizing him as a fellow Jew, and also one who was qualified to address the congregation and teach. It would seem that his reputation of being one who was capable of teaching the scriptures had preceded them, for he is here being called upon by the leadership in the synagogue. And we see that Paul stands up, and address both the Jews, and the God fearing Gentiles who were there, these would be those who have attached themselves to the Jewish faith, just like what we saw with Peter and Cornelious, a Roman who would worship at the synagogue, but being a Gentile was limited in his access but none the less...believed in the God of Israel....it would be these to whom Paul was also addressing when he says in verse 16, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God."

Paul's address to the people gathered here sets forth the truth, and significance of God's sovereignty as he says, "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm he bought them out of it." All of these things that we see him speaking of in these first few verses of this discourse would be something that was widely believe and understood by all who were there. They knew, and understood that it was God who chose Israel, that it was God who established Israel, and it was God who lead them out of captivity, and Paul goes on to summarize how God worked to fulfill his promises and to keep his people for he says that God destroyed seven nations and distributed the land to them, to give them a land that was promised to them.

After having reminded them about God's sovereignty, and his work through Israel he continues the summary of their history until he comes to David, which he then uses to point to the fact that Jesus, the one in whom they had put to death on the cross, was the seed of David, the promised Son of David who God raised up to be the savior of Israel. In verse 26, Paul challenges them, confronting them with the unbelief of Israel, and the violence which was brought upon Jesus by the hands of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, when he says, "Men and Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham and those among you who fear God. He is addressing both the Jews and the Gentiles who were present in the synagogue at the time, for he has now reached the main thrust of his argument and confrontation to those who are listening. He continues on, "to you, the word of this salvation has been sent" God, has sent him to them, no less sovereignly then he had sent Israel out of Egypt, and he was sent to bring the gospel of salvation to free them of their bondage of sin. Verse 27 "For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know him, nor even the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath have fulfilled them in condemning him."

They did not even know the voices of their own prophets, they did not see that all that was written was being fulfilled in Christ, that it was He who was the one in whom all of their prophets foretold, even though these passages were read every single week, yet, God used their own rebellion to bring about his plan of salvation, fulfilling even what these prophets foretold about the Messiah through their condemning of him, in verse 29 Paul says, "Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb" In ignorance, and blinded by their hatred and anger toward Jesus they fulfilled the very purpose of his coming. To suffer and die as the innocent savior having no cause for death other then to be a sacrifice for the sins of God's people. But as we know it doesn't end there, for God raised him up from the dead, which was the fulfillment of the promise to David, that his kingdom shall endure forever...but that promise was not to the earthly kingdom, but to the spiritual in which Christ, the everlasting king, the Son of David rules and reigns for eternity. Verse 32, "And we declare to you glad tidings, that promise which was made to the fathers, God has fulfilled this for us their children in that he has raised up Jesus.

In other words, this is an exciting time..for now we are the recipients of all that these prophets have foretold was coming, the fulfillment has come, and God has established his everlasting Kingdom, as it is written in Psalms "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." And he has raised him up from the dead, no more to return to corruption as he has spoken...I will give you the sure mercies of David. Therefore he says in another psalm, Psalm 16 to be exact, You will not allow your holy one to see corruption. While these were the words of David in prayer, Paul attributes them to Christ, in verse 36 by showing that David after he had served his generation, after fulfilling all that God had set before him to do, by the will of God he died and was buried, and his body saw corruption. That is death and decay.

But Jesus on the other hand, whom God raised up from the dead saw no corruption, having been raised and now seated at the right hand of God not only escaped the natural corruption of mankind by overcoming death itself, but has become the salvation of mankind so that our souls may likewise be free from the corruption of sin and death. Through this one man, is preached the forgiveness of sins, by the grace and mercy of God in which the law of Moses could not accomplish. In verse 39, Paul says, “it is by Him everyone who believes is justified, from all the things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. In Christ is the fulfillment of these things, the everlasting king, who has come and established his everlasting kingdom, and has now called to himself his people to believe and to dwell with in his grace.

Yet look at verse 40 and 41, the end of Paul's discourse here he leaves them with a warning...”Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in all the prophets come upon you, Behold you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.” This was sort of a doubling down on the Israelites rejection of Christ. In verse 27, he said that Those who dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers did not know him no, did they even understand or believe the voice of the prophets which was taught them daily, Therefore what has been spoken by the prophets has come upon them...they despised Christ, and actively sought to destroy not just him, but his followers as well even though you have someone here like Paul who was walked them through their own history and showing them how it all relates to Christ....but we see that this rejection continued, for in verse 45 it says, “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

Yet the response of the Gentiles was the complete and total opposite, verse 42, “So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.” Again fulfilling this trend that we have been seeing all through Acts, the Jews reject, the Gentiles believe. I am sure that those Jewish leaders of the synagogue completely understood what Paul was saying, in effect was rejecting their practices and adherence to the law, for he said that faith in Jesus is what justifies, now the law. To the Jew, such statements would be like Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians, the stench of death...but to the gentiles, who by their very nature of being Gentiles were denied much in the way of access in the Jewish faith, would see such words as the aroma of life. For there is justification outside of the law, outside of the temple and one must not be a Jew to attain it. And that justification is a perfect, and holy justification...not a ceremonial, traditional sense as what was practiced by the Jewish faith. And as Paul said, in verse 39, it is a justification that the law of Moses could not attain.

This was the very point of Paul's writing in Roman's 8, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” Again there is no justification to be found in the law, only condemnation and death..for mankind could not ever truly adhere to God's law, and as we even saw in Jesus ministry as he confronted the religious leaders, their adherence to the law only brought them pride, and arrogance..it drummed up within them sin as they were attempting to be sinless by it's adherence. So again, since the law is unattainable for mankind, it only stands to condemn us....but we have a great hope, as Paul wrote , verse 3 in chapter 8 of Romans. “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, (notice the issue was not God's law..but it was the sinful flesh of man, God's law was holy, was just, but it was the sinful flesh of mankind who could not rise up to God's holy standards.)

What the Law could not do, because of man's weakness and inability, "God did by sending his son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin; he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh...we do not walk according to upholding the Mosaic law...but according to the spirit." Therefore, all of those who are in Christ, by faith...are justified, have been free from the condemnation and the curse of the law, to now live holy and just lives.. not because we are able to of ourselves..but because God has enabled us to and works in us through the holy spirit to strive for the mark. We seek to please God, not to fulfill some law, or righteous requirements...but because we love him, and we seek to please him. This is why Christians will often do things that are not even to their best interest, but they do so for the sake of Christ and his gospel because they love him, who died so that we may be justified by his blood, wiping away our sin and condemnation. When one understands what God has done, and believes...there is no other response then to worship him for his grace and mercy...that he would love us while we yet rejected him, that he would die for us, though we despised him...but in his mercy that he would call us from our sin and rebellion to be free from that condemnation of sin...so that we can be his children, the adopted heirs of his kingdom.

It is no surprise the rejection of the Jews to Paul and Barnabas ministry, for they believed their justification came by the law, and by their lineage and heritage...but Paul has shown them, through their own history that is not the case, but that it is by Christ and Christ alone. The rug had been pulled out from underneath them, they were left with a dilemma...either Paul is right, and everything they have been doing for generations was wrong....or Paul is wrong and is a deceiver and false teacher. Which putting ourselves in their shoes honestly makes their rejection understandable, for generations they missed the mark, they did not see the purpose and instead worshiped the letter of the law instead of the spirit of it, not seeing that such things were an example to teach, not in themselves a mode of justification. But that is why salvation is of God, and is a work of God upon the heart and mind...for without the new birth, we are unable to see and understand the things of God. IT must be God who first acts upon us making us able to believe, it is God who gives us this faith, as Paul wrote in Ephesians 2, "For by grace you have been saved through faith...it is not as though by keeping the law you have been saved, but its merely by God's sovereign grace that he has given you...through faith, and that not of yourself, it is a gift of God. Not of works, not of keeping the law and working out your own justification by it, for that would only bring about boasting as it did among the Jewish leaders...but it is only by the faith given to us through the grace of God that we can believe, and it is only in Him who has completely, and perfectly fulfilled the righteous requirements of God's law for us, that we can stand before God justified.