

What do Paul Revere, Winston Churchill, and the apostle Paul have in common? They all were given the task of delivering a big, urgent message that called for various kinds of responses. Paul Revere, took up the mission of warning John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and other patriots that the British were approaching Lexington on the evening of April 18, 1775. Whether or not he said the actual words, the message was clear: The British are coming. The response was serious and sober. It's time to get ready for war.

Winston Churchill had a different tone and message on May 8, 1945. After a radio address he spoke twice to crowds of people. This of course was Victory in Europe Day, and Churchill's message was one of victory: "*My dear friends, this is your hour. This is not a victory of a party or of any class. It's a victory of the great British nation as a whole.*" The response was quite different than that of those who heard Paul Revere's warning. The people of Britain danced in the streets, opened bottles of champagne, and celebrated. The war was over. Victory!

The apostle Paul (and Barnabas) were sent with a message as well. This really is the thrust of Acts 13. As the first foreign missionaries are sent out, they have one purpose: to spread a message. So let's check it out...

Our text starts out by saying Barnabas and Paul were sent out by the Holy Spirit. This is the message of the book of Acts. And this is the story of the church in every age and every corner of the world in which the gospel has made inroads. People sent out by the Holy Spirit. This can be our story every time we gather before the Lord for worship together. When we leave church on Sunday and strike out into another week, we are "sent out by the Holy Spirit".

They sailed to the island of Cyprus. In Salamis (northeast), they preached in the synagogues (explain). Well, they make their way throughout the entire island as far as Paphos (southwest side). So they had gone throughout the island, spreading this message wherever they went. Upon coming to Paphos, they meet two people Luke wants us to focus on and the radically different ways they respond to the message Paul and Barnabas have. One is a magician and the other is his boss, the proconsul of the island of Cyprus. A proconsul was an officer in Roman empire given civil and military authority over a province. The proconsul, named Sergius Paulus, called for Paul and Barnabas because he had heard that these men were spreading a message and wanted to hear it. Let's see what happened (go through verses 8-11).

That's what I would call a major beat-down. Okay, Paul here showing that evil powers Satan stand no chance against God. Compared to God's power (he was filled with the Spirit) demonic power is like a mosquito swarming around your face that you eventually squash on your shoulder. More than that, it is like a tiny little ant standing in the way of the 1st Cavalry Division of the US Army. If you saw this, how would you respond? Let's see how the proconsul responded. Verse 12:

*Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, **for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.***

He saw what happened and thought wow! And he was astonished at the teaching. The word astonished means “to be struck with amazement.” Well, in the rest of the chapter, we get to see the message that Paul preached. And the message spread like crazy! So much so that in verse 49 it says, “*And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.*” So here’s what happened. Paul and his companions sail from Cyprus to Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) and come to the city Antioch (not the same as before). Like usual, Paul makes a beeline for the synagogue. And while sitting there, the ruler of the synagogue asks if they have anything to share. Paul is like, “Perfect!” and stands up and begins to speak. May we, if given the opportunity, be ready any moment to speak for Christ. I want to point out four things from Paul’s message:

1. Paul announces news
2. Paul offers a gift
3. Paul calls for a response
4. We see a specific result

1) Paul announces the good news of a big, sovereign God who saves

Verses 16 to 41 reads like a short summary of redemptive history and the actions of God. It is so God-centered. Paul’s message: God is big and the Author of history, God is sovereign and works out his purposes for his glory, all leading to his saving work in the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul stood up, got the people’s attention and begins speaking. Buckle up. I’m gonna go fast. Here’s what he says:

Verse 17a says that God chose Israel to be his covenant people. Verse 17b says that God made the people great while in Egypt. Verse 17c says that God led them out of Egypt by his power. Verse 18 says that God “put up with them” in the wilderness for forty years. May imply that he cared for or carried them. Verse 19a says that God destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan. Verse 19b says that God gave them the promised land as their inheritance. Verse 20 says that God gave them judges. Verse 21 says that God gave them Saul as a king. Verse 22 says that God removed Saul and God raised up David to be their king. Verse 23 says that through David’s line of descendants, God brought the Messiah (Jesus) to Israel. Verse 26 says that God sent this message of salvation. Verse 27 says that God was even working out his plan through the actions of evil men when Jesus was condemned and given the death sentence of crucifixion. Verse 29 says that God’s plan was worked out through those who executed Christ and laid his corpse in a tomb. Verse 30 says that God raised him from the dead. Verse 33 says that God fulfilled his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by raising Jesus from the dead. Verse 40 says that God gives freedom to all those who believe. And finally, verse 48, which is not part of Paul’s sermon, but commentary from Luke (the author), just continues this theme:

*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.***

In other words, there was something at work even before their believing. Namely God. Even faith is a gift of God's grace. Why does Paul speak this way in his sermon? He is saying that there is a great and awesome God. Know him. Think about him. Paul is saying this God is really working in history. And he is not playing a supporting role. He is the main Actor in history, working out his plan and purposes. God is the ultimate explanation for and the meaning of everything. If we are not careful, we read the bible in a way in which we see ourselves and what we must do all over the place. Paul here helps us to see that the bible is about God and what he has done and what he is able to do today! Paul forces us to focus our attention vertically and not merely at a horizontal plane. Remember, he is speaking in a synagogue, predominately to Jews. Why was Israel God's people? God. How did they grow to be great in Egypt? God. How did they come out of Egypt? God. God carried them through the wilderness. In the fullness of time, God sent his Son into the world. At just the right time, God delivered up Jesus to be crucified on the cross. God poured out his righteous wrath upon Jesus for your sins and mine. God raised him from the dead.

So let's think this through. If you are saved. If you are believing in Jesus. If you love Jesus, it is because God saved you. God gave you the gift of faith. God gave you a new heart - one that loves him now instead of hates him. And in some instances he moved heaven and earth to do so! And God is here, working today. Paul announces the good news of a big, sovereign God who saves.

2) Paul offers the gift of righteousness through Jesus

Look at verses 38-39:

*Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone is **freed** from everything from which you could not be **freed** by the law of Moses.*

"Freed" is better rendered justified. What does it mean to be justified? It means to have the righteousness of Christ credited to your account. You see, mankind's biggest problem is not that we need our love tank filled. It is that we are unrighteous and therefore guilty before a righteous God. So to be justified means to be clothed with the spotless, perfect righteousness of Christ which cannot be improved upon and cannot be diminished. Therefore if we are justified, we are then not guilty. To be justified is to stand before God, in Christ, "Just as if I've never sinned." But there is a positive aspect to it as well. Justified people stand before God "Just as if I've always obeyed," because the positive, active obedience of Jesus Christ is credited as mine.

The law of Moses cannot justify a single person. We all stand condemned by it. And if we wrongly think we can stand before God approved on the merits of our own righteousness even for an hour, all we need to do is go to the 10 commandments and apply them the way Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount. John Bunyan (Pilgrim's Progress) said: "Run John, run the law demands, but it gives us neither feet nor hands. Far better news the gospel brings. It bids us fly and gives us wings."

****Application**** Do you understand the mind-boggling truth of justification? So many live under a boulder of guilt. So many live in a cesspool of condemnation. Even Christians. And it is because they have not understood what it means to be justified and they are in some way living under the law as though our moral performance tips the scale an ounce in our favor before God. God requires a perfect righteousness. It is “*by Jesus that you are justified from everything from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.*” Amazingly it’s offered to ungodly people. Those are the only ones who need it. Paul offered this stupendous gift.

3) Paul calls for a wholehearted response

In verses 39-43, I want you to notice three things about how Paul urges his hearers to respond. Verse 39:

*And by him everyone who **believes** is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.*

First, believe. God’s justifying freedom comes through believing. Now, believing, as we saw earlier, is a gift from God, right? Everyone who was appointed to eternal life believed. It was a gift from God, but the people really did believe. And you must too. And God’s gift of believing is not a one time thing. No, it is an ongoing reality. Daily, we take our stand in faith on the finished work of Christ. In one very real sense, we do not move beyond this! Let your daily confession be, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood’ and righteousness.” So believe. But Paul says more. Verse 40-41:

***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.”*

Beware. Beware of moving away from simple trust in Jesus. This was much of the message Paul wrote to the church at Galatia. You have received the good news of Jesus which made you righteous in God’s sight. Why go back to your human performance as the measure of God’s acceptance of you? Beware! Don’t do it! Finally, in verse 43, Paul says:

*Paul and Barnabas, who as they spoke to them, urged them to **continue in the grace of God.***

Continue in the grace of God. Continue, to the end. Grace, from beginning to end. We need to hear these same things. Believe and keep believing. Beware of getting off the justification road into the weeds of your moral performance. And continue in God’s grace!

4) Wherever Paul’s message spread and was received, fullness of joy in the Holy Spirit spread

When the Gentiles heard that the gospel was for them too, it says in verse 48 says,

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.

Then at the end of the chapter, in the concluding verse (verse 52), even amongst persecution, it says:

And the disciples were [continually] filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

The outcome of the good news being received is joy. People going from death to life, from enemies of God to friends, from condemned to justified, from guilty to forgiven, from forsaken to delighted in by this big sovereign God, there is an explosion of joy! We saw the same thing in Acts 8. We see this was the announcement of the angels in Luke 2.

And it is full of joy and the Holy Spirit that will motivate and move you to be sent out of here and sent into your spheres of life with this good news. The best news the world has ever heard - **infinitely more urgent than Paul Revere's and of a victory infinitely more joyous than the announcement of Winston Churchill. We too are called to spread this message.** Isaiah 55:12 says, *For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the forest shall clap their hands.* Let's pray. Call people forward for prayer...