



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

LifeGroup

April 21, 2024
Acts 13:13-26

Community

TODAY'S THEME

On his first missionary journey, the apostle Paul teaches in the synagogue in Antioch. Paul boldly traces God's unfolding mission to draw all people to him through several generations of judges and kings, including Samuel, Saul, and David. That mission of salvation finally finds its completion in Jesus. Our mission as Christ-followers is to bear a bold witness for the coming generations that this salvation has been sent.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

God meets us where we are, rather than insisting that we meet God where God is. That's why God came in human flesh, to meet us where we are. This is God's grace.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We'd like to help our small group members to explore how they can flexibly share Jesus with others, and that Jesus can meet them where they are.

If we're lost, God is our shepherd. If the foundation of our lives is shaken, God is our rock. If we're feeling weak, God is our strength. If we're in bondage, God is our deliverer. If we're in danger, God is our rescuer. If we're in the dark, God is our light.

In our small group, is anyone experiencing these things? How can we be the presence of God for one another?

ICEBREAKER

What does Jesus look like? To you, when you think of his face, what does he look like? What do you think has shaped this image in your mind: scripture, movies, photos, books? Describe him in vivid detail. The answers about Jesus' appearance are probably as diverse as the number of people in the group.

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, we pray that you will meet us in those places where we need you the most. We know you want to work in us and through us. Clear away the fear, the lack of faith or the selfishness stand-ing in the way. When we look into your face, help us to see the unconditional love of God that would go to a cross for us. Amen.

Content

Both Paul and Barnabas are listed among the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch (13:1). Through a call of the Holy Spirit, they were set apart and commissioned by the faith community for God's work (13:2-3). They, along with John Mark (Barnabas' cousin), caught a ship and sailed to Cyprus, and then from Paphos to Perga, which is where our text picks up the story. (*Read Acts 13:13-26.*)

We're told that, while in Perga, John Mark leaves the mission and returns to Jerusalem, though we're not told why. Whatever the reason, we know that Paul resents it and refuses to take him on his second missionary journey, a decision that causes a sharp division between Paul and Barnabas (15:37-38). Eventually the mission team winds up in Antioch of Pisidia (not the same Antioch from which they started their journey). This Antioch was a hub of good roads and trade and had a large Jewish population. It had been founded in 281 B.C. by Seleucius I, and he had named it after his father, Antiochus. It had been declared a Roman colony city, and became the most important city of southern Galatia. It had a mix of Romans, Greeks, Asians, and Phrygians.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever visited this region? Describe it to the group. Paul and Barnabas catch a ship to Cyprus. Can you envision what this kind of journey was like in 44 A.D.? What motivates Paul and Barnabas to these extraordinary measures?

Upon arriving in a new city to witness for Christ, Paul and Barnabas go first to the synagogue. They go on the Sabbath, taking advantage of the Jewish custom of inviting itinerant teachers to speak, something Jesus also did (see Luke 4:16). Sometimes the Jews there believe in God and diligently study the Scriptures. Tragically, however, many cannot accept Jesus as the promised Messiah, because they have the wrong idea of what kind of Messiah he would be. He is not a military king who would overthrow Rome's control, but a servant king who would defeat sin in people's hearts.

Paul and Barnabas do not separate themselves from the synagogues, but try to show clearly that the very scriptures the Jews study point to Jesus. Given the opportunity to speak, Paul begins by focusing on God's covenant. This is something all Jews agree on; it's a point of pride. Paul moves from election to God's faithfulness even in Egyptian captivity, and then to Exodus through

the strength of God's uplifted arm. Paul continues with God's faithfulness in giving the Israelites the promised land by defeating seven native tribes. It is interesting to note that Paul skips over any reference to Moses and the law. We are not certain why.

In a few words, Paul moves through the era of the judges and prophets, and then to the kings: Saul and David. David is the key touchpoint here, because it is from David's line that God fulfills his promise of a Savior. This is, by the way, the only time in Paul's writings in which he refers to Jesus as Savior.

DISCUSSION

If you've ever taken a speech course you know what it means to "read your audience." How is Paul accomplishing that in this speech? What specific touchstones does Paul point out on the pathway to the Messiah? Why do you think he skipped over any mention of Moses? Why do you think Paul only mentions Jesus as Savior in this passage?

At the mention of Jesus, Paul references John the Baptist, focusing on John's baptism and his call to all of Israel to repent in light of the coming Messiah. Paul's reference of John's humility ("I am not worthy to untie his sandals") may point to the incredible popularity of John's ministry in the ancient world. How else can we explain his mention alongside Saul, David and the judges? Paul then proclaims to the Israelites and God-fearers (Gentiles who had converted to Judaism) that God has brought a new covenant of salvation through Jesus.

Paul concisely scans the broad sweep of God's covenant faithfulness, ending with God's "final Word" in Jesus. Paul's purpose is to introduce Jesus and the gospel in ways that his audience can understand and, by grace, believe.

DISCUSSION

If you were a Jewish person listening to Jesus, where would you have parted company with this speech? Are you wondering what happened after this speech? Scan ahead in the scriptures and summarize the outcome.

There seems to be a great division occurring between the Jewish and Gentile populations. Why is that?

GOING DEEPER

We're all on a missionary journey. What can we learn from Paul about sharing our faith with others? What are some current contexts that we need to understand in order to speak the Gospel message into them? What personal barriers do you have regarding your own missionary journey?

Application

Is there anyone in our group who feels lost? (*Take some time to share.*) **Promise:** God is our shepherd, and will meet us in the places where we feel lost.

Is there anyone in our group for whom the foundation of life has been shaken? (*Take some time to share.*) **Promise:** God is our rock, and will meet us when our foundations shake.

Is there anyone in our group who feels weak? (*Take some time to share.*) **Promise:** God is our strength, and will meet us in our weakness.

Is there anyone in our group who is in bondage? (*Take some time to share.*) **Promise:** God is our deliverer, and will deliver us from bondage.

Is anyone in our group in danger? (*Take some time to share.*) **Promise:** God is our rescuer, and will protect us in times of danger.

Is there anyone in our group who's "in the dark?" (*Take some time to share.*) **Promise:** God is our light, and will shine light into the darkened places of our life.

How can we be the presence of God for one another? Will we commit to pray for each other this week?

PRAY TOGETHER

Lord God, you are able to meet us wherever we are. In the coming week, meet us in our lostness, our frailties, our weakness, our bondage, our danger, and our darkness. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to look into your face and see the unconditional love of God that would go to a cross on our behalf. Convince us that we are not defined by what we do, but by what you have done for us on the cross. Go with us into this week, and teach us how to be loving community for one another. Amen.