



AUGUST 15, 2021 | PASTOR WOOHYUN JUNG

“The Heart of the Gospel” (Acts 13:13-52)

¹³ From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.”

¹⁶ Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! ¹⁷ The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; ¹⁸ for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness; ¹⁹ and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. ²⁰ All this took about 450 years.

“After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. ²² After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’

²³ “From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴ Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ As John was completing his work, he said: ‘Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for, but there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’ ²⁶ “Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. ²⁷ The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. ²⁸ Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹ When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. ³⁰ But God raised him from the dead, ³¹ and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. ³² “We tell you the Good News: What God promised our ancestors ³³ he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

“You are my son;
today I have become your father.’

³⁴ God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said,

“‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’

³⁵ So it is also stated elsewhere:

“‘You will not let your holy one see decay.’



Acts 13:13-52 (cont'd)

³⁶ “Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. ³⁷ But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

³⁸ “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. ⁴⁰ Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

⁴¹ ““Look, you scoffers,
wonder and perish,
for I am going to do something in your days
that you would never believe,
even if someone told you.””

⁴² As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

““I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.””

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

⁴⁹ The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹ So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Core Idea: The heart of the Gospel lies in the centrality of God and the work of Jesus Christ which leads to a specific mission for the believers.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon church. If you have your Bibles, please turn to Acts 13:13 and we'll read it to the end. The book of Acts as many of you know is an account of the first Christian church – it tells us how the church was formed, what they believed in, how the believers lived together, how they related to those who were hostile against the message, but most importantly, how the Gospel spread and was received by the people beyond Jerusalem. As we go through this book, my prayer is that we'll learn something about what the church was always meant to be – and that it'll inspire us, guide us, and challenge us to be the church that God always envisioned us to be. The bulk of this passage contains the first recorded sermon that Paul preached in Acts. It's a little lengthy; but I pray that it breathes new life in you just by hearing it knowing that *"the word of God is alive and active"* (Hebrews 4:12).

[read Acts 13:13-52]

After Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by the church in Antioch, they began their first missionary journey. In verse 13, we read that Paul sailed from Paphos to Perga, which is about 200 km in distance. Then they travelled another 160 km north to reach Pisidian Antioch. Now, don't get confused because this is not the same Antioch where the two of them started this missionary journey. Pisidian Antioch was a Roman colony, a civil military center for the province, with a large Jewish population. And there, we find Paul and Barnabas beginning their ministry first in the synagogue, where Paul was given an opportunity to share the Gospel.

Before we talk about Paul's sermon, it would help us to remind ourselves why they went through all these troubles just to share the Gospel to the people they didn't know. This must have been a difficult journey. They were probably physically exhausted, emotionally drained, and financially empty. There was no guarantee that they would be received well by the people. They probably had to give up a lot of things to make this possible. Then what drove them to do this, knowing the price they had to pay? Let me read from Romans 1:14, where we see a glimpse of what might have been on Paul's heart. Paul says, *"I am **obligated** both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so **eager** to preach the Gospel also to you who are in Rome. For I am **not ashamed** of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile."* Paul was obligated (which literally says, "I'm a debtor"), which is why he was so eager to do this. And what ultimately drove him to be like this was because he was not ashamed of the Gospel; he was convicted that this was God's power that can bring salvation to everyone who believes. In other words, the reason why Paul endured all the pains of traveling and sacrificed so much was because he was unshakably convicted by the Gospel that it will save, and that it will bring life; so, he was desperate to share this Gospel to the world. Brothers and sisters, do you feel *obligated* to take the Gospel to your workplace – not out of duty but because you've experienced this incredible grace offered to you? Are you *eager* to live out the Gospel at home? Are you *convicted* that this message of the Gospel can and will bring life to the lost? Then are you ceasing every opportunity that God is giving you by joyfully and passionately making Christ known to the world? If you are, praise the Lord, but if you're not, my prayer for you is that God will ignite that passion in you once again through Paul's sermon, to be captured by the beauty of the Gospel so that you would be moved to joyfully, eagerly, and sacrificially preach the Gospel wherever you are. Three things that Paul teaches in his sermon:

- **THE CENTRALITY OF GOD**
- **THE WORK OF JESUS CHRIST**
- **THE MISSION OF CHRISTIANS**



1) THE CENTRALITY OF GOD

Starting verse 17, Paul spends more than a third of his sermon going through the history of the Israelites. This is intentional because he is speaking mostly to the Jews. He wanted the Gospel to reach *them*; so, he describes the Gospel in a way that they would understand best. In other words, he was able to contextualize or bring out the side of the Gospel that best connected with the listeners. This is true because we see in Acts 17 that the way he shares the Gospel to the Greek philosophers in Athens is completely different. This is a side point, but if you want to share the Gospel effectively, invest your time to get to know them first – their fears, struggles, desires, questions, and ambitions – and simply point them to the person of Jesus Christ. In other words, it's going to take time. Patiently walk with them as you trust that God is working in their lives. *He* will bear fruit according to His timing. Let's go back to our passage. You'll notice something interesting in the way Paul tells the history of the Israelites. You could clearly see that the way Paul understands the Israelites' history was from the perspective of God – He is the main Actor. The Israelites are not at the center of their own story; *God* is the central figure in *their* history. Let me show you.

- V. 17: God *chose* the people of Israel to bless the nations
- V. 17: God *made* the people prosper in Egypt
- V. 17: God *led* them out of Egypt
- V. 18: God *endured* their conduct in the wilderness
- V. 19: God *overthrew* seven nations
- V. 19: God *gave* their lands to His people as their inheritance
- V. 20: God *gave* them judges
- V. 21: God *gave* them Saul, their first king
- V. 22: God *removed* Saul
- V. 22: God *made* David their king

This is how Paul described their history. He could've left out God and still would've been accurate. He could've simply said, "The Israelites dwelt in Egypt and became prosperous – but were oppressed. So, they escaped their life of slavery under Egypt. They conquered seven nations and elected kings to rule over them." That would've been fine, but Paul didn't. Why? **Because to Paul, *this* was reality.** He truly believed that God was the One who ordains and orchestrates all things according to His will and purpose. There's nothing that happens apart from His knowledge – and apart from His approval. Paul wanted to show them that there is this magnificent, glorious, almighty, all-wise God who is the true Author of history. He alone is the explanation and the meaning of everything.

This was a radically different way of looking at life – it was shocking and possibly even offensive, but Paul wasn't done yet. Verse 23 says, "*God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as He promised.*" It's interesting to note that this language of prophecy is used throughout his sermon. In verse 27, in regard to the people condemning Jesus, Paul says that "*they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.*" In verse 29, when referring to the killing of Jesus, Paul says that they were carrying out "*all that was written about Him.*" Verse 32, "*We tell you the Good News: what God promised our ancestors He has fulfilled for us.*" Then he starts quoting from the OT – Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3, then Psalm 16:10 – which all point to the Messiah that will come to save Israel. What's incredible is that there are actually 351 specific prophecies in the OT concerning the Messiah. From the very beginning in Genesis 3 when sin entered the world, God promised that He's going to send someone to crush the head of Satan and the power of sin. And ever since then, the prophets were telling people that He *is* coming. And all of that anticipation was fulfilled and satisfied in the person of Jesus Christ. From the beginning, the history has been pointing forward to Him; and since He came, the world is looking forward to Him when He will come back in glory. Jesus is at the center of it all. God is the Author of history, and He is the One who provides all good things especially what we need the most – a Saviour.



This truth has two important implications. **First, it means that God is writing your story.** Everything happening in your life today is ordained and orchestrated by God. Think for a moment all that's happening in your life – all the fears you have, concerns, decisions to be made, tasks to be done, the things that are under control and the things that are not. Do you truly believe that God is writing your story? If you do, how will this truth impact you today? Maybe God is inviting you to let go, obey, forgive, serve, give, work harder, rest, talk to someone, or pray. Nothing that's happening in your life is an accident. He will use it for His glory and for your good.

Second, it means that Jesus is at the center of history – which means that we're not. You and I are not at the center of life. It's unfortunate that we try so hard to live as if it is. People will continue to come and go, but Jesus will still remain at the center. Then friends, are you trying to remain at the center of your own lives? I invite you to give that up because it's the only way to experience peace that transcends all things. Let me explain. We know that the cosmic universe is in perfect order. We're part of a system where the sun is at the center while the planets orbit around it. There is balance and there is structure, but imagine that all of a sudden, the system began to revolve around Mars. There would be absolute chaos – and the whole system will begin to crumble down – and so it is with our lives. Our lives are in complete order as we revolve around God because that's how things were meant to be, but when we attempt to bring all of life (including God) to revolve around us, we will begin to experience absolute chaos in our lives. We may feel empty. We may aimlessly live every day. We may feel hopeless and helpless, but there is a way to change that – revolve around *Him* (the Author of life, the Center of history, and the Provider of all good things). He will make things right. You will experience this peace that the world cannot give.

2) THE WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

In verses 27-28, Paul talks about how Jesus died even though He was not guilty of any sin deserving death. He didn't have to die. He was unjustly executed. Then was He just a victim of an unfortunate circumstance? No, because Jesus knew He had to die. In the Gospel of Mark, He predicted His own death three times (Mk. 8:31-32, 9:30-32, 10:32-34). Then why did He have to die? That's where you and I come in. **Jesus died for you and me.** As He hung on the cross, Jesus bore all the horrific weight of our sins so that we would be set free. All our rebellion, all our disobedience, all our sin fell on His shoulders – and He died for us, as our Substitute, as our Saviour so that we would be forgiven, so that we would be made clean, so that we would be accepted, all because of His love for us. Paul says in Galatians 3:13, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.*" But this wasn't the end of the story.

Verse 30: "**But God raised Him from the dead.**" Verse 32, "*What God promised our ancestors He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.*" Verse 34, "**God raised Him from the dead so that He will never be subject to decay.**" Jesus rose from the dead. If we're not careful, we could read this and walk away empty because it seems so basic to us, but if you've been saved by what Christ has done for you on the cross, our hearts cannot, should not remain dull. We're not talking about resuscitation or reincarnation to another form. We're talking about Jesus who died and three days later, **resurrected**, came back to life for you and me so that we could have eternal life. Death has been defeated. **Jesus is not dead; He is alive.**

What does this mean for us? Paul explains in verses 38-39. **Everyone who believes in Jesus is set free from every sin.** We cannot set ourselves free from sin by trying to obey all the laws because we are slaves to sin. That's what Paul is saying here. We can try to justify ourselves (prove ourselves worthy to be saved) by obeying all the laws – not lying, not hating, cheating judging, gossiping, not putting money, work, or family on the throne of our hearts – yet we continue to fail. Isn't that true? We continue to sin; in fact, we commit the same sin again and again because we are slaves to sin. We go back to it over and over again.



We cannot seem to escape from it no matter how hard we try, but the Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus died on the cross and He rose from the dead so that the chains can be broken. You are freed to live according to the way you were created to live – enjoying our relationship with God our Father, but at the same time, Paul warns them of the opposite. In verses 40-41, he quotes from Habakkuk, where God was declaring judgment on His people by saying, “You can’t even imagine what you’re about to experience as the judgment against your sin. You don’t want to know.” Then as Paul was urging the people then, I want to urge you, do not forsake Jesus. **Follow Jesus.** Put your faith in Jesus today. What this means is that you should rely on Jesus. Trust that He can achieve for you what you can’t on your own. Today, not tomorrow, not when you think you’re ready, today, right now, I invite you to consider the cross, which tells you that you are a sinner deserving of God’s judgment, yet there’s a Saviour, who willingly died for you so that you may be set free. All you need to do is believe that the message of the cross is Good News for you. I’m not saying life will be happy and good all the time. In fact, it might be even more painful because the world hated Jesus, but in Him, you’ll find complete satisfaction, meaning, and joy for your life.

Now, what about the Christians? How should grace-filled Christians live? This leads to my last point.

3) THE MISSION OF CHRISTIANS

Verse 32 says, “*We tell you the Good News.*” **We now live to tell the Good News.** This is why Paul was on this missionary journey. Because he knew who Jesus was, what He did, what that meant for him, and what that meant for those who don’t know this, he sacrificed his comfort, security, pride, and wealth to embark on this journey to bring the Gospel to these people. And look at the response of the people when Paul preached the Good News: they wanted to hear more. Some even believed. And on the next Sabbath, verse 44 tells us that “*almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.*” Can you imagine – the whole city coming together just to hear the Gospel? Paul and Barnabas must have been thrilled; but not the Jews. Verse 45, “*When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.*” They thought the Good News of Jesus Christ dying to make forgiveness of sin possible was only for the Jews. They didn’t realize that the blessing was not restricted by race, gender, or history; it was available for all. Well, despite their grumbling, this is what happened in verse 48: “*When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord... [verse 52] the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*” Not only that, verse 49, “*the word of the Lord spread through the whole region*” – all because Paul was convicted, transformed; hence, proclaimed the Gospel.

I want to end by turning our attention to verse 36. “*Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.*” This is an amazing truth. **This tells us that God has a purpose for you today.** You have a purpose. God will use you for His glory. Then continue to walk with Him so that you will serve God’s purpose in this generation, but **this also means that God has a purpose for this church.** God has a purpose for City on a Hill, and I’m so thankful that this church has and will continue to serve God’s purpose in this generation.

What is that purpose? **It’s to lead peoples near and far to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the Gospel for the glory of God and joy of all people.** This is what Jesus says in Matthew 28, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” God’s purpose was nothing less than the redemption of the world, and that purpose would be accomplished through us. This is how we must live as a church. Realize that you and I hold in our hands the only true message of salvation the world will ever hear. There will never be another Gospel, and there is no other way for people to be saved from their sins. If your friends, family, and coworkers are ever to be saved from their sins, it will be because someone spoke the Gospel to them.



Paul says in Romans 10, “*How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News!’*” City on a Hill, Christ is sending you out. *This* is our calling. Let the truths of the Gospel penetrate your heart. Meditate on what this means for your friends, family, and coworkers to stand before God, the righteous Judge, apart from Jesus Christ. Remember what the grace of God has done in your own life and imagine what He could do in theirs. Then pray for God’s Spirit to work as you open your mouth and speak. My prayer is that City on a Hill will continue to serve God’s purpose for our generation until He calls us home.

CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters, hold onto the Gospel. God is writing your story – He is in control. He will guide. He will provide. We are confident of this because Jesus Christ died for us. “*He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32). Then don’t stay silent. Proclaim, live out, and be transformed by the Gospel that brings life and joy to those who hear.

Let’s pray.