



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Great Lion of God, Acts 13:14-41

“Paul at Antioch: Biblical Evangelism”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of following the Apostle Paul in his ministry. We are grateful to Thee for this dedicated and devoted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. We desire, Lord, to have something of the same spirit of this great man. We know that he was a chosen vessel for ministry of the word of God to the Gentiles, and we do not desire to be apostles. We recognize the place of the apostles in the historical unfolding of the Christian faith. But we do appreciate very much the way in which he put Jesus Christ first in his life and subordinated all of his other interests to him. Help us to have similar priorities, and give us, Lord, something of the boldness that he had in proclaiming the word of God. Deliver us from cowardice and fear and trembling. Enable us in spite of the natural fear that we have in making Christ known to nevertheless courageously tell forth the gospel. We pray for each one present here. We pray that Thy hand may be upon us all, that we each may be more faithful, more courageous, more useful, and more fruitful in the days that are ahead. For Jesus sake. Amen.

[Message] We're turning to Acts chapter 13 and looking at the account that Luke gives of the apostle's ministry in Pisidia in Antioch. We are inclined to think that the

church never faced such a task as it faces today in challenging the world. There is the world's humanistic philosophy, its Marxism, its science, its obsession with sex, its emasculated religion parading under the name of Christian. And one tends to think that the experiences of the 20th Century are experiences that other believers in other centuries have never known. But when one reads the New Testament and looks at it against the background of the apostles and our Lord, it becomes evident soon that while the precise form of the heresies may vary a bit, they had to deal with much the same thing. Today we have all of these things that are plaguing us, the persecutions, the difficulties, the intellectual problems. Well, they're all really, ultimately, the same kinds of things that the church had in its earliest days. Of course, there are in some ways in the 20th Century magnifications of these things.

When one thinks of religious persecution and looks in the past, there have been some rather shameful episodes in Christian history. One thinks of even the activities of some of the genuine Christians who were taught that it was perfectly alright to exterminate those who did not believe the same things that they believed. Occasionally liberals like to make a great deal over that as if to suggest that the apostles and then also the reformers were guilty of great mass sins and we are to think of them as the sinners in our present age as not. Well for every one person that you can find was put to death by some of the men who were sympathetic with the reformed faith in the days of the reformation, you could probably find a thousand put to death in the 20th Century. It is said that Stalin, for example, exterminated twenty million people in Russia in the thirties. That's not to mention what Hitler did. And what others have done and what others are doing today. So, the scattered persecutions that the Christians falsely carried out themselves against those that did not hold to the faith as they held it cannot even be compared with the things that the unbelievers have done. The apostle, it's evident, faced all of these things and of course he faced the Jewish people in his day who had turned away from the Lord and consequently were persecuting him.

At the time that the apostle began this first missionary journey he was about fifty years of age, so far as we can tell. An age when men frequently turn to the comforts of a firm base, but in spite of that, he was faced with these same problems that we have and courageously went out and, under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, carried on his preaching ministry. He faced contemporary thought. He faced the great philosophers of his day, which probably were greater philosophers than the philosophers of our days. He faced the leading religions of his time. And he faced also the degrading morals of his day too.

What did he confront the world with? What was his particular methodology? I think that would be very enlightening for us to reflect upon the apostle's methodology in confronting the philosophies and religions and the false teachers of his day. What did he do? Well this particular ministry that he had in Pisidia in Antioch is of some help to us because here we have the only full length account of one of the sermons that Paul preached. And it points to the fact that there were no new techniques that he set out, no fresh terminology and no diluted message at all. In fact, the characteristic thing about this sermon is that what the apostle did was to take the Old Testament Scriptures and simply summarize them and point to the important points in the history of Israel and show those who were listening to him that these things had been fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

He did not use any new terminology. He did not think that it was necessary to use the slang of the 1st Century. He did not change his doctrinal terms. He did not say in the Old Testament they spoke about justification and sanctification and holiness, but we must use the terms that are suitable for our age and thus water them down in any way. No, as a matter of fact, he used the Old Testament itself and used it adhering to it very closely and very strictly in his preaching. And remember this: it had been hundreds of years since the prophets finished their ministry. There are people in the 20th Century who say we ought to change our terminology because the people in the 20th Century don't understand what we were saying in the first part of the 20th Century. But the

apostle did not follow that kind of methodology. I think if we learned something from him, it is this, and that the words of Scripture are suitable for every age. The Bible is relevant to all of our lives. And men who are the objects of the spirit's work are men who have been prepared to respond to the ministry of the words of the Bible as we have them.

Now, I'd like to turn to the first part of this account of Paul's ministry. Now remember he has left Antioch. He has gone to the island of Cyprus, he and Barnabas, and evidently some others were traveling with them. There they had had contact with a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Barjesus and with the deputy of the country Sergius Paulus. And as a result of one of the apostolic miracles Sergius Paulus had evidently become a believer. Now we read in verse 13, “Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia.” That is, they left. They got on a boat. They traveled across the Attalian Sea, not Italian but the Attalian Sea and they went to Perga. They went up a little river, and Perga was a wall city by the side of the river Cestrus, and at Perga in Pamphylia we read, “And John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.”

Now the John referred to here is John Mark. The Mark who wrote the second of our gospels that we have in the New Testament. Now he was, of course, related to Barnabas. And evidently he was taken along by Barnabas and by Paul. But when they came to Perga in Pamphylia, he decided that he was going to go home. Now the apostle took a long time to get over this. Later on, he makes reference to the fact that Mark went back and therefore he was not worthy for a particular task that he had been suggested for, and so the apostle thought that Mark should have continued with them.

It's a very interesting question. We'd like to know. It would be nice to be able to ask Paul, “What was it that caused John Mark to go back?” All kinds of suggestions have been made. I humorously referred to one of them, and that was that he got homesick there and as one commentator suggested he went home skulking to his mother. It's a

German commentator who suggested that he went home “zu seine mutter” or “to his mother.” But there is no real indication that that’s why he went home.

It’s possible that he got there, and he took one look at those mountains, and the mountains that faced him as they went up into Asia Minor were rather high mountains. And they were famous for the bandits and brigands that pounced upon any particular group of people who went up the Roman road without some help. It was the custom because of them to gather together a kind of caravan and go together. Just like people used to go out west to protect themselves from the Indians, so there, and some have suggested that Mark just began to quail before the possible difficulties of traveling on into Antioch in Pisidia. We don’t really know.

It’s possible even, as some have said, that he thought that, he didn’t realize that they were going to go to the Gentiles to that extent. He knew they had talked about the Gentiles because Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. And they had talked about his calling, but he just didn’t realize that it involved going up into the center of Asia Minor, which was a long way from home.

And still others have said that since Paul is apparently is beginning to take the lead, notice verse 13, “Now when Paul and his company,” and remember it was Barnabas who went off and got Paul and brought him to Antioch, it seems that Barnabas in the beginning was taking the lead but now Paul has become the leader of the little company. And some have said that Mark was just disappointed that the apostle has now become the leader and Uncle Barnabas is no longer the leader. Well, we don’t know. It’s certainly interesting that Barnabas does very willingly take the second place. Paul has outstripped him except in dignity. There is a little couplet that illustrates it pretty well. “It takes more grace than I can tell to play the second fiddle well.” Well Barnabas was a man who knew how to play the second fiddle well.

So, John Mark departed from them and returned to Jerusalem. And we read on in verse 14, “But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia.” Now,

that was a lengthy trip, and so they spent considerable amount of time as they went up the Roman road. “And went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”

Now, let me stop for a moment because here is something that I think is rather interesting, and it's rather important to for the local church. One might wonder why the local church according to the apostolic picture of the local church did not have a pastor, was ruled by a body of elders, and why there was freedom, evidently, for the carrying out of the priestly office for the men and freedom in the meeting also for the ministry of the word of God? Well it is likely that the reason for this is that the meetings of the early church naturally had as their general pattern the meetings in the synagogue.

Now the synagogue was organized in a rather unusual way. The elders of the synagogue did not do the teaching and preaching. The rulers of the synagogue acted as a board of elders, and they had authority and control over the synagogue. But so far as the ministry of the word of God was concerned, that was done by individuals who had shown that they had spiritual gifts. Remember in the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry he went into the synagogue in Nazareth when he began his public ministry, and the book was given to him, and he read, and he sat down to teach. Now he did not have any training. He had no seminary training. He didn't have any special training. The only special training that he had had was his own knowledge of the Scriptures which was obviously something that had come to the attention of the individuals.

Now in the synagogue service, they would gather. The elders would have charge of the meeting. There would be a man called an attendant, a hazan. And he would be responsible for having the Scriptures there, and he would be responsible for putting them in the hands of the individuals who read them. The synagogue service was composed of prayers. It was composed of readings from the law and from the prophets. And then there was a time of exposition of the word by someone who had some spiritual

capabilities. It might be anyone who had spiritual capabilities. In other words, there was freedom in the meeting for the ministry of the word. That’s why the apostle is able to teach in this meeting.

So, we read here that the rulers of the synagogue sent unto Paul and his company, perceiving or perhaps having heard that they were individuals who were trained in the word of God, perceiving that there was a possibility for them to speak. They say, “Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” So, because there was freedom in the service the apostle is able to preach. Now, that’s carried over into the New Testament, and when one reads 1 Corinthians chapter 14, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, it’s evidently in the early church that they had meetings that were probably very similar in many ways to the meeting that we have on Sunday night here, freedom for the ministry of the word of God, freedom for the exercise of priesthood, freedom for the expression of praise and thanksgiving, and the giving out of hymns.

Now, the apostle, “Stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.” And I’m going to read now beginning at verse 16 through verse 19 for the first section and just make a general comment. “Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.” Notice the individuals in the synagogue, they were Israelites, and they were also God fearers, individuals who had not yet become circumcised and had become proselytes but were attracted to Judaism.

“The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot.”

Now notice that Paul begins the sermon that he is giving in Antioch and Pisidia by reference to the sovereign act that begins Israel's history. Look at it carefully. He says, “The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers.” So, the apostle begins with the doctrine of election. You know he didn't have someone get up in a meeting now and say, “Wait a minute, wait a minute. It's unfair. It's unfair for God to choose Israel. Why did he choose Israel? Why didn't he choose the Egyptians? Why didn't he choose the Parthians? Why didn't he choose the Italians? Why didn't he choose some of those Arabs? Why not Esau?” All these questions, the apostle doesn't give any explanation. He doesn't think it's necessary. He believes a sovereign God is sovereign. And he's able to do as he wills, and furthermore, that it is a glorifying thing for this God to realize that he is that sovereign God.

I have a book that I haven't finished yet. It's written by a professor at Bethel. Well, he was at Bethel Theological Seminary in Minneapolis. He's now pastor of a large Baptist church in Minneapolis. He's a very fine scholar. He's taught theology, relatively young man, graduate of the University of Munich, although he is an American, graduate of Fuller Seminary, a very learned young man. And he's written a book called *The Justification of God*. It's an exposition of Romans 9:1-23, and the theme of these verses, which he says has been the subject of many years of investigation on his part is, because he was troubled about how God could say, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,” how he can say, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,” and “Whom I will I will harden.” And it finally dawned upon him after he had studied this for years that this very fact was one of the things that glorified our great God that he is that kind of sovereign. And thus, he is able to do as he wills. It's part of his own dignity and greatness and supremacy, to be sovereign.

So, Paul says, “The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers,” Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and “Exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt.” Men love God everywhere but on the throne. But that only shows, of course that we don't

have the divine view point. We don't have the apostle's view point. He saw no problem what so ever in saying, “The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers,” and chose the nation and exalted them and made them his own. So he begins there.

Now he continues in verse 20 through verse 23. Let me read these verses,

“And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. (By the way, that was, of course, Paul's tribe.) And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave their testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus.”

Now notice that he just moves rapidly from the choice of the Father's to David the king who's the type of Christ and is the head of the seed, and then comes the break, captivity, and disaster. I wish it were possible to talk about that statement in verse 21, “And afterward they desired a king,” because that was a sign that Israel had begun to lose their proper idea of their relationship to the Lord. Why did they need a king? They didn't need a king. They had a king in heaven. But all the nations around them had kings. They had pharaohs. They had kings. We don't have a king. We ought to be like them. It was a constant embarrassment to Israel that they didn't have a king. You can just imagine, as they would be on the roads, and they would travel and they would meet somebody from Egypt, and the fellow from Egypt would say, “Who's your king? We have Pharaoh whatever.” “We don't have a king.” Or, if they went the other way, “Who's your Caesar?” “We don't any Caesar.” “Strange you don't have a king? That's strange. Who's your king?” “Yahweh.” “How old is he? What does he look like? What kind of clothes does he wear? Where does he live?” They couldn't answer any of those questions. It

was embarrassing. It's just like people in Believers Chapel you know. “Who's your pastor? When do you take up the collection?” All the other things that are strange and peculiar. There are some people who can't stand that. They just cannot stand it. They want a king. They want to be like the other people. They cannot stand the reproach. So, well I said I wanted to talk about it. I wasn't going to talk about it, but I did. It just came out. That's not in my notes either incidentally. I would have done a better job if I'd thought about it a good bit.

But anyway, coming now to verse 24 and 25, we have the culmination according to Paul.

“When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.”

So you can see in this little review of history that Paul has given them, it's very brief, he touched on Abraham's election. He hit the high spot of David, and then finally, John the Baptist because John the Baptist was the ambassador of the King. So he singled out two or three key movements as he has summarized the Old Testament, and he's now come to the infinite music of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And here he launches into the more serious part of his ministry by giving us a review of Jesus Christ's teaching. Well, let me read the verses first, 26 through 37. Let me read the whole section.

“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they

had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God, (those two little significant biblical words) But God, raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.”

What would you think the apostle would speak about when he gives details concerning the ministry of the Lord Jesus? What would you do? Well, I imagine that you would think of his miracles, his teaching, the good life that he lived, and I'll tell you if you were a modern theologian; you know what he would talk about? You'd talk about Jesus' love. That's what you'd talk about. That would be in almost every sentence because that is in almost every sentence of modern contemporary theology, the love of God. Now, let us make no mistake, the Bible teaches that God is love, and the Bible teaches very definitely that our Lord was a gift of a Father who loves, and that our Lord Jesus Christ loved. But the apostle passes by the miracles. He passes by his teaching. He passes by the good life that he lived. He passes by expatiating on the love of Christ. And of course, he doesn't talk about politics, and he doesn't talk about social reform, and he doesn't talk about public housing and the evils of the day, and he doesn't talk about moral issues. He doesn't talk about contemporary thought. What does he talk about? You would think that if he had good homiletics, he would introduce his sermon with

some popular topic, housing in the Roman Empire, poverty programs, and so on. But he talks about the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ.

Now I don't know one might say, “Well he didn't have to long to speak and he figured the best thing to do was to get right to the heart of it because he might not live through the message, and you need to get the important thing out.” No, I don't think that's really true, but it is the death, burial and resurrection as the answer to the problems of life because the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus Christ dead, buried and resurrected received in faith is the solution to the individual problems of life and the problems of the church and the problems of the world. That is the solution set forth in the inspired word of God. So, death, burial and resurrection is the answer to the problems of sin, the problems of life, the problems of the destiny of men is set forth by the apostle.

Now, one of the early church fathers, Augustine said, “Love men, slay error.” “Love men, slay error.” Well, that's not bad advice. Love men in the preaching of the gospel. Seek to bring them face to face to Christ. Seek to bring them to trust in him. Plead with men. Be as persuasive as you can with the gospel of Christ. But do not in any way compromise the truth of God. “Love men, slay error.” I think that's what Paul does. He does that constantly. He loves men. He slays errors. Evangelicals need not only to pray together, we might say, they need to slay together. We don't do enough slaying in our day. It's amazing how many people have false ideas about biblical things and attend regularly evangelical churches. It's amazing. I think the apostles would be amazed.

But now notice, he talks first about the rejection of the Messiah. Verse 26,

“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their

rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.”

This is why the word of God has come to you, Paul says. It has come to you because in Jerusalem to whom that word was sent, they have rejected him. In other words, the apostle believed, just as our Lord believed, that the gospel was to go to the Jew first, and then to the Greek. And so he says you are receiving the word because they in Israel have rejected him. And notice that he says that their rejection is the reason why the word is coming. Not because they were confused, but because they have rejected the word of God.

I have a good friend. He's a very prominent Christian man. He goes around the country and around the world really, preaching the gospel of Christ. To my mind, he loves men. He doesn't slay enough errors. He, for example, will say over and over again that men are not saved, not because they reject Christ, but because they reject a caricature of Christ. He says they reject him because they are confused. “Men are not in rebellion,” he will say, over and over again. He tells our college students all the time, “Men are not in rebellion. They're in confusion. The answer is not to say to them that they are rebellious and that Christ needs our rebellion, but to strip away the confusion. Men are all ready, by the millions,” he says. “But they do not know how to come. It's not true that men are not willing to receive Christ.” These are his very words. Then he adds, “It's not true that men are not seeking after God. It's basically true, but God has created a God shaped vacuum in our hearts that by his grace, we seek him.” Well there is a vacuum in man's heart, but unfortunately when the gospel comes and the word of God ministers to us to tell us that we are sinners and in rebellion, it's at that point that we suppress the truth that is in our hearts. That's what we do naturally. Men do not seek after God. Men are in rebellion. It's not simply that they are confused about the gospel. Many are confused. They are rebellious and confused. But you'll notice the apostle did

not hesitate to say the reason you have the gospel is because they have rebelled against the gospel.

In verse 29, he says, “And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulcher,” so that the cross was the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus. “And then they laid him in a sepulchre.” That was proof of the reality of death. It was proof of the completion of his humiliation. Nothing is more humiliating than to be put in a grave and to have the body corrupting. In fact, nothing is more humiliating for an individual to be lying in a casket, and to have someone else expound the significance of him. That’s the ultimate in humiliation. You cannot say a word for yourself. You become the subject of somebody else’s exposition. In fact, never was the distance between the humanity of our Lord and the deity of the Son of God farther than when our Lord was in the grave, unable in his human nature to give an exposition of the significance of himself, so that he became the object of the exposition of men. That’s humiliation. That’s part of the sufferings of Christ that were the inactive sufferings of Christ. So, here we have the divine majesty of the Son of God and here we have on the other hand the human weakness of the body lying in the tomb. But that’s the fulfillment of things.

It always reminds me of a little story of a stormy night when a gale was blowing and a child said in awe to its father. “God must have lost grip of his winds tonight.” Well the resurrection is proof that God never loses grip of his winds. And while the Lord Jesus Christ suffers the humiliation of the cross and the burial, we read in verse 30, “But God,” the apostles don’t sing any mourning dirges, but they sing the glory of a God who acts. And he was raised, and he was seen. The main difficulty with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is that men really do not investigate what the Scriptures have to say about him. It’s very unfortunate, but that’s characteristic of human beings. They never really do investigate what the Scriptures say concerning the Lord Jesus.

So God raised him from the dead. “And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children,” by raising up the Lord Jesus Christ again, as it’s written in the second psalm. “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” That incidentally, that statement, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee,” is clearly a reference to the resurrection. In what sense could it be said that the Lord Jesus was begotten in the resurrection. After all, he is the eternal Son. He existed from eternity past. He had no beginning, the second person of the Trinity. In what sense can it be said, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee?”

Well, I just make a suggestion to you that since it’s probable that this is a reference to the resurrection, there is a sense in which our Lord is begotten in the fullest sense at the resurrection because remember he was the eternal Son. He took to himself an additional nature. He came and labored in our midst. If you had looked at him, he would have a body that would be very similar to the bodies that you and I have. And then of course, he died, but on the resurrection day he was given a resurrection body. He’s the only person who has ever been resurrected to this point. Christ, the first fruits, then those that are Christ’s at his coming, no resurrection, at the present time, has taken place except Jesus Christ’s resurrection. Now forget all those restorations to life. That’s what they were. What we’re talking about is resurrection. That is the resurrection of the body in glorified form. Only Christ has received a glorified body to the present day. Now in that sense on the resurrection day the Father is able to say, concerning the Son, as he comes forth in the glory of this glorified resurrection body, “Ah, this is my Son whom I have begotten.”

And mind you now he is like this forever. Think of that, the second person of the trinity at a point in time took human nature to himself always to be betrothed to human nature. Eternity past never knew the possession of human nature. But now forever into

eternity future, the God man, but on the resurrection day, glorified. So, this is my Son whom I have begotten. If he should say, “This is my Son in whom I’m well pleased,” how much more is he able to say that as the work is completed and the Son of God, redemption has been accomplished. He has raised him in token of the fact that he’s accepted the work of the Son and now he is given a resurrection body, a glorified body, “Ah, my son.”

Incidentally, that’s what he’s going to make all of us too because we’re going to have a body like unto his own glorious body for the simple reason that God was not totally satisfied with one Son. He wanted to have other sons too. So he’s the first born among many brethren. He brings many sons unto glory by his atoning work. And they join him as the family of God. Isn't it great? Isn't it great to think about it? All of the experiences of life, they’re terrible. They’re difficult to go through, but think of what lies before the children of God. “This day have I begotten Thee.” That’s going to be said of all of us on the day of the resurrection. It’s going to be magnificent. It’s going to be quite an improvement for some of us, quite an improvement. Not for any of you, of course, but I know some people it will be quite an improvement of.

Now, here we have the dispensation of the Davidic Blessing. And I’ll read verse 34 through verse 37. The apostle says, “And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.” He refers to the Davidic Covenant and the blessings that flow from that covenant. “Wherefore he saith also in another psalm.” Incidentally you’ll notice the apostle doesn't mind citing from the Bible when he preaches, and he cites from passages in the Old Testament and doesn't stop to give a lengthy explanation of them either. He expects the people to study the Scriptures too. “Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” He’s trying to show that David’s not the one that the passages speak about. It’s ultimately David’s son because David saw corruption. “For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on

sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.”

I love that expression, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” Now if you turn back to the Old Testament in Isaiah chapter 55 where this text is found, you find something else there too. Notice verse 3 of Isaiah 55. I’ll read it for you because it might take you too long to find Isaiah. “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” So, God promises Israel, but then in verse 7, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” That’s the sure mercies of David. That’s what is available by virtue of what Christ has done in his death, burial, and resurrection.

The sure mercies of David, the covenant has been consummated in the blood of the cross, the sure mercies of David, the abundant pardon is now ours. It’s an abundant pardon because it comes from an abundant fountain, an infinite fountain. It’s an abundant pardon because of the abundant objects who are the recipients of it. Never think for one moment because we say there are elect people that God is not going to save a great company of people. He is going to save a multitude which no man can number out of ever tribe kindred tongue and nation. More people, in my opinion, are going to be saved by far than individuals who have been lost. When we get to heaven and discover what God has done, we are going to be surprised by the numerous saints of God.

It’s an abundant pardon because of the abundance of sins that are covered by it. Think of your own sins. Think of the sins of others. Think of the sins of countless millions of people. What an abundant pardon, the blood of Jesus Christ has won. And it’s an abundant pardon because of the abundant means by which it was accomplished. No little savior, no small sacrifice, a sacrifice so great that when Jesus Christ died upon the cross, he cried out, “My God. My God. Why hast Thou forsaken me?” And a separation

took place between the Father in heaven and the sin sacrifice, the Son of God dying as the man, the infinite Son upon whom had been put the sins of sinners, an abundant pardon because of the abundant terms of pardon.

Isn't it marvelous to think that God says that this great pardon is yours upon the basis of good works, good citizenship, faithfulness in the church, observance of the ordinances, trying hard, never backsliding? No, we know the terms of are very simple. The terms are free gift, free gift. Come to him. Return from your wayward ways. Return to the Lord your God. As Isaiah put it there, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” There is no work, no works at all. It's all of sovereign grace. Not even a decision of our free will. He works in our wills to respond. What an abundant pardon, and of course, it's abundant because of the abundant blessings that attend this pardon. It's not simply the forgiveness of sins, not simply membership in the family of God, but a future that is forever in the presence of the Lord. No wonder we sing on Sunday night, “Who is a pardoning God like Thee, or who has grace so rich and free.”

Well the apostle as a good preacher looks for a response. In verse 38 and again in verse 40, he uses “therefore.” These are inferences from the great work that has taken place. Can you not imagine that these Jews in this synagogue that were listening to him, and the God fearers, were just, their eyes must have gotten bigger and bigger and bigger? They had never heard anything like this in all of their days. Some reacted very negatively as we see, but some of the Gentiles said come back and tell us about it next week too. You don't often find much like that in the church today. You don't find a lot of people that come up, rush after the meeting, and say, “Oh that was wonderful. Are you going to be here next Sunday? Please be here next Sunday. Give us some of the same ministry.” Listen to what he says, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are

justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses.” Oh what freedom. Here are individuals who have been trying to keep the Law of Moses. Peter will later say, “It was a yolk which neither we or our fathers were able to bear.” Keep the law to be saved? And he says, “By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets,” justified, declared righteous.

I had a person, a young man call me today. He’s a preacher, a young preacher in St. Louis. He said, “You were up here preaching in St. Louis about five years ago.” He said, “I went to hear you. And I’m teaching justification now and I need to understand exactly what justification is like.” And so I had - I’ve been preaching this morning – explained to him carefully. He had understood it correctly. He just wanted to be sure that justification meant to be declared righteous. He said he had been reading some literature and some of the literature had said that’s a legal fiction to say we’re declared righteous when we’re not really righteous. Well it is a legal relationship we have. We are declared righteous when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, not made righteous, declared righteous. That is divine law court says you are righteous. But of course we still have the sin principle dwelling within us, and we will not be made righteous until we enter into the presence of the Lord. So we had a nice time together. He says, “That really clarifies things for me,” and so I guess he’s preaching tonight, same thing I’m doing. Justified, past, present, future provided for. This is the germ of the apostle’s theology that he will expound so beautifully in Romans and Galatians and right here in the beginning of his ministry you can see he was preaching “sola gratia,” “by grace alone,” “sola fide,” “by faith alone.”

The admonition follows. Justification has its dark side, of course. And so he says, “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets.” And then he quotes Habakkuk, “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it

unto you.” He’s already studying Habakkuk. He’s already studying Luther’s grandfather. [Laughter] That’s right because Paul learned his doctrine, “The just shall live by faith” from Habakkuk, and Luther learned it from Paul. That’s why Habakkuk’s Luther’s grandfather. Incidentally, one of the old manuscript families adds here, and they were silent, it’s probably not genuine but you can imagine that they were, it’s a fitting conclusion to the greatest sermon that Antioch ever heard.

Well, what happened? Look at verse 46, “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” That’s the next week. And then in verse 48, “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” How about that? Some people say, “You believe in order to be elected.” No, you are elected in order to believe. “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” In fact, in the Greek text – I’m glad I studied Greek – “As many as had been ordained to eternal life believed.” So their faith was the product of their election not the cause of their election. So you think of Paul as being the great Calvinist. No, the greatest Calvinist of them all was our Lord. And Luke wasn’t a bad one either. See all of the prophets and all of the apostles all believed the same doctrines of the sovereign grace of God. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for this magnificent message the apostle delivered. What an illustration it is to us Lord. How important it is that we set forth the inspired Scriptures, without apology, feeling no sense of reproach. What a privilege to be identified with our Lord, the prophets, the apostles, the great followers of the apostles down through the centuries. We look for Lord to the day of the resurrection when we shall enter into the eternal fellowship and communion with our ...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]